

## No Man is an Island: Divining Providence in Three Eighteenth Century Novels

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Throughout time, a preoccupation of humanity has been an attempt to find some kind of order in a world, which, in its mysterious irrationality, appears as menacing and chaotic. Unwilling to confront an empty eternity which starkly reveals the tenuousness of man's significance, western literature through the ages has constantly emphasized a 'Providential Order,' often incomprehensible to man, which controls and guides all. In the eighteenth century, as science, rationalism, Protestantism and capitalism were undermining the whole moral, religious and social order of the time, with man for the first time seen as an individual essentially alone on a sea of chaos, the importance of this belief became all the more obvious. First of all it affirmed the existence of a divine reason behind the apparent irrational forces of nature, thereby taming them and bringing life back into a manageable form for man. In Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, for example, nature, with its storms, earthquakes and gales, becomes a tool of Providence warning the individual of his sinfulness. Similarly, it allowed man a future hope of a morally just eternity at times when natural forces appeared indiscriminate in their meting out of earthly rewards and punishments, once again presenting a kind of spiritual affirmation to this worldly chaos, and re-establishing a future divine order behind the apparent social and religious disorder. Thus, in Johnson's *Rasselas*, Imlac tells Nekayah:

Do not reproach yourself for your virtue,  
or consider that as blamable by which

evil has accidentally been caused . . . When we act according to our duty, we commit the event to him by whose laws our actions are governed, and who will suffer none to be punished for obedience.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, in his letters, Richardson writes of his decision that his heroine Clarissa must ultimately die:

What greater moral proof can be given of a world after this, for the rewarding of suffering virtue, and for the punishing of oppressive vice, than the inequalities in the distribution of rewards and punishments here below?<sup>2</sup>

The central moral problem of the eighteenth century that this paper will address involves, simply put, man's search for the good life and the possibility of its attainment. Looking back on this period from our present day, we can broadly define two sides to the problem: one side held that the good life was impossible on this earth, possible only in heaven; the other side taught that with the proper guidance of both the passions and mind the possibility of a good life existed in the here and now. Clearly, Richardson subscribes to the former position, as does Johnson, but for a different reason. Johnson's message is that in an increasingly secular world, pleasures of the senses are not in themselves enough to bring man happiness while Richardson appears to espouse the view that life is merely a religious trial and true happiness can only be found when one transcends earthly values and receives a divine reward. On the other hand, Defoe, by rewarding Crusoe with unlimited wealth after he has repented of his prideful ways, would hold the latter belief.

Thus, all three authors follow the same pattern of journey, separation and self-discovery. Crusoe, Rasselas and Clarissa wander outside the usual boundaries of society, following their 'fancy' and seeking 'novelty', and all three arrive at the same conclusion — albeit in a different fashion — that although reason is useful in controlling our passions and helping us to consider the

workings of divine providence, it is not in itself enough to secure happiness. Despite their differences, then, the main theme in these works is clearly the spiritual awakening of the main characters and an acceptance, through the unification of their reason and religious faith, in the existence of a divine providence. This paper will consider the journeys that all three take towards an understanding of God: Crusoe's awakening coming only after he has been removed from the world of man and forced to confront his inner self, Rasselas' only after he has escaped the confines of his "happy prison" and considered the diverse ways of man and Clarissa's when she puts aside her self-righteous pride and desire to be rid of the world and releases herself to God's will.

### Some have Escaped Shipwreck of Soul by Shipwreck of Body<sup>3</sup>

Each Beast, each insect happy in its own  
Is Heavn'n unkind to Man, and Man Alone?<sup>4</sup>

Though the literary strength of *Robinson Crusoe* is of course derived partly from the novel's plot, much rests on Defoe's skill in presenting the reader with direct and indirect insights into the moods, mentality and temperament of the protagonist. However, by seeing so clearly into Crusoe, the reader must be prepared to confront his contradictions, hypocrisies and inconsistencies as he tries to develop a set of individual values and beliefs. With the rise of Protestantism in the eighteenth century, increasing emphasis came to be placed on the individual bearing primary responsibility for his spiritual direction. It followed, therefore, that God must signify His intentions to the individual through the events in his daily life. The process of Crusoe's spiritual awakening, and his growing awareness of the role of Providence in the world and in his own life, is one of the main themes of the novel. His conversion, however, is a slow, meditative process from blindness to God's love, to a fear and finally to an acceptance of His ways, resulting in a love of God.

Much of the literary criticism of Crusoe's conversion falls into one of two extremes. Some critics accept Crusoe's total religious conversion and seek to

prove how perfectly he acts after his awakening. Others make suspect his piety, showing that his religion is only called upon in times of material need or to justify his self-seeking actions. This paper will attempt to show that either of these two extremes ignores the concept of Crusoe's process of change and discovery. In so doing, they ignore the very human aspects of Robinson Crusoe which make him such a perfect example of the Everyman. The early part of this essay will not cast judgment on the sincerity of Crusoe's religion, but seek to follow him in his religious awakening from a man who at first merely follows his "Fancy" to a man who is forced to use his "Reason" and finally to a man who unites the latter with an awareness of a Divine Providence. It will argue that this is the Everyman that Defoe was trying to present: one who does not abandon self-interest or practical reasoning for religion but learns to act in life with a consciousness of a higher religious order. Since Crusoe is not perfect, he will often seem to manipulate this religious sense to give a kind of divine sanction to his self-interested actions. However, just as often this consciousness will serve as a restraint on some of his more willful and sinful tendencies, gradually bringing him to respect and love God and his fellow man.

Up until the time Crusoe is stranded on the island, he constantly follows his purely selfish "Fancy" paying little heed to his father's commands, the ship-master's warnings, the storms which twice threaten his life or the dictates of his own reason. He does have momentary periods of reflection and repentance; however these are all short-lived and Crusoe admits, "My ill fate pushed me on now with an obstinacy that nothing could resist; and though I had several calls from my reason and more composed judgment to go home, yet I had not the power to do it".<sup>5</sup> Even after reaching Brazil and seeing the chance to attain "a secure middle life", Crusoe is dissatisfied. Only later does he realize that he was still the willful agent of his own miseries, and all his future miscarriages were:

Procured by my apparent obstinate adhering to my foolish inclination of wandering abroad, and pursuing that inclination,

in contradiction to the clearest views of doing myself good in a fair and plain pursuit of those prospects and those measures of life which Nature and Providence concurred to present me with and make my Duty. (42)

To the eighteenth-century Protestant, Crusoe's discontent with his station and his rebellion against his father would be regarded as serious sins in themselves. However, just as important is Crusoe's lack of any religious understanding, and his refusal to truly acknowledge what, to a religious man, are the clear warnings of the wrath of God through second causes. By flouting these continual warnings and following his own whims, Crusoe's willfulness and shortsightedness impel him further and further into a complete alienation from God.

