The Female Jailor and Female Rivalry in Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*

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> *"Oh the deadly snares/That women set for women, without pity/Either to soul or honour! ...Like our own sex, we have no enemy, no enemy!"*
> - Thomas Middleton, *Women Beware Women* (1613/14; 1657)

> *"How much more cruel and insulting are bad women, even than bad men!"*
> - Belford, from Richardson's *Clarissa*

1 In Samuel Richardson's landmark novel, *Clarissa* (1748-49), the eponymous heroine escapes the arranged marriage her parents have tried to force her into only to be abducted and imprisoned by the aristocratic rake Lovelace. She ultimately reforms him—but after he rapes her and she languishes away for several hundred pages, mourning the loss of her virginity and chastising him via a steady stream of epistles (the book contains a total of nine volumes and 547 letters).[1]

2 *Clarissa* was enormously popular in its day. The French novelist Rousseau lauded the work: "No one, in any language, has ever written a novel that equals or even approaches *Clarissa*" (qtd. in Watt 219). Likewise, Samuel Johnson commended it as "the first book in the world for the knowledge it displays of the human heart" (qtd. in Watt 219). Widely read throughout the eighteenth-century, it enjoyed the production of five editions in Richardson's lifetime and generated numerous imitations across the continent, especially among the rising class of women writers. While it fell out of favor in the 19th century, *Clarissa* was again taken up by modernists in the 20th century and has since become a canonical text for students of British literature. It also continues to amass popular appeal: as recently as 2010, the British journal *The Guardian* named it the fourth best novel in the English language, and it has been adapted by BBC into both a mini-series (1991) and a radio play (2010). Even as recently as May 2016, *The New Yorker* featured an article about the novel's lasting impact.[2]

[1] Given that several condensed versions of the lengthy novel exist and that, moreover, Clarissa is available electronically from several sources, I will be using the free online version available via Gutenberg and referring to the books and letters within which the quotations occur instead of traditional page numbers.

[2] See Adele Waldman, "The Man Who Made the Novel: Loving and Loathing Samuel Richardson," *The New Yorker* 16 May 2016. Web. 9 May 2016.

3 One of the primary arguments made about Richardson's novels (his two other landmark texts are *Pamela* and *Sir Charles Grandison*) is that they gave birth to new literary conventions and thus held a central role in reshaping the ideological landscape of eighteenth-century England within which the middle-class family emerged. As literary scholars like Ian Watt, Michael McKeon, and Nancy Armstrong have argued, the eighteenth-century novel was anchored by characters who embraced enlightenment values like rational autonomy, self-moderation, introspection, and psychological interiority; the narrative impulse to reward these characters for their integrity both reflected and promoted a shifting set of cultural values rooted in personal rather than economic merit. Importantly, the main character of these novels was often a woman from the gentry. Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall explain: "A society based on market forces necessitated relationships beyond the grasp of the cash nexus, a site for moral order—located where else but in an idealized femininity and childhood, within the sacred bounds of family and home" (xxx). Eve Tavor Bannet terms this major literary shift to valorize the middle-class heroine the "domestic revolution." From the privacy of her heart and home, the heroine exerted her moral influence; her ability to reform those above and below her depended on eliciting their desire for intimacy (both sexual and platonic) with her. Hence, the seemingly depoliticized space of courtship within the eighteenth-century novel served the socio-cultural function of both defining and disseminating middle-class ideology.[3]

[3] Nancy Armstrong makes this argument in her canonical text, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*.

4 Clearly, Clarissa's character and narrative trajectory function to disseminate a middle-class ideology based in a merit economy. However, scholars have long debated whether Clarissa, either character or text, can be read as 'proto-feminist.' Yes, Clarissa stands up to her parents, rejects oppressive societal expectations, and though raped by Lovelace, expresses fierce autonomy in refusing to be possessed by him. It's also true that editorial commentary throughout the text lays blame for Clarissa's death on misogynistic norms, including men's rakish behavior and problematic marriage laws.[4] Moreover, Richardson was a generous donor to major philanthropic projects dedicated to helping women, children, and infants; in particular, he both financially supported the Magdalen House, a home for former prostitutes, and wrote sympathetic pamphlets about the women there in the hopes of garnering public support for the project.[5] We also know that Richardson mentored a number of fledgling women writers from whom he regularly solicited advice as he drafted *Clarissa*. Elspeth Knights notes, in fact, that he borrowed from some of their experiences for his plots.[6]

