Eighteenth-Century Fiction

Volume 17
Issue 3 *Fiction and the Family / Genre romanesque et la famille*

Article 7

4-1-2005

Representations of the Domestic Parlour in Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, 1747–48

Karen Lipsedge

Recommended Citation
Lipsedge, Karen (2005) "Representations of the Domestic Parlour in Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, 1747–48," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*: Vol. 17: Iss. 3, Article 7.
Available at: http://digitalcommons.mcmaster.ca/ecf/vol17/iss3/7

Copyright ©2013 by Eighteenth-Century Fiction, McMaster University. This Article is brought to you by DigitalCommons@McMaster. It has been accepted for inclusion in Eighteenth-Century Fiction by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@McMaster. For more information, please contact scom@mcmaster.ca.

Representations of the Domestic Parlour in Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, 1747–48

Abstract
In his account of Richardson's epistolary method, Francis Jeffrey describes the degree to which Richardson engages the reader. On reading his novels, the reader does not remain an outsider, but glides into the "domestic privacy" of his protagonists. As Ian Watt has observed, the term "domestic privacy" is significant. It not only refers to the private experience of the characters but also to their domestic interiors—that is, the houses that they live in and how they inhabit them.

This article is available in Eighteenth-Century Fiction: http://digitalcommons.mcmaster.ca/ecf/vol17/iss3/7

Representations of the Domestic Parlour in Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, 1747–48

Karen Lipsedge

> With Richardson, we slip, invisible, into the domestic privacy of his characters, and hear and see every thing that is said and done amongst them, whether it be interesting or otherwise, and whether it gratify our curiosity or disappoint it ... . We feel for [them] as for our private friends and acquaintance, with whose whole situation we are familiar.[1]

In his account of Richardson's epistolary method, Francis Jeffrey describes the degree to which Richardson engages the reader. On reading his novels, the reader does not remain an outsider, but glides into the "domestic privacy" of his protagonists. As Ian Watt has observed, the term "domestic privacy" is significant. It not only refers to the private experience of the characters but also to their domestic interiors—that is, the houses that they live in and how they inhabit them.[2]

An understanding of the characters' domestic privacy is important for an appreciation of the novels of Richardson and his contemporaries because a distinction can be made between earlier types of prose fiction and novels from the early to mid-eighteenth century. In

1 Francis Jeffrey, "Edinburgh Review" (October 1804), in Francis Jeffrey, *Contributions to the Edinburgh Review*, 4 vols. (London, 1844), 1:321–22.

2 Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (London: Hogarth Press, 1987), 175.

EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FICTION, Volume 17, Number 3, April 2005

earlier forms, characters are usually depicted as "general human types" who act out conventional plots in a non-specific time and place.[3] In the emergent novel, on the other hand, the attention tends to shift from the general to what Mrs Barbauld refers to as the "minute and circumstantial."[4] Substantial detail is imparted not only about the characters—their sentiments, modes of behaviour, and attire—but also about their homes. The two are intimately related, for unlike earlier types of prose fiction, the early to mid-eighteenth-century novel firmly situates characters in domestic space. Furthermore, the reader can only have a full understanding of the protagonists if she knows these interiors. As Watt notes, "the delineation of the domestic life and the private experience of the characters who belong to it ... go together—we get inside their minds as well as inside their houses."[5] Or, to put it another way, only by entering their houses can we penetrate their minds.

The intimate relationship between Richardson's novels and the domestic interior has generated increasing interest among social and literary historians. Christina Marsden Gillis, Cynthia Wall, and Philippa Tristram all consider the relationship between the novel and the domestic interior, paying particular attention to the early to mid-eighteenth-century Palladian country house and its depiction in Richardson's three novels.[6] A weakness in these studies, however, concerns the interpretation of the spatial organization of the Palladian house and how this influences an interpretation of Harlowe Place. When considering the internal plan of the Palladian house, Gillis, for example, observes that the eighteenth century witnessed an "increased compartmentalization of the house into its private and public zones."[7] She suggests Richardson found his model for Harlowe Place in this specific type of house. Tristram and Wall draw similar conclusions. To demonstrate how Richardson underlines this bipartite division of interior space, these scholars examine the two rooms that receive the most attention in *Clarissa*: Clarissa's closet and her lesser parlour.

3 Watt, 15.

4 *Correspondence of Samuel Richardson*, ed. Anna Laetitia Barbauld, 6 vols. (London: R. Phillips, 1804), 1:xx.

5 Watt, 15.

6 Christina Marsden Gillis, *The Paradox of Privacy: Epistolary Form in "Clarissa"* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1984); Cynthia Wall, "Gendering Rooms: Domestic Architecture and Literary Acts," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 5 (1993), 349–72; Philippa Tristram, *Living Space in Fact and Fiction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989).

7 Gillis, 7.

Situated upstairs, adjacent to her bedchamber, Clarissa's closet is the only private room that she owns at Harlowe Place. This private upstairs room is contrasted with its polar opposite, Clarissa's lesser parlour. Located downstairs (in what Tom Keymer refers to as the "communal" arena),[8] Clarissa's lesser parlour is, for Wall, a "public room."[9] But what is important about Clarissa's lesser parlour is that, although it is situated in the communal arena, Clarissa does not use it either as an informal entertaining room or as a family parlour. Instead, she employs it as a relatively private room for solitary and intellectual activities, such as her philosophical conversations with Dr Lewin. Clarissa's unconventional use of her lesser parlour is relevant because this usage affects how the reader interprets the Harlowes' transformation of the room, in letter 7, from a relatively private place into a public space for courtship. Understanding this unconventional use also helps the reader interpret how the Harlowes employ particular structural features in Clarissa's lesser parlour, such as the door and wainscot partition, to imprison Clarissa, as well as Clarissa's attempts to diffuse their power and regain space control. None of these points have been stressed in previous studies of the representation of the domestic interior in *Clarissa*. Gillis does acknowledge that by the early eighteenth century the parlour was "a room usually connected with privacy in the familial or domestic sense."[10] In *Space and the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, Simon Varey notes how the Harlowes exploit the politics of space in Harlowe Place, in order to reassert their authority and power over Clarissa.[11] However, neither Varey nor Gillis examines how Richardson articulates Clarissa's anomalous use of the lesser parlour to demonstrate the subtle gradations of privacy in Harlowe Place. Nor do they consider how the presence of an ambiguous room like the lesser parlour undermines the strict binary (public-private) division of the Palladian country house.

One reason for this failure to recognize the significance of the function of Clarissa's lesser parlour is a lack of attention to the eighteenth-century perceptions of the use of parlours. Such knowledge is essential, because there is not just one parlour in Harlowe

8 Tom Keymer, *Richardson's "Clarissa" and the Eighteenth-Century Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 112.

9 Wall, 361.

10 Gillis, 31.

11 Simon Varey, *Space and the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 191.

Place but three—a great parlour and two lesser parlours. Moreover, an understanding of how parlours were viewed helps illuminate how Richardson uses these spaces to explore the absence of family harmony and the lack of privacy in the novel.

The Eighteenth-Century Domestic Parlour

The first references to domestic parlours in the literature of the mid-fourteenth century indicate that, at that time, they were used as informal sitting and eating rooms.[12] One of the most revealing accounts of the parlour appears in Langland's *Piers Plowman* (1362), where his reference to the "privy parlour" not only illustrates its function, but also underlines the effect that the introduction of the parlour has had on domestic manners:

> A dull place is that hall where, each day in the week, the lord and lady don't like to preside. The rich are now making a practice of eating apart in a private parlour, to avoid poor men, [or in] a chamber with a fireplace, and leave the chief hall that was made for gathering at meals.[13]

According to Langland the privy parlour—a room in which the lord and his wife eat in preference to the hall—has reduced the hall's primacy and altered the communality of the medieval way of life. This is one of the earliest literary references to the growing desire for more privacy and less formality that the increasing use of parlours exemplifies.