Ironically, it is Crusoe's propensity to roam and to be unconfined which results in his complete loss of physical freedom. Marooned on an island, he must now establish a new orientation, one that will permit him to cope practically and psychologically with his situation. This process is perforce tentative and exploratory. Both inwardly and outwardly the reader follows Crusoe trying to determine the nature of his environment and to devise suitable responses to it in a process filled with agonizing uncertainties, indecisiveness and puzzlement. Crusoe quite naturally alternates between periods of depression and self-pity, resignation and philosophic acceptance, pride and humility, terror and joy. His initial reaction to his deliverance from drowning is one of thanks to God, but soon he falls into gloom and despair:

I had great reason to consider it as a determination of heaven that in this desolate place and in this desolate manner I should end my life, the tears would run plentifully down my face when I made these reflections and sometimes I would expostulate with myself why Providence should thus completely ruin its creatures and render them so absolutely miserable, so without help abandoned, so entirely depressed, that it could hardly be rational

to be thankful for such a life. (65)

However, immediately after this, Reason interrupts his self-pity by reminding him of the death of his eleven shipmates and asking, "Is it better to be here?" (66) It is important to note at this point that even though Crusoe acknowledges the role of Providence in his deliverance, he still only perceives it in a physical sense. Similarly, though Reason checks his self-pity, it too remains rooted on a physical plane; as yet there are no attempts by Crusoe to utilize it and seek a higher understanding of the designs of God that lie behind his apparent misfortunes.

Slowly, Crusoe's attitude towards his lot becomes more moderate, attributable to his growing self-confidence that he can, using Reason, secure his physical needs and safety. Thus, while he is able to constantly occupy himself with outward action, Crusoe is able to avoid any inner confrontation, and until his sickness, the importance of things and physical survival often provide him with a temporary diversion from his bleak reality. During this period, the reader shares in Crusoe's growing feeling of comfort and control over his new predicament.

Two instances, the "miraculous" growth of the corn and the earthquake, interrupt the purely pragmatic account of Crusoe's life. In the grain episode, Defoe contrasts Crusoe's immediate response and his later maturer consideration. Finding the stalks, Crusoe first imagines their growth to be miraculous and considers them "the pure productions of Providence for my support" (81). This thankfulness to God soon abates however, when he discovers that it was he who was instrumental in causing the grain to grow. During the earthquake episode his religion is equally short-lived; afterwards, Crusoe admits that even though he was greatly terrified, "I had not the least serious religious thought, nothing but the common, "Lord, have mercy upon me!" and when it was over, that went away too." (83)

So, still blind to any deeper religious insight, Crusoe is able to find contentment in his world as long as nothing unexpected occurs to threaten his

physical safety or his carefully collected possessions. However, Defoe is clearly trying to point out that rational reason alone is not enough for man's existence in the world, since any time a catastrophe besets Crusoe, he "becomes greatly cast down and disconsolate, not knowing what to do." (86) Still only fearing for his physical safety, Crusoe is yet to learn that Reason, although necessary to subdue his unruly passion, is in itself insufficient as a guide for all human activity.

Crusoe's vision occurs when he has reached the nadir of his physical and spiritual condition. As a result of the voice which says, "Seeing all these things have not brought you to repentance, now thou shalt die." (89), and forced by his sickness to confront his human impotence, Crusoe at last begins to reflect on his past life. This episode marks the beginning of his religious awakening; for the first time he uses his Reason to contemplate the causative pattern of his plight and to seriously consider his relationship to God. He admits that up to this time he hadn't "the least serious religious thought," acknowledging that his seafaring wickedness "had brought about a certain stupidity of soul without desire of Good or Conscience of Evil" (90). He also becomes aware of the subtler actions of God through second causes, saying that during the earthquake "I was heartily scared but thought nothing of what was really the Cause", and realizes that previously he "was merely thoughtless of a God, or a Providence, (and I) acted like a mere Brute from the Principles of Nature" (90). Eventually, Crusoe's thoughts are led to contemplate God and Nature; he reasons that "if God has made all these things, He guides and governs them all", and reaches the conclusion that God had appointed all this to befall him as a result of his "dreadful mis-spent life" (94).

Despite Crusoe's expanded understanding of God's ways and his clearer perception of the unity of the physical and spiritual, he still perceives the island merely as a physical punishment for sins. It is clear that Crusoe is only on the first stage of his path to redemption. Coming across the Biblical passage, "Call on me in the day of trouble and I will deliver, and thou shalt glorify me" (95),

he immediately prays for his deliverance from the island. After many days, he perceives the line in a different sense; “Have I not been delivered and wonderfully too, from sickness? . . . God had delivered me, but I had not glorified him, that is to say I had not owned and been thankful for that as deliverance, and how could I expect greater deliverance?” (97). It is not until the next day, after serious reflection, that Crusoe begins to comprehend the spiritual meaning of deliverance as “deliverance from sin”, which, he realizes, “is a much greater blessing than deliverance from affliction.” Now Crusoe admits, “This was the first time that I could say, in the true sense of the words, that I prayed in all my life; for now I prayed with a sense of my condition” (98).

This change in Crusoe’s attitude is a pivotal part of the book; the island has become a place of potential salvation instead of merely a place of punishment for his past sins. Moreover, he has begun to fuse the physical and the spiritual, using his Reason to realize that unless the soul is delivered from sin there can be no true deliverance of the body. Only with this new understanding of the connection between physical and spiritual distress, and a heightened perception of how God manipulates the physical world for spiritual ends, can Crusoe continue on his path to redemption.

However, just as Crusoe’s understanding of the word ‘deliverance’ was a gradual process, so is his process of actually applying his new awareness to his everyday life. He must now learn to live his religious understanding by reading the Bible, keeping the Sabbath and celebrating the anniversary of his deliverance with fasting and prayer. As a representative of Everyman, Crusoe is not a model of perfection; he must fumble his way to a religious balance as he must fumble his attempts at boat building, pottery and bread baking. His discovery of God does, however, make it easier for him to bear his lot. Immediately after his first prayer, Crusoe states:

My condition began now to be, though not less miserable to my way of living, yet much easier to my mind; and my thoughts being directed by a constant reading of the Scripture and praying



to God, to things of a higher nature, I had a great deal of comfort within which until now I knew nothing of (98).

However, this religion, born of deprivation, has more difficulty in surviving prosperity. Finding that his crops have been successful, Crusoe wants to build his barns bigger, and moments later begins to fantasize about nearby lands and taking his deliverance into his own hands. Now he wishes he had not sold Xury, not because of moral regrets, but because he needs him for the venture. Next, he builds a large canoe, ignoring whether he would ever be able to launch it, and only later admitting, "This was the most preposterous method; but the eagerness of my Fancy prevailed" (127). Despite his religious awakening, Crusoe has not been set free of natural human desires and temptations. The reader is constantly reminded of the imperfections of man by Crusoe's intermittent lapses into feelings of self-pity, discouragement and dissatisfaction with his station. However, his general movement seems to be towards greater serenity and resignation to the will of God. While other episodes simply occur and are over, Crusoe's religious reflections are unceasing, and the reader is reminded that they continue even when the narrative is concerned with other matters by passages such as: "These thoughts took up many hours, nay days, nay may I say weeks and months" (130). Indeed, this reflective mood now becomes an intrinsic part of the novel.