5 Clearly, the text takes pains to emphasize its heroine's victimization at the hands of her father, uncles, Lovelace, and, by extension, the masculine empire over which they reign. To this end, Nancy Armstrong has even read *Clarissa* alongside the popular tradition of American captivity narratives wherein colonial women were captured by Native Americans whom they ultimately reformed and Christianized. Armonstrong posits that *Clarissa* is a "sweeping condemnation of traditional male authority" ("Captivity" 377) and suggests Richardson chose the best-selling model of the captivity narrative to "demonstrate in extravagant terms that respectable women are no more safe in England than in British North America, [and] that England must become a sanctuary for them ("Captivity" 377). However, Armstrong cautions against a wholesale reading of the text as feminist. Clarissa's influence on the men around her depends on her lack of power: "by virtue of her helplessness and the danger in which she

[4] For an overview of proto-feminist readings of the text, see Siohban Kilfeather, "The Rise of Richardson Criticism." *Samuel Richardson: Tercentenary Essays,* ed. Margaret Doody and Peter Sabor. New York: Cambridge UP, 1989. Terry Eagleton does not argue for a feminist reading of Clarissa, but does claim that Clarissa wields power in so far as she is able to wield rhetorical power and thus works to subvert her own oppression. See Eagleton, *The Rape of Clarissa: Writing, Sexuality, and Class Struggle*, U of Minnesota Press, 1982.

[5] See Martha Koehler, "Redemptive Spaces: Magdalen House and Prostitution in the Novels and Letters of Samuel Richardson," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 22.2 (2010): 249-78.

[6] Apparently, not always with their permission. Both Elspeth Knights and Ruth Perry note that some of his women readers accused him of exploiting their personal tragedies. See Knights, "'Daring but to Touch the Hem of her Garment': Women Reading *Clarissa*." *Women's Writing* 7.2 (2000): 221-45. Also see Perry, "Clarissa's Daughters: Or, The History of Innocence Betrayed." *Clarissa and Her Readers: New Essays for the Clarissa Project*. Eds. Carol Houlihan Flynn and Edward Copeland. New York: AMS, 1999. 119-41.

repeatedly finds herself, [Clarissa] provides the categorical imperative for a new brand of masculinity" (379). In other words, it is precisely because Clarissa is weak and vulnerable that a reformed masculine ideal is necessary; because she is unable to save herself from bad men, good men must come to her rescue. Other scholars have similarly challenged claims concerning the novel's 'feminist' impulse, many noting that the 'heroine' dies trapped in a house (the symbol of the domestic ideal), able to exert her moral authority only via the mediation of her male executor and male author.[7]

6 Moreover, the novel's characterization of the other women of the novel is decidedly misogynistic. It is crucial to remember that the women of the novel are as violent, if not more violent, than the men and arguably crueler.[8] Clarissa is first bullied by her sister, then her sister's sadistic servant, Betty Barnes, and finally by the prostitutes who terrorize, drug, and assist Lovelace in raping her. Thus, Belford's condemnation of "bad women"—the epigraph with which I began this essay—likely rang true for readers of the novel: bad women *do* seem more cruel and insulting than bad men (Vol. 7; letter XV). Clarissa's abandonment by her mother is felt more keenly than her father's, her sister's cruelty cuts more deeply than her brother's, and Lovelace's misogyny pales in comparison to that of the savage women he employs, Betty Barnes and Mrs. Sinclair. While eventually both Clarissa's mother, sister, and servant, as well as all the men of the novel will express to some degree or another regret for their actions, the worst women of the novel—the prostitutes—die unrepentant. Thus, while Armstrong has argued that the novel purposefully draws parallels between Lovelace and the 'savages' of captivity narratives, I'd argue that—at least within the narrative-- the actual 'savages' from whose clutches Clarissa needs to be rescued are the women who surround her. In effect, the novel deploys the trope of female rivalry to shift blame away from male-perpetrated violence and the patriarchal system which normalizes it.

7 Throughout the text, heterosexual rivalry (by the eighteenth century colloquially termed 'the battle of the sexes') is displaced by female homosocial rivalry. In other words, for every bad man Clarissa encounters, there is a worse woman. The first of these is Clarissa's mother. Mrs.

[7] See, for example, arguments on this subject made by Margaret Doody and Florian Stuber in "Clarissa Censored." *Modern Language Quarterly* Winter 1998: 74-88, and Tassie Gwilliam, *Samuel Richardson's Fictions of Gender*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993.

[8] For a discussion of men's violence against Clarissa and her own sadomasochistic tendencies, see Laura Hinton, "The Heroine's Subjection: Clarissa, Sadomasochism, and Natural Law." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32 (1998): 293-308. . Much of what Hinton has to say about Clarissa's invitation of violence from men can also be applied to what I argue in this essay about her relationship with women.