Once established as a functional space, the parlour's value as an alternative informal eating and reception room increased, and by the late sixteenth century the domestic parlour had become one of the main elements of the house, as indispensable as the hall, kitchen, great chamber, chapel, and lodgings. This change in the parlour's status was underlined in two ways: by the addition of the prefix "great" and by a more elaborate decorative style. Not until the mid-seventeenth century was the great parlour moved from the side to the centre of the hall. At this time, people also began to provide their country houses with another type of parlour: the common or family

12 See Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), 58.

13 Langland, *Piers Plowman* (1362), trans. M. Williams (New York: Random House, 1971), Passus X, 170.

parlour. Situated at the side of the hall, as opposed to the centre, and decorated in a less ostentatious style, this family parlour was regarded as an "ordinary eating and sitting room" for the family and close friends.[14]

By the early eighteenth century, both the family parlour and the great parlour had become key rooms within the domestic interior. Though they were still employed as informal eating and sitting rooms, the principal differences between the two rooms lay in their location, their decorative style, and the type of people that had access to them. Situated near the main hall, the great parlour was generally used for entertaining prestigious guests, and it was ornately decorated. In the great parlour at Ranger's House in Blackheath, London, for example, the dominant colour was a dark, rich red, which was considered most apt for one of the main entertaining rooms. According to the 1728 inventory, the room featured three sets of crimson camblet "window curtains, vallence ... and window seats"[15] and six chairs made out of "walnut tree" (one of the new, fashionable woods), with their rich sheen accentuated by "red Morocco Leather" chair covers. The large round table was made from equally fashionable mahogany. To set off these luxurious woods were two large gilt-framed "glasses." One was "a pier glass" that was "48 by 28, Top 30 by 28," and the other was a "Chimney pier glass" that was "43 by 27, end 27 by 7 1/3." The final item in the inventory is the chimney piece, which had "a Marble table" and brass fire equipment.[16]

The common parlour, on the other hand, was perceived as a domestic or family room. Situated either in the lower storey (also known as the "rustic")[17] or in the wings, this was a room to which the family and close friends would retreat to gain respite from the main social arenas. In contrast to the great parlour, the emphasis in this room was on intimacy and comfort. Only one type of chair appeared in the great parlour: the six walnut tree chairs. In the "common

14 *OED*, s.v. "Parlour."

15 Camblet, also known as camlet, was a mixed fabric composed of wool and silk, and was often watered. Along with moreen and harateen, it was one of the principal furnishing materials in the eighteenth century. See John Cornforth and John Fowler, *English Decoration in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1974), 131.

16 "A true and perfect Inventory of all and singular the Goods, Chattels and Credits of Francis Hosier," 22 June, 25 June, and 27 June 1728, John Bishop Jurate, "An Inventory of Ranger's House in 1728" (July 1728), PRO-KW (Public Record Office, Kew), script of photocopies made from the original ledger, July 1983.

17 "Rustic" refers to the appearance of the lower storey facade: having a roughened surface; *OED*, s.v. "Rustic."

parlour" were two types: an "easy [reclining] chair and cushion" and "six Matted Chairs." The "Chimney glass" also differed. Instead of a "gilt frame," it was surrounded by a "walnut tree" frame that would not have reflected the firelight. There is a reference to a "Mahogoney [*sic*] Table," but revealingly its size is not indicated. The inventory also refers to a "Card Table," suggesting one of the pastimes of the Hosier family.[18] Unlike the great parlour, everything within the common parlour alludes to the family's domestic regime: the games they played and the articles of furniture they favoured. That the common parlour was perceived as a family room, as opposed to a social room, did not mean that the "basic assumptions about the conduct of social relations were abandoned."[19] As Amanda Vickery observes, "politeness was not a formal suit only to be worn where the circumstances of ceremony demanded it. Rather, it was a garment that should never be laid aside, and which ought to be worn gladly and lightly, as if it were of no encumbrance."[20]

But the elevation of the common parlour to one of the key domestic rooms reflects a change in the balance between family and social zones, with a larger proportion of architectural space being reserved for the use of the family alone. In light of the significance of the parlour and the changes to domestic lifestyle that it exemplifies, the fact that Richardson pays particular attention to the parlours in Harlowe Place—a house in which there is an absence of both informality and privacy—deserves attention.

Four descriptions of the three parlours in Harlowe Place enable the reader to ascertain, if only approximately, their location. They appear in letters 21, 78, 86, and 500.[21] From these descriptions, one can determine that the three parlours are joined in a suite at the back of the house. Adjoining the hall and next door to Bella's lesser parlour is Clarissa's lesser parlour. Her room also has a view of the formal garden and a door that opens out onto it. Adjoining Bella's lesser parlour is the great parlour, which is the final room in the suite.

18 "A true and perfect Inventory" 22 June, 25 June, and 27 June 1728.

19 Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Life in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 202.

20 Vickery, 210.

21 Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa; or, The History of a Young Lady,* 1747–48, ed. Angus Ross (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 114, 308. Ross's text follows that of the first edition, 7 vols., 1747–48. References are to this edition.

The provision of two lesser parlours, one for each daughter, was uncommon at this time. During my examination of contemporary architectural manuals and correspondence, such as Isaac Ware's *A Complete Body of Architecture*[22] and the letters of the Duchess of Leinster, I have come across only a few references to lesser parlours, and these have all belonged to men.[23] Of equal significance is the absence of a family parlour in Harlowe Place. The only reference to a family parlour in *Clarissa* is the one at the Howes' house, briefly mentioned in letter 7 (59). From Clarissa's description, the Howes' parlour appears to be in the rustic and, like those common parlours that Roger North celebrates in his mid-seventeenth-century architectural notes, it is a distinct family space where one can avoid the "unpleasant" task of being "forc't to cross people, when one has no mind to it, either for avoiding ceremony or any other reason."[24]

Richardson has given the three Harlowe Place parlours a key role in *Clarissa*. They are the only ground-floor rooms that are referred to, and they, in particular the two lesser parlours, provide the backdrop for all the family scenes. Richardson thereby encourages the reader to make a direct connection between his atypical representation of the parlours and the increasingly hostile treatment that Clarissa receives in these rooms. This reading is reinforced by the marginal annotations made by Lady Bradshaigh in her 1750 copy of *Clarissa*, and the subsequent marginal correspondence that ensued between her and Richardson. In response to Clarissa's observation in letter 21, "I found my mother and sister together in my sister's parlour," Lady Bradshaigh writes in the margin, "Everyone [has] a parlour, what a uncomon and unnecessary thing."[25] Her note in the margin indicates her dissatisfaction with "the unconventionality of separate parlours" and, as a result, Richardson's inclusion of too many parlours in Harlowe Place.[26] On reading Lady Bradshaigh's marginal annotation, between February 1750 and spring 1751, Richardson writes, "Looks

22 Isaac Ware, *A Complete Body of Architecture, adorned with plans and elevations from original designs [...] in which are interspersed some designs of Inigo Jones, never published* (London: Osborne and Skipton, 1756).

23 *The Correspondence of Emily, Duchess of Leinster, 1731–1814*, ed. Brian Fitz-Gerald, 3 vols. (Dublin, 1949–57).

24 *Roger North's Writings on Architecture* (1690), ed. Howard Colvin and John Newman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 137–38.

25 *The Annotations in Lady Bradshaigh's Copy of "Clarissa,"* ed. Janine Barchas (Victoria: English Literary Studies 76, University of Victoria, 1998), 48.

26 *Lady Bradshaigh's Copy of "Clarissa,"* 48.

like." As Barchas explains in *The Annotations in Lady Bradshaigh's Copy of "Clarissa,"* Lady Bradshaigh's "counter-response, 'a devided family,' completes the phrase begun by Richardson: 'looks like a devided family.'" This completion suggests that Lady Bradshaigh has interpreted Richardson's comment as a hint "that this architectural separation is symbolic of the moral division in the Harlowe family."[27] Thus the existence of two lesser parlours, one for each daughter, might have been unconventional in a mid-eighteenth-century domestic interior, but in *Clarissa* their inclusion serves to articulate the recurrent themes of the novel: "a devided family" and the violation of space. Richardson also uses the parlours to show how the Harlowes have replaced the conjugal values of love and respect with a market economy as they transform rooms into assets for which the family members bargain.

The Harlowes' Great Parlour

Only referred to by name in letters 6, 7, and 500, the Harlowes' great parlour receives the least attention of the three parlours. Despite its designation, this room never resembles a contemporary great parlour. Richardson's idiosyncratic representation of the Harlowes' great parlour is most apparent in letter 7, when what Clarissa later refers to as a "strange alteration" occurs to both her family and the room (116). Since Clarissa has been staying at the Howes' house, she only becomes aware of this change once she is inside the great parlour. As she writes in her letter to Anna:

> I was struck all of a heap as soon as I entered to see a solemnity which I had been so little used to on the like occasions in the countenance of every dear relation. They all kept their seats. I ran to my papa, and kneeled; then to my mamma; and met from both a cold salute; from my papa a blessing but half-pronounced; my mother, indeed, called me, child, but embraced me not with her usual indulgent ardour. (59)

Clarissa's description indicates that the great parlour's transformation is due to the Harlowes' uniform refusal to observe conventional modes of familial etiquette towards her. When Clarissa kneels to her mother and father, and "[pays] her duty" to her uncles and sister, for example, none of them acknowledges either her return home or her entrance into the room. Completely unprepared for so unusual a

27 *Lady Bradshaigh's Copy of "Clarissa,"* 48, and Barchas, introduction, *Lady Bradshaigh's Copy of "Clarissa,"* 17.

reception, Clarissa is immobilized. She is uncertain how to act and which mode of behaviour to employ. She is even unable to sit down when she is "bid" because, as she explains, "my heart was full" (59). Instead she notes, "it became me to stand, if I *could* stand a reception so awful and unusual. I was forced to turn my face from them and pull out my handkerchief." James, the first to speak, further compounds the "solemn and stiff form" of the Harlowes' physical gestures by using a harsh, interrogatory style of language. Clarissa refers to him as "my unbrotherly accuser," and indeed, acting more like a judge conducting a trial in a courtroom than a brother speaking to his sister in a domestic room, he bombards Clarissa with questions. Meanwhile the rest of the family, like members of a jury, watch the proceedings with interest, reacting passionately to each of James's accusations. Only Mrs Harlowe has "a kind word" to utter: "Let the *child* ... be heard" (59).

