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Abstract

This essay explores the fetishism of mourning and mourning jewellery as fetish in Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*. Following some historical background on mourning jewellery fashioned with human hair and a definition of fetishism as it relates to mourning jewellery, I discuss Clarissa herself as fetish. I also examine Clarissa's bequests of mourning jewellery by exploring how these fetishized bequests offer psychic compensation to the wearers, allow access to the virtues associated with Clarissa, and assure remembrance of the dead. Finally, I argue for the centrality of mourning to the realization of Richardson's moral, didactic, and aesthetic intent.

Keywords

Samuel Richardson, Clarissa, mourning, mementos, fetish, mourning jewellery

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abstract

NOTIFIED OF the death of Clarissa Harlowe, Robert Lovelace insists that Belford send mementoes to him: “But her dear heart and a lock of her hair I will have, let who will be the gainsayers!”¹ Yet Clarissa’s heart will be buried with her, and the “four charming ringlets” (8:128) cut from Clarissa’s hair will be encased in mourning jewellery and bequeathed to a chosen few. Anna Howe and Mr Hickman will each receive “a ring with my hair” (8:192), as will members of Lovelace’s family. Colonel Morden claims one of Clarissa’s tresses, “for a locket, which, he says, he will cause to be made, and wear next his heart in memory of his beloved Cousin” (8:128). A fifth and final ringlet is cut from Clarissa’s hair after Anna Howe pleads that she “might be allowed a lock of the dear creature’s hair” (8:169), in addition to the ring that Clarissa has bequeathed her. No member of the Harlowe family will receive a lock of her hair, in any form, nor will Lovelace.

As Samuel Richardson’s novel intimates, mourning jewellery that incorporates hair from the deceased was deemed a special gift, a material link to the beloved decedent. This essay explores

¹ Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa; or, The History of a Young Lady*, 3rd ed., intro. Florian Stuber, 8 vols. (1751; New York: AMS Press, 1990), 8:135. References are to this edition.

the fetishism of mourning and mourning jewellery as fetish in *Clarissa*. The first section presents historical background on mourning jewellery fashioned with human hair, and I define fetishism as it relates to mourning jewellery. In the second section, I discuss *Clarissa* herself as fetish, and then examine *Clarissa*'s bestowals of mourning jewellery, exploring how these fetishized bequests offer psychic compensation to the wearers and allow access to the virtues associated with *Clarissa*, assuring remembrance of the dead. Finally, I argue for the centrality of mourning to the realization of Richardson's moral, didactic, and aesthetic intent.

"Long, long worn in memory": Mourning Jewellery and Fetishism

Mourning jewellery fashioned from or with human hair combines two forms of traditional jewellery: mourning jewellery and hair jewellery. Eighteenth-century mourning rings evolved from the medieval tradition of *memento mori* as well as from "the tradition of bequeathing personal jewellery to family members and friends."² As Maureen DeLorme writes, "Mourning jewelry, originally designed with the ubiquitous *memento mori* individual reminder, changed in the 17th century to *memento illius*, or the commemorative remembrance of 'another';³ it is during this time period that mourning rings became a customary part of the funerary rites of the wealthy.

In the will, the decedent designated the recipients of the rings, which were most often distributed during funeral services, for wear immediately and during subsequent months of mourning. Often several levels of mourning rings were distributed, determined by the social status of the mourner and the relationship between mourner and decedent. Inexpensive mourning rings might be inscribed with the decedent's initials, date of death, age at death, and some simple design elements. A more expensive ring might have a short "posie" or motto engraved into it, such as "prepared be to follow me" or "remember"; it might also be decorated with sombre-coloured gemstones, a sepia on ivory mourning scene, or even a miniature portrait of the decedent. A bequest of mourning jewellery to someone from the lower social stations

² C. Jeanenne Bell, *Collector's Encyclopedia of Hairwork Jewelry* (Paducah: Collector Books, 1998), 10.

³ Maureen DeLorme, *Mourning Art and Jewelry* (Atglen: Schiffer Publishing, 2004), 65.

was considered thoughtless because a ring was a luxury item, and more sensible gifts, such as clothing or money, would be judged more appropriate and thoughtful.⁴ Yet, perhaps because mourning rings became *de rigueur* for members of the middle and upper classes, a certain impersonality attached itself to the custom. By the late seventeenth century, it was not uncommon for a hundred rings to be given away at a single funeral, nor was it rare for an individual to possess a collection of fifty or more mourning rings.⁵

In contrast, hair jewellery was extremely personal in nature, and not always associated with death. Instead, bracelets, necklaces, earrings, broaches, watch chains, and lockets made with human hair commemorated love (between family members, friends, lovers) or even successful business relationships.⁶ A lock of hair was a token of high approbation. When the elderly Mary Delany was presented with “a lock of her Majesty’s hair,” she was informed that “it undoubtedly marks her [Queen Charlotte’s] esteem and regard for you.”⁷ In Henry Fielding’s *Amelia*, when Booth goes off to war, Amelia presents him with a casket, filled with medicines, foodstuffs, and remembrances, but, according to Booth, the “most valuable of all to me was a lock of her dear hair, which I have from that time to this worn in my bosom.”⁸ Upon the death of George IV, locks of hair counted among his

⁴ In his will, however, Samuel Pepys bequeathed a mourning ring worth ten shillings (the lowest level of mourning ring) to Jane Penny (formerly Birch), his first maid. See the appendix “A List of all Persons to Whom Rings and Mourning were Presented Upon the Occasion of Mr. Pepys’s Death and Burial,” in John Ashton, *Social Life in the Reign of Queen Anne* (New York, 1883), 441–44.

⁵ See Shirley Bury, *An Introduction to Sentimental Jewellery* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1985), 15–32; Delorme, 65–115; and Lou Taylor, *Mourning Dress: A Costume and Social History* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983), 224–47.

⁶ See Bell; Bury, 33–45; Marcia Pointon, “Materializing Mourning: Hair, Jewellery and the Body,” in *Material Memories* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), 39–57; Pointon, “Wearing Memory: Mourning, Jewellery and the Body,” in *Trauer Tragen—Trauer Zeigen; Inszenierungen der Geschlechter*, ed. G. Ecker (Munich: Fink, 1999), 65–81; and Helen Sheumaker, “This Lock You See: Nineteenth-Century Hair Work as the Commodified Self,” *Fashion Theory* 1, no. 4 (1997): 421–46.

⁷ Mary Delany, *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mrs Delany*, rev. from Lady Llanover’s edition, ed. Sarah Chauncey Woolsey, 2 vols. (Boston: n.p., 1879), 2:381.