Harlowe is not 'bad' in the way that the other women of the novel are bad. That is, she is not violent with Clarissa. However, the narrative implicitly and explicitly condemns her maternal failure to protect her daughter from male tyranny. Importantly, Mr. Harlowe's mandate that his daughter marry the aging Mr. Solmes so as to garner wealth for the family is largely ventriloquized by his wife, Mama Harlowe, who practices blind allegiance to his authority. Yet it's clear that both Mama Harlowe and Clarissa suffer from the former's failure to stand up to Mr. Harlowe. In letter after letter, Clarissa describes to her friend Anna how her mother vascillates between scolding Clarissa, threatening her, weeping, and cajoling her to marry Solmes. When her mother kisses her after they've argued, Clarissa confides to Anna, "Did not this seem to border upon cruelty?...It would be wicked [would it not] to suppose my mother capable of art? But she is put upon it, and obliged to take methods to which her heart is naturally above stooping" (Vol. 1, Letter 17). Clarissa's description makes clear that her mother is repressing her natural maternal instincts and, as such, their sacred bond is broken. Importantly, the reader learns from the first letter of the book that Mrs. Harlowe is unable to follow the dictates of her own heart because, although "she is admirably qualified. to lead" she has instead "submit to be led" (Vol. 1, Letter 1). In other words, although she could rescue Clarissa, she does not. When Clarissa is kidnapped, she sends her mother letters begging her help, but her mother responds by returning them, unopened. When she learns that Clarissa has been raped and is dying, Mrs. Harlowe resists sympathy, telling her daughter she must "sail with the tide" of the family's continued anger (Vol. 7, Letter 28). Thus, the text implies that Mrs. Harlowe is worse than Mr. Harlowe because *she* is a mother and should know better.

8 Ironically, while the era's conduct book literature celebrated the domestic ideal, in its literature there is a dearth of good mothers. Instead, novels of the period are swarming with monstrous mothers and orphaned heroines. Marilyn Francus argues that this is because "a 'good' mother, like her monstrous and spectral doubles, demonstrates agency, will, and action … As a consequence, 'good' mother narratives force the acknowledgement of legitimate maternal power and authority and implicitly compete with the patriarchal imperatives they were supposed to support" (16). In other words, while conduct book literature might promote the *idea* of an agency-wielding 'good' mother, an embodied fictional representation of that ideal proved too threatening. Thus, within a patriarchal narrative, Mama Harlowe cannot rescue Clarissa. She cannot embody the maternal ideal. The new masculine ideal (which, in the novel, will be

embodied by the reformed Belford) depends on Mama Harlowe's failure to save her daughter.

9 Arabella is equally as ineffectual as a sister and, because she is also a rival for male desire, far more cruel. Just as Mrs. Harlowe stands in for Mr. Harlowe, Arabella shifts attention away from the bad behavior of their brother James. Much of James' harassment of Clarissa is filtered through the letters he sends her, whereas Arabella consistently, sadistically, torments Clarissa in person—a violence the reader witnesses in Clarissa's letters. Throughout the text Arabella is depicted as materialistic, vain, self-complacent, coquettish, and jealous. In contrast to Clarissa's tempered rationality (a hallmark of eighteenth-century enlightenment ideology), Arabella is controlled by her passions. On several occasions, Arabella's violent rages cause Clarissa to believe she is about to hit her. Clarissa describes one encounter:

> My sister is but this moment gone from me: she came up all in a flame, which obliged me abruptly to lay down my pen: she runs to me—
> Oh spirit! Said she; tapping my neck a little *too* hard. And is it to come to this at last!—
> Do you beat me, Bella?
> Do you call this beating you? Only tapping your shoulder *thus,* said she; tapping again more gently-- …. (Vol. 2, Letter 9)

In the above scene, readers witness a woman who is entirely out of control, "in a flame," "foaming with passion," "out of patience" and intending "violence" against her sister. Worse, she refuses to recognize that she is her own sister's bully, even when Clarissa calls her out on her behavior. While James is also described negatively, the novel implies that Arabella's behavior, like Mrs. Harlowe's, is doubly toxic because she is behaving unnaturally—"natural" being implicitly defined as the way the female exemplar, Clarissa behaves.

10 In fact, Arabella's apathy toward her sister belies the fact that she is, herself, a victim of a misogynistic culture. Even Clarissa notes this irony, complaining, "Should not sisters be sisters to each other? Should not they make a common cause of it, as I may say, a cause of sex, on such occasions as the present?" (Vol. 1, Letter 14). Her question encourages the reader to condemn Arabella's sisterly (and womanly) failure and would seem to promote the need for female community. Yet the text fails to treat Arabella sympathetically, despite the fact that Arabella is far more disadvantaged by societal norms than her sister. After all, she lacks the physical beauty valued by her culture and which, in the absence of a sizable dowry, might attract a suitor. A marriage to a wealthy man might, in turn, bestow on her some financial independence and, with