If James is the "unbrotherly accuser," and the principals of the Harlowe family are the jury, then Clarissa is eventually the "dejected criminal" (113). Forced into this role and commanded by James to deny his charges, she attempts to plead her innocence, begging to be heard out; yet Clarissa is reduced to a stunned silence. As a guest she could not "prescribe to Mrs or Miss Howe who should be their visitors," hence she is uncertain how she has "given occasion for such harshness." James, meanwhile, is unaffected. "Resolved to be dissatisfied" and swearing "unchecked either by eye or countenance," he continues to intimidate Clarissa. Her father only intervenes once, towards the end of the scene, when "with vehemence both of action and voice" he informs Clarissa that she "had met with too much indulgence in being allowed to refuse *this* gentleman and the *other* gentleman, and it was now *his* turn to be obeyed." Clarissa, however, emotionally reduced by "a reception so unusual and unexpected," requests "leave to retire in order to recollect [her]self." She is unwilling to discover which particular aspect of her father's "will" she is expected to obey (59–60).

Despite its function as one of the main entertaining rooms, in the eighteenth century the great parlour was perceived as an informal room. By the end of letter 7, however, the Harlowes' harshness has transformed the room's affective character. Indeed, by the end of letter 7, the Harlowes' great parlour does not appear like a domestic room at all. It is more like a public courtroom where Clarissa is ostracized and James determines her fate. Their superiors, meanwhile, look on with approval.

Eighteenth-Century Fiction, Vol. 17, Iss. 3 [2005], Art. 7

Figure 1. *The Harlowe Family, from Samuel Richardson's "Clarissa,"* oil on canvas c. 1745–47, by Joseph Highmore (1692–1780). Reproduced courtesy of the Yale Centre for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1981.25.338. "My brother seemed ready to give a loose to his passion; my papa put on the countenance which always portends a gathering storm; my uncles mutteringly whispered; and my sister aggravatingly held up her hands. While I begged to be heard out—my

The similarities between the Harlowes' great parlour and a court, and between the family's behaviour and that of a judge and jury, are exemplified in Joseph Highmore's illustration of the letter (see figure 1). As Richardson observed in a letter to Mrs Belfour, "Mr Highmore has ... drawn the assembled Harlowes, the accusing Brother, and the accused Sister, on her return from Miss Howe's."[28] Entitled *The Harlowe Family*, Highmore's picture is a parody of a contemporary conversation piece. The principal function of the conversation piece, a genre popular in England from the 1720s to the 1790s, was to celebrate family life. The artist would employ the disposition of a family and their friends and the organization of the furniture within a domestic interior to highlight the group's harmonious domesticity.

28 Samuel Richardson to Mrs Belfour, mid-January 1749, *Correspondence of Samuel Richardson*, 4:255–56.

In *The Harlowe Family*, however, Highmore uses the disposition of the Harlowes and the organization of their furniture to negate all sense of either harmony or "domestic feeling."[29] The family is not gathered companionably round a central table but scattered along the pictorial frame. The dominant figure is James. Standing with his back to the viewer, James dictates to his family in a dogmatic manner. The anomaly of his authoritarian position in the family is accentuated by his position directly opposite his father. As Janet Aikins observes, "we cannot see [James's] full face, but in his father's scowling visage ... we see a representation of James's features ... [in his] angry expression and in the jowly shape his face is likely to assume at his parent's age."[30] In his father's gouty foot, which is just visible between James's legs, the viewer is alerted to the subsequent result of James's intemperance. The way in which James's pictorial position separates Clarissa and her mother from the rest of the Harlowes also prefigures his central role in the destruction of the family. Moreover, as the empty chair with its back turned towards Clarissa suggests, her relationship with her mother will soon be severed as well.

Aikins draws comparisons between Highmore's *The Harlowe Family* (c. 1745–47) and the first plate of Hogarth's *Marriage à la Mode* (1743)[31] (see figure 2). Entitled "The Marriage Settlement," the first plate introduces the viewer to a domestic world that, like the Harlowes' world, is dominated by money and greed. The scene is set in an ornate, tastelessly decorated room, perhaps a great parlour. This cluttered, claustrophobic environment offers an interesting contrast with Highmore's depiction of the Harlowes' almost barren, yet equally claustrophobic great parlour. On the left-hand side of the picture are the two fathers, who are seated at a table laden with deeds, money, and financial records, busily trying to settle the marriage contract. The more prominent of these fathers is the Baron, who is seated in an extremely large chair. Laid out next to the Baron is his family tree, which links the Squander dynasty to "William, Duke of Normandye."

29 Jenny Uglow, *Hogarth: A Life and a World* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), 159.

30 Janet E. Aikins, "Richardson's 'Speaking Pictures,'" in *Samuel Richardson: Tercentenary Essays*, ed. Margaret Anne Doody and Peter Sabor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 157.

31 Aikins, 158. For comparisons between Hogarth's *Marriage à la Mode* and Highmore's illustrations of *Pamela*, see Charles Saumarez Smith, *Eighteenth-Century Decoration: Design and the Domestic Interior in England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1993), 124–45, and Mark Hallett, *Hogarth* (London: Phaidon, 2000), 185–87.

Eighteenth-Century Fiction, Vol. 17, Iss. 3 [2005], Art. 7

Figure 2. *Marriage A-la-Mode* [*sic*], plate 1, "The Marriage Contract 1745," by William Hogarth (1697–1764), engr. G. Peotin (38.6 x 46.5 cm). Reproduced courtsey of the McMaster Museum of Art (plate on extended loan from Dundurn Castle, Hamilton, the McMaster University Collection).

With his index finger, the Baron points to this family tree, drawing attention to the lineage that he is offering in return for the marriage contract. The position of the Baron's other hand, and his facial expression, bear a remarkable resemblance to those of Mr Harlowe in Highmore's picture. The Baron even has a gouty foot, which he rests before him on a velvet-padded stool. Parallels can also be drawn between the merchant's forlorn daughter and Clarissa. Located on the far right-hand side of the picture, she, like Clarissa, occupies a peripheral pictorial space. Since the back of her father's chair is facing her, she too appears to be imprisoned within this small space. Unlike Clarissa, however, she is not on her own but is seated on the same couch as Viscount Squanderfield. Yet, as their dismissive postures and the proximity of the two chained dogs indicate, their marriage will be as intolerable as Clarissa's would be to the odious Solmes.

As the references to Highmore's illustration and its similarities to Hogarth's conversation piece suggest, the great parlour scene described in letter 7 of *Clarissa* foreshadows Clarissa's fate. Lured into this room by her brother only to be greeted by harsh words and rejecting postures, Clarissa has become the family's victim. This great parlour scene—the last time the room is named until letter 500—marks the start of Clarissa's ostracism and her loss of spatial control.

Clarissa's Lesser Parlour

Clarissa's lesser parlour is initially referred to in letter 4: " The good Dr. Lewin, who frequently honours me with a *visit of conversation* as he is pleased to call it ... had parted with me in my own parlour" (51). "A *visit of conversation*" had two quite distinct meanings in the eighteenth century. An "at home" was also known as a "visit of conversation." Taking place during the late morning or late afternoon at one's house, "at homes" were informal gatherings to which the host invited a number of friends for tea and light conversation. If the "at home" was hosted by a young, single woman, the visitors would generally all be female, and it would take place in one of the more intimate, informal entertaining rooms, such as the common parlour. If the company was mixed, however, the "at home" would be held in the withdrawing room, and an older person, normally the mother, would be present. Depending on the gender and interests of the group, topics of conversation at such visits would obviously vary. Yet, since these were sociable and not intellectual events, the subjects covered were more likely of a light and charming nature, such as Horace Walpole enjoyed when he went to the "at homes" held by Lady Pomfret.[32]

Conversely, those topics addressed during a "*visit of conversation*" with Dr Lewin would be of a more philosophical nature. Described as a "divine of great piety and learning to whom Miss Clarissa Harlowe owed much of her improvement," Dr Lewin is presented as Clarissa's spiritual adviser (38). As Anna remarks in her account of Clarissa's daily employments, his visits were a regular event, occurring "twice or thrice a week if his health permitted" (1470).[33] Anna also notes that

32 *OED*, s.v. "At Home" under "Conversation." The example given is: "Lady Pomfret has a charming conversation once a week," 1740, H.Walpole, *Correspondence* (1820), 1:71.

