

The End(s) of Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison*
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Richardson's final novel *Sir Charles Grandison* is seven volumes in duodecimo, six in octavo. Given its size, it's hard to imagine that the readers of *Grandison* were clamoring for more material. And yet, they did.¹ On March 14, 1754, Julian "Julia" Bere wrote to Samuel Richardson in response to the ending of *Grandison*.² Richardson, who was a printer as well as an author, chose to publish his response to Bere's letter and distribute it free to the public. That pamphlet bore the title

Copy of a LETTER to a LADY, who was solicitous for an additional volume to the History of Sir Charles Grandison; supposing it ended abruptly, and expressing herself desirous to see Sir Charles in the Parental Character; and to know if the Story were intended to be carried further.

Bere assumed that the novel could not possibly have come to the abrupt end it did, and Richardson was clearly aware that she was not alone in that reaction. Unlike Richardson's prior

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NOTES

¹ "I am pestered with Letters and Applications for another Volume of Grandison. The Women, in general, want to see Clementina's story prosecuted; Emily actually married; and to know how Sir Charles and his Lady will go on, and how they will educate their Children" (Forster MS XII, I, 102-103: 5 April 1754, quoted in A.D. McKillop, *Samuel Richardson, Printer and Novelist* [Hamden CT: The Shoe String Press, 1960], p. 224.)

² Forster MS 457 xv, iv, 20-1. Or so says Jocelyn Harris, who identifies the Bere letter as the response in *Sir Charles Grandison*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972), 3:485. (Except where otherwise specified, references are to the Harris edition.) Of course, Richardson was in correspondence with a great many readers during the same period, such as Sarah Chapone, "Elvira," "Celia & Aminta," S. Wescome, Lady Bradshaigh, all of whom have correspondence dating from around 14-15 March 1754.

novels, *Grandison* has no in-text postscript that catalogues the subsequent lives of the characters. This choice is one of many innovations that sets *Grandison* apart from Richardson's earlier novels, including use of massive backmatter and a vastly expanded cast of narrating characters. I argue that the ways in which Richardson innovated in the final volume of his final novel altered his attitude towards closure, which he expressed in the extratextual justification he published to defend those innovations. Richardson carried these altered attitudes into the work of his late life, as he became the editor and anthologizer of his own works. Richardson's final novel is a vital key to understanding his didactic project as a whole – and is, in many ways, the conclusion of that project.

Here I offer some new ways of thinking about the history of the novel, revising the assumptions that novels moved from a tradition of stasis to one of dynamism. Richardson's own evolution as a writer, particularly after *Clarissa*, is often read with emphasis upon his perceived failures, rather than in terms of possible pleasures and successes. *Grandison* the novel and the character often become metonymies for dullness, which has obscured the ways in which the novel is lively and engaging.³ When *Grandison* has been noted as different, it has been either based on the gender of the title character, the wider range of narrative voices, or the novel's perceived stultifying dullness.⁴ Jocelyn Harris writes appreciatively of the "ambitious new

³ For example, Patricia Meyer Spacks calls the novel "yet another dramatic meditation on point of view" in *Novel Beginnings: Experiments in Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2006), p. 107. McKillop argues "the story does not move steadily to a conclusion, but is dragged along intermittently. It is *Grandison*, rather than *Clarissa*, that we may call with Tennyson a 'great still book'" (p. 210).

⁴ Laura Brown calls *Grandison* "an exhaustive formal experiment in the construction of imaginative identification with a male protagonist" – a reading that identifies innovation in the content more than the shape of the narrative (*Fables of Modernity: Literature and Culture in the English Eighteenth Century*, [Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2003], p. 220.) James Grantham Turner labels *Grandison* as "clearly romance" in contrast to *Pamela* as comedy and *Clarissa* as tragedy, due to its "paragon lovers and meandering episodic plot" in "Richardson and His Circle," in *The Columbia History of the British Novel*, ed. John J. Richetti (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1994), pp. 73-101, 80. It is *Grandison* as panorama that J. G. Turner praises, though only as it relates to the novel's "affinities with genres we currently value" and "its influence on Austen and Eliot" (p. 81). In his discussion of Kant's shifting attitudes towards Richardsonian novels, David Hensley also uses the language of experiment in regards to *Grandison*, but for him it is an ethical experiment, attempting to reconcile goodness and desire – which in the eyes

experiments in *Grandison*” that Richardson attempted, but her generosity is rare⁵— most critics who credit Richardson for his innovations in *Grandison* are less charitable.⁶ Even those who, like Mark Kinkead-Weekes, can write compellingly of *Grandison*’s pleasures, ultimately conclude that the novel is a “disaster.”⁷