⁸ Henry Fielding, *Amelia*, ed. David Blewett (1751; London: Penguin, 1987), 101–2.

possessions, material tokens of his numerous amours: “There was a prodigious quantity of hair—women’s hair—of all colours and lengths, some locks with the powder and pomatum still sticking to them.”⁹ Because a lock of hair bespoke a high level of intimacy and affection between giver and receiver, requests for tokens of hair were often denied. Frances Burney refused a mutual friend’s request to provide Sophia von La Roche with a lock of her hair: “Thinking so little as I think of Madame de la Roche, it would be have been a species of falsehood to send such a gift.”¹⁰ When James Boswell requested a lock of the “charming auburn hair” of Anna Seward, she also refused, not willing to bestow anything that could suggest a willingness to provide other favours.¹¹ Thus, a present of hair designates both intimacy and approbation, highlighting the transgressive nature of the Baron’s capture of Belinda’s lock of hair in Alexander Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock* and the inappropriateness of Marianne’s gift to Willoughby in Jane Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility*.

The most poignant use of hair was when a loved one died. For a mother, a lock clipped from the head of a newly deceased child preserved the love between child and mother long after the child had been buried. For friends, lovers, and family members, hair from the decedent, carefully stored in a crystal-covered locket or ring bezel, also preserved remembrance, love, and grief. As John Donne’s *The Relic* testifies, in the seventeenth century and prior, a lock of hair from the deceased was believed to ensure reunion in the afterlife, and, in the eighteenth century, presenting someone with a lock of hair was presenting someone with a piece, in every sense of the word, of oneself, assuring (re)union of some sort, if only psychical. The two forms of jewellery—mourning and hair—had been combined “as early as 14th-century Europe,”¹² yet not with any regularity until the late seventeenth century, and

⁹ Charles C.F. Greville, *The Greville Memoirs: A Journal of the Reigns of King George IV, King William IV, and Queen Victoria*, ed. Henry Reeve, 8 vols. (London: Longmans, Green, 1896), 2:194.

¹⁰ Frances Burney, *The Diary and Letters of Madame D’Arblay (1778–1840)*, ed. Charlotte Barrett; preface and notes by Austin Dobson, 6 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1904–5), 3:351.

¹¹ James Boswell to Anna Seward, 18 May 1784, Letters of James Boswell, Yale University, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, MS L 1143, fol. 1277, cited in Teresa Barnard, *Anna Seward, A Constructed Life: A Critical Biography* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 137.

¹² DeLorme, 66.

mourning jewellery worked from hair became highly fashionable only in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Mourning jewellery that incorporates hair from the deceased, then, exists as a historically specific phenomenon, prevalent only from the period of the late seventeenth century until the late nineteenth century; its popularity coincides with emerging industrialization, nascent consumerism, and transitional attitudes towards death. Initially, only the wealthy wore mourning jewellery or bequeathed it; however, mass production eventually allowed the less affluent to participate in the custom: “The local jeweler had only to put in the deceased’s hair and engrave the pertinent information on the back of the broach or inside the shank of the ring.”¹³ Mourning rings and broaches became popular consumer objects, yet, paradoxically, once personalized with the hair, name, and death date of the decedent, resisted easy categorization as commodities, since the objects then held little value for anyone other than the intended recipients. Commemorative hairwork jewellery does not function as commodity fetish in the later Marxian sense, as its value comes not from the “expenditure of human labour-power, of human labour in abstract” (though the mass-produced mourning jewellery of the Victorian era does possess these “hidden” labour costs),¹⁴ but, instead, from the material and psychic remnants of interpersonal relations between mourner and decedent. In many respects, mourning jewellery incorporating human hair functions as fetish in the earliest (pre-1750) sense of the word, wherein a material object, the *fetisso*, is viewed by others as possessing little or no value, yet holds immense psychic, spiritual, and/or social value for the individual wearer.¹⁵

¹³ Bell, 11.

¹⁴ Karl Marx, “The Fetishism of Commodities,” in *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, ed. Frederick Engels (1887; Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1954), 1:78. Commodity fetishism certainly did exist in eighteenth-century England, but commemorative hairwork jewellery does not neatly fit the Marxian model.

¹⁵ See William Pietz, “The Problem of Fetish, I,” *Res* 9 (1985): 5–17; Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, II,” *Res* 13 (1987): 23–45; and Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, IIIa,” *Res* 16 (1988): 105–23. The fetish is a European construct initially used to depict the peoples and cultures of West Africa as the primitive, irrational, and erratic “other.” I argue that the popularity of hair jewellery during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries existed, in part, as reaction against Enlightenment privileging of the rational, the technological, and the commercial over the spiritual, the psychic, and the personal.

Much of the special nature of commemorative hair jewellery as fetish resides in the potentially sentient nature of the hair itself. Memorial hairwork jewellery was at its most popular during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when attitudes towards death were transforming. In the eighteenth century, belief in the “sensibility of the cadaver”¹⁶—the corpse’s ability to feel, listen, remember—still existed. As Ruth Richardson notes, a “transitional state” was posited “of a period between death and burial in which the human being was regarded as ‘neither alive nor fully dead’”; in this liminal state, the corpse was believed to possess “both sentience and some sort of spiritual power.”¹⁷ Co-extant was the opposite belief, that the “body without the soul is nothing,”¹⁸ that nothing of the individual’s essence remained within the corpse. Either way, people were interested in the corpse, in its dissection, exhibition, or preservation, whether because it could reveal scientific and medical secrets, or because the corpse “retained a remnant of life that on occasion was manifested.”¹⁹ Sometimes, corpses were preserved in their entirety, as was the case with Jeremy Bentham, whose will specified that his corpse serve both scientific and convivial purposes; more often, a portion of the dead body—usually a lock of hair—was preserved.²⁰ During the eighteenth century, the decedent’s hair existed as “a commemorative monument, to be visited as one visits a friend living in the country”; during the nineteenth century, the lock of hair became merely “the vehicle of memory.”²¹ Commemorative hair jewellery, then, may be seen as a reaction against the increasingly

¹⁶ Phillipe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death: The Classic History of Western Attitudes Toward Death Over the Last One Thousand Years*, trans. Helen Weaver (1981; New York: Barnes and Noble, 2000), 356.

¹⁷ Ruth Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 15. Richardson’s research is specific to England, from the late seventeenth century to early nineteenth century. Belief in the sentience of the corpse dates from medieval times or earlier, and appears to originate in uncertainty over the spiritual afterlife of the soul (where it resided, whether or not it “slept” until judgment day); over the physical moment of death, as corpses emitted noises, continued growing hair and nails, and even exhibited involuntary movement; and over the relationship between body and soul.

¹⁸ Ariès, 355.

¹⁹ Ariès, 360.

²⁰ Ariès, 387.

²¹ Ariès, 461, 462.

dominant (purportedly, more rational) view of body and soul as separate entities, as well as the increasingly clinical treatment of death. During the eighteenth century, this reaction expressed itself as continued belief in the interconnectedness between body and soul, between the living and the dead; during the nineteenth century, as a form of nostalgia.