This serenity is immediately shattered, however, when Crusoe discovers a human footprint in the sand. Once again the reader is reminded of the very human fragility and shortsightedness of Crusoe's religion and how quickly, when faced with an unforeseen physical danger, he forgets God's promise in the Bible, "I will never, never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (114). During this episode, Crusoe comes close to falling back into his old passionate, headstrong and non-religious existence. Fear and material greed, which deprive him of Reason and disrupt his spiritual peace, make him once again a victim of his natural self. As he later admits, "I must report that the discomposure of my mind had too great impressions upon the religious part of my thoughts . . . that

I seldom found myself in due temper for application to my Maker” (161). As was the case previously in times of danger, Crusoe’s initial reaction to the footprint is an overwhelming fear for his physical safety. Only after two years of living in a state of great uneasiness does his religious reason gain some form of control, leading him to realize that “the discomposure of the mind must necessarily be as great a disability as that of the body, and much greater”, and that his recent prayers to God, performed “only under great affliction and pressure of mind, surrounded by danger”, are no more fit for acceptance by God than is a man’s repentance on his sickbed. (161). This final realization shows a definite deepening of Crusoe’s religious awareness. However, the reader can see that though his trust in Providence has provided a new strength with which he can eventually resolve his problems, it has not exempted him from long periods of physical alarm and spiritual turmoil.

It is in the latter half of the novel that Crusoe is forced to live his religious philosophy by expanding his Christianity from an individual level to a social one. During this time, his understanding of the proper conduct of a Christian towards other men is deepened, and he learns to act only after receiving spiritual guidance. It would appear that Defoe fully intended to show that Crusoe must learn to use his religious reason for the benefit of others, patiently awaiting Providential circumstances, before he is entitled to his physical deliverance from the island. It is true that often he seems to use his religious awareness to rationalize purely personal expediency, but once again, like Everyman, Crusoe must be allowed to follow this quite natural tendency which often enables man, consciously or unconsciously, to rationalize idealism into line with pragmatism. In this way, Defoe’s novel continues to present the reader with a complex combination of spiritual and material issues, which moral choices in daily life customarily involve.

It is a process of religious and practical considerations, therefore, which leads Crusoe to realize that his original design to destroy a large number of cannibals would have been no less a sin than that of willful murder, since how

was he to know “what God himself judges in this particular case” (168). Later, when he does kill many savages, it is again important to note the process through which he passes. His initial reaction upon seeing the cannibals preparing for their feast is to resolve to kill them all. However, his resolution is tempered as he considers that “God did not call me to take upon me to be a judge of their actions, much less an executioner of His Justice” (228). It is only when Crusoe sees that the cannibals are preparing to devour “a poor Christian” and not merely performing their barbarous customs on each other, that he feels justified, both morally and spiritually, to proceed in his rescue. Thus, the reader again sees a process of change in Crusoe: from immediate irrational fury, to religious contemplation, and finally to an action sanctioned by the dictates of God. He has learned that God’s will, properly understood and obeyed, ultimately meshes with prudential considerations if man patiently awaits divine direction rather than taking matters into his own hands. This is again made clear in the episodes involving Friday’s rescue. It is a full year and a half after Crusoe’s dream of saving a savage that the exact circumstances of which he dreamt come to pass. Not only does Friday provide Crusoe with a companion and servant, freeing him of physical fear and giving hope of physical deliverance, but he also allows Crusoe to extend his religion and become Friday’s spiritual guide. By introducing a companion, especially a non-Christian one, Defoe provides Crusoe with a further occasion to demonstrate his religious sincerity.

It is, then, in the very inconsistency of Crusoe’s struggle between practicality and piety, and in his very human ability to manipulate his religious insight into rationalizing a number of his actions, that Defoe creates the Everyman in his protagonist. The question whether it is self-interest or religious insight which dominates Crusoe’s activities is secondary to the process by which he learns to combine religious and practical concerns to guide his Reason. Sometimes the reader sees Crusoe regarding Providence as an agent which acts on his behalf, in whose functions he should take an active

part and whose dictates often favour his practical intentions. At other times, however, his religious conscience controls and alters his practical desires, teaching him to trust in God's plans even though his passion often tempts him to take matters into his own hands.

It is clear that Defoe was completely aware of Crusoe's imperfect religion and deliberately made it so; Crusoe himself, for example, repeatedly calls attention to the fact that its effects on his actions are often not lasting and its control over his thoughts is not dependable. Thus, the reader must view this novel as an account of a man attempting to unify his spiritual and physical self, with the soul as an antagonist which neither conquers nor is conquered. Instead, this soul provokes crises which will continue to trick and surprise, until man becomes the master of his inner life through constant reflection on God and the workings of Providence.

Why Life, a Moment; Indefinite, Desire?  
 Our wish, Eternity? Our Home, the Grave?  
 Heavn's Promise dormant lies in Human Hope;  
 Who wishes Life Immortal, proves it too.  
 Why Happiness pursu'd, tho' never found?  
 Man's Thirst of Happiness declares It is  
 (For Nature never gravitates to nought):  
 That thirst unquencht declares It is not Here.<sup>6</sup>

Boswell said of his friend Johnson "He refuses to disguise the general misery of man, but has not depressed the soul to despondency and indifference. He has everywhere inculcated study, labour and exertion."<sup>7</sup> It is clear from his many essays in *The Rambler* that Johnson had no patience with those who minimized the evils and miseries of humankind. Johnson was not a complainer; he met his difficulties with courage and a Christian resignation, but he was an uncompromising realist and held quite a somber view of life. With his relentless mordant wit, he constantly satirized the deistic optimism of

those who explained away evil as a necessary part of a larger good, using its existence in this world to support their belief in a moral Providence:

We are not to consider those on whom evil falls, as the outcasts of providence; for . . . under the dispensation of the gospel we are nowhere taught, that the good shall have any exemption from the common accidents of life, or that the natural and the civil shall not be equally shared by the righteous and the wicked.<sup>8</sup>

This is not to say that Johnson condemned or even opposed those moralists who preached a “virtuous way of living” as the only means of entry into God’s Kingdom. That he understood and even partly agreed with their position is clear in the following excerpt from *Adventurer 120* where, after several paragraphs describing the vanity of human wishes and man’s futile quest for secular happiness, Johnson writes:

From this general and indiscriminate distribution of misery, the moralists have always derived one of their strongest moral arguments for a future state: for since the common events of the present life happen alike to be both good and bad, it follows from the justice of the Supreme being that there must be another state of existence, in which a just retribution shall be made, and every man shall be happy and miserable according to his works.<sup>9</sup>

However, with his focus more on the internal, psychological dilemma of man, and his conviction “that wherever human nature is to be found, there is a mixture of vice and virtue, a contest of passion and reason,”<sup>10</sup> Johnson appears to have a more compassionate understanding of the precariousness of human existence. Thus, though he still presupposes a just God, his argument for the existence of an eternal after-life hinges more on the attributes of Man than on the more judgmental moralist view which hinges on the attributes of God:

It is scarcely to be imagined that Infinite Benevolence would create a being capable of enjoying so much more than is here to be enjoyed, and qualified by nature to prolong pain by

remembrance and anticipate it by terrour, if he was not designed for something nobler and better than a state in which many of his faculties can serve only for his torment; in which he is to be importuned by desires that never can be satisfied, to feel many evils which he had no power to avoid, and to fear many which he shall never feel; there will surely come a time, when every capacity of happiness shall be filled, and none shall be wretched but by his own fault.<sup>11</sup>

It is then in Johnson's emphasis that the subtle distinction between his writing and that of other eighteenth century writers, such as Richardson and Defoe, lies. With their didactic intent to teach Christian virtue and to emphasize a just and moral God, the reader can see that in both *Pamela* and *Robinson Crusoe* the authors tend to equate earthly reward with divine reward. In both novels, the reader is presented with an isolated moral agent cut free from the inherited traditions, customs and laws of society, attempting to work out some form of personal salvation in an untrustworthy and chaotic world. Life becomes a form of religious trial; temptations are presented and each becomes a possible occasion for sin. However, once the tests are passed by an willing acceptance of the Christian virtues of charity, humility and chastity, the authors, along with most of their contemporaries, act as the benevolent hand of God and reward their characters with the usual gifts of a happy marriage, unlimited wealth and retirement to a rural estate. Even in *Clarissa*, where Richardson follows the concept of divine reward through to its very limits with his radical refusal to allow Clarissa to live after she has recognized her pride, there is still the usual meting out of Providential justice among the good and evil characters.

In *Rasselas*, the reader sees no such clear-cut distinctions between right and wrong, or good and evil, and the word "sin" — so prevalent in the above works — is not even mentioned. Indeed, although the work does presuppose a just God, this idea stays below the surface with the emphasis always remaining

on the empirical hopes and fears of man. What Johnson shows is that even characters who are purely moral find secular happiness ephemeral. What, then, is the author's intent in *Rasselas*? This question is again best answered by his friend Boswell: "Johnson meant, by shewing the unsatisfactory nature of things temporal, to direct the hopes of man to things eternal."<sup>12</sup> Such an answer will come as no surprise to the student of eighteenth century literature; this theme was more prevalent in this period than in any other, as Protestantism increasingly emphasized the role of the individual in seeking out their own spiritual salvation. But, in directing the attention of his readers towards a "rational" faith in an afterlife, Johnson, his concern resting with mankind in all its diverse forms, resists the urge to preach and define one way of life as better than another. Unlike the moralists, he does not expound a doctrine which demands a division in this world between good and evil people who will receive all their just rewards or punishment in Heaven or Hell. Instead, he delves deeper into the human dilemma and argues that an afterlife must exist by showing the failure of a rational search to find happiness; where the unsatisfactory nature of any and all choices of life are shown to be deficient in satisfying man's infinite yearnings. Thus, in the characters of *Rasselas* and *Imlac*, the reader sees two essential, if paradoxical, elements in human nature. *Rasselas*, with his naive hopefulness, believes that if he could choose his way of life he would fill every day with pleasure, while *Imlac*'s more experienced disillusionment leads him to say that in life "much is to be endured and little to be enjoyed."<sup>(26)</sup><sup>13</sup> *Imlac*'s comment on life is one which Johnson himself had often made, but it is clear that he also saw in himself and others the ineradicable hope expressed by *Rasselas*. Both of these sides of man are united in the words of the anonymous (Johnson?) narrator who comments on the story of the hermit:

For the hope of happiness . . . is so strongly impressed that the longest experience is not able to efface it. Of the present state, whatever it may be, we feel, and are forced to confess, the

misery, yet, when the same state is again at a distance, imagination paints it as desirable. (47)

It is then the alternation in life between hope and disillusionment which leads to “the conclusion in which nothing is concluded.” (104) In this very conclusion the reader sees Johnson’s belief that the Creator, who planted in man the aspiration towards contentment, will in the afterlife provide its satisfaction. Thus, the aspiration for this state’s *not* being satisfied in this world is evidence in itself of man’s immortality.

If Man were made for this life only, and not designed to aim at anything beyond it, why were not all his Desires and Expectations confined within the Compass of his Being? When the time allotted us to appear is but a Span long, why are we continually reaching out into eternity and never satisfied with anything less than infinite?<sup>14</sup>

Ye who listen with credulity to the whispers of fancy, and pursue with eagerness the phantoms of hope; who expect that age will perform the promises of youth, and that the deficiencies of the present day will be supplied by the morrow, attend to the history of Rasselas, prince of Abyssinia. (1)

So begins the story of Rasselas, who, despite the fact that in the Happy Valley, “all the diversities of the world were brought together, the blessings of nature were collected and its evils extracted and excluded,” (2) finds himself discontent, and begins to “delight in solitary walks and silent meditation.” (4) Looking at the animals in the valley, he compares their condition with his own:

What . . . makes the difference between man and all the rest of the animal creation? Every beast that strays beside me has the same corporeal necessities with myself: he is hungry and crops the grass; he is thirsty and drinks the stream; his thirst and hunger are appeased; he is satisfied and sleeps; he arises again



and is hungry; he is again fed and is at rest. I am hungry and thirsty like him, but when the thirst and hunger cease, I am not at rest; I am like him pained with want, but am not like him satisfied with fullness. (5)

Immediately, then, Johnson addresses three phenomena which distinguish human from beast: a sense of desire, the use of reason and a sense of time. Animals merely have needs, which, once satisfied, temporarily cease. Man has “desires distinct from sense” which, Johnson shows in this work, permit no surcease. Man’s reason and his sense of time clearly divide his physical and mental state; though physically content, man’s reason, often afflicted with his “Fancy”, perceives inferences, compares resemblances and connects with or weaves into present circumstances those in the past and the future. Thus, Rasselas says, “I fear pain when I do not feel it; I sometimes shrink at evils recollected and sometimes start at evils anticipated.” (5)

The idea that man’s sense of time distinguishes him from brute creation and partially accounts for his terrestrial discontent became commonplace in the literature of the eighteenth century. William Wollstonecraft, in his work *The Religion of Nature Delineated*, written in 1722 and by 1750 in its seventh edition, stated:

If the souls of men are mortal, the case of brutes is much preferable to that of men. The pleasures of brutes, tho, but sensual, are more sincere, being pulled or diminished by no diverting consideration . . . Their sufferings are attended with no reflexion . . . They are void of cares; are under no apprehension for families and posterity; never fatigue themselves with vain inquiries, hunting after knowledge which must perish with them; are not anxious about their future state, nor can be disappointed of any hopes or expectations. (210)

“Indeed,” wrote the author of *Guardian 89*, on June 23, 1713, “were it not for my belief in immortality, I had rather be an oyster than a man, the most

stupid and senseless of animals than a reasonable man tortured with an extreme innate desire of that perfection which it despairs to obtain.”<sup>15</sup> However, Rasselas, with the increased awareness that sets him apart from the other dwellers of the Happy Valley, does not envy the animals: “Nor do I, ye gentle beings, envy your felicity; for it is not the felicity of man . . . surely the equity of providence has balanced peculiar sufferings with peculiar enjoyments.” (5) Already the reader can see Johnson’s intent: if Providence set man above other animals by giving him Reason, and if it is this reason which in part causes him to be discontent with the sensuous pleasures of life, then his reason must be meant to consider another more permanent state free of worldly pleasures and in an immortal union with an omnipotent God.