it, agency. Yet, even Anna acknowledges Arabella's dim prospects for such a match precisely because of who her sister is: "What man of a great and clear estate would think of that elder sister while the younger were single?" (Vol. 2, Letter 2). Clarissa's inherent superiority is affirmed, yet Arabella is not an object of pity. Instead, both Anna and Clarissa mock Bella's "plump, high-fed" face (Vol. 1, Letter 7); Anna even jokes that only the heinous and hideous Solmes would make a good match for Bella since "the woman…*should* excel the man in features" and only Solmes might match that criteria (Vol. 1, Letter 10). The irony of her name, Ara*bella,* also seems a deliberately cruel choice by Richardson. Further, Clarissa is favored not only by her parents and by suitors like Lovelace (who Arabella initially desires) but by their grandfather, who leaves all of his wealth to Clarissa, and their uncles who would do the same.

11 Luce Irigaray, in her canonical feminist essay "Women on the Market," argues that because society assigns women value only in relation to men's desire and heterosexual exchange, women tend to interact with each other as rivalrous commodities. Clearly, a feminist reading of Arabella's behavior recognizes that she is behaving as a competing commodity. Yet, within the text Arabella and Clarissa are never reconciled and Arabella winds up married to a man who abuses her—an implicit punishment for her abusive behavior toward Clarissa and for her refusal to adopt Clarissa as a model of the feminine ideal. Any potential to use Arabella's position to challenge patriarchal authority is undercut and defused by the trope of female rivalry.

12 Clarissa finds more female rivals elsewhere. Given the dialectic relationship between eighteenth-century gender and class ideologies, it is important to note that the lower the social rank of the novel's women, the greater their violence towards Clarissa. Betty Barnes is a servant in the Harlowe household who behaves particularly sadistically. She is employed to spy on Clarissa by Clarissa's parents who confine the heroine to her room and tell her she cannot leave it without Barnes at her side. Barnes delights in spying on Clarissa, rifling through her letters, and reminding Clarissa of her impending fate as Solmes' wife. Clarissa despises Barnes, telling Anna: "[T]his creature has surprised me on many occasions with her smartness; for, since she has been employed in this controlling office, I have discovered a great deal of wit in her assurance, which I never suspected before" (Vol. 2, Letter 9). Clarissa's appraisal of Barnes' unlikely intelligence represents a desire to demarcate clear class boundaries. The fact that Clarissa is "surprised" that Barnes possesses such scruples serves to warn the reader of the

potential threat embedded in the working class woman whom they let into their homes and leave unguarded.

13 Additionally, the narrative warns against homosocial intimacies between women of the working class and those in the gentry, suggesting that the working class women will contaminate those above them.[9] Indeed, Anna suggests that the primary reason Arabella is mistreating Clarissa is because she has made the mistake of "lay[ing] herself in the power of a servant's tongue!" (Vol. 1, Letter 15). Clarissa, too, scolds Barnes for interfering in her relationship with her sister: "She [Arabella] always preferred your company to mine. As you pulled, she let go" (Vol. 2, Letter 19). However, Clarissa also notes that the problem of upstart working class women is not confined to the Harlowe house; she predicts "that were the succession of modern fine ladies to be extinct, it might be supplied by those from whom they place in the next rank to themselves, their chambermaids and confidants" (Vol. 2, Letter 19). Clarissa makes explicit Arabella's mistake in allowing her servant so much power; in turn, Arabella has endangered not only their sisterly relationship but also the social hierarchy.

14 Again, a feminist Marxist reading of Betty Barnes might note that she, even more than the women who employ her, is disadvantaged by the system. She is, after all, employed by Clarissa's parents and merely following their dictates. Her economic well-being depends on trying to force Clarissa into marrying Solmes. Moreover, one might argue that she has as much a right to desire to cross class boundaries and enter the middle-class as Arabella and Clarissa have to marry further up the social ladder themselves. And yet, because Barnes' story is filtered through the letters of her social superiors and she is never given voice herself, the reader is encouraged to see her only as Clarissa's tormentor. She functions, by means of contrast with Clarissa, to draw further blame away from the underlying problems in patriarchy and to shift the readers attention onto class and gender-based rivalries. Further, she helps to displace some of the readers' anger at Arabella because she is so much 'worse' and might be, as Anna suggests, ultimately responsible for influencing Arabella's unsisterly behavior.