Richardson’s work in *Grandison* displays formal innovations in its ending that have been overlooked by those following Anna Laetitia Barbauld’s early judgment that the novel “would be improved by merely striking out the last volume, and indeed, a good part of the sixth”.⁸ Instead of producing a third novel ending that resembled his prior authoritative prose endings, instead of creating an ending within the text, Richardson chose to produce a document, the “Letter to a Lady,” that **looks** like a postscript but does something quite different. He largely rejected the audience’s desire for further details and sent the curious reader back into the voluminous text to infer his characters’ later lives. The subsequent history of the “Letter to a Lady” is also

of Kant, is a failure that ends in "the weak and tender yearning of mere wish-fulfillment fantasy" ("Richardson, Rousseau, Kant: 'Mystics of Taste and Sentiment' and the Critical Philosophy," in *Cultural Interactions In the Romantic Age: Critical Essays in Comparative Literature*, ed. Gregory Maertz [Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1998], pp. 177-207, 191.)

⁵ McKillop, p. 7.

⁶ McKillop spends little time discussing the composition of the novel in his chapter on *Grandison*, and concludes, "There is no advance in critical and artistic power from *Clarissa* to *Grandison*" though he does credit Richardson with keeping "up his pioneering in fiction to the last" – perhaps the very definition of damning with faint praise (p. 225). For D. Eaves and B. D. Kimpel, "His conscious artistry is apparent; it keeps the novel from being boring, at least through the first five of the seven volumes; but it does not do more than that" (*Samuel Richardson: A Biography* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971], p. 387). Quoting Brian Downs, who calls it the "best book in a technical sense" but "a poorer thing," Eaves and Kimpel go on to state, "if it offends less, it also gives less delight" (ibid.).

⁷ Kinkead-Weekes separates the novel *Sir Charles Grandison* from the one he dubs *Harriet Byron* – which he argues is a far more successful novel in terms of dramatic arc in *Richardson, Dramatic Novelist* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 293-4. His extended reading of Harriet’s plot and its merits – a new "drama of embarrassment" – is one of the few that occurs in criticism around *Grandison* (p. 305). His is one of the most generous assessments of the possibilities inherent in the novel, though he too in the end criticizes the novel for its failures. For Kinkead-Weekes, "Richardson failed to his on an artistic way of probing his hero’s consciousness" – a failure which turned a near-"triumph" into a disaster (p. 365). Had there been such an aspect to *Grandison*, Kinkead-Weekes argues "*Grandison* might have become an impressive novel of a very unusual kind" (p. 366). Instead, it "fails at its crisis" and becomes "broken-backed in the middle" and thus one could not "hope for much life in the concluding volumes" (p. 367).

⁸ *Grandison*, 1:cxxxiii.

interesting. It was at least once bound into the *Grandison* text.⁹ This action highlights the way in which Richardson's evolving authorial intentions and many readers' expectations clashed at the end — or rather, the endings — of *Grandison*. Given Richardson's standing as one of the fathers of the modern novel, an incomplete understanding of his last major work leads to incomplete knowledge of his work as a whole and therefore an incomplete understanding of the history of the novel.

***Grandison*: A Canonical Author's Non-Canonical Novel**

Sir Charles Grandison might be called a forgotten novel. It currently exists in only one modern edition, in contrast to the many editions of Richardson's more well-known novels *Pamela* and *Clarissa*. This is both reflective of and contributes to *Grandison*'s continued marginal status. *Pamela* is considered among the first epistolary novels and *Clarissa* as Richardson's masterpiece. *Grandison*, as the third and final component of Richardson's corpus of fiction, has been largely ignored.¹⁰ In the *MLA Approaches to Teaching the Novels of Samuel Richardson* volume, one of the few essays on *Grandison* promotes the teaching of only the first third of the novel, while abridging the still-longer *Clarissa* remains anathema.¹¹ Indeed, there

⁹ The British Library's copy of *Grandison* is bound with the *Letter to a Lady* – indeed, it is one of the few places outside of the *Sentiments* reprint where the pamphlet can be found.

¹⁰ Or worse – roundly ridiculed. Late-nineteenth-century critic William Ernest Henley, dancing on the grave of Richardson's literary reputation, deemed Sir Charles "too perfect to be of the slightest moral use to anybody" and among similar "faultless monsters" in *The Works of William Ernest Henley: Views and reviews*, 4 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1921), 4:197. Laurence Hutton can sweepingly proclaim in 1909, "All men admit that Sir Charles Grandison has become a bore, where he is known at all" in *Talks in a Library with Laurence Hutton: Recorded by Isabel Moore* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1909), p. 45. In his rehabilitation of *Grandison*'s influence, Gerard A. Barker feels compelled to note "Sir Charles's obvious perfection" makes any plot arc concerning him "not only perfunctory but clearly predictable" in *Grandison's Heirs: The Paragon's Progress in the Late Eighteenth-Century English Novel* (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 1985), p. 20.