33 Dr Lewin's teachings complemented the practical education which Clarissa received from Mrs Norton. See *Clarissa*, 33, 1417.

Dr Lewin occasionally "obliged them [the Harlowes] with his company at their table," when they would engage in "*dinner-time conversation*" (1470). However, owing to the more sociable nature of dining, and the varied company, the type of conversation pursued at the Harlowes' dining table would have borne a greater resemblance to the type covered during an "at home." In addition, these events were rare, as Anna explains, "for, being a valetudinarian, and in a regimen, [Dr Lewin] generally made his visits in the afternoon" (1471). Although a "*visit of conversation*" with Dr Lewin might have been no less informal than an "at home," the different type of conversation engaged in and the smaller number of people present are significant. These elements transformed Dr Lewin's visits to Clarissa's lesser parlour into more exclusive, intimate events.[34] Thus from a brief analysis of the first reference to Clarissa's lesser parlour in letter 4, it seems that Clarissa's lesser parlour was especially created for her use, and in the manner that she chose. Like Roger North's "private parlour" at Rougham Hall, it is an exclusive sanctuary that Clarissa used "for [her] owne absolute retirement."[35]

Yet there is one important difference between Clarissa's and Roger North's parlours. As the prefix "private" suggests, North's parlour was the last room at the end of the enfilade. This remote location accentuated the solitary nature of his activities. Clarissa's lesser parlour, on the other hand, is in the centre of the house adjacent to the main hall. Despite its function, Clarissa's lesser parlour is not a private room. Her only private room is her closet in her upstairs apartment, adjacent to her chamber. Located in such a prominent position, Clarissa's lesser parlour is an anomaly: it is a relatively private room of her own that is situated in the main social part of Harlowe Place.

This disjunction of location and function underlines the lesser parlour's significance for Clarissa. She can enjoy the relative privacy that this intimate room affords her, while still being a part of the family's social life. Yet this disparity also underlines the lesser parlour's significance for the Harlowes. Situated in the centre of Harlowe

34 In *Sir Charles Grandison*, Charles Grandison has similar types of conversation with Dr Bartlett; however, these usually take place in Dr Bartlett's closet. When Charles is away, Dr Bartlett also encourages Harriet Byron to take advantage of these conversations. "And what do you think is our subject?" she writes in a letter to Lucy Selby, "The great and glorious truths of Christianity." Samuel Richardson, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison*,1753–4, ed. Jocelyn Harris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 2:440.

35 *Roger North's Writings on Architecture*, 84.

Place, this unusual room announces its presence and its owner. This centrality is why, after all, her parents originally gave the lesser parlour to Clarissa—as a symbol of her value to them. When Clarissa no longer complies with their wishes, the lesser parlour's status is also the reason why it is the first domestic room that the Harlowes repossess when, at the end of letter 78, they remove all of Clarissa's personal possessions. Moreover, they dispossess Clarissa of her lesser parlour by disregarding her former use of the room, and appropriating it for their own purposes. For example, in letter 78 the Harlowes use this lesser parlour as a theatrical setting for Clarissa and Solmes's courtship scene. As well, when they are in the lesser parlour with Clarissa, they adopt the same cold, formal manner that they used in the great parlour in letter 7. As a result, the Harlowes gradually transform what Clarissa once called her own lesser parlour into an alien and uninviting room.

The alteration of Clarissa's lesser parlour is worthy of attention because it enables the Harlowes to render Clarissa exposed, vulnerable, and insecure. To consider this transformation process in greater detail, it is necessary to turn to letters 21 and 78 and outline the representation of the sisters' lesser parlours, the differences between them, and the type of interior detail that is referred to. It is also necessary to look at how the representation of these two lesser parlours demonstrates the ways in which the Harlowes both conceive of and employ rooms within Harlowe Place, as well as their concept of privacy and their definition of the united family.

Letter 21

The reader is first given access to Bella's lesser parlour in letter 21. Originally a single room was "separated in favour of us girls, for each to receive her visitors in at her pleasure" (303), and one would assume that these two lesser parlours are similar. As Clarissa's account in letter 21 demonstrates, however, how Bella employs her lesser parlour and the types of people she allows into it render these two rooms as dissimilar as the two women themselves:

> I have been down ... I found my mamma and sister together in my sister's parlour. My mamma, I fear, by the glow in her fine face (and as the browner, sullener glow in my sister's confirmed) had been expressing herself with warmth against her *unhappier* child; perhaps giving such an account of what had passed,

> as should clear herself and convince Bella, and through *her*, my brother and uncles, of the sincere pains she had taken with me! (113)

Throughout the first half of volume 1, Clarissa and her mother have enjoyed an almost exclusive relationship. When her mother is ill, for example, it is Clarissa—her chosen "nurse"—who refuses to "stir from her bedside" and who for "two nights ... had the honour of sharing it with her" (54). Furthermore, when the other members of the family fail in their attempts to compel Clarissa to marry Solmes, it is her mother who is sent with "preparative sweetness" (88). Often taking place within the relative privacy of their upstairs apartments, and on two occasions in their private closets, these meetings appear to occur in a separate time and place. When mother and daughter are together, they seem to inhabit a safer, tranquil realm where confidences are shared, reassurances are given, and the harsh reality of the Harlowes' behaviour is obliterated, if only temporarily. Even when they are with the family in the social arena of the great parlour, Mrs Harlowe still shows Clarissa discreet signs of "kindness and condescension," protecting her whenever possible from James and Bella's "*caballing*" (88, 54).

When Clarissa discovers her "mamma and sister together in my sister's parlour," she feels betrayed (113). As her specification of the name of the room and the repetition of the word "sister" emphasize, Clarissa interprets this as a sign that Mrs Harlowe has found another location in which to spend her leisure time, and another favourite with whom to share confidences. This is not the first time that Mrs Harlowe has chosen to be with Bella rather than Clarissa. At the end of letter 19, for example, Clarissa wonders why "as only my sister dines with my mamma" she has not also "been commanded down" but is "sent up a plate from her table" (106). This is the first time, however, that Clarissa believes she has found her mother betraying her most "favoured" child in order to "clear" herself (96, 113). Of equal significance, Clarissa observes that, by "giving such an account of what passed," her mother is attempting to "convince Bella, and through *her*, my brother and uncles, of the sincere pains she had taken with me!" (113). Bella's unsisterly behaviour towards Clarissa, her "masculine" relationship with James, and her loyalty to the Harlowe family are often remarked upon by Clarissa. With reference to the ownership of the lesser parlour, and Clarissa's concept of safety within the room, Bella's allegiance to the family is of particular relevance. For, if to

express oneself to Bella in Bella's lesser parlour is not only to express oneself to the sister alone but also indirectly to all the Harlowes, then who really owns Bella's lesser parlour: Bella or the "principals" (249) of the Harlowe family? And, as a result, how accessible is it?

Clarissa's lesser parlour is a relatively private, almost sacrosanct place in which she engages in cerebral and solitary activities. It is her own room and is only accessible to intimates and close family members. Conversely, Bella's lesser parlour appears to Clarissa to be an unsafe and disconcerting room. In that place she believes her mother has betrayed her confidences, telling secrets that Bella will then share indiscriminately with the rest of the Harlowe family. Thus, Clarissa's discovery of her mother in a room that is not Clarissa's own, betraying "her *unhappier* child" to a sister and "through *her*" to the family (113), among whom she has no friends, serves to transform Clarissa's perception of the lesser parlour's spatial character. To Clarissa, Bella's lesser parlour has become a more public, accessible place than it at first appears.

Clarissa's altered perception of the room is reinforced by her mother's behaviour towards her. On entering Bella's lesser parlour, Clarissa is greeted by her mother "with a sternness that never sits well on her sweet features." As a result, Clarissa feels instantly distanced from her mother. As in the changed great parlour, she feels here like the "dejected criminal" in a courtroom who is obliged to observe her "mamma and sister together"—a cruel parody, perhaps, of her own relationship with her mother. This unaccustomed pairing also forces Clarissa to question her identity. For if she has been replaced by Bella, who or what is she?