15 As argued thus far, Clarissa's exemplary status materializes by means of contrast with the other women of the novel. We see this occur symbolically in so far as, over the course of the novel, the materiality of Clarissa's body slowly gives way to its own ethereality, culminating in

[9] See Susan Lanser for further discussion about the threat of homosocial relationships between working class and middle class women. Lanser, "Befriending the Body: Female Intimacies as Class Acts." *Eighteenth Century Studies* 32.2 (1998-99): 179-98.

her death, while the 'bad' women of the novel become increasingly more mired in their corporeality. Ironically, at the same time as the women become worse, the men begin to reform. While Lovelace is provided the rhetorical means (via letter-writing) by which to articulate his eventual reformation, none of the 'bad' women are provided such an opportunity. Arguably, as the novel progresses, Lovelace's focus turns from bodily desire to spiritual desire, mirroring Clarissa's movement toward ethereality. But her rivals sink further into their quicksand of their bodily appetites.

16 As the moment of her wedding to Solmes nears, a terrified Clarissa is duped by Lovelace (via Betty Barnes, whom he has employed) into running away. Rather than taking her to safety, however, Lovelace dumps her in a brothel, hoping that her isolation from her friends and family and the influences of the prostitute will eventually persuade her to consent to his sexual advances. Of course, Lovelace initially claims that he has taken Clarissa to an inn and that the innkeeper, Mrs. Sinclair, is a widow and the other women living there are her tenants and relatives. However, Clarissa soon discovers that Mrs. Sinclair runs a brothel and that her housemates are actually prostitutes.

17 When Clarissa enters the Sinclair household, she appears to be walking into Lovelace's trap, but the narrative eventually makes clear that 'bad' women, not Lovelace, are her truest adversaries. Janet Todd has said of the contrast between the women of the novel that "[t]he terrifying Sinclair may seem far from the weak and submissive Mrs. Harlowe, but their functions collide; both women minister to men and preside over houses whose genteel veneer barely hides the brutality beneath" (35).[10] In other words, both households are overseen by women who, at the behest of men, imprison Clarissa. However, it's also clear that the degree of brutality Clarissa experiences in these households depends on the social class of the woman in charge; moreover, the further down the social class the women are, the more the gender hierarchy is destabilized. By the time Clarissa dies, there is no longer any question as to who her greatest threat is: other women.

18 One of the most compelling ways in which the novel deflects blame away from the men's monstrous behavior is in the dehumanization of the prostitutes, reducing them to their most animal of features. Although Lovelace is Clarissa's rapist, throughout the text readers are granted

[10] Although Todd is more interested in the portrayal of the friendship between Clarissa and Anna, she uses Clarissa's relationships with these other women as a point of contrast.

access to his psychological interiority via his letters. In his letters, readers discover he is sorrowful. Thus, he can be identified and empathized with. He is, in fact, so charming that a number of readers of the novel expressed desire for him. One reader, Lady Bradshaigh, admitted she could not "help being fond of Lovelace" (*Correspondence* 178). Richardson himself would lament, "Oh that I could not say, that I have met with more admirers of Lovelace than of Clarissa" and even revised the text in its second edition to make Lovelace more reprehensible (qtd. in Bloom 10). Even a number of modern critics have read Lovelace as a hero.[11] Yet the women he employs are offered no such subjectivity. Instead, they are mocked by even the worst of the novel's men. Lovelace writes to Belford to revel in Mrs. Sinclair's masquerade as an honorable woman:

> [Y]ou'll be ready to laugh out, as I have often much ado to forbear, at the puritanical behavior of the mother [Sinclair] before this lady [Clarissa]. Not an oath, not a curse, nor the least free word escapes her lips. She minces in her gait. She prims up her horse-mouth. Her voice, which when she pleases, is the voice of thunder, is sunk into a humble whine. Her stiff hams, that have not been bent to civility for ten years past, are now limbered into curtsies three deep at every word. Her fat arms are crossed before her; and she can hardly be prevailed upon to sit in the presence of my goddess. (Vol.4, Letter 4)

In this letter, as elsewhere, Mrs. Sinclair's perversity takes center stage, entertaining Lovelace, Belford, and by extension the reader, with whom Lovelace forms a bond by letting them in on the joke, so to speak. There is nothing human about this beast of a woman masquerading as a 'woman,' a guise that the men of the novel are able to see through and expose for the reader.

19 In another instance, the depiction of Mrs. Sinclair mirrors that of a wicked witch from fairytale lore. Maddened by Clarissa's temporary escape, Sinclair threatens bloody violence against the negligent maid who allowed it: "[M]ake up a roaring fire—the cleaver bring me this instant—I'll cut her into quarters with my own hands; and carbonade and broil the traitress for a feast to all the dogs and cats in the neighbourhood; and eat the first slice of the toad myself,