¹¹ Teri Ann Doerksen is tellingly offhand in this admission: even when she "expands" from the "limited way" she had initially imagined using the text, her students still only encounter 1000 pages of 1648 in the Oxford edition ("Students in the Cedar Parlor: How and Why To Teach *Sir Charles Grandison* in the Undergraduate Classroom," in *Approaches to Teaching the Novels of Samuel Richardson*, ed. Jocelyn Harris and Lisa Zunshine [New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2006], pp. 169-175). Zunshine writes about teaching the first volume of

are even separate scholarly camps devoted to debating the precise nature of *Grandison*'s boringness.¹² But to pass over this novel is to come away with an incomplete picture of Richardson's literary project. The challenges – and the new solutions – that Richardson discovered during the composition of *Grandison* reveal the experimental nature of the novel form, even in the hands of this most conservative writer.

While we have come to think of the novel as a codified form, to speak primarily of conventions leaves little room for consideration of how those conventions became conventional at all. Case studies like that of *Grandison* open up useful questions about what the emergent novel really looked like in the eighteenth-century. Eighteenth-century prose endings, often considered predictable, are in fact an important but overlooked source to refine our understanding of the early novel. Scholars have argued, paradoxically, that the early novel is both emerging and codified.¹³ We have suggested that there was a built-in set of assumptions about the novel's form and features before the genre wholly solidified. While some novel's

the three-volume Oxford edition as a stand-alone experience – a tactic she admits leaves something "out" of the experience – something her students often feel the need to supplement ("Teaching Sir Charles Grandison Instead of Pamela to Undergraduate," *Approaches to Teaching the Novels of Samuel Richardson*, ed. Jocelyn Harris and Lisa Zunshine [New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2006], pp. 184-90, 184.) Leah Price is famous for articulating – controversially – that one cannot hold all of a Richardson novel in one's head at once, and has written of the abridging of *Grandison* and Richardson's other novels – a practice that continues today (*The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel: From Richardson to George Eliot* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003]).

¹² There are roughly two camps in the debate over *Grandison*'s status as a "boring," static work. One of the more generous critics, Patricia Meyer Spacks, investigates *Grandison* alongside two other novels in *Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1995), arguing that her three chosen novels were "interesting" to contemporary audiences and became later "boring" to later audiences. To the contrary, Leah Price rejects Spacks' thesis that *Grandison* was ever "interesting" to anyone in *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel*, and states that the features of Richardson's text which "bore" us and bored his first readers were designed to do precisely that (pp. 20-1). Price is perhaps in this more right, in the sense that the "interesting" and "boring" potentialities seem to coexist side-by-side, rather than transform from the one into the other over time.

¹³ Which is of course an off-shoot of the very real challenge of defining "the novel" in the period. While Watt's *Rise of the Novel* (Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 2001) created a very tidy evolution towards Austenian novel form, he does so by paying exacting attention to a very small sample set of authors, and an even smaller subset of those author's works (excluding, for example, *Grandison*). On the opposite scale, and more currently, Franco Moretti's "wide reading" still tends to talk about the rise and fall of "fads" in the novel (see for example *Graphs, Maps, and Trees* [New York: Verso, 2005]). Work like that of McKeon and Hunter creates new and fruitful blurriness, but much remains to be done. I find myself looking to the recent work of Patricia Meyer Spacks (such as *Novel Beginnings: Experiments in Eighteenth-Century Fiction* [New Haven CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2006]) and its organization along the lines of "threads" rather than subcategories to better understand the development of the novel without falling into an anachronistic sense of "evolution".

endings do make use of the expectations derived from older forms, many eighteenth-century fictional texts experiment with new sorts of endings that do not conclude in a tidy fashion. This untidiness, or resistance to narrative closure, is manifested in a variety of ways. Some of them are external, such as sequels or adaptations. Others are encoded within the work through its form: publication in parts, or anthologizing shorter works in a single volume. Other manifestations of closure-resistance are found within the narrative itself: digressive material, false or multiple endings, or endings that seem excessively hasty. In 1997, J. Paul Hunter called for a new mode of thinking about the form of the early novel that describes "a range of practices that do not conform to particular entrenched models"¹⁴ In this essay, I take up Hunter's call in order to establish a new model through an examination of eighteenth-century endings, such as that of *Grandison*.