Because commemorative hairwork jewellery contains a potentially sentient part of the decedent and represents a final gift from the beloved, it holds the potential to function as fetishized substitute for the absent loved one. According to E.L. McCallum, “the central conflict of fetishism, whatever form it may take (commodity, sexual, anthropological) is between belief and knowledge; this conflict necessarily engenders competing interpretations of the world, particularly because it is the belief that the fetishist acts upon, not the knowledge alone.”²² The mourner (fetishist) uses a memorial object (fetish) as a tool to negotiate between certain knowledge of an undesirable reality (death of the beloved) and the belief that this reality does not exist. As Marcia Pointon points out, “It would be possible to argue that one of the ways in which the existence of the lost object is psychically prolonged is through the organization and construction of a memorial which is worn or carried or which, even if it is not worn, nonetheless possesses an implicit symbolic function of linking (the material equivalent to cathecting) the body of the subject/owner with the body of the loved but now lost object of desire.”²³ Any material object associated with the decedent may become the fetish that aids the process of mourning; however, because many eighteenth-century English mourners believed that something of the decedent’s “sensible” self continued to exist within the corpse and in the incorruptible parts of the decedent’s body, the cathectic power of commemorative hair jewellery becomes much greater than would be the case with other material objects. In addition, commemorative hair jewellery provides cathexis for two individuals—the mourner and the dying person. The mourner seeks a material substitute for and psychic communion with the absent beloved; the dying individual seeks to assuage the impending absence of self by assuring that a literal piece of self remains

²² E.L. McCallum, *Object Lessons: How to Do Things with Fetishism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), xvi.

²³ Pointon, “Wearing Memory,” 69.

behind and by securing the continued cathexis of the mourner, which, in turn, secures remembrance. On the one hand, commemorative hairwork jewellery anticipates the Freudian concept of mourning fetishism, in that the piece of jewellery provides a material substitute for the absent or lost beloved. On the other hand, it complicates and resists the Freudian concept of the fetish: both hold a psychic investment in it, and, most significantly, the decedent (whose very absence is the *raison d'être* behind the fetish) retains autonomy and agency by determining who will—or will not—receive this special fetish.

A piece of commemorative hair jewellery functions as a unique form of fetish by existing as a material expression of love and loss between two individuals, by acting as substitute for and agent of the absent beloved, and by grafting a potentially sentient portion of the decedent's body onto the mourner's own body. In its initial form (prior to personalization), it possesses commodity value; however, once employed for its intended use, its intimate contents and excessive personalization render it void of commercial value. It allows the mourner to communicate with the deceased, to resurrect, to reify, and to remember the dead, while it offers the decedent the material means to demonstrate, one last time, love for the mourner, and to insist upon the mourner's continued remembrance. In Richardson's novel, Clarissa lives on after death, through her story, letters, and bequests of rings "with my hair in crystal" (8:193). As Charlotte Montague notes, the rings "will be long, long worn in memory" (8:207).

"With my hair in crystal": Mourning Clarissa

In *The Rape of the Lock*, it is Clarissa who provides the necessary weaponry, a "glittering forfex" from her own arsenal, with which the Baron will carry out the rape of Belinda's lock of hair: "Just then, Clarissa drew with tempting grace / A two-edged weapon from her shining case." After the theft has transpired, the now "grave Clarissa" chides the shorn, bereft Belinda, admonishing her to value good sense and virtue over beauty, and she concludes by offering the following advice: "And she who scorns a man, must die a maid; / What then remains but well our power to use, / And keep good-humour still whate'er we lose?" An array of seemingly contradictory messages, verbal and non-verbal, issue

from Clarissa: silently but actively, she plays the devil, providing the Baron with “the little engine”²⁴ of mischief, perhaps from a desire to teach the vain Belinda a lesson, or perhaps in envy of the lustrous twin ringlets. The harm now done, Clarissa acts the saint, piously lecturing on the merits of virtue and the transience of physical beauty. And, last, she plays the earthbound pragmatist, offering practical advice on sexual relations and coolly suggesting that Belinda “keep good-humour” despite the rape. Belinda, the Baron, and Clarissa each assign different and multiple meanings to the curl, based upon their own desires and deficiencies. For Clarissa, the lock of hair simultaneously represents beauty, vanity, transience, envy, and more, and she projects onto the ringlet aspects of her own self; the shorn lock becomes the embodiment of her own moral message. Notably, at the end of the poem, this earthly lock of human hair transforms into a heavenly comet, visible yet untouchable, a blaze of light variously interpreted by all who see it.

In Richardson’s *Clarissa*, Clarissa functions as Pope’s Clarissa, Belinda, and the purloined lock. Like Belinda, Richardson’s Clarissa possesses “more *secret* pride and vanity than I could have thought” (2:246); and she also experiences rape, albeit of a more serious kind than Belinda. Like Pope’s Clarissa, Richardson’s Clarissa possesses a “little engine” of her own, a penknife with which to effect her own demise, and, after the rape, she transforms herself into a saint, musing on virtue and the transience of human existence, though she never becomes the pragmatist, rejecting as she does the practical necessity of marrying her rapist. Finally, like Belinda’s lock of hair, Richardson’s Clarissa is “a comet which blazes briefly, disastrously, once in a lifetime, to the astonishment of all,”²⁵ and, like the shorn ringlet, she is fetishized, ultimately transforming into a heavenly creature, a mediating object that others interpret variously, based upon their individual desires and deficiencies.

Of particular relevance is this notion that Richardson’s Clarissa herself functions as fetish. Terry Eagleton, Julie Park, Elisabeth Bronfen, and Jolene Zigarovich—all have argued for

²⁴ Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock*, in *Alexander Pope: A Critical Edition of the Major Works*, ed. Pat Rogers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 77–101; III, line 147; III, lines 127–28; V, line 7; V, lines 28–30; III, line 132.