[11] Martin Price, for example, calls Lovelace a restoration comedy libertine who scorns the hypocrisies of the world and its artificial hierarchies (34). Thus, he feels Clarissa is justified in desiring him, and that her desire signifies a rebellion against bourgeois hypocrisies. See Price, "The Divided Heart." *Samuel Richardson*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House, 1987. 33-42. Similarly, Anthony Winner suggests, "Theoretically, Lovelace offers freedom from bondage and a joint rebellion against the enslaving world" (44). He continues, "Since family and society have degraded Clarissa intro property, Lovelace's idealization of her as property appears a relative improvement" (45). Embracing Lovelace as a hero figure, Winner argues that "Richardson's celebrated empathy with feminine premises and psychology is carried over into Lovelace, who joins the traditional emotionalism of women to masculine force" (47). See Winner, "Richardson's Lovelace: Character and Prediction." *Samuel Richardson*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House, 1987. 43-50.

without salt or pepper" (Vol. 6, Letter 38). Here Sinclair extends the feminine violence first witnessed in Arabella; she threatens not just to beat but to devour her foe. Her appetite literalizes the desire for power earlier expressed by Barnes and, more implicitly, Arabella. Again, although the text makes clear that the prostitutes became prostitutes because of men, these gestures seem half-hearted or obligatory. Instead, the text appears to relish in the transgressive behavior of its 'bad' women.

20 Perhaps nowhere more damning of the prostitutes' excessive corporeality is the description of Sinclair's deathbed scene, narrated by the novel's hero Belford. After Clarissa's death, Sinclair falls and breaks her leg and develops a fatal infection. She calls Belford to visit her. He describes to Lovelace his horror at her appearance:

> Her misfortune has not at all sunk but rather, as I thought, increased her flesh; rage and violence perhaps swelling her muscly features. Behold her then, spreading the whole tumbled bed with her huge quaggy carcase: her mill-post arms held up, her broad hands clenched with violence; her big eyes goggling and flaming-red as we may supposed those of a salamander; her matted grizzly hair made irreverence by her wickedness (her clouted head-dress being half off) spread about her fat ears and brawny neck; her livid lips parched, and working violently; her broad chin in a convulsive motion; her wide mouth by reason of the contraction of her forehead (which seemed to be half-lost in its own frightful furrows) splitting her face, as it were, into two parts; and her huge tongue hideously rolling in it; heaving, puffing as if for breath, her bellows-shaped and various-coloured breasts ascending by turns to her chin and descending out of sight with the violence of her gaspings. (Vol. 9, Letter 25)

Mrs. Sinclair is, again, excess embodied. Richardson, via Belford, places particular emphasis on her transgressive, power-hungry body: its swelling, spreading, heaving, puffing, and ascending in direct contrast to Clarissa who hovers over the text, an ethereal composition of words. Whereas Clarissa has assumed her idealized position as the spiritual muse, Sinclair refuses to disappear; she insists on being seen and recognized. Belford goes so far as to make the comparison explicit, stating that "it is evident, that as a neat and clean woman must be an angel of a creature, so a sluttish one is the impurest animal in nature" (Vol. 9, Letter 25). Ironically, however, the "neat and clean woman" in the text—Clarissa—is able to exist in her pure state only as an idealized angel. Sinclair's monstrosity, in contrast, is evidenced even in her refusal to die; she literally refuses to part ways with her body. Alhough Belford attempts to convince Sinclair to accept her fate and repent to a clergyman, she refuses, raving against death until the end. Importantly, the prostitutes who surround her are described as equally monstrous, and though seeing their

mistress die so wretchedly does give them pause, Belford notes that theirs is only a "transitory penitence" (Vol. 9, Letter 25).

21 Another way in which the novel works to shift the blame from men and patriarchy on to women is in its depiction of Lovelace as another victim of the prostitutes' bullying. They initially appear to be Lovelace's lackeys, like Barnes had earlier, spying on Clarissa so as to relay to him her habits and disclose where she hides her letters. However, the longer Clarissa remains in the brothel, the more Lovelace appears to lose control over the women. Indeed, their hatred of Clarissa far exceeds Lovelace's desire for her. So badly do the women of the Sinclair house desire Clarissa's fall, they begin to encourage Lovelace to quit procrastinating and rape her. While Lovelace tries to attain Clarissa's consent, the prostitutes bully Lovelace because they think he is not being aggressive enough. Lovelace complains of their badgering to Belford: "Sally, a little devil, often reproaches me with the slowness of my proceedings" (Vol. 4, Letter 21). In another instance, Lovelace tells Belford of the prostitutes' behavior when Clarissa has refused to dine with him:

> All the women set me hard to give her cause for this tyranny. They demonstrated, as well from the nature of the *sex,* as of the *case,* that I had nothing to hope for from my tameness, and could meet with no worse treatment were I to be guilty of the last offence [rape]. They urged me vehemently to *try* at least what effect some greater familiarities that I had ever used with her would have" (Vol. 4, Letter 36).