With these concerns in mind, I return to the particular case of *Sir Charles Grandison*, published between 1753 and 1754. Samuel Richardson's massive works each present a challenge to the scholar of ending. As Samuel Johnson famously noted, they are decidedly *not* novels one reads for the plot, and yet Richardson was fastidious about the ends of his novels. *Pamela* reaches what we consider the stereotypical close (marriage) in the middle of the novel and is brought back for a sequel thereafter. His second novel, *Clarissa*, was published in parts, leading to wild (and often erroneous) speculation about its ending, which Richardson insistently called "happy" despite the heroine's suffering and death. In both of these novels, Richardson defends and protects the endings through the use of third-person prose conclusions – a technique he deviates from wildly in his final novel, *Sir Charles Grandison*.

¹⁴ J. Paul Hunter, "Serious Reflections on Farther Adventures: Resistances to Closure in Eighteenth-Century English Novels," in *Augustan Subjects: Essays in Honor of Martin C. Battestin*, ed. Martin C. Battestin and Albert J. Rivero (Cranbury NJ: Associated Univ. Presses, Inc., 1997).

Grandison's Shape: Finding the End

A sketch of the shape of this final novel gives a sense of why Richardson found it particularly difficult to conclude. Unlike Richardson's previous, more famous, novels *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, *Sir Charles Grandison's* plot is difficult to condense into one particular timeline or to reduce to focus on a single character. The titular hero Sir Charles dominates the attention of all of the correspondents in this epistolary novel as he moves between England and Italy, caught between the competing claims of two virtuous heroines, English Harriet Byron and Italian Clementina della Porretta. But unlike Richardson's previous title characters, Sir Charles very rarely participates directly in the novel's epistolary correspondence. Instead, the voice readers encounter most consistently is that of Sir Charles's love interest Harriet Byron, whose virtue and epistolary prolixity resembles Richardson's previous titular heroines. Readers learn more about Sir Charles through Harriet, and through the massive cast of characters who correspond with her – more characters than either of Richardson's prior novels.

But even this plot summary is incomplete and potentially misleading. Many further subplots fill the novel, not only following Sir Charles, Harriet, and Clementina, but their friends, families, and even on occasion their enemies for long stretches of the novel.¹⁵ Sir Charles's younger sister Charlotte is a powerful supporting character, and accounts of her courtship and rocky early marriage distract from the central Grandison/Harriet/Clementina conflict. So do any number of other supporting characters, usually young women, such as Grandison's ward Emily. Moreover, the love triangle at the heart of the novel is far from a tidy uniting of Sir Charles and

¹⁵ The author of the abridgement *The Paths of Virtue Delineated; Or, The History in Miniature of the Celebrated Pamela, Clarissa Harlowe, and Sir Charles Grandison* (1756) chooses to condense the novel by switching to a third person narration, stripping out most of the subplots, and by recapitulating events in chronological rather than narrative order. By doing so, the abridgement shrinks the novel from nearly 2500 pages to fewer than 120. This process of abridging and reorganizing allows for a tidier conclusion than Richardson could manage.

Harriet – indeed, the inability to make both Harriet and Clementina perfectly happy is one of the chief obstacles to a satisfying ending to *Grandison*.

Moreover, *finding* the end of the novel is, from a purely material perspective, surprisingly challenging. This was first a problem of publication. The novel was written between late 1749 and 1753, and manuscript pages were circulated amongst Richardson's circle of trusted correspondents, who commented on the story in progress. By October 1752, the circle knew of Harriet and Sir Charles Grandison's marriage--an event of the penultimate volume. However, here Richardson stalled, returning to the work of editing, hoping simultaneously for a leaner book and for inspiration as to how to conclude the novel. The first volume likely went to press in February 1753, while the final volume was still largely unwritten.

Moreover, because of the threat of a pirated Irish edition, Richardson felt forced to defend the legitimacy of his own edition. He did this in the separately-published *The case of Samuel Richardson, of London, printer*, but also within the text itself, in an "Address to the Public" with its own epistolary evidence against the pirates. This "Address" is the very last thing Richardson's first readers would have encountered in the final volume of *Grandison*. When Richardson published the final volume, he wrote, "What they [the Dublin pirates] will do with the Seventh Volume, I cannot say, for it is half a Volume over-measure, and they are so much exposed in it"¹⁶

Richardson here points to a larger reality of the final volume. The mass of non-narrative material he chose to include is not easy to ignore. While readers of *Pamela* and *Clarissa* had only a handful of additional pages to contend with once they reached the end of the novel, the readers of *Sir Charles Grandison* never had the luxury of encountering the narrative divorced

¹⁶ Forster MSS., XI, 96, April 8, quoted in W.M. Sale, *Samuel Richardson: Master Printer* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1950), p. 69.