Clarissa requests a "private audience" with her mother, but is denied, because at that moment "Shorey came in to tell her that Mr Solmes was in the hall, and desired admittance" (113). For a visitor to arrive seemingly unannounced and at dusk is contrary to the etiquette of visiting "at home." According to contemporary rules, one only came to call if one was invited, and then it would be at a time set in advance by the host.[36] For Solmes to arrive on a Saturday night "at supper" is curious (113); it is not a time set aside for his "particular visits" nor, as far as Clarissa is aware, for one of his "more general ones" (62). Even more perplexing, however, is Solmes's desire to be admitted into Bella's lesser parlour. Both lesser and common parlours were only

36 For more on the contemporary etiquette of "at homes," see Vickery, 204–6.

accessible to relatives and close intimates. Solmes, neither a relative, an intimate, or Clarissa's official suitor, should not be given access, especially when only women are present.[37] Instead, he should be received in a room like the withdrawing room that was accessible to both close friends and acquaintances, and where the activities of playing cards and drinking tea were believed to "provide the ideal occasion to get acquainted."[38] Hence when Clarissa is made aware of Mr Solmes's arrival, her immediate response is, "Ugly creature! What, at close of day, quite dark, brought him hither?" (113).

But, as the "changed" behaviour in first the great and now Bella's lesser parlour indicates, the Harlowes flout convention. Their behaviour is dictated by family *interest* alone and, as a result, the functions of their rooms change according to their financial schemes. In the same way that Solmes's attendance at tea in letter 7 and again at breakfast in letter 16 were part of the Harlowes' cruel plot to introduce Solmes as a favourite, his sudden arrival at supper in letter 21 is equally contrived. As Clarissa soon realizes, Solmes has been invited to Harlowe Place so as "to know the result of the conference between my mother and me" (113). His access to Bella's lesser parlour—an intimate room—would indicate, first to Solmes and later to her father, that he is soon to have intimate access to Clarissa as well. To allow the "caressed" suitor into Bella's lesser parlour, however, will render Clarissa even more vulnerable and isolated than before. Clarissa's only recourse, therefore, is to hurry away, not only from Solmes's side but also out of this alien room and into the safety of her own. Yet, in her eagerness to escape, Clarissa has not taken into account Mrs Harlowe's newly acquired artfulness. Nor has she realized just how eager her mother is to ensnare her in Bella's lesser parlour with Solmes and thereby prove the "sincere pains she has taken with her ... *unhappier* child." Thus "commanded ... not to stir," Clarissa is "caught," and she is forced to undergo the public humiliation of her mother's rejection and her sister's triumph. Meanwhile Solmes, fully

37 Contemporary manuals advised parents not to leave their daughters unattended while they were being courted. This is why they favoured more accessible, sociable rooms, like the withdrawing room. However, as demonstrated by the courtship of both Clarissa and Bella, the Harlowes flout convention. For more about courting practices in the eighteenth century, see Elizabeth Bergen Brophy, *Women's Lives and the Eighteenth Century Novel* (Tampa: University of South Florida, 1991), chap. 2.

38 Rodris Roth, "Tea-Drinking in Eighteenth-Century America: Its Etiquette and Equipage," in *Material Life in America, 1600–1860*, ed. Robert Blair St. George (Boston: Northeaston University Press, 1988), 444.

comprehending the significance of his access, proudly "stalk[s] in," filling the room (113, 114). Solmes's triumph is short-lived, however, for subsequent to his clown-like entrance, Clarissa carries out two bold acts of defiance, which permit her not only to gain spatial command of Bella's lesser parlour, but also to leave it.

To help explain the reason for Clarissa's behaviour, it is worthwhile briefly considering the differences between Solmes's visit to Bella's lesser parlour in letter 21 and the visit described in letter 16. In letter 16, all of Clarissa's immediate family—her mother and father, James and Bella—are present. Furthermore, in letter 16, Clarissa is not emotionally alone. She has the support of her mother, who, on seeing her daughter trembling as she "put[s her] chair nearer the wretch," calls upon her to "sit by me, love, and make tea." Once Clarissa is removed from close proximity to the man she abhors, she is able to resurrect those spatial boundaries that Solmes has transgressed. By being diverted with a task that Clarissa conceives as her activity, she is also able to divorce herself from the horror of this trial and regain command of herself. Consequently, although Clarissa is both physically and morally "offended" by Solmes when he presses her hoop, the "kindness and condescension" that she receives from her mother serve to reduce the sense of fear and vulnerability that this violation causes: she is able to endure this visit with greater ease (87, 88).

Conversely, in letter 21, Clarissa does not have any task in which to engage. Nor does she have any emotional support, since Mrs Harlowe is "more like the taunting sister than the indulgent mother" (114). All the codes of conduct have been undermined and confused, and, as Clarissa's description of Solmes's entrance indicates, she is trapped:

> The man stalked in. His usual walk is by pauses, as if (from the same vacuity of thought which made Dryden's clown whistle) he was telling his steps: and first paid his clumsy respects to my mamma, then to my sister; next to me, as if I were already his wife and therefore to be the last in his notice; and sitting down by me, told us in general what weather it was. Very cold he made it; but I was warm enough. Then addressing himself to me: And how do *you* find it, miss, was his question; and would have took my hand. (114)

Stuck next to a man who is about to take her hand because he believes she is "already his wife," Clarissa is "caught" within an even tighter snare in Bella's lesser parlour than she was in letter 16 (114). She is physically constrained in a room where, with neither a "friend in [her] sister" (113) nor her mother to save her, she will be "sacrificed to this odious man" (85).

"Vexed" and unable to "contain herself," Clarissa then carries out the two "bold" acts (114). She withdraws her hand and continues with her plea: "I withdrew it, I believe with disdain enough: my mamma frowned; my sister bit her lip. I could not contain myself: I never was so bold in my life, for I went on with my plea, as if Mr Solmes had not been there" (114). By performing these two acts one after the other, Clarissa transforms the spatial character of Bella's lesser parlour. She also gains command of the room. For by withdrawing her hand and continuing with her plea, Clarissa employs a mode of behaviour and a style of language that are completely inappropriate for the courting scene her family has contrived, as her mother's and sister's horrified reactions indicate: "My mamma coloured and looked at him, looked at my sister, and looked at me ... What would the girl be at? Why, Clary!—Is this a subject!—is this!—is this!—is this a time—and again she looked upon Solmes" (114). In response, Clarissa merely continues with her plea:

> I begged pardon. But my papa, I said, would return. I should have no other opportunity. I thought it requisite, since I was not permitted to withdraw, that Mr Solmes's presence should not deprive me of an opportunity of such importance for me to embrace; and at the same time, if he still visited on my account (looking at him), to show that it could not possibly be to any purpose. (114)

Thus, without even removing herself from his side, Clarissa visually and verbally indicates her invincible dislike for Solmes, and she even denies his presence (114). As a result, she simultaneously extracts herself from the snare that her family has contrived, and undermines any significance that Solmes's entry into Bella's lesser parlour might have held. In addition, she resumes her sense of self as an individual who has rights, rather than as an object that her family can treat like a financial asset.

This is the first time Clarissa has been able to re-establish her identity and regain an element of self-control since her entry into the lesser parlour, and her rediscovery of self is highly significant. For, temporarily released from her forced compliance to her family and to Solmes, Clarissa is liberated, if not yet physically then psychologically. The success of Clarissa's boldness is also due to her mother's and sister's failure to react fast enough and resume control. Stunned, Mrs Harlowe can only emit half-sentences. Meanwhile Bella and Solmes, in an attempt to hide their confusion, suddenly become interested in

their accessories, injecting a farcical interlude that Clarissa cannot resist describing in detail to Anna (114). Surrounded by such "confusion," Mrs Harlowe's only recourse is to grant Clarissa's request for a "private interview" and lead her out of Bella's into her own parlour: "My mamma came to me, and angrily taking my hand led me out of that parlour into my own; which, you know, is next to it" (114). Although it is only "next door," the physical act of removal into her own lesser parlour enables Clarissa both to redefine Bella's parlour as "that" parlour and to fully recover her sense of self. It is not the geographical distance between the two rooms that is significant, but the psychological distance between them: the clear distinction between the insecure, unfamiliar "parlour where he was" (115) and the more intimate, lesser-known parlour where she is now. As Clarissa proudly writes to Anna, this is "my own" parlour, a safe place where Clarissa has decorated the interior, where she defines the atmosphere, and where she has complete control over modes of behaviour, exits, and entrances. Thus once inside her own parlour, Clarissa is instantly empowered and is able to underline her determination not to marry Mr Solmes.