Here we see that Lovelace *prefers* to take things slowly with Clarissa. However, the "bad women" with whom he associates negatively influence him. He concedes that they have swayed him: "their arguments being strengthened by my just resentments…I was resolved to take some liberties…. (Vol. 4, Letter 25).

22 Indeed, the women not only push Lovelace to rape her, but offer tips for helping him to do so. As the novel progresses, Lovelace makes some headway with Clarissa which the prostitutes tell him he can use to his advantage:

> Mrs. Sinclair and the nymphs are all of the opinion that I am now so much of a favourite, and have such a visible share of [Clarissa's] confidence, and even in her affections, that I may do what I will, and plead violence of *passion;* which, they will have it, makes violence of *action* pardonable with their sex…and they all offer their helping hands. Why not? They say: has she not passed for my wife before them all?...They again urge me, since it is so difficult to make *night* my friend, to attempt in the *day*. They remind me that the situation of their house is such, that no noises can be heard out of it; and ridicule me for making it necessary

> for a lady to be undressed. *It was not always so with me,* poor old man! Sally told me; saucily slinging her handkerchief in my face. (Vol. 5, Letter 4)

In the above passage, a number of important strides are made in characterizing these "bad" women as worse than Lovelace. First, they justify his rape of Clarissa by assuring him that women will forgive those who rape them if the rapist does so out of passion. Further, they blame the victim, arguing that because Clarissa has pretended to be his wife to save her reputation, she has implicitly consented to his advances. They also argue away the excuses that Lovelace has brought forth, telling him he neither needs to wait for the cover of night or for Clarissa to willingly undress for him. Here, too, we see that a motivating cause for their hatred of Clarissa is that they resent Lovelace's desire to treat her better than he had treated them. Again, the novel invokes the trope of female rivalry, just as it had done with Arabella.

23 Viewed through a feminist lens, it's clear that the women despise both Clarissa's exemplary status and Lovelace's desire for what has become increasingly clear to them (and to him) is not her body, but the economy of virtue she represents. It's an economy within which these 'fallen' women have no capital; it's the economy Luce Irigaray criticizes because of its commodification of women like Arabella that leads, in turn, to female rivalry. Yet, as with Arabella, the prostitutes are more monstrous than sympathetic. Eventually, the prostitutes succeed in persuading Lovelace to rape Clarissa. He justifies his crime to Belford, explaining he really had no other choice: "In this situation; the women ready to assist; and, if I proceeded not, as ready to ridicule me; what had I left but to pursue the concerted scheme…?" (Vol. 6, Letter 36). The prostitutes drug Clarissa and help hold her down while he rapes her. Importantly, Sinclair's face - not Lovelace's - is the last thing Clarissa remembers seeing before she is raped, symbolically suggesting that Sinclair is the actual rapist.[12]

24 Afterwards, Lovelace continues to blame the women for the rape. He moans, "The cursed women, indeed, endeavored to excite my vengeance, and my pride, by preaching to me of me. And my pride was, at times, too much excited by their vile insinuations" (Vol. 9, Letter 31). He

[12] The Sinclair household is clearly a more brazen version of Mrs. Jewkes from Richardson's first novel, *Pamela* which Bradford Mudge examines. Mudge says Jewkes "serves both to dramatize Pamela's virtues and to highlight the disparity between 'good' femininity and 'bad' femininity" (192). He notes the scene in which Jewkes and Pamela wrestle in front of a peeping Mr. B; in this scene "they physically act out the novel's central conflict between 'good' and 'bad' femininity, between one definition of womanhood that celebrates women as the corporeal vessels of religious virtue and another definition that portrays them as the embodiments of satanic vice" (194). Pamela ultimately wins and wins over Mrs. Jewkes, who reforms. See Mudge, *The Whore's Story: Women, Pornography, and the British Novel 1684-1830*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000.

also considers how he might, himself, have reformed in time but for the bad women's influences: "Had I carried her [I must still recriminate] to any other place than that accursed woman's—for the potion was her invention and mixture; and all the persisted-in violence was at her instigation, and at that of her wretched daughters, who have now amply revenged upon me their own ruin, which they lay at my door—" (Vol. 9, Letter 31). Again, the women - not his own desire - have brought about his and Clarissa's ruin.

25 Because he has positioned the women as the actual captors and rapists, Lovelace can thus reposition himself as Clarissa's protector; in this manner, by means of contrast with the bad women, the narrative pushes to transform Lovelace from aggressor to quasi-hero. On a number of occasions, he tells Belford he is afraid to leave her alone with the prostitutes. Clarissa also seems to accept Lovelace's role as protector; she is demonstrably more afraid of Sinclair than Lovelace, even begging him at times to protect her from the other women. Clarissa's 'recognition' of the greater threat posed by the women confirms for the reader what might otherwise be read as Lovelace's deflecting of blame. The fact that Clarissa is more afraid of the women than him suggests they 'really are' her real captors.