from a massive chunk of supplementary material. In the octavo edition, 133 pages of the final 438-page volume -- a solid third -- are devoted to the concluding apparatus. This apparatus includes an index, a concluding note by the editor, an index of similes and allusions, an additional letter, as well as the Address to the Public. That material that would only expand in the seven-volume third edition. Even the pirated Dublin editions included most of the material, save Richardson's Address to the Public, of course.¹⁷ Thus over 30% of the concluding volume of *Grandison* was taken up with material that can be understood as "supplemental" to the main text. How could readers adequately anticipate the end of the novel with such an expansion of pages still awaiting them -- even when they'd reached the end of the correspondence? To dismiss this substantial chunk of the ending as merely incidental would be not only to mistake Richardson's purpose but to downplay the physical reading experience of the text.

At the very least, the backmatter included obscures the ending even for the reader who ultimately ignores these innumerable appendices. A reader cannot flip to the final page -- or any page near it -- and easily find the final letter. Nor is there a "tell tale compression of pages" of the sort Jane Austen wryly refers to at the ending of *Northanger Abbey*. Even once found, the final letter is not easily read as a conclusion. After Harriet's final letter, the page contains no "finis," merely a black line followed immediately by a list of errata that comprises one-third of the final narrative page. What follows this abrupt ending is material that serves a great many purposes, none of which furthers a sense of tidy conclusion. Instead, this massive anthology recasts the *Grandison* narrative into discrete mini-plots, allowing the re-reader to recall plot arcs for even the most minor characters. Or readers could return to the text to selectively follow individual plots, creating non-linear patterns of reading.

¹⁷ This would continue to be the case throughout Richardson's lifetime and beyond, as the novel went from the parallel duodecimo and octavo editions to the later six-volume octavos and the later seven or eight volume duodecimo editions.

What is noticeably missing from this substantial backmatter is a prose conclusion – a feature of both of Richardson’s prior novels. Instead, the only piece of writing that even approximates a prose conclusion exists only outside the text: the “Letter to a Lady” mentioned earlier. In the space where a reader might expect a prose conclusion – the five-page “Concluding Note by The Editor” – Richardson addresses a series of complaints and critiques of the novel. None of the main issues Richardson deals with here relates to plotting, conclusions, or the like. He decries against hasty reformation (this seems a stab at Fielding’s *Tom Jones*) that is “in contradiction to all probability, for the sake of patching up what is called a happy ending”.¹⁸ This denouncement is the closest Richardson gets within the text of *Grandison* to a direct statement about the ending of this novel¹⁹ – strange, given Richardson’s prior novel endings.

Changing Postscripts: From Closure to Closed-Loop

Before *Sir Charles Grandison*, Richardson's postscripts were an integral part of each of his previous two novels. Dispersing rewards and punishments (and often lingering lovingly over both), the postscripts to *Pamela* and *Clarissa* could not be ignored. Indeed, the pages of both novels are designed to encourage such a seamless transition: *Pamela*'s final letter shares page space with the editorial conclusion, wherein the fates of Pamela, Mr. B, Lady Davers, and Miss Goodwin are detailed. The sequel to *Pamela* (the two final volumes commonly known as *Pamela II*) has a similar layout, where the final letter shares visual space with a longer editorial

¹⁸ *Grandison*, 3:466. In her introduction to *Grandison*, Harris has argued that *Grandison*'s composition was motivated significantly by the publication and success of Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1:1). Fielding's novel (particularly its title character) was castigated for promoting moral laxity, as its happy ending depicted a rather abrupt reform on the part of its hero.

¹⁹ Instead, the volume's final twenty-two pages are a mini-epistolary narrative of Richardson's dealings with the Dublin printers. Richardson felt it was crucial to include this narrative at the very end of the book, and to keep it there until it was removed in the 1766 fifth edition. This is the only one of the *Grandison*-related pamphlets to be included in the backmatter of the novel, despite the fact that the other *Grandison* pamphlet, the aforementioned "Letter to a Lady," is arguably more connected to the text than the pamphlet on the Dublin piracy.

conclusion (now marked as “Conclusion”). *Clarissa*’s “Conclusion,” while far longer and more exhaustive in its catalogue of character fates, is “Supposed to be written by Mr. Belford.” As Mr. Belford is one of the four principal correspondents of the novel, writing the conclusion in his voice becomes a fictional pose that incorporates the conclusion into the larger narrative.