As a room that bears a greater resemblance to their own upstairs apartments, Clarissa's own lesser parlour also offers her a more convivial environment in which to re-establish her relationship with her mother. Yet, despite the change that the physical movement has induced in Clarissa, Mrs Harlowe remains unaltered. In contrast to her former doting self, she completely ignores the more intimate atmosphere of Clarissa's lesser parlour and begins battering her daughter with a tirade of accusations as soon as they enter the room: "Is not this behaviour very bold, very provoking, think you, Clary?" (114). Clarissa flounders. "Denied [the] ear" that she believed a "private audience" with her mother would guarantee her, she is at a loss as to how to restore her mother's love (115, 113). As the scene progresses, her "own" familiar lesser parlour, to which she had longed to escape, gradually becomes as unfamiliar as her mother.

Mrs Harlowe leaves her cruellest act for the end of her long diatribe when she announces that "once for all ... she would now assure me that she was as much determined *against* Mr Lovelace, and *for* Mr Solmes and the family-schemes, as anybody; and would not refuse her consent to any measures that should be thought necessary to reduce a stubborn child to her duty" (115). This is not the first time Mrs

Harlowe has threatened to abandon Clarissa. In letters 18 and 19, for example, when Clarissa is still adamant that she will not surrender her "heart" to her family, her mother threatens to "tear" herself from Clarissa, vowing that she will deny her all the love and pity she once unconditionally granted her (103). Each time Clarissa has managed to appease her mother and convince her to save her from a marriage to a man she never can endure. Yet, on this occasion, Mrs Harlowe remains determined. Fearful for the stability of her own position within the Harlowe household, and humiliated by Clarissa's provoking behaviour in Bella's lesser parlour, she has decided to save herself. Clarissa, as if literally being reduced to her duty while her mother is speaking, is "ready to sink" (115).

Mrs Harlowe does not abandon her daughter instantly. As Clarissa notes, she "was so good as to lend her arm to support me" (115). Yet even this action is not carried out without a condition, or what Mrs Harlowe refers to as "one further opportunity." Clarissa asks her mother, "And is this all I have to hope for from my mamma?" and she replies, "It is. But, Clary, this one further opportunity I give you—Go in again to Mr Solmes, and behave discreetly to him; and let your papa find you together, upon *civil* terms at least" (115). Either to go back into Bella's lesser parlour, behave *civilly* to Solmes until her father returns, and regain her mother's affection, or to lose all hope of a reconciliation with her mother: these are Clarissa's options, and both are equally inconceivable. She cannot go back into Bella's parlour: it would be an undeniable sign of her agreement to become Mrs Solmes. And as she reiterates throughout the novel, she " never can nor *ought* to be ... Mr Solmes's wife" (105). Consequently, unable to respond verbally to her mother's ultimatum, Clarissa walks away: "My feet moved (of themselves, I think) farther from the parlour where he was, and towards the stairs; and there I stopped and paused" (115). The cruel irony, however, is that by walking away from her mother, Clarissa not only ensures that she is freed from Solmes's addresses but that she will be permanently separated from her mother as well. By drawing attention to her physical movements within the house, Richardson demonstrates the significance of Clarissa's actions. Hands and feet suddenly become the focus of the scene, with each movement seeming to re-enact physically the emotional separation between mother and daughter. Holding out her hand to Clarissa, ironically the very hand that led her away from "that" parlour, Mrs

Harlowe beckons to her and attempts to lure her back into it. By moving her feet in the opposite direction to her mother's hand, Clarissa signals her refusal to be brought "*round to* [her] *duty*" (65):

> I was moving to go up—
> And *will* you go up, Clary?
> I turned my face to her. My officious tears would needs plead for me; I could not just then speak; and stood still.
> Good girl, distress me not thus!—Dear, good girl, do not thus distress me!—holding out her hand but standing still likewise. (116)

Standing still in two different locations—Mrs Harlowe by "that" door and Clarissa by the stairs that lead to her chamber—mother and daughter have reached an impasse. Clarissa attempts to plead with her mother and asks, "What can I do, madam?—What *can* I do?" (116). But on receiving the same answer, "Go in again my child," Clarissa remains defiant and stands still. As a result, her mother not only rejects her daughter's hand, but her "heart" as well:

> Obstinate, perverse, undutiful Clarissa Harlowe! with a rejecting hand and angry aspect; then take your own way, and go up!—But stir not down again, I charge you, without leave, or till your papa's pleasure be known concerning you.
> She flung from me with high indignation: and I went up with a very heavy heart, and feet as slow as my heart was heavy. (116)

Any sense of triumph Clarissa might have felt on her removal from Bella's lesser parlour into her own is only short-lived. Despite the intimate, less crowded atmosphere of her room, the private "interview" that Clarissa hoped would prevent her from losing her mother has in fact served to separate the two. As the antithesis of all the former upstairs chamber scenes between Clarissa and her mother, letter 21 is one of the most disturbing of the Harlowe Place letters.

Having gone her own way and returned to her upstairs apartment, Clarissa is instantly made aware of how the loss of her mother's favour will affect her position as a member of the Harlowe family. As soon as her father returns, she is shut out. Commanded not to stir down again and banned from the "presence" of all her family, she is ostracized (121). Clarissa's only source of company is the sound of the fearful footsteps of Hannah, who, like Clarissa, has been banned to the peripheries of the house. Meanwhile, the family gathers in an "angry

assembly," formulating the "family-schemes" (115) that they use will in their attempt to oppose her will. In her "twelve o'clock" supplement to Anna's letter, Clarissa outlines her "doom": "This moment the keys of everything are taken from me. It was proposed to send for me down; but my papa said he could not bear to look upon me" (116). Deprived of her keys, Clarissa is removed from the heart of the house, which marks the beginning of her imprisonment. She is made to enact the role of a "poor prisoner" in her own home (122), and because she is banned from the communal areas of the house, Clarissa is unaware of how her emotional and physical dislocations have affected her ownership of the lesser parlour; that is, until letter 78.

Letter 78

At the beginning of letter 78, Betty enters Clarissa's chamber with a message from Mr Solmes. Relishing the opportunity to taunt her "young lady's" sister while she is there, Betty also provides Clarissa with a detailed description of the "full congregation" waiting below (302). As Betty's lengthy account unfolds, Clarissa discovers that while she was still in her upstairs chamber, the Harlowes were transforming her lesser parlour. No longer is it what Betty mockingly refers to as Clarissa's "own parlour"—an intimate, relatively private room for reflection and quiet conversation (302). Instead, it has become a public and artificially theatrical space, where the exits, entrances, props, actors, and script have all been installed by the Harlowes in order to create their perfect courtship scene.[39] Solmes, looking "as fine as a lord, with charming white peruke, fine laced shirt and ruffles, coat trimmed with silver, and a waistcoat standing on end with lace," is suitably bedecked in an ostentatious engagement costume (302). He is already inside the room, dutifully practising the script that has been suggested to him by his "tutoress," Clarissa's Aunt Hervey (303). In contrast to letter 21, he does not need to wait for permission to gain access to the lesser parlour. As suitor, he now appears to dominate the whole of the room. Meanwhile the Harlowes, his dutiful coterie, are gathered around their "new-made beau" (310).

Engulfed in the full horror of the approaching interview, Clarissa's mind becomes "disordered" (303), for she is keenly aware that as the lead role in this sadistic drama, she is the one person missing.

39 Gillis also notes that in letter 78, Clarissa's lesser parlour seems to resemble a stage set (31).

Trembling as she descends the stairs, Clarissa can only compose herself by erasing from her mind Betty's earlier suggestion that she is no longer owner of the lesser parlour, and by planning her escape. Consequently, as soon as she enters the lesser parlour, she refers to her routes of exit—the door she came in and the central door inserted within the wainscot partition; then she refers to the parlour as "*my* parlour" (303). During the course of the letter, however, Clarissa's conceptions of these two doors and of herself as owner of the lesser parlour change. After she has been prevented from leaving through the main door and denied access to the adjoining room, for instance, Clarissa realizes that these are not routes of entry or exit that she can employ at will. They are cruel barriers that the Harlowes use to delimit her space and reduce her independence. Not until the end of letter 78 does Clarissa finally acknowledge that because she refuses to be sacrificed to Solmes, she will be denied the privilege of her own room within Harlowe Place. In addition, she will remain permanently separated from all of the Harlowes.