²⁵ Jocelyn Harris, *Samuel Richardson* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 51.

the fetishistic nature of Clarissa's body, though for Eagleton and Park, it is Clarissa's living, sensible body that functions as fetish, while, for Zigarovich and Bronfen, it is Clarissa's dead, insensible body. Eagleton argues that "as the 'phallic' woman, Clarissa is the totem by which Lovelace protects himself from his own terrible lack of being ... His only hope is that, since Clarissa *is* the phallus, she cannot *have* it."²⁶ For Park, Clarissa's sensible body functions as fetish for Lovelace's "affective lack"—and for Richardson's as well; specifically, Clarissa's fetishized heart and hymen "substitute for love and virtue."²⁷ Bronfen emphasizes Lovelace's need for the fetish—in this case, Clarissa's embalmed heart—to be viewed, as it satisfies "the desire to deny that something is absent from sight."²⁸ In this instance, female sexuality and death become inextricably linked, as only through the death of Clarissa can Lovelace achieve mastery over her body, not through sexual relations, but through repeated visual observation. And, for Zigarovich, it is Clarissa's entire "exquisite" corpse, not just her embalmed heart, that is fetishized and eroticized by both Lovelace and Clarissa; both Clarissa and Lovelace find her death and imagined corpse desirable and erotic, in a culture that exhibited anxiety over the "increased secularization of death."²⁹

What these essays suggest is that Clarissa's body, alive or dead, fulfills some sort of nebulous or abstract lack, for Lovelace (and perhaps for Richardson himself). However, Lovelace is not alone in fetishizing Clarissa's body. Certainly the Harlowes do so, as Jayne Elizabeth Lewis notes: "the Harlowes have always realized that Clarissa has considerable symbolic value in and of herself."³⁰ Clarissa's marriageable body offers itself as the material totem through which the Harlowes envision further social and economic advancement. Yet, significantly, those who use Clarissa

²⁶ Terry Eagleton, *The Rape of Clarissa* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 60.

²⁷ Julie Park, "'I Shall Enter Her Heart': Fetishizing Feeling in *Clarissa*," *Studies in the Novel* 37, no. 4 (2005): 383, 372.

²⁸ Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity, and the Aesthetic* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 97.

²⁹ Jolene Zigarovich, "Courting Death: Necrophilia in Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*," *Studies in the Novel* 32, no. 2 (2000): 114, 113.

³⁰ Jayne Elizabeth Lewis, "Clarissa's Cruelty: Modern Fables of Moral Authority in *The History of a Young Lady*," in *Clarissa and Her Readers: New Essays for the Clarissa Project*, ed. Carol Houlihan Flynn and Edward Copeland (New York: AMS Press, 1999), 58.

as fetish prior to her death are denied any possibility of fetishizing her remains. In addition, Lovelace and the Harlowes employ Clarissa as fetish for abstract desires represented by but largely external to Clarissa herself. The Harlowes use Clarissa to conjure up dreams of additional wealth, status, and property. Lovelace, as usual, operates from more complex motives, but he certainly employs Clarissa as fetish in order to fulfill some deep deficiency of self, something that needs to be filled with “Light, Air, Joy, Harmony” (6:196), all of which Lovelace views as obtainable through Clarissa. Notably, Clarissa sanctions mourning fetishes only to those individuals desirous of summoning Clarissa herself, not to those who employed Clarissa as fetish for other aims.

Finally, Clarissa’s corpse—not the one lovingly imagined by Lovelace and Clarissa, but the one actually displayed within the coffin—holds the most fetishistic significance because it literally represents presence and lack, and, though the body is dead, it appears alive, even days after death. It is a “lovely corpse” that appears in “an easy slumber”; a “sweet smile” plays upon the bloodless lips (8:102, 162). When Anna Howe views the dead Clarissa, she kisses the corpse, saying, “But *is* she, *can* she, be really dead!—O no!—She only sleeps.—Awake, my beloved Friend! My sweet clay-cold Friend, awake: Let thy Anna Howe revive thee; by her warm breath revive thee, my dear creature!” (8:167). Reality (Clarissa’s corpse) and desire (Clarissa merely sleeps) synthesize, if only for a moment; knowledge and belief temporarily fuse. The smiling cadaver appears to retain sensibility. The lovely corpse, in its materiality, is and is not the loved and lost Clarissa.

Yet, a corpse being subject to decay, it must be buried no matter how lovely, and, so, for Clarissa’s mourners, small pieces of this living/dead body must serve as substitutes for Clarissa herself. The locks of Clarissa’s hair are taken from her corpse, not from the living woman, yet these bright ringlets appear invested with the living Clarissa’s presence and, as noted previously, the newly dead corpse was often thought to possess both sentience and spiritual power. Several of the ringlets are designated for mourning rings, for enclosure within crystal-covered bezels. These rings function as reliquaries, as tiny coffins encasing an incorruptible piece of Clarissa, and they replicate in miniature the real coffin with the real body. In addition, the well-known iconography of Clarissa’s

“quite insanely appealing”³¹ coffin—the broken lily, the winged hourglass, the coiled and crowned serpent, and other symbols and inscriptions—might easily be reproduced on the mourning rings, increasing their fetish value. The coffin exists within the novel as text, subject to exegesis and interpretation, its meaning determined by the individual reader/viewer, and, just as the symbols on the coffin inspire “a veritable orgy of reading,” so too will the mourning rings. As Castle explains, “The coffin itself *says* nothing, but acts as a site for individual discoveries—of guilt, of compassion, of bitterness. It inspires as many interpretations as it has interpreters; readers read it according to subjective emotional states.”³² Similarly, the mourning rings act as “site[s] for individual discoveries,” not only for the ring-wearers, but also for those denied any such token of Clarissa’s esteem.

As Raymond F. Hilliard points out, “The aggression implicit in Clarissa’s posture as determined martyr is aimed at all her persecutors,”³³ and the stipulations demonstrate this hostility, for neither her family nor Lovelace will receive one of the customary mourning rings, while Clarissa offers these rings to other individuals, many of whom she barely knows. Equally important, Clarissa assures that neither the Harlowes nor Lovelace will receive even the smallest part of her person; she denies them a single strand of her hair. Through her bequests, Clarissa reclaims her own body, refusing to give a piece of herself to those who sought to use—or who did use—this body for their own purposes, yet offering something of herself to select individuals. In death, Clarissa lives, conjured through the wearing of a ring with her “hair in crystal,” offering solace to the chosen few and a bit of damnation to all the rest.

In her will, Clarissa bequeaths cash sums to certain individuals so that they may purchase mourning rings commemorating her death. Specifically, the will makes provisions for twelve individuals to receive plain mourning rings (plain only in that they lack Clarissa’s hair as an element of the design) and seven individuals to receive mourning rings that contain her “hair in crystal.” In addition, three individuals claim a lock of her hair, though only

³¹ Terry Castle, *Clarissa’s Ciphers: Meaning and Disruption in Richardson’s “Clarissa”* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 138.

³² Castle, 138, 141.