Thus, when readers finally reach the “finis” of *Grandison*, they encounter an ending that desperately needs such a postscript. Many plot threads are left hanging: our heroine Harriet is still pregnant, and her sister-in-law Charlotte’s “reform” is not entirely convincing. Most noticeably for Richardson’s audience, Sir Charles’s two most problematic admirers, his ward Emily and his Italian love Clementina, have been expelled from the novel with largely-undetermined fates. Thus, Julia Bere’s letter to Richardson was far from unusual -- it seems fairly clear that a substantial number of Richardson’s readers found the final volume of *Grandison* lacking. At the same time a great many other subplots were left unresolved, or resolved only by implication. Thus, if the postscript/conclusion to *Sir Charles Grandison* were to follow the form set out by the conclusions of *Pamela*, *Pamela II*, and *Clarissa*, it would at the very least tackle in some depth the fates of the main characters, and most likely (if one assumes a trajectory of expansion from first novel to last), extensive discussions of even many minor characters and their further lives.

The layout of the “Letter to a Lady,” as well as its full title, suggest that here, finally, will be the desired prose ending – indeed, the British Library’s copy of the novel bound the pamphlet into the text itself. However, when one examines the content of the “Letter to a Lady” as a potential postscript, it falls far short of the expectations inspired by the prior novels, providing only glimpses into the future lives of his characters, rather than the detailed accounts provided in earlier conclusions. In the “Letter to a Lady,” further events of the novel’s characters take up a

scant few further paragraphs: Harriet's lying-in, the self-evidence of her choice to (as Pamela B and Charlotte G had before her) "be a Nurse" to (in other words, to breastfeed) her child, and to take him with her to Italy. Thus, the timing of the Grandison family's future trip to Italy is altered by the health and needs of "the heir of Sir Charles Grandison". Lest any reader criticize this wait, Richardson directs his readers back to the account of Sir Charles's travel over Mount Cenis in Volume IV and to "acquaint yourself with the Bay of Biscay" if the reader is inclined to suggest a sea voyage.²⁰ These directions are moves that, like other parts of the backmatter, return the reader to the text proper.

Some small details are provided for a tiny fraction of minor characters, including the Harriet's admirers Sir Rowland and Mr. Fowler (going to Wales) or Harriet's uncle Mr. Selby (who "goes on at Selby-house crowing over his Wife, and his Nieces..."). Richardson speculates that he **could** have given Harriet's cousin Nancy Selby to Harriet's discarded suitor Mr. Orme –

...but that is not right to put together two persons who neither of them have entire health, til they are quite recovered; and that would take up time. He, accompanied by his Sister, is a second time gone to Lisbon, you know. And she, Emily hints, is not without her Lover.²¹

Richardson, like Sir Charles's ward Emily, "hints" but refuses to elaborate and make final and definitive statements. In this fashion, only a half-dozen characters are given further details of any interest. Few comprise the extended scope afforded to even the lowliest character in *Clarissa*.

Moreover, these few characters are swamped by the overwhelming majority who are

²⁰ *Grandison*, 3:468.

²¹ Samuel Richardson, *A Collection of the Moral and Instructive Sentiments, Maxims, Cautions, and Reflexions, Contained in the Histories of Pamela, Clarissa, and Sir Charles Grandison*. (London: Samuel Richardson, 1755), p. 405; ECCO CW11 1145054.

named in the Letter but whose outcomes receive no further details. Richardson dismisses a surprisingly large number of his cast with a terse "no more need be said" of their lives. Five times as many characters are named only to slot them into "happy" or "unhappy" categories of future existence – a Day of Judgment but not of exposition. Sir Charles is among the over twenty-eight characters, both major and minor, are dismissed from the reader's view with very little further detail beyond their "happy" ending. Ten characters are "deservedly unhappy," and Richardson notes, "there are too many of such characters, in everybody's knowledge, to require *theirs* to be further dwelt upon".

Even those characters who do receive an ending receive them in less-complete fashion than in prior Richardson novels. The most striking example of the incomplete ending is that of Clementina, who "at the year's end, may either marry the Count... or, be allowed more time." This is the same ending that the reader is left with within the *Grandison* narrative, and it remains an ending so vague as to be practically playful on Richardson's part:

"Do you think, Madam, I have not been very complaisant to my Readers to leave to them the decision of this important article? I am apt to think, from what I have already heard from several of them, of no small note, and great good sense, that a considerable time will pass before this point will be agreed upon among them: And some of my correspondents rejoice that Clementina is not married in the book; hoping that she will never marry; while others express their satisfaction in the time given her, and doubt not but she will.²²

Jocelyn Harris suggests that this ending is anything but "complaisant" on Richardson's part. She claims that Richardson planted a great deal of suggestive moments in the final volume of

²² *Moral Sentiments*, p. 404.

Grandison to guide readers to an expectation of Clementina's eventual marriage.²³ But I think we must conclude that Richardson absolutely refuses to be explicit. In other words, he appears to have had a vision for the ending, but chose – again and again – not to reveal it explicitly.