26 Further, the novel routinely makes explicit the misogynist truism that women, in general, are far worse than men when it comes to cruelty and violence. Lovelace complains: "A mischief which would end in simple robbery among men-rogues, becomes murder if a woman be in it" (Vol. 6, Letter 16). In other words, men's bad behavior has a moral limit, whereas women's does not. Later, he proclaims of the prostitutes' behavior that it is "a scurvy villainy (which none but wretches of [Clarissa's] own sex could have been guilty of" (Vol. 6, Letter 7). Indeed, he makes this point over and again, suggesting women have more to fear from the machinations of other women than they ever could of men. Lest it be argued that Lovelace's claims are ironic and that his unreliability as a narrator undercuts his condemnation of the women, consider that both he and Belford make nearly the same statement in two different parts of the text. Lovelace, writing to Belford moans, "A bad woman is certainly, Jack, more terrible to her own sex than even a bad man" (Vol. 6, Letter 31). Belford, the only male moral authority in the novel and arguably both a foil and reformed version of Lovelace, later reiterates this same statement: "How much more cruel and insulting are bad women than bad men" (Vol. 7, Letter 15). If Belford, in his moral progress via Clarissa's guidance, is supposed to be moving further away from Lovelace's influence, it's telling that he echoes these misogynistic truisms. Moreover, in the

conclusion of the novel, Richardson (via Belford) returns to tell the story of the prostitutes, apparently to reiterate their wickedness. In so doing, he reminds readers of what Lovelace would often say: "Let not any one reproach us Jack: there is no wickedness like the wickedness of a woman." Richardson then underscores this truism with reference to a biblical verse (Ecc.xxv 19) from which this sentiment derives; in so doing he implicitly grants divine sanction to Lovelace's and Belford's misogyny.

27 Yet, while Clarissa, Lovelace, and even Belford explicitly denounce the prostitutes, it is their own self-condemnation that best evidences the novel's misogynistic impulses. At Sinclair's death, Sally is forced to admit of herself and Mrs. Sinclair to Lovelace that Clarissa's "ruin was owing more to their own instigations than even [savage as thou art] to thy own vileness" (Vol. 9, Letter 19). Sinclair concurs, "For though it was that wicked man's fault that ever she was in my house, yet it was mine, and yours, and yours, and yours, devils as we all were (turning to Sally, to Polly, and to one or two more), that he did not do her justice!" (Vol. 9, Letter 25). Importantly, the prostitutes do not repent. They are only acknowledging their own vileness and owning their monstrosity. They are affirming what Lovelace, Belford, Clarissa, and ultimately the novel, have already insinuated: that women are the root cause of all evil.

28 The depiction of communities of women as dangerous can be read, as I have argued elsewhere,[13] as evidence not only of a general distrust of the potential power that lies in female homosocial intimacy, but more specifically in respect to the threat posed by female literacy and a growing community of women writers in the eighteenth century. These women writers threatened to offer up counter narratives, to disrupt patriarchal authority. Some evidence suggests that Richardson at times attempted to silence rival female authors.[14] Thus, we might turn once again to what Lovelace has to say about the prostitutes. Exasperated with their aggression against Clarissa, he cries to Belford,

> damn the whole brood, dragon and serpents, by the hour…The great devil fly away with them all, one by one, through the roofs of their own cursed houses, and dash them to pieces against the tops of chimneys, as he flies; and let the lesser

[13] See my article, Johnston, Elizabeth. "'Deadly Snares': Eighteenth-Century Women Writers and the Trope of Female Rivalry," *SLI: Studies in the Literary Imagination* 47.2 (2014) [special edition of Cambridge Scholars Publications, Ed. Kristine Jennings].

[14] See Ellen Gardiner's essay concerning Richardson's tendency to assert control over both Clarissa's narrative and the narratives of the women writes whom he patronized. Gardner, *Regulating Readers: Gender and Literary Criticism in the Eighteenth-Century Novel*. Newark: U of Delaware P, 1999.

> devils collect their scattered scraps, and bag them up, in order to put them together again in their allotted place, in the element of fire, with cements of molten lead. (Vol. 7, Letter 12)

Here Lovelace imagines the prostitutes' "scraps" burned into nonexistence. Given the "scraps" of paper exchanged for nearly one-thousand pages of the novel, and given Clarissa's "scraps" of paper willed to Belford, it's not much of a leap to imagine the "scattered scraps" in this passage as stories told by women, stories which threaten male authority. But if we could rescue these scraps, piece them together, I think what we would find is something very much like what I have tried to knit together here: a counter-narrative that exposes the ways in which even a text which appears to challenge patriarchy ultimately works in its service.

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