³³ Raymond F. Hilliard, “Clarissa and Ritual Cannibalism,” *PMLA* 105, no. 5 (1990): 1093.

two, Colonel Morden and Anna Howe, will receive one, to encase in a locket or to preserve intact, respectively. Any or all of these items could potentially function as fetish. Certainly, the locks of hair and the jewellery that holds Clarissa's hair are more likely to be fetishized precisely because they contain an incorruptible (and potentially sensible) part of the saintly Clarissa, but any material object, including any of the mourning rings, may function as fetish if the mourner invests it with such power. At the very least, the mourning rings recall the living Clarissa, yet acknowledge her absence; they act as mnemonic tokens, revivifying the dead. In addition, as Clarissa was remarkable for her virtue and patient suffering, a ring associated with Clarissa might act as a talisman by which the ring-wearer can access those very attributes. In this respect, it is helpful to think of Clarissa as Protestant saint, as many scholars have: "Clarissa is a Christian saint, who by her probationary mortification assures herself of a reward in heaven."³⁴ According to Phillipe Ariès, "Saints were all thaumaturges (that is, miracle workers) and intercessors, and the faithful had to communicate directly with their relics, had to touch them in order to receive their magical emanations."³⁵ Thought of in this way, the mourning rings become reliquaries of the saintly Clarissa, allowing the ring-wearer to summon aid and inspiration when required, and this would be particularly so, if relics, as many people believed, retained some measure of sensibility.

Through her bequests, Clarissa separates the living into two groups: the blessed and the damned. The rings provide a mark of her favour; they bind the wearers to Clarissa's memory and designate the wearers as acolytes and devotees of the cult of Clarissa. Aesthetically, the bestowals create presence where least expected, as the rings momentarily bring minor characters to the forefront, and, in doing so, Richardson renders palpable an absence associated with his villains: a figurative emptiness encircles the fingers of Clarissa's parents, uncles, brother, sister, and professed lover. If small kindnesses, such as those that Miss Biddulph and Mr Goddard rendered towards Clarissa, are worthy of a token of remembrance, then how great the unkindness of the Harlowes and Lovelace. In this way, the mourning rings encapsulate and stand for Richardson's didactic and moral message.

³⁴ Allan Wendt, "Clarissa's Coffin," *Philological Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (1960): 484.

³⁵ Ariès, 209.

The intended recipients of the twelve mourning rings sans hair appear a disparate group, comprising four childhood friends, two clergymen, a physician, an apothecary, an executor, the acerbic Mrs Howe, Aunt Hervey, and young Dolly Hervey. The amounts provided for the rings vary widely, from five to fifty guineas, though the amount of each does not necessarily correlate with the level of personal intimacy. The least expensive rings, at five guineas apiece, go to Clarissa's childhood friends, "Miss Biddy Lloyd, Miss Fanny Alston, Miss Rachel Biddulph, and Miss Cartwright Campbell" (8:193). Miss Alston and Campbell are mentioned only in the will, but Miss Biddulph and Miss Lloyd have expressed an avid interest in Clarissa's story since the beginning. They are mentioned as early as Anna Howe's second letter to Clarissa and appear in Anna Howe's correspondence with some regularity, as neighbours of the Howes and Harlowes. Although extremely minor characters, they appear loyal to Clarissa, even after her elopement from Harlowe Place, an important point when considering Clarissa's distribution of rings. From a moral perspective, the bequests mark the young women as behavioural foils by which the conduct of Clarissa's family members and Lovelace may be measured.

Four other legatees receive gifts of mourning rings in recognition of services rendered during Clarissa's final days. All legatees are men, possessed of some measure of income and wealth, functioning in professional capacity. None has known Clarissa for very long. To "the worthy Dr. H," in whom Clarissa "found a Physician, a Father and a Friend," twenty guineas is provided for a mourning ring; to "the kind and skilful Mr. Goddard," the apothecary, fifteen guineas for the same; to Mr Belford, her executor, twenty guineas; and to "the reverend Mr.——, who frequently attended me, and prayed by me in my last stages" (8:197), fifteen guineas. All four men are mentioned with gratitude for services rendered or to be rendered, and if Samuel Pepys's will is any indication, the distribution of mourning rings to physicians, surgeons, apothecaries, lawyers, scribes, and executors was common practice. (Of course, that famous literary law clerk, Charles Dickens's Wemmick, approvingly accepts mourning rings from the deceased clients of Mr Jagers: "They're curiosities. And they're property. They may not be worth much, but, after all, they're property and portable").³⁶

³⁶ Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (1860–61; Garden City: Nelson Doubleday, n.d.), 188–89.

Some discernment has been made regarding the relative social status of the recipients, with the physician receiving more than the apothecary; the gentleman executor more than the clergyman. To those from the lower stations who have provided comparable levels of service, such as Mrs Lovick, Mrs Smith, the nurse Anne Shelburne, or Clarissa's landlord Mr Smith, Clarissa bequeaths equivalent sums of cash, rather than rings, suggesting that money is the more thoughtful provision for individuals (particularly women) from the working classes. In the cases of Dr H, Mr Goddard, Belford, and the reverend, sums of cash might be deemed insulting, at odds with their social position or professional stature.

As with the bequests to Clarissa's childhood friends, the rings mark a disparity in moral behaviour between these relative strangers and those with familial or amorous ties to Clarissa. These four characters stand as aesthetic and moral foils to the men in Clarissa's family, her father, two uncles, and brother. Clarissa expresses her gratitude towards the doctor and the apothecary in terms that suggest the fatherly nature of their treatment: "I am inexpressibly obliged to You, Sir, and to You, Sir ... for your *more* than friendly, your *paternal* care and concern for me" (7:243–44). Similarly, Belford now functions in a brotherly capacity. As talismans of good behaviour, the rings indicate moral judgement on the part of Clarissa.

The remaining assignments for plain mourning rings are more personal in nature. The "reverend and learned Doctor Arthur Lewen" receives "Twenty guineas for a Ring." The amount, like the bequests to Belford and the others, is moderate, yet it recognizes "the instructions" by which the young Clarissa "equally delighted and benefited" during the thrice weekly "conversation-visits" (8:193, 306). The ring is a recognition of his sympathetic support of Clarissa. In his last letter to Clarissa, he writes: "I will only add, that the misfortunes which have befallen you, had they been the lot of a child of my own, could not have affected me *more*, than yours have done" (7:251). In the event that the elderly and "very ill" Dr Lewen predeceases Clarissa, which he indeed does, Clarissa has thoughtfully arranged for Lewen's daughter to "have benefit of it" (7:248, 8:193), with the twenty guineas provided directly to the daughter, rather than a ring. Based on Dr Lewen's age and his daughter's living with him, she is most probably a spinster, with few financial resources of her own and little hope of a substantial legacy from her clergyman father.

The acid-tongued Mrs Howe also receives “a ring of Twenty-five guineas price.” In some ways, this bestowal is surprising, after Mrs Howe’s prohibition of correspondence between her daughter and Clarissa, subsequent to Clarissa’s elopement. Mrs Howe writes to Clarissa about her daughter: “I have charged her over and over not to correspond with one who has made such a giddy step,” labelling Clarissa’s correspondence an “*Evil communication*” (6:108). Yet the bequest to Mrs Howe exists, first and foremost, as a gift to Anna herself; and, most importantly, it acknowledges Mrs Howe’s almost immediate change of heart in allowing Anna to continue correspondence with Clarissa, out of love for her daughter, capitulation to Anna’s “headstrong ways” (6:368), and from genuine compassion for Clarissa.

