

RICHARDSON'S *CLARISSA*: CRITICAL COMMENTS

John Adams:

"Democracy is Lovelace and the people are Clarissa.. The artful villain will pursue the innocent lovely girl to her ruin and her death."

Harold Bloom:

"Until Clarissa begins to die, the sheer force of her resistance compels Lovelace to become even more himself. Conversely his aggression greatly strengthens her."

"I wouldn't wish her death longer—but not shorter either."

John Carroll:

Richardson portrays "the dark, hidden drives of the human soul."

Samuel Taylor Coleridge:

"I confess that it has cost, and still costs, my philosophy some exertion not to be vexed that I must admire, aye, greatly admire, Richardson. His mind is so very vile a mind, so oozy, so hypocritical, praise-mad, canting, envious, concupiscent!"

Margaret Doody :

Clarissa is "a novel about power."

John A. Dussinger:

"Clarissa seldom writes without a cautious eye on her audience."

Terry Eagleton:

"What is worrying about Lovelace in the early part of the novel is not so much that he preys upon women but that for a man he spends too much time writing."

Maud Ellmann:

"Lovelace is the archetypal enemy of society, the most extreme challenger of its values, identity and organization. In plot, *Clarissa* is a novel about the ruin of a society. Lovelace throws in turmoil the world of Harlowe Place. He bears responsibility for depriving the world of its 'shining light.'"

Rita Goldberg:

Both Clarissa and Lovelace believe in "an extraordinary woman's redeeming or damning power."

"Clarissa's story is of a passion, in the Christian sense, which must be distinguished from passivity. The source of her spiritual triumph has been her insistence on the integrity of the person, body and spirit."

Morris Golden:

"The stronger will, Clarissa's, defeats everything which it meets or can be conceived of—Lovelace, the Harlowes, all of society, and, in the assurance of forgiveness for suicide and of salvation, even her God."

Tassie Gwilliam:

"...once Lovelace is a rapist, Clarissa is no longer in doubt about his meaning or about the meaning of masculinity. So, in that sense, Lovelace, not Clarissa, is stripped and revealed (to her) by the rape."

Samuel Johnson:

Clarissa is "the first book in the world for the knowledge it displays of the human heart."

"...there is always something which she prefers to the truth."

Mark Kinkead-Weekes

Richardson "formally banishes himself, and creates by becoming each of his characters."

Tom Keymer:

"The story is negligible—abduction, violation and death.... A second story in many ways outgrows the first—a story of characters at writing-desks, struggling to fix their experiences adequately in prose and so define and assert their own conflicting senses, psychologically, epistemologically and above all morally, of what is happening in their world."

Q.D. Leavis:

Its only interest is "almost entirely historical."

Alan Dugald McKillop:

Richardson is "a pioneer in the analytical study of behavior under the pressure of a social code."

He presents "the minds of his characters in the very moment of thinking and feeling."

William Lyons Phelps:

"Lovelace... is at once seen to be impossible. Analyse him—he simply will not do; no such person ever lived. Reading his letters, we see his gay personality, know him well, and never forget him. May not the real reason for this be in the fact that Clarissa is the heroine of a realistic novel of actual life, and Lovelace is simply the hero of romance?"

Mario Praz:

Clarissa is "an archetypal suffering virgin, the key figure in a drama of sadism and masochism that has haunted western literature."

Martin Price:

"Lovelace is one of the great characters of English fiction..."

Dorothy Van Ghent:

"The central event of the novel... is... the deflowering of a young lady—and one which scarcely seems to deserve the universal uproar which it provokes in the book."

William Beatty Warner:

"Each reader acts out the disturbing and pleasurable desire to penetrate the lady... The Lady is the test; the serpent is the reader."

Ian Watt :

The rape, "when Clarissa is unconscious from opiates, may be regarded as the ultimate development of the idea of the feminine sexual role as one of passive suffering: it suggests that the animality of the male can only achieve its purpose when the woman's spirit is absent."

"Clarissa dies rather than recognize the flesh."

Cynthia Griffin Wolff:

"She [Clarissa] is someone, we feel, only so long as she perceived herself better than someone else."

"The reader, with Anna and Clarissa, must *discover* the truth; hence the lengthy letters and apparent rambling."