It is desire that motivates Rasselas to leave the Happy Valley. Johnson makes it clear that a sense of desire is necessary for man’s temporary felicity. As Imlac states, “Some desire is necessary to keep life in motion,” (17) or, as Nekayah more clearly defines it:

Such . . . is the state of life, that none are happy but by the anticipation of change; the change itself is nothing. When we have made it, the next wish is to change again. The world is not yet exhausted; let me see something tomorrow which I never saw before. (98)

It is then only in the “novelty” of the moment that man is happy in this temporal world. With his sense of time, the pleasures that man does find are far from the permanence of true happiness, for, once attained, the novelty wears off, or man lives in a constant fear of losing that which has made him happy, or he looks at others’ happiness and begins to grow weary of his and to long for theirs. After Rasselas wonders why he is more unhappy than any of his friends, Imlac tells him

we are long before we are convinced that happiness is never to be found, and each believes it possessed by others, to keep alive the hope of obtaining it for himself . . . and therefore you will

rarely meet one who does not think the lot of his neighbors better than his own. (37)

In the Happy Valley, where “every desire was immediately granted, “ (2) Rasselas laments “I have already enjoyed too much; give me something to desire.” (7) When the sage tells him of the plethora of miseries in the external world, Rasselas responds “Now . . . you have given me something to desire. I shall long to see the miseries of the world, since the sight of them is necessary to happiness.” (7) Actually, it is not so much the sight of misery that is necessary to happiness, but the anticipation and novelty of such a sight. After all, Rasselas’ apprehension of misery in the course of his travels does not make him any happier; rather it merely induces him to see and experience different forms of unhappiness, leading, as was Johnson’s intent, to a realization that happiness cannot be found on earth. But for Johnson, it is imperative that Rasselas, and man, aided by their reason, come to this conclusion themselves, for he believed “to escape misfortune is to want instruction, and . . . to live at ease is to live in ignorance.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, paradoxically, Rasselas must see the miseries and discontents of life to achieve true happiness, that is, a belief in the afterlife, which will come only after he realizes the difference between permanence and “novelty”, eternal and temporal, and sees that looking for what is timeless in a world of time is truly a waste of time.

This dependence of man on “novelty” becomes a subsidiary theme in Rasselas. The men allowed into the Happy Valley had to be able “to add novelty to luxury.” Rasselas regrets the loss of childhood, because then nature always had something new to show; the hermit’s cell soon lost “the pleasure of novelty.” When, after the debate on marriage, Rasselas is almost discouraged, Imlac says he is confining himself to a city which “can now afford few novelties,” and even the Pyramids reveal the folly of supposing that anyone “can feed the appetite of novelty with successive generations.” In the same way, it is a desire for novelty that motivates Imlac to leave his homeland and his father behind to pursue his fortune across the seas. He hopes for perpetual

stimulation, devoid of satiety:

When I first entered upon the world of waters and lost sight of land, I looked round about me with pleasing terror, and, thinking my soul enlarged by the boundless prospect, imagined that I could gaze round for ever without satiety; but in a short time I grew weary of looking on barren uniformity, where I could only see again what I had already seen. (19)

Clearly, his hopes are in vain. That desire which had actuated his flight from confinement has led inevitably to satiety and, albeit in a different sense, further confinement. After this realization, Imlac immediately desires to return to Abyssinia where he anticipates the solicitation of his former companions. He is once again disappointed and, perhaps weary of this inexorable cycle of desire and satiety, claims that “I resigned myself with joy to perpetual confinement.” (28) The irony that he does so “with joy” seems to indicate his resignation to a moral fate from which he feels he cannot extricate himself which in turn provides conclusive evidence of an eternal happiness of the soul. Thus, while desire is necessary to keep man’s cycle of existence in motion, it is also a torment to him. Desire provides only the illusion of escape, as it ultimately must lead to satiety and, therefore, to an increased awareness of life’s confinement. True escape must involve a flight away from temporal cycles. In *Rasselas* the central question becomes: can man, as he exists, extricate himself from the confines of that existence and thereby find constant happiness?

It is unnecessary and impractical in this paper to discuss every “choice of life” that Rasselas, Nekayah, Pekuah and Imlac consider on their journey. It is already clear, knowing Johnson’s intent, that their search to find a “happiness . . . which is something solid and permanent, without fear and without uncertainty,” is ensured to fail before it has begun. Yet, by realistically presenting so many different forms of life, Johnson allows the reader to discover this themselves with a minimal amount of moralizing on the part of the author. Thus, the prescriptions offered by the two philosophers are either

impractical or meaningless; the young are involved in trivial and transient pleasures, the old possessed with regrets and self-reproach; the shepherds feel exploited and are envious of the rich, while the rich are beset with paranoiac mistrust and greed; the hermit is desolate and the ruler surrounded with conspirators; the learned have apotheosized themselves; marriage is filled with domestic pain but celibacy “knows no pleasures;” even historical monuments reveal “the insufficiency of human enjoyments” and show that unbounded riches cannot “feed the appetite of novelty with successive gratifications.” Through his travels, Rasselas learns without a doubt that the causes of man’s unhappinesses are rooted in his human nature, not in his environment.

If, then, as Nekayah states, “happiness is itself the cause of misery,” and one accepts that “we do not always find visible happiness in proportion to visible virtue,” since “even if one practices virtue, the folly or vice of another may make one miserable;” what *will* the practice of virtue and religious belief in the immortality of the soul offer man in this life? Paradoxically, it is our sense of our temporal existence, which on the one hand helps to cause our misery, that also acts as our balm in times of grief. As Imlac tells Nekayah:

When the clouds of sorrow gather over us we see nothing beyond them, nor can imagine how they will be dispelled; yet a new day succeeded to the night, and sorrow is never long without a dawn of ease . . . Our minds, like our bodies, are in continual flux; something is hourly lost, and something is acquired . . . nature will find the means of repatriation. (72-73)

If we live virtuously, with a belief in a benevolent providence, Johnson shows the benefits will be twofold: we will never have the misery of guilt added to any grief, and our faith in God will give us hope, in times of calamity, of a future happiness. Nekayah realizes this when she tells her brother “All that virtue can afford is quietness of conscience, a steady prospect of a happier state; this may enable us to endure calamity with patience,” (56) and Imlac reiterates this important truth in more detail while Nekayah is blaming herself for Pekuah’s

misfortune:

Great princess . . . do not reproach yourself for your virtue, or consider that as blamable by which evil has accidentally been caused . . . When we act according to our duty, we commit the event to him by whose laws our actions are governed, and who will suffer none to be finally punished for obedience . . . When we pursue our end by lawful means, we may always console our miscarriage by the hope of future recompense . . . This at least . . . is the present reward of virtuous conduct, that no unlucky consequence can oblige us to repent it. (70)

Just as importantly, our faith will support us when we are confronted with our death or the death of a loved one; a time when, clearly, reason, knowledge and human friendship are to no avail. For Johnson, the stoic attempts to overcome the ills of life through philosophy are doomed to failure. In *Rambler* 32, he wrote that “the experience of every hour” shows that the arts of reason and philosophy can only palliate, they can never cure that “infelicity” which is “involved in corporeal nature, and interwoven with our being.”<sup>17</sup> Johnson makes this clear in Chapter XVIII “The prince finds a wise and happy man.” The sage “who discoursed with great energy on the government of the passions” and “compared reason to the sun,” suddenly forgets all his precepts and is thrown into misery when his daughter dies: “What comfort . . . can truth and reason afford me? Of what effects are they now, but to tell me that my daughter will not be restored”? (41) Thus, the teachings of stoics, however useful in alleviating the ills of this life, are useless when we face the prospect of leaving it; but the hope of Christianity and a belief in the Gospel promise of eternal happiness can really assuage our grief when we think on, or face, the occasion of death. It is this realization which the travelers reach just before “The conclusion, in which nothing is concluded.” While standing at the catacombs, Rasselas says:

Let us return . . . from this scene of mortality. How gloomy would

be these mansions of the dead to him who did not know that he shall never die; . . . Those that lie here stretched before us . . . warn us to remember the shortness of our present state; they were, perhaps, snatched away while they were busy, like us, in the 'choice of life.'

"To me," said the princess, "the choice of life is become less important; I hope hereafter to think only on the choice of eternity." (104)

Thus, *Rasselas* is one long, persistently argued endeavor to show that finite objects can never finally satisfy, but not by reason of any defect in the objects themselves. The defect — and the glory — is in man himself, a finite creature ever yearning for the infinite. Johnson has clearly shown man his hope that this short life "in which much is to be endured," will be followed by an eternity of happiness, and the absence of happiness from this world is a guarantee of its presence in the next:

For (Man) alone, Hope leads from goal to goal  
And opens still, and opens on his soul,  
'Till lengthen'd on to Faith, and unconfin'd  
It pours the bliss that fills up all the mind.<sup>18</sup>

The days of man are but as grass. For he flourisheth as a flower of the field, for as soon as the wind goeth over it, it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.<sup>19</sup>

In his introduction to *Clarissa*, Richardson warns the reader:

Do not enter upon the perusal of the Piece before you as if it were designed only to divert and amuse. It will probably be thought tedious, to all such as dip into it, expecting a light novel, or a transitory romance, and look upon the Story in it . . . as its sole end, rather than as a vehicle to Instruction. (ixv)

The story of *Clarissa Harlowe* and her triumph most richly fulfills the requirements of a pious biographical fiction of heroic Christian virtue in action.

From the above quote, it is quite clear that Richardson wished his second novel, like *Pamela*, to be read in a context of popular didactic narrative. His work becomes a celebration of an exemplary character from ordinary life whose courageous resistance to a corrupt world exalts her to the status of a saint from whom the readers can learn the discipline of a Christian life. Despite the dubious intellectual reputation of the novel in the early eighteenth century — Beasley, in his work *Novels of the 1740's*, describes fiction of this time as “tenth-rate pulp . . . the stuff of history’s dustbin”<sup>20</sup> — Richardson very deliberately chose this popular form for his Christian message so that it would appeal to all levels of a rapidly growing heterogeneous reading audience. Deeply troubled by what he considered to be an age of moral degeneracy, with “skepticism and infidelity openly avowed and the doctrines of self-denial and mortification blotted out of the Catalogue of Christian Virtue,”<sup>21</sup> Richardson told Lady Bradshaigh that Clarissa “appears in the humble guise of a novel only by way of accommodation to the manners and tastes of an age overwhelmed with luxury and abandoned to sound and senselessness.”<sup>22</sup>

Richardson is not alone, however, in his choice of the novel form and of Clarissa, an ordinary middle-class woman separated from society, as vehicles for teaching “Christian Virtue.” The Christian hero or heroine — Robinson Crusoe, Tom Jones, Pamela and Roderick Random — all show, to varying degrees, the experiences of an isolated moral agent cut free from the inherited traditions, customs and laws of society, attempting to work out some form of personal salvation in an untrustworthy and chaotic world. This new type of Christian hero came at a time when Protestantism was increasingly pushing church authority into the background, emphasizing instead the individual conscience and spiritual self-awareness as the only means to salvation. This new code of honor, however, which Ian Watt describes as “internal, spiritual and available to all without distinction of class or sex,”<sup>23</sup> though making a future divine reward more accessible than ever before, necessarily produced a feeling of loneliness and separation. The question became: How could the individual



fortify him- or herself against the threats posed by the disorder and degeneracy of the world in which he or she lived? Richardson's answer seems to be: through a constant refinement of one's sensibility with a courageous willingness to investigate the minutiae of one's daily life, while acknowledging human weaknesses and attempting to correct them by embracing the Christian virtues of charity, humility and chastity. Life becomes a form of religious trial; temptations are presented and each becomes a possible occasion for sin. Only through introspection on how one fares through these tests will the individual eventually come to discover God's preordained pattern in one's life. However, in one important sense, Richardson differs from his contemporaries in that the reward Clarissa receives after the threats have been met and the tests passed is not the usual earthly Edenic paradise such as a happy marriage, unlimited wealth or retirement to a rural estate. Clarissa dies, and in this sense Richardson follows the concept of divine reward through to its very limits, refusing to allow the typical solution to the problem by equating earthly reward with divine reward. Clarissa is no Robinson Crusoe, who, once he has acknowledged the role of Providence, repented for his prideful sins and done a few good deeds, is set free from his prison and rewarded with seemingly endless wealth. Clarissa transcends earthly values and thus her only possible retribution is a union with God and an acceptance into the community of saints. Richardson makes his position quite clear when, in answer to repeated requests from his friend Lady Bradshaigh that Clarissa be rewarded for her virtue in this world, he wrote:

A writer who follows nature, and pretends to keep the Christian system in his eye, cannot make a heaven in this world for his favorites, or represent this life other-wise than as a state of probation. Clarissa, I once more aver, could not be rewarded in this world. To have given her her reward here, as in a happy marriage, would have been as if a poet had placed his catastrophe in the third act of his play when the audience were

obliged to expect two more. What greater moral proof can be given of a world after this, for the rewarding of suffering virtue, and for the punishing of oppressive vice, than the in-equalities in the distribution of rewards and punishments here below?<sup>24</sup>