Only two mourning rings go to members of Clarissa’s family—rings without her hair. Aunt Hervey receives a “sum of Fifty guineas for a ring” (8:190); Dolly Hervey, twenty-five guineas for the same. Yet neither young Dolly nor her mother will receive a lock of hair to incorporate into the ring. The question is why? In Dolly’s case, it is most probably because of her youth, and because Dolly does not need it, since Clarissa has provided “my kind and much-valued Cousin Miss Dolly Hervey” with other means of assuaging grief, diminishing loss, and asserting moral superiority, through her bequests of “my watch and equipage, and best Mechlin and Brussels head-dresses and ruffles; also my gown and petticoat of flowered silver of my own work,” “my harpsichord, my chamber-organ, and all my music-books,” and “all my books in general, with the cases they are in.” These items are meant for instruction and pleasure; they are intended to ensure that Dolly looks to the future, rather than the past, and that she will remember Clarissa with pleasure, rather than pain: “I know that she will take the greater pleasure in them (when her friendly grief is mellowed by time into a remembrance more sweet than painful) because they were mine” (8:190). The mourning ring provides Dolly with the customary means by which to negotiate Clarissa’s death, but the other items allow Dolly, in a way, to become Clarissa herself, to enjoy those very things that gave Clarissa pleasure and informed Clarissa’s mind, to become one with the deceased Clarissa in ways that others cannot. She will read Clarissa’s books; she will play Clarissa’s instruments; she will wear Clarissa’s clothes. Through her bestowals, Clarissa continues in Dolly’s life, as instructor and educator, and Dolly’s grief will

be assuaged through her attempts to emulate her beloved cousin. The harpsichord and books offer continued communication with the deceased, initially engendering grief, but, in the long term, providing countless hours of enjoyment. Pleasure and instruction are emphasized in Clarissa's bequests to Dolly.

The reason why Mrs Hervey is denied a ring with Clarissa's hair is less clear. Mrs Hervey has proven the most sympathetic of the Harlowes throughout Clarissa's ordeal (other than Dolly); thus, she has merited a mourning ring. Clarissa writes of her aunt: "I beg of her to accept my thankful acknowledgements for all her goodness to me from my infancy; and particularly for her patience with me, in several altercations that happened between my Brother and Sister, and me, before my unhappy departure from Harlowe-Place" (8:190). Yet all of Clarissa's thanks are reserved for the time prior to her "unhappy departure from Harlowe-Place"; none, after. Therein lies the probable cause behind Clarissa's refusal to provide Mrs Hervey with a lock of hair: Clarissa twice requested Mrs Hervey's intervention with her family, only to be refused on the grounds that Mrs Hervey "dare not open my lips in your favour" (3:250). As Clarissa later writes to Mrs Norton, "I did not doubt my Aunt's good-will to me. Her affection I did not doubt. But shall we wonder that Kings and Princes meet with so little control in their passions, be they ever so violent, when in a private family, an Aunt, nay, even a Mother in that family, shall chuse to give up a once favoured child against their own inclinations" (8:266). Mrs Hervey gave up Clarissa against her own inclination. This bequest appears intentionally ambivalent, representing both gratitude and hostility on the part of Clarissa. Also to go to Mrs Hervey is Clarissa's "whole-length picture in the Vandyke taste, that used to hang in my own parlour" (8:192), a gift that seems highly fraught with emotional possibilities: Will the painted eyes of Clarissa smile benignly at Mrs Hervey, or will they look at her with reproach and accusation?

The eleven plain mourning rings represent moral worth, and, in this capacity, act as rejoinders to those denied such marks of esteem. The twelfth plain ring, Mrs Hervey's ring, functions simultaneously as reward and punishment, a peculiarly purgatorial piece of jewellery. The remaining seven rings—all with Clarissa's hair in crystal—demonstrate Clarissa's desire to acknowledge love, to offer long-term solace, to diminish loss, and to exert her will over the future actions of the legatees. Because the rings

contain a “relic” of the deceased (Clarissa’s hair), the rings also offer “beneficent contagion,” to borrow a term associated with religious historicity; specifically, the hair encased within the crystal of the ring possesses the full “potency” of the greater whole (Clarissa’s entire living person).

It is no surprise that Anna Howe and Mr Hickman receive rings “with my hair” (8:192). Anna has also asked for—and received—a lock of Clarissa’s hair, which could be produced when the cold touch of hair in crystal is insufficient. For Anna, both ring and ringlet allow repeated reunion with the beloved decedent, invoking love, loss, and remembrance. Of the dead, Adam Smith commented, “It is miserable ... to be no more thought of in this world, but to be obliterated in a little time from the affections and almost from the memory, of their dearest friends and relations.”³⁷ The mourning ring with Clarissa’s hair ensures Anna’s remembrance. The relationship between Clarissa and Anna Howe has been intensely close—“but one heart, but one soul, between us” (8:169)—and Anna functions as the most reliable witness and knowledgeable interpreter of Clarissa’s behaviour during her ordeal. Anna’s role is that of principal, living witness to the dead Clarissa’s virtue, in return for which Clarissa offers Anna reunion on earth (through remembrance) and in heaven: “O my dear Anna Howe! ... But we shall one day meet (and this hope must comfort us both) never to part again!” (8:70). By seeking prolonged union with Anna from beyond the grave, Clarissa seeks continued remembrance and in a way that sustains Clarissa’s image as virtuous sufferer.

Anna also receives several other personal bequests from Clarissa, including a full-length portrait of Clarissa and her “best diamond ring” (8:191). These presents to Anna are meant to conjure Clarissa, to recall her physical presence. The full-length portrait assures that Clarissa’s image never fades from Anna’s memory; it exists as stand-in for the living Clarissa: “Portrait gifts ... not only represent people, they also stand in their stead.”³⁸ Clarissa’s best diamond ring becomes an engagement ring of sorts, pledging troth. The bequests to Mr Hickman have equal resonance: a duplicate mourning ring with Clarissa’s hair enclosed

³⁷ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 6th ed. (1759; Dublin: J. Beatty and C. Jackson, 1777), 8.

³⁸ Pointon, “Wearing Memory,” 57.

provides a physical and psychical link between Anna and Hickman, with Clarissa as mediator. In addition, Clarissa symbolically gives Anna to Mr Hickman through the bestowal of her own locket containing a miniature portrait of Anna Howe. Clarissa's bequests to Mr Hickman urge his suit with Anna, by demonstrating Clarissa's approval of this "*mighty* sober man" (2:5).