To explain how the Harlowes employ these structural features to imprison Clarissa and demarcate lines of territory, an exploration of the change in Clarissa's behaviour in letter 78 is necessary. Such an analysis will also indicate how Clarissa uses her command of language in an attempt to diffuse the Harlowes' power and regain spatial control. Having entered the lesser parlour and ascertained her routes of exit, Clarissa turns her attention to Solmes and begins to implement the plan that will effect her escape. In many ways, Clarissa employs the same tactics to escape from her lesser parlour that she found to be so successful when she was in Bella's. Gaining confidence from Solmes's "visible confusion," she ignores his ineffectual attempts to conduct an intimate address—his greeting of "half a dozen choked-up madams," his "cringing to the ground," and his "five or six" hems—and immediately adopts the opposite: the distant and strictly formal behaviour suitable for an interview (303). As she writes, "I turned from him and seated myself in one of the fireside chairs, fanning myself. I have since recollected that I must have looked very saucily" (303). Neither facing Solmes nor sitting next to him, Clarissa further underlines these visual signs of her determination never to marry him by "speak[ing her] mind plainly" (303). Solmes, initially undeterred by Clarissa's lack of interest, continues to court her, peppering his dialogue with the predictable rhetoric of flattery. In

response, Clarissa enumerates the precise reasons why she has "invincible objections" to his address. Solmes eventually "paused, and seemed a little at a loss" (304). Evidently not tutored with skills proficient enough to challenge a woman who refuses to be wooed, he finally flounders. Thus, in complete disregard of the set engagement piece that the Harlowes have constructed within the lesser parlour, Clarissa effectively exploits a code of manners to reduce Solmes's visit to the same level of confusion that she created in letter 21. In many ways, these acts of boldness are even more successful in this lesser parlour than they were in Bella's. On this occasion, Clarissa is not forced to suffer the public humiliation of her sister's triumph or her mother's taunting. In addition, Solmes is at his weakest. He is, after all, attempting to court Clarissa. Hence Clarissa has complete control over the conversation, the hemming Solmes, and the spatial atmosphere of the lesser parlour.

Even her Uncle Antony's sudden interruption does not temper Clarissa's determination to find a means of escaping from the lesser parlour, nor is she discouraged by his blatant summary of her behaviour: "So, niece, so!—sitting in state like a queen, giving audience!—*haughty audience*!" (304). Instead, her uncle's entrance into the parlour makes Clarissa bolder. As soon as she realizes that it will be harder "to procure ... [her] uncle's compassion" (302) than she had at first thought, she assumes a less reverential stance and begins to employ her uncle's brutal remarks to devise harsh retorts of her own. For example, in response to Clarissa's query as to why she is "to be made unhappy in a point so concerning to my happiness," her Uncle Antony informs her:

> Your grandfather's estate is not wished from you. You are not desired to live a single life. You know *our* motives, and we guess at *yours*. And let me tell you, well as we love you, we would much sooner choose to follow you to the grave than that *yours* should take place. (305)

Undeterred by his gruesome warning, Clarissa draws upon his references to death and the grave to construct her own equally macabre challenge:

> Then, sir, you shall sooner follow me to the grave *indeed*—I will undergo the cruellest death: I will even consent to enter into the awful vault of my ancestors, and to have that bricked up upon me, than consent to be miserable for life—And, Mr Solmes, (turning to him) take notice of what I say; *this*, or *any*

> death, I will sooner undergo (that will soon be over) than be yours, and for *ever* unhappy! (305)

Clarissa's reference to being buried alive draws attention to her sense of being imprisoned within the lesser parlour. This reference also reiterates how effectively the Harlowes have employed the doors and walls of the room to imprison her. One could, as Doody suggests, assume that the impact of her challenge to Solmes is somewhat undermined, for by drawing attention to her sense of imprisonment Clarissa is also alerting both the Harlowes and the reader to her increased sense of vulnerability.[40] But it is necessary to recognize that neither Clarissa's sense of confinement nor her use of architectural structures as reflectors of her psychological state are new. After letter 21, Clarissa constantly refers to the manner in which her family has "watched, banished, and confined" her within her own home (149). Her sense of claustrophobia does increase in letter 78, when she realizes that she does not have access to either the door through which she entered or the central door. Towards the start of letter 78, however, Clarissa is not aware that she cannot leave the room. As far as she is concerned, once she has artfully engineered her own departure she will be able to return to her upstairs apartment. Thus, although she both abhors the man she has been left with and is distraught at her family's behaviour towards her, Clarissa conjures up the macabre image of being buried alive because any form of punishment, even death, would be preferable to the living death she would have to endure in a marriage to Solmes.

That Clarissa's remark puts her uncle into such "a terrible rage" and Mr Solmes into such shock that both have to remove to the window can only be to Clarissa's advantage (305). Like her uncle, she too is angry and has "thrown [herself] very much disordered ... into the contrary window" (305). However, Clarissa's awareness that her own words caused her uncle so much anger that he is rendered almost incoherent enables her to quickly regain command of her self and use this opportunity to withdraw. Then James arrives: "I was going out of the door I came in at; the gentlemen looking upon one another, as if referring to each other what to do, or whether to engage my stay, or suffer me to go: and who should I meet at the door but my brother, who had heard all that had passed"(305). The organization of this

40 Margaret Anne Doody, *A Natural Passion: A Study of the Novels of Samuel Richardson* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 191.

passage into one long sentence and the repetition of the word "door" underline how James's sudden entry into the lesser parlour instantly annuls any command that Clarissa may have had.

Once inside the parlour, James assumes the position of authority. In complete disregard of either Solmes's rights as the suitor or Uncle Antony's rights as James's superior, he controls the tone of the dialogue and the atmosphere of the lesser parlour, injecting fear and menace. He grasps her hand "with violence," and then, as if he were the father of the bride, he leads her "up to meet Mr Solmes," having already announced, "You shall not be *bricked up*! ... Oh thou fallen angel! ... [You] shall be redeemed, and this worthy gentleman ... will be so good as to redeem you from ruin." As her cruel "saviour," James then attempts to dispose of her hand to Solmes, only to toss it away "with a whirl" when Clarissa challenges him. Barely giving himself time to pause for breath, James then turns to Solmes and urges him to "look at her person." Meanwhile he, like a seller at a slave market, points out those qualities which will encourage Solmes to "save" her (305–6).

James's sudden appearance at the lesser parlour door is Clarissa's first indication that this is not an escape route. This barrier, an impenetrable obstacle, is guarded by James. What was once referred to as Clarissa's lesser parlour is now James's. Contemptuously trampling over all rules of propriety and etiquette, James consumes the spatial content of room, and he attempts to consume Clarissa at the same time. Relentlessly employing his body like a living barricade, he tries to crush Clarissa's will into submission. Surprised and horrified at James's behaviour, Uncle Antony can or will do little to restrain him, save uttering the occasional rebuke. Clarissa, later describing herself as "the animal ... baited to make cruel sport for my brother and sister, and Mr Solmes," can do little to protect herself (322–23). She does repeatedly challenge James and questions what right he, as her brother, has to control her. Yet James's relentless physical abuse negates any verbal command she may have. As she observes, "had I been left alone with [Solmes], I saw plainly, I could have got rid of him easily enough" (307).

Finally, having put both herself and all three men "into great disorder," Clarissa retires into the garden, "staggering with extreme disorder" and supported by Betty (308). Her mode of departure is diametrically opposed to the confident and independent manner she

adopted when she first attempted to leave the lesser parlour. An hour later "a messenger," her cousin Dolly Hervey, arrives to inform her that her company is desired, and Clarissa re-enters the lesser parlour:

> Nobody was there. I sat down, and had leisure to weep; reflecting, with a sad heart, upon what my cousin Dolly had told me.
>
> They were all in my sister's parlour adjoining: for I heard a confused mixture of voices, some louder than others, drowning, as it seemed, the more compassionating accents. (309)

This is the first time that Clarissa has been on her own since she entered the lesser parlour. It is also the first time she has paid any attention to the wainscot partition and Bella's adjoining lesser parlour. When she first entered the room, Clarissa noted that "they all [the Harlowes] remained in the next parlour, a wainscot partition only parting the two" (303). Neither the significance of her family's location nor the thinness of the partition has been referred to since. Instead, Clarissa's sole concern has been the activity within her former lesser parlour and her need to gain egress from it. But on hearing the "confused mixture of voices" filtering through from the adjoining parlour, Clarissa turns her attention towards the partition and recalls what her cousin Dolly had told her:

> Mr Solmes would have given up his claim to you; for he said you hated him, and there were no hopes; and your mamma was willing he should; and to have you taken at your word, to renounce Mr Lovelace and to live single. My mamma [Aunt Hervey] was for it too; for they heard all that had passed between you and my uncle Antony, and my cousin James; saying it was impossible to think of prevailing upon you to have Mr Solmes ... . But your Papa was immoveable, and was angry at your mamma and mine upon it: and hereupon your brother, your sister, and my uncle Antony, joined in, and changed the scene entirely. (309)

Originally the thin permeable wall that separated these two rooms was "in favour of us girls." Now the wainscot division is only for the benefit of one daughter, Bella, and the principals of the Harlowe family. This partition is their listening screen that allows them to remain as a shielded audience in one room, while Clarissa, their captive sacrifice, is imprisoned in the next. Having overheard all that passed between Clarissa, Solmes, her Uncle Antony, and James during the previous scene, they now decide Clarissa's fate and argue over the script for the next act of the drama.[41] Yet on hearing the "confused mixture of

41 Novelists of the period frequently employ the wainscot partition as a listening screen. See,

voices" and being reminded of her family's invisible presence, Clarissa now attempts to use the wainscot partition to her own advantage by listening to the debating voices (309). She is later told that her father and mother remained behind the wainscot partition because "neither ... would trust themselves with [her]: the one for passion-sake, it seems; my mamma for tenderer considerations" (309).[42] Consequently, Clarissa believes that once she is physically inside the adjoining parlour her parents will no longer be able to "give up [their] daughter." Instead, they will silence the loud, hard-hearted voices of her brother and "masculine" sister, and save the "flower and ornament of the family," welcoming her once again into the heart of her father's house (308–9). The need to break through the central door and have physical contact with her audience suddenly becomes Clarissa's main priority. She is convinced that access to the adjoining parlour is essential for her survival. And this belief dictates her subsequent actions.