Thus, to a degree, in pursuing his didactic purposes Richardson follows the same pattern of journey, separation, and self-discovery as did Fielding, Defoe and Johnson in their novels. Many of the major works of this time subscribe to an idealism that works itself out in the protagonist's moral progress towards a final reward. Richardson, like the other authors, portrayed an ordinary person whose extraordinary story would hopefully inspire his readers and teach them the rewards and rigors of spiritual discipline. Yet, unlike Tom Jones and Robinson Crusoe, Clarissa's self-discovery takes her beyond the realms of an "everyman", since Richardson always intended for her to evolve into a monument to the ideals of piety and Christian virtue: "I laid indeed a heavy hand on the good Clarissa. But I had begun with her, with a view to the future saint in her character; and could she, but by suffering, shine as she does?"<sup>25</sup>

For this reason, the mode of the epistolary novel suited Richardson's purposes perfectly since it enabled him to reveal a detailed account of Clarissa's private sufferings, and to give an intensely rendered revelation of her spiritual and emotional life. The reader is able to *see* the development of her self-understanding, compare her virtuous character with those around her, and follow the effects she has on them. Most importantly, one is able to follow Clarissa's preparations for death, which, though to a modern reader may seem excessive to a point of morbid affectation, were an essential confirmation of her saintliness, her triumph over the trials of life, and a means of showing, in an age of growing secularization, how only faith in a future state could provide a secure shelter from the terrors of mortality.

Clarissa's triumph, however, had to be a gradual human process; hence Richardson deliberately did not allow his heroine to be completely flawless from the very beginning:

As far as is consistent with human frailty, and as far as she could be perfect, considering the people she had to deal with and those with whom she was inseparably connected, she is perfect. To have been impeccable, must have left nothing for the divine grace and purified state to do, and carried out our idea of her from woman to angel.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, the dominant theme in the first part of the novel is the heroine's ignorance of her true nature. Like Robinson Crusoe, Clarissa's excessive faith in her own abilities, which implies an unconscious belief in her superiority, leads her to disobey her father and leave the family, which, in the eighteenth century, still represented a nucleus of divine order. Richardson himself stated: "Going off with a man is the thing I wanted to make inexcusable,"<sup>27</sup> and it is clear that even though this prideful action becomes the means by which Clarissa attains her sainthood, he considered her self-centeredness a moral failing and the root of her increasing distresses.

Once Clarissa has left home, thereby rejecting the religious and social values of her day, she must establish her own separate reality, and by constantly besetting her with seemingly invincible enemies of virtue and goodness, Richardson shows that this will be no easy task. In the early days of her flight, then, Clarissa continues with an attitude of self-deluding righteousness, refusing almost to take any blame for the elopement and continually demanding social proprieties from Lovelace. In her work *Clarissa, Poetry and Morals*, van Heyningen writes:

Once Clarissa has entered the underworld, society and all its supporting controls have been left irrevocably behind, and gone with them are the relationships which have formed her nature. Duty has no meaning in a world of total sham; duty, honor, and merit all depend upon real distinctions between real people.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, Clarissa must accept this new reality, since, despite her unwillingness to relinquish the familiar and safe patterns of behavior that had served to define

her, the liaison with Lovelace has led her hopelessly beyond the boundaries of established order. It is this realization, and a gradual awareness of her own self-pride, which forces Clarissa to accept that she must simply concentrate on preserving the unity of her own personality within this chaos. This, in turn, leads to an honest examination of her own soul, in an attempt to find some meaning and coherence within the reality she has caused herself to be plunged into. It is clear that Richardson wished to make it entirely evident to the reader that, even in such a pure and seemingly innocent person as Clarissa, the subtle forces of pride quietly linger and will draw us down into sin if we are not constantly vigilant. Thus, Clarissa's pride results in an overconfidence, a lack of caution and sufficient moral concern, evident in her improper relationship and plans to flee with Lovelace, and her prideful belief that she can control a man who has not been controlled by other women.

It is not until after the rape, however, in the scraps of paper passed onto Lovelace, that Clarissa admits to her pride: "How art thou humbled in the dust thou proud Clarissa Harlowe! Thou that never stepped out of thy father's house, but to be admired." (239) She acknowledges "that I was too secure in the knowledge I thought I had of my own heart, " (242) and admits that Belle saw her pride, while she thought her chiding and upbraiding to be merely the result of envy. But, even though the reader can see in the following excerpt from a letter to Anne Howe that Clarissa is aware of the role of Providence in her suffering, and often seems to be thankful for it, it will be some time before she can truly "live" her beliefs:

I was the pride of all my friends, proud myself of their pride and glorying in my standing. Who knows what the justice of heaven may inflict, in order to convince us we are not out of the reach of misfortune, and to re-duce us to a better reliance . . . my calamities have humbled me enough to make me turn my gaudy eyes inward, to make me look into myself. — And what have I discovered there - Why my dear friend, more secret pride and

vanity than I could have thought had lain in my unexamined heart . . . Indeed, . . . I am afraid I have thought myself of too much consequence. But, however this be, it is good, when calamities befall us, that we should look into ourselves and fear. (274)

At first, Clarissa views her physical violation by Lovelace as a loss of self, and her initial reaction is one of complete despair and self-condemnation leading to an overwhelming desire for any form of escape, even death:

Once more I have escaped! — But alas! I, my *best self*, have not escaped! — Oh! you poor Clarissa Harlowe! . . . But no more of myself! My lost self. You that can rise in a morning to be blessed, and to bless; and go to rest delighted with your own reflections, and in your unbroken, unstarting slumbers conversing with saints and angels, the former only more pure than yourself, as they have shaken off the encumbrance of body; . . . (Letter to Anna Howe, 273)

I shall never be myself again: I have been a very wicked creature — a vain, proud, poor creature full of secret pride — and now I am punished — so let me be carried out of this house, and out of your sight; and let me be put into Bedlam . . . (242)

Initially, then, Clarissa sees her physical death merely as a means of escape from the sinful self she has discovered through introspection: “But still upon *self*, this vile, this hated *self*! I will shake it off if possible! And why should I not, since I think, except one wretch, I hate nothing so much?” (245) Isolated from her traditional background, and having discovered the pride and passionate desires inherent in her nature, she wishes “Would but they kill me, let them come and welcome. I will bless the hand that will strike the blow;” (252) and cries to Lovelace, “Twill be a mercy, the highest act of mercy you can do me, to kill me outright upon this spot.” (250) Violent suicide thus becomes a real possibility for Clarissa; but death under these circumstances would be a defeat,

and the battle she had waged would be in vain should she yield to it. Success is still possible — even success in death — but if it is to come, Clarissa herself must find a way to transform death from a loss of identity and a violent usurpation of self to an assertion of self.