Sir Charles's treatment in the "Letter" at its conclusion illustrates Richardson's strategy most directly. While Richardson's correspondent expresses "herself desirous to see Sir Charles in the Parental Character," Richardson quashes such a notion by sending the correspondent back to *Pamela* (specifically *Pamela II*):

As to what you are pleased to hint of the Hero's appearing to shine in the parental character, have I not in *Pamela* entered into that subject pretty largely? And have I not in this history avoided touching upon the same topics that I have treated on in either of the two former?²⁴

Instead of further details, Richardson then proceeds to remind the correspondent of many incidents in the novel that illustrate Sir Charles's treatment of children, then hypothesizes about continuation, asking, "And where, and at what age of his children... should I have been allowed to stop?"²⁵

This is Richardson's segue to his concluding paragraph, which proposes a twist on the notion of the "happy ending"

All that can be expected therefore in such a work, if its ending is proposed to afford the most complete scene of felicity of which human life is capable, must be to leave the principal characters happy, and the rest with fair prospects of being

²³ See Jocelyn Harris, "The Reviser Observed: The Last Volume of *Sir Charles Grandison*," *Studies in Bibliography* 29 (1976): 1-31.

²⁴ *Moral Sentiments*, p. 406.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

SO.26

Here, Richardson proposes a sense of ending based not on dramatic unity (as in *Clarissa*), but on human nature and probability – an ending that allows for “the various turns of human affairs”.²⁷

Richardson’s “Letter to a Lady” offers almost no new information, but instead chooses to point the reader back into the text. Written and printed in a form that mimics earlier prose endings he had composed his prior novels, Richardson raises the expectation of further character details, and then almost entirely obliterates it. In effect, rather than create new material and plot that would be open to critique, Richardson attempts to create a feedback loop, stating again and again that further plot is unnecessary, because close reading of the novel itself will provide all the information needed to extrapolate the later lives. This is the reason why Richardson did not believe it necessary to include the letter in later editions of *Grandison*. Instead, he included it in the 1755 *Collection of Moral Sentiments* a year later, classifying it as a supplemental text of reference rather than as a further narrative.

Some Conclusions About Failure to Conclude

The fictional techniques displayed in *Grandison* had longevity in the genre far beyond even the heyday of the epistolary novel. Novelists would continue to ponder the challenges of ending character-centered narratives. Richardson’s solution to a very knotty problem would continue to bear fruit. Richardson’s playful “Letter to a Lady” anticipates a similar reader-address a century later. A nineteenth-century author writes in ending to a novel:

Here pause: pause at once. There is enough said. Trouble no quiet, kind heart;

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ This language seems to be indebted to Sarah Fielding's sense of ending, particularly in her *Volume the Last*. See Emily Friedman, "Remarks on Richardson: Sarah Fielding and the Rational Reader," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 22, 2 (Winter 2010): 309-26.

leave sunny imaginations hope. Let it be theirs to conceive the delight of joy born again fresh out of great terror, the rapture of rescue from peril, the wondrous reprieve from dread, the fruition of return. Let them picture union and a happy succeeding life.²⁸

This is Charlotte Brontë's conclusion to her final 1853 novel *Villette*. It is infamous for its "heretical"²⁹ ambiguity – a refusal to play by the conventions of the nineteenth-century novel³⁰. However, as we have seen through *Grandison*, Brontë's ending was not the first to toy with her readers in this fashion – while all the while assuming that there is such a thing as a "correct" reading. The novel's tragic ending could only be misunderstood by misreading "sunny imaginations"³¹ of the sort consistently scorned throughout the novel. A century earlier Samuel Richardson ended his own final novel with an ending that many readers complained was no ending at all, extending beyond the marriage of the primary hero and heroine without providing a satisfying conclusion for the secondary heroine. Like Brontë, Richardson may have felt forced to the chosen non-ending because of his documented fear of reader backlash. Unlike Brontë, Richardson's final novel has been all-but-forgotten, dismissed as an unsatisfactory final work because of its feedback-loop ending. In contrast, *Villette* is celebrated for its complex, dark ending.

²⁸ Charlotte Brontë, *Villette* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008) p. 496.

²⁹ To use the words of Toni Wein from "Gothic Desire in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 39, 4 (Autumn 1999): 733-46.

³⁰ The notion of *Villette*'s ending as a revolutionary one can be seen in the work of a great many critics, particularly those interested in feminist discourse. See John Hughes, "The Affective World of Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 40, 4 (Autumn 2000): 711-26. See also Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, "Faithful Narrator' or 'Partial Eulogist': First Person Narration in Brontë's *Villette*," *Journal of Narrative Technique* 15 (1985): 244-55. Also see Brenda S. Silver, "The Reflecting Reader in *Villette*," in *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, ed. Elizabeth Abel, et al. (Hanover: Univ. Press of New England for Dartmouth College, 1983), pp. 90-111.