The remaining five rings are designated for Lovelace's relatives, none of whom Clarissa has met in person. Unlike the other mourning rings, with or without her hair, Clarissa provides specific instructions as to their construction: "I bequeath to Lady Betty Lawrence, and to her Sister Lady Sarah Sadleir, and to the right honourable Lord M. and to their worthy Nieces Miss Charlotte and Miss Martha Montague, each an enameled ring, with a cipher Cl. H. with my hair in crystal, and round the inside of each, the day, month, and year of my death: each ring, with brilliants, to cost twenty guineas" (8:193). The rings would clearly be identified as mourning rings, by their enamelled surface and inscriptions. These rings seem intended to be like those bequeathed to Anna and Mr Hickman, but the extra five guineas would ensure that "brilliants," small multi-cut diamonds, surround the crystal bezel, as more befitting to adorn the aristocratic fingers of Lord M. and his relations.

These bequests to Lovelace's family reveal more than gratitude for their numerous kindnesses, which included offers of family, friendship, and "one hundred guineas *per* quarter" for life. Charlotte writes, "We each of us desire to be favoured with a place in your esteem; and to be considered upon the same foot of relationship, as if what once was so much our pleasure to hope *would* be, *had* been" (7:119). That is, they wish to be considered Clarissa's relations. The mourning rings offer forgiveness of sorts, an attempt to assuage the guilt they feel about their kinsman's rape of Clarissa. Yet, the rings with Clarissa's hair also bind Lovelace's family to Clarissa, and perhaps are intended to keep Lovelace outside the family circle, so to speak. By giving rings to Lovelace's family, she tries to bind their loyalty to her—not him. The distributions to Lovelace's family also serve as messages for the Harlowes, suggesting their faultiness towards their daughter, as Lovelace's relations are willing to treat Clarissa as a family member, whereas Clarissa's own relations are not.

The remaining lock of hair goes to Colonel Morden, at his request. In her will, Clarissa begs of "my worthy Cousin William

Morden, Esq. ... to accept of two or three trifles, in remembrance of a Kinswoman who always honoured *him* as much as he loved *her*" (8:190–91). These "trifles" function doubly as fetishes, recalling Morden's deceased father, as well as Clarissa. One is a "rose diamond ring, which was a present from his good father; and will be the more valuable to him on that account" (8:191). Clarissa wore this same ring when escaping from Mrs Sinclair's brothel the first time—"a rose diamond ring, supposed on her finger" (5:27)—the ring she wears when raped. Of course, Morden knows nothing of the ring's history; nevertheless, it is significant that this ring is bequeathed to the man who will revenge Clarissa's rape and death. Although Clarissa has begged Morden not to be "my Avenger" (8:247), the bequest of this particular ring suggests the possibility that Clarissa desires such an end.

Another item designated for Morden is a "little miniature picture set in gold, which his worthy father made me sit for" (8:191).³⁹ As Susan Stewart writes, "the miniature allowed possession of the face of the other," and she argues that "the miniature projects an eternalized future-past upon the subject; the miniature image consoles in its status as an 'always there.'"⁴⁰ Uncle Morden had intended for this miniature portrait of Clarissa to be bestowed "upon the man whom I should one day be most inclined to favour" (8:191). The miniature should have gone to Lovelace; instead, Colonel Morden, the man most concerned with Clarissa's welfare and honour, receives it, as he has treated Clarissa with that respect, love, and affection that his father hoped Clarissa would find in a favoured suitor and caring spouse. Colonel Morden also claims a lock of Clarissa's hair, "for a locket, which, he says, he will cause to be made, and wear next his heart in memory of his beloved Cousin" (8:128). Possibly, the miniature portrait of Clarissa might serve as an exterior centrepiece for the locket, with Clarissa's hair enclosed within; if so, this piece of sentimental jewellery would function doubly as fetish, employing both image and hair of the deceased: "When the miniature exists simply as a representation," Stewart notes, "it functions as sympathetic magic; when it is enclosed with a lock of hair, a piece of ribbon, or some other object

³⁹ The third bequest is a piece of embroidery.

⁴⁰ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 126.

that is ‘part’ of the other, it functions as contagious magic.”⁴¹ It is magic that conjures up the beloved decedent, allowing continued possession of the other and reunion even after death. Might Colonel Morden have been wearing this locket, “next his heart,” when duelling with Lovelace?

Through the mourning rings, Clarissa recognizes the right of certain individuals to grieve her death, and she provides them with the means to negotiate and reconcile her loss. Yet neither sister, brother, mother, father, nor either of her two uncles is offered any like solace. Instead, Clarissa provides them with those possessions that they long coveted, those buildings, plots of land, revenues, ancestral portraits, and silverware to which they long thought themselves entitled and for which they resented Clarissa’s ownership. Clarissa determines that her family will receive what they have long desired—those material assets for which they sacrificed her happiness. Clarissa denies them any token of love, any sign of forgiveness; although, admittedly, her mother is offered the option of selecting “any one piece” of embroidery, as well as retaining Clarissa’s Vandyke portrait, if she “should think fit to keep it herself” (8:192). With the exception of Dolly Hervey, Mrs Hervey, and Mrs Harlowe, the Harlowes receive no personal items, which would express love, gratitude, respect, forgiveness, and desire on Clarissa’s part to assuage their guilt and lessen their loss. Clarissa refuses them any token by which to palliate guilt and regret, and, in doing so, denies them their right to grieve and, ultimately, to heal.

Lovelace, too, is denied any token of forgiveness, and, ironically, his insistence that he receive such a token results in a counterfeit fetish being delivered to him. In response to Lovelace’s urgent request for Clarissa’s heart and a lock of her hair, Belford informs Mowbray, Lovelace’s messenger: “As to the lock of hair, you may easily pacify him (as you once saw the angel) with hair near the colour, if he be intent upon it” (8:136). Because Lovelace could not distinguish Clarissa from other women—to him, “every woman is a Rake in her heart” (3:106)—his friends substitute the gold of Clarissa’s hair with the dross of an impostor’s. For Lovelace, mourning Clarissa will be without comfort, or perhaps one lock of hair will do as well as another, for as his friend Mowbray asks, “what is there in one woman more than another, for matter of that?” (8:88).

⁴¹ Stewart, 126.

"For death endears": The Reader and the Dead Heroine

Asked to provide his interpretation of events surrounding the abduction, rape, and death of a certain Miss Betterton, Lovelace insists that no rape occurred, that all was love between him and Miss Betterton, and he concludes his defence, by saying, "But enough of dear Miss Betterton. *Dear*, I say; for death *endears*.—Rest to her worthy soul!" (3:231). The question of whether or not death endears (or, more to the point, whether or not Clarissa's death endears) is an important one, because the manner in which readers respond to Clarissa's death—that is, whether they mourn, mock, or recoil from the passing of the fictional heroine—shapes how they respond to the novel itself and to its moral message.