The strength to resist suicide originates in Clarissa's recognition of the power and integrity of her own will, along with her gradually increasing awareness of the separateness of the body and soul. She has seen her previously proud ways, has repented for them, and now can judge herself independently of others:

For myself, if I shall be enabled, on due reflection, to look back upon my own conduct without the great reproach of having willfully, and against the light of my own judgment, erred, I shall be more happy, than if I had all the world's accounts desirable.  
(471)

Slowly, Clarissa's condition changes from despair to hope, though her body continues to wither: "My mind, too, I can find, begins to strengthen; and methinks at times, I find myself superior to my calamities." (442) The psychological importance of Clarissa's acceptance of her sinful passions, her repentance for them, and a growing confidence in a separate essential soul that remains inviolate and transcends the physical world, cannot be stressed too highly. She realizes that "to act up to our best judgment at the time, is all we can do. If I have erred, 'tis to worldly wisdom only that I have erred." (451) She can, then, in the words of Miss Howe, "Comfort yourself . . . in the triumphs of a virtue unsullied; a will wholly faultless." (285) Here is the very core of self that has not been touched, and a preservation of this pure will, along with a belief that God knows of her purity, will become not only a desperate measure by which Clarissa can maintain the self intact, but a positive step in the formulation of a new statement of identity. Thus, her first great triumph over the sinfulness of self becomes not a castigation of identity but a correction, and finally a celebration, of it. Despair would be an even greater sin than pride;

Clarissa must use her increased understanding as a means of hope, relying on God's help to support her: "Let me, however, look forward," she resolves, "to despond would be to add sin to sin. And whom have I to raise up, whom to comfort me, if I desert myself." (314)

From this point on, the reader follows Clarissa, with the help of divine grace, preparing cheerfully for her return to her "Father's house," and for her soul's "marriage." Richardson's work now becomes a study of a saint moving towards the Creator as well as a direct criticism of the world's standards; standards that judge merely by events with no concern for the motives that caused them. How can Clarissa live without compromising her newly discovered values? As she writes to Miss Howe:

Do you think 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 perhaps *compassion* of a man, who has, by means so inhuman, robbed her of it? My soul disdains communion with him. (344)

Her death becomes a release, for, with no "willful errors to look back on with self reproach," Clarissa's standards are not of this world; they can only be realized in the after-life. In this sense she is a perfect example of the spiritual independence of Protestantism: since the individual is ultimately a spiritual entity, no individual or institution can destroy the sacredness of the human personality. Shunned by her society, and with her own values in complete contrast to their expectations, Clarissa must establish her own reality. Death becomes not a loss of self but the only way for her to realize her identity completely — not a defeat, but a triumphant affirmation of her newly discovered self.

Richardson had to make a very clear distinction, however, between Clarissa's earlier desire for death merely as an escape from her predicament: "For what purpose should I eat? For what end should I wish to live? I tell thee Dorcas, I will neither eat nor drink. I cannot be worse than I am," (242) and her

later release to God's will where she longs to be rid of the world but leaves it up to divine providence to decide when this moment will come:

When appetite serves, I will eat and drink what is sufficient to support nature . . . And whatever my physicians shall think fit to prescribe, I will take . . . In short, I will do everything I can do to convince all my friends . . . that I possessed my soul with tolerable patience . . . for thus, in humble imitation of the sublimest exemplar I often say: - Lord, it is thy will; and it shall be mine. Thou art just in all thy dealings with the children of men; and I know thou wilt not afflict me beyond what I can bear; and if I *can* bear it, I *ought* to bear it; and (thy grace assisting me) I *will* bear it. (345)

It is at this point that we see Clarissa's attitude change towards those who have caused her suffering. She admits, "Mr. Lovelace's baseness, my father's inflexibility, my sister's reproaches, are the natural consequences of my own rashness; so I must make the best of my hard lot." (379) Gone are the words of self-righteous pride and feigned hurt we saw earlier in the novel in her dealings with Lovelace:

Wretch, inhuman, barbarous, and all that is base and treacherous, begone from my door!! . . . Vilest of men and most detestable of plotters! How have I deserved from you the shocking indignities — but no more — only for your own sake, wish not, at least for a week to come, to see the undeservedly injured and insulted. (194)

In her last letter to Lovelace, the new Clarissa, filled with compassion and religious tolerance, states; "I tell you, that, wherever you go, I wish you happy. And in this I mean to include every good wish." (387) Even though this is the man who raped her, she has no desire for worldly revenge; thus, she writes to her cousin:

One day, sir, you will perhaps know all my story. But, whenever



it is known, I beg that the author of my calamities may not be vindictively sought after. He could not have been the author of them, but for a strange concurrence of unhappy causes. (417)

Again, she not only wishes Lovelace happiness and offers him her forgiveness, but says “And Almighty, . . . forgive him too; and perfect his repentance, and sanctify it to him!” (440) Clarissa also extends her love and blessings to her family and relations, even as they steadfastly refuse to see her or to believe in her innocence:

Once more, my dear cousin, . . . commend me most dutifully to my father and mother . . . To my sister, to my brother, to my uncles — and tell them, I bless them with my parting breath — for all their goodness to me - even for their displeasure — I bless them — most happy has been to me my punishment here! Happy indeed! (458)

Stinstra, a Mennonite clergyman who translated *Clarissa* into Dutch, said in his preface:

I have never found anywhere a more beautiful or lovelier picture of a serene, virtuous, Christian preparation for death. I maintain that every virtue loving Christian will fall in love with this work. For, for those who are attempting to take their course through this world, free of vice and holding onto virtues, this work will enable them to learn by example of how and where others broke the rules of morality, and how temptations steal upon them and what they must avoid.<sup>29</sup>

Richardson had criticized previous tragedy on the grounds that “the tragic poets have . . . seldom made their heroes . . . in their deaths, look forward to a future hope.” He prided himself that he is “well justified by the Christian system, in deferring to extricate suffering virtue to the time when it will meet with the completion of its reward.”<sup>30</sup> Truly, Clarissa’s death is a triumph. As Ian Watt states:

The reward of the afterlife modifies the tragic death of Clarissa. The overpowering sense of waste and defeat actually conveyed by Clarissa's death, combined with the fortitude she displays in facing it, actually succeeds in establishing a true tragic balance between the horror and grandeur of her death.<sup>31</sup>

The reader can see from her letters that Clarissa meditates upon death in the manner and with the results approved of by Jeremy Taylor; "The frequent use of meditation . . . will make death safe and friendly . . . and that we shall sit down in the grave as we compose ourselves for sleep."<sup>32</sup> But Clarissa's death could not be *just* a personal triumph. As her life was important precisely because it had an earthly significance and her virtue noteworthy because others could find a lesson for their own lives, Richardson intended Clarissa's death to have a social significance. Thus, her death, filled with a quiet hope and trust in God, exemplifies Man's goal. Clarissa has taken to heart the warnings of God, had read aright "the ways of Providence" in the world, and has seen that even death itself is but God's method of subduing "His poor creatures unto Himself." By following Christ's example of vicarious sacrifice and triumph over the world, Clarissa has become a saint; a pure and perfect ideal that all men can strive for. In creating a parable illustrating the fundamental doctrine of the cross, Richardson thus attempted to portray the nature of sin and guilt under the operations of conscience, and to represent in his heroine the ultimate refinement of sensibility as the condition of salvation. In Clarissa's dying words, uttered just moments before she gains a heavenly father and a spiritual bridegroom, we can see what ultimately Richardson believed to be the truth for all men in this life: "That God would not let her depend for comfort upon any but himself." (459)

## NOTES

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