The second act of the Harlowe's cruel courtship scene finally begins with another unsuccessful re-enactment of the courting ritual. This time, her Uncle Antony plays the role of father and leads "the new-made beau" by the hand towards Clarissa (310). In an attempt to prevent the encounter, Clarissa stands up. Yet her Uncle Antony, as if forewarned, immediately orders Clarissa to "Sit down!" (310). He then ensures her compliance by physically keeping her in place: "I stood up. My uncle looked very surly—Sit down!—sit down, girl!—And drawing a chair near me, he placed his *dear* friend in it, whether he would or not, I having taken my seat. And my uncle sat on the other side of me" (310). Observing that her physical actions alone are no longer effective, Clarissa verbally reinforces her refusal to marry Solmes. As a result Solmes is silenced, and her "uncle could *only* be angry; and that he was before" (310). Then as if on cue, James bolts into the parlour "in exceeding great wrath," calling Clarissa "several vile names" (311). Now all the components of the Harlowes' malicious scheme are present, and the trial can commence for a second time.

Angered by James's stage-like entrance, his relentless abuse, and the trio's contrived performance, Clarissa can no longer contain herself.

for example, Francis Sheridan, *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (1761), ed. Patricia Koster and Jean Coates Cleary (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 429, and *Sir Charles Grandison*, 4:97.

42 Her family's inability to be physically with Clarissa is referred to throughout the first half of *Clarissa*. See for example, letters 8, 16, and 60.1.

As she remarks, "Then was I a rude, an ungrateful, an unworthy creature" (311). Announcing "I own it all!" she looks at her Uncle Antony, and asks him to consider the reason for Solmes's "mediation: for who sees not" she demands, "that this is giving himself a merit with everybody at my expense?" (312). "Then turning to [her] brother, who seemed surprised into silence by [her] warmth," Clarissa discharges him as her caretaker and, as if she was employing the wainscot partition to speak indirectly to her "audience," she announces herself as eternally dependent on the father (312). Suddenly the pace of the scene becomes frenetic. As if in response to Clarissa's announcement, "Instantly almost came in Betty, in a great hurry" and the central door and those behind it become the focus of attention:

> Sir, said she to my brother, my master desires to speak with you this moment at the door.
>
> He went to that which led to my sister's parlour; and this sentence I heard thundered from the mouth of one who had a right to all my reverence: Son James, let the rebel be this moment carried away to my brother's—this very moment—she shall not stay one hour more under my roof! (312)

Realizing this is her last chance to physically see and occupy the same architectural space as her father, rather than just hear him, Clarissa launches herself at the door. As she explains to Anna:

> I trembled; I was ready to sink. Yet, not knowing what I did or said, I flew to the door, and would have opened it—but my brother pulled it to, and held it close by the key—Oh my papa!—my dear papa, said I, falling upon my knees at the door—admit your child to your presence!—Let me but plead my cause at your feet! ...
>
> I will not stir from my knees, continued I, without admission—at this door I beg it!—Oh let it be the door of mercy! And open it to me, honoured sir, I beseech you!—But this once, this once! although you were afterwards to shut it against me for ever! (312)

As in letter 21, Clarissa describes her flight towards the central door as if it were an involuntary action: "not knowing what I did or said, I flew to the door." Rather than the dream-like motion with which she walked away from that parlour in letter 21, in letter 78 her rush towards it is full of passion and energy. As the religious tone of her pleas suggests, this door has become a metaphor for Clarissa's survival.[43]

43 The concept of the opening of the closed door as a metaphor for salvation recurs

Yet if the need to gain access to the parlour is instinctive to Clarissa, then the desire to deny her that access is equally instinctive to her "marble heart[ed]" brother (312). As Highmore's illustration clearly demonstrates, in order to maintain his position of superiority within the family James must maintain a boundary—be it a door, a wall, or even his own body—between Clarissa and her parents. Thus, as Clarissa tries to open the door, James "pulled it to, and held it close by the key" (312). He only lets go of the key when he is certain of both his own success and his sister's failure:

> The door was endeavoured to be opened on the inside, which made my brother let go the key on a sudden, and I pressing against it (all the time remaining on my knees) fell flat on my face into the other parlour; however, without hurting myself. But everybody was gone, except Betty, who helped to raise me up; and I looked round that apartment, and seeing nobody there, re-entered the other, leaning upon Betty; and then threw myself into the chair which I had sat in before; and my eyes overflowed to my great relief. (312)

Abandoned like a ruined "flower and ornament" and with only Betty to help her, Clarissa returns to the lesser parlour. On her departure from Bella's lesser parlour in letter 21, Clarissa used the possessive pronoun my "own" to make a clear distinction between her room and Bella's. Now, conversely, both lesser parlours have become one: the "other" parlour. They, like every other room on the ground floor, now belong to the Harlowes. On entering this room, therefore, Clarissa's sense of alienation is heightened. Her surroundings only serve to highlight the difference between the person she was when she sat in the chair before and her current lone status.

Meanwhile her family, having repossessed all of the downstairs, now turn their attention to the upstairs apartment and her closet, eradicating not only Clarissa's spatial command within Harlowe Place but also her physical presence. During the closet searching, Clarissa is forced to remain within the lesser parlour. Denied access to a room elsewhere, and unable to gain any respite within the available space, Clarissa begins to find the lesser parlour increasingly oppressive; its small size is now threatening rather than comforting. Neither time nor sleep can offer Clarissa release. For, as she discovers later, when she attempts "to indulge the kind summons" of sleep, it, like all other

throughout the Bible. See, for example, Revelation 3:20, 1 Corinthians 16:9, and Job 31 and 32.

aspects of the natural world, appears to have abandoned her, leaving her seemingly trapped eternally with Solmes (313). This dreadful episode prefigures the living death she would experience if she married him. At last "permitted to go up to [her] own chamber" (319), Clarissa finally leaves the lesser parlour. Yet, as at the end of letter 21, Clarissa's release from the lesser parlour merely accentuates her loss of command over those physical and architectural boundaries that once protected her. On returning to her apartment, she discovers that no place has escaped the Harlowes (319). Her closet—the one private place that Clarissa could call her own—has been invaded.

Richardson uses the three parlours in Harlowe Place to signify Clarissa's exclusion from the centre of the house and the social life of the family. Before the novel's timeline begins, Clarissa, the youngest child and the "ornament of the family" (308), occupies a prominent position at the heart of the Harlowe family. Both her ownership of a lesser parlour and its location at the centre of the social arena indicate this privileged status. However, Clarissa is soon displaced from her pivotal position. From the incident in the great parlour, it is evident that Clarissa's physical and emotional dislocation has already begun by the end of letter 7. By the end of letter 78, Clarissa has been rejected by her family and lost the ownership of her lesser parlour. In addition, she has lost her upstairs private closet, her last physical refuge in Harlowe Place. Richardson's decision to use an architectural space such as the domestic parlour to chart Clarissa's physical and psychological extrusion from her family is relevant. In the eighteenth century, the domestic parlour was perceived as permitting increased informality and privacy. But Richardson's depiction of the Harlowes' use of the three parlours works against this in order to articulate the absence of family harmony and to show how the Harlowes conceive of rooms and people as commodities. Richardson's atypical representation of the parlours also enables him to underline the intimate relationship between the ownership of domestic space and the concept of self. By the time she leaves Harlowe Place, Clarissa has lost both: she has neither a place of her own nor her former stable sense of self.

Kingston University