³¹ See, among others: Phillip Rogers, "Fraudulent Closure in *Villette*'s 'Faubourg Clotilde,'" *Brontë Studies: The Journal of the Brontë Society* 30, 2 (July 2005): 125-30. See also Ian M. Emberson, "'A Wreck Just Sinking': The Beginning of *Jane Eyre* and the Ending of *Villette*," *Brontë Studies: The Journal of the Brontë Society* 28, 1 (March 2003): 89-90.

Richardson's ending to *Grandison* may be judged differently given such a parallel. Moreover, *Grandison*'s ending provides a new way of looking at Richardson's authorial career as a whole. In his Editor's Note to the first volume of *Sir Charles Grandison*, Richardson provides a précis of the two earlier novels' ambitions, and *Grandison* itself is imagined as a continuation of (and ending to) the larger project:

Here [that is, after *Clarissa*] the Editor apprehended he should be obliged to stop, by reason of his precarious State of Health, and a Variety of Avocations which claimed his first Attention: But it was insisted on by several of his Friends who were well assured he had the Materials in his Power, that he should produce into public View the Character and Actions of a Man of True Honour.³²

Thus, *Grandison* – the story of a “Man of True Honor” – is imagined as the final component in a **set** of exemplary portraits displaying his understanding of virtue in a multiplicity of class and gender contexts. Richardson would devote his energies after *Grandison* to the annotation, anthologizing, editing, and excerpting of his three novels – a process of **reflection** rather than new creation. This process began within the space of *Grandison*, as Richardson set aside substantial space in his final volume for backmatter designed to return the reader to the novel proper – to look back, not to project forward. The extratextual “Letter to a Lady” reaffirms this design, encouraging readers to reenter the text to infer character's future lives. Moreover, the “Letter” makes a claim to incorporate readings of Richardson's **prior** novels into the reading of the final one. No two novels, Richardson emphasizes, cover the same moral, didactic, and human territory. By extension, Richardson makes a plea for readers to examine all three novels in relation to one another, to see them as part of the same project.

Thus, *Grandison* is not a standalone or aberrant novel but is the final step and, in effect,

³² *Grandison* 1:4.

the conclusion of Richardson's writing life, before his impulse shifted to the revision of his three novels. That life began in the composition and defense of novels whose first-person, epistolary form tempted readers to read them as inherently open novels. These open novels were violently and assertively ended with point-blank prose – attempting to create closure at any cost. By the end of his career, Richardson had come to a different solution, creating a final novel whose ending blurs the distinction between open-endedness and absolute closure. Richardson achieved this through an emphasis on reflection, an emphasis he would carry through to his later work of anthologizing and excerpting his own novels. Understood as a testing ground for new techniques in this way, *Grandison* can be read not just an offshoot, but also a vital key to understanding Richardson's career in fiction and its later influence. To look at *Grandison* is to examine the end of a writing career. To better understand his work, we must look at where he ended.

Richardson's final novel exemplifies, perhaps more than its predecessors, Samuel Johnson's dictat to read Richardson's works for something other than plot – that is, the sentiments. In the end, Johnson's quip provides a rather liberating way of understanding Richardson's weird and experimental text. Rereading, meditation -- the work we know Richardson himself performed and found meaningful -- is most strongly encouraged in *Grandison*. It not only includes massive end matter (as his two other novels would expand to include), but it also makes ending with the final letter a spur to reenter the text. It seems that was far more important to him than offering a sense of closure.

If a heavyweight like Richardson does not conform to the portrait of the eighteenth-century novel writer, then the portrait is clearly problematic. Nor is this a case of a minor novel by a major author “sticking out” from a larger zeitgeist. Richardson's move from heavy-handed prose conclusions is far from unique, as many other authors also experimented with the

boundaries of what the novel ending could do. Incorporating such marginalized texts and authors into our work begins to show us a more comprehensive understanding of the history of the novel, in all its twists and turns. In the case of *Grandison*, critics have already partially acknowledged the importance of the novel as influence, as proto-novel of manners, and as (failed) experiment. What has not been done, and what this article has attempted to do, is a reading of some of Richardson's innovations in *Grandison* with a generous eye, and to highlight his successes and his impact over and above his failures. Reassessing "boring" *Grandison* for its merits rather than its defects is a step toward recovering a forgotten part of the eighteenth-century reading audience: those who took pleasure in this text and wished it would never end.