For Terry Castle, Clarissa's death opens up the text for readers: "As Clarissa dies ... a multitude of readers are born—her 'Friends,' her enemies, and of course the real reader, who may be friend or enemy."⁴² Yet, as Tom Keymer has demonstrated, many contemporary readers—friends of Clarissa—became enemies of the novel, refusing to read further once apprised in advance of the fatal outcome, walking "away from the prospect of the fictional bereavement."⁴³ Assuredly, a considerable number of contemporary readers objected to Clarissa's demise; nonetheless, I would argue that, for those contemporary readers strong enough, brave enough, or perhaps (un)feeling enough to read through to the bitter end, significant benefits accrued in terms of emotional investment in the novel. Death, in other words, endeared many contemporary readers to Clarissa and to *Clarissa*, and it did so for several reasons. First, Clarissa's death is essential to the realization of Richardson's moral message. Second, mourning, in and of itself, offers its consolations, and this was particularly so for the eighteenth-century mourner. And, third, as mourning the death of Clarissa blurs the lines between fiction and reality, it allows the text and the moral missives enclosed within it to function as mourning fetish, metaphorically replicating the ring "with my hair in crystal."

Among those who finished the lengthy novel and approved of the heroine's suffering and subsequent demise was Mary Delany. She described her feelings upon reading the final volumes of the

⁴² Castle, 146–47.

⁴³ Tom Keymer, "Clarissa's Death, *Clarissa's* Sale, and the Text of the Second Edition," *Review of English Studies* 45.179 (August 1994): 395.

novel in a letter to Mrs Dewes: “My heart was almost broke with her [Clarissa’s] frenzy, but that scene afterwards composed and revived my spirits, and made me almost rejoice in her distress.”⁴⁴ In a subsequent letter she refers to Lady Bradshaigh’s letters to Richardson that demanded a happy ending: “I thought them written with great vivacity and wit; though against my own judgement as to the catastrophe of ‘Clarissa.’”⁴⁵ Delany obviously preferred the tragic ending, as did other readers of *Clarissa*, including Sarah Fielding. In Sarah Fielding’s *Remarks on Clarissa* (1749), a fictional Miss Gibson pronounces the final word on the novel, arguing that the heroine “could not find a better Close to her Misfortunes than a triumphant Death”; she adds, “Whilst we seem to live, and daily converse with her through her last Stage, our Hearts are at once rejoiced and amended, are both soften’d and elevated, till our Sensations grow too strong for any Vent, but that of Tears; nor am I ashamed to confess, that Tears without Number have I shed.”⁴⁶ As evidenced by the testimonies of Mary Delany and Sarah Fielding, Clarissa’s death proved curiously satisfying for many readers, for reasons clearly related to Clarissa’s role as moral exemplum and to the process of mourning itself, which “softens and elevates” the heart.

Clarissa’s death transforms the process of reading; instead of mere novel, *Clarissa* becomes hagiography, in which the reader traces the transformation of flawed human being into persecuted martyr into blessed saint. The moral message of *Clarissa* lies embedded within the text (as five meditations and as moral snippets) and external to the text (as the separately published *Meditations Collected from Sacred Books*).⁴⁷ If readers accept that

⁴⁴ Delany, 1:380.

⁴⁵ Delany, 1:386.

⁴⁶ [Sarah Fielding], *Remarks on Clarissa*, Augustan Reprint Society Publications nos. 231–32 (Los Angeles: University of California, William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1985), 54–55, 55–56. *Remarks on Clarissa* presents “a lively group of disputants” arguing over various aspects of Richardson’s novel; however, as Peter Sabor notes, the pamphlet raises objections to the novel “only to [have them] be refuted” (v). See Sabor, introduction to *Remarks on Clarissa*, iii–viii.

⁴⁷ Keymer, “Richardson’s *Meditations*: Clarissa’s *Clarissa*,” in *Samuel Richardson: Tercentenary Essays*, ed. Margaret Anne Doody and Peter Sabor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 96–97. The rare *Meditations* was “a small octavo, dated 1750, and consists of a five-page advertisement by ‘the Editor’ of *Clarissa*, a three-page preface signed ‘Cl. Harlowe’, and, on the following seventy-six pages, the meditations themselves, to a total of thirty-six” (91).

“the tragic ending of *Clarissa* was designed to instruct about life eternal,”⁴⁸ then Clarissa’s death is viewed as morally and didactically necessary. Rejection of Clarissa’s death, whether it be a refusal to finish the novel or a refusal to bereave the loss of the fictional heroine, becomes a rejection of the novel’s moral message and its intent of teaching the reader the necessity of endurance, mortification, and suffering. In a novel where, as Margaret Anne Doody writes, the “activity of transforming matter into spirit is the incessant essential action of the self,” death expresses itself as the ultimate articulation of spirit and fulfilment of character.⁴⁹ In the moral struggle between the temptations offered by the material world, vivid and immediate, and the less gaudy attractions offered by the spiritual world, shadowy and deferred, Clarissa emerges triumphant.

However, subscribing to the moral sentiments offered by *Clarissa* works in tandem with and is strengthened by the process of fictional bereavement. Tears for the dead heroine acknowledge, engage with, and perform the novel’s moral message. As Esther Schor points out, eighteenth-century moral philosophers argued that sympathy for others provides “the basis for public morality.” Concerning Adam Smith’s 1759 *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Schor writes, “sympathy derives from a feeling of dissonance between ourselves and the sufferer’s situation; according to Smith, we do not imagine *being* that particular sufferer, but rather imagine being *ourselves* in the sufferer’s situation.”⁵⁰ Readers sympathize with Clarissa by imagining themselves in her fictional shoes, and admiration for the heroine is inspired because Clarissa manages these sufferings in a manner vastly superior to that of the majority of readers. Yet, under Adam Smith’s theory, the dead Clarissa—as opposed to the living or dying Clarissa—should provoke an even greater sympathetic response, precisely because she is dead. For Adam Smith, sympathy for the dead avails nothing (the dead cannot properly benefit from sympathy), and so the sympathetic mourner owes the dead a debt, which may be used, in turn, to

⁴⁸ Elizabeth Bergen Brophy, *Samuel Richardson: The Triumph of Craft* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1974), 26.

⁴⁹ Margaret Anne Doody, *A Natural Passion: A Study of the Novels of Samuel Richardson* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 152.

⁵⁰ Esther Schor, *Bearing the Dead: The British Culture of Mourning from the Enlightenment to Victoria* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 20, 34.

promote social sympathy.⁵¹ Thus, mourning makes one moral by generating an overflow of sympathy that finds expression and outlet in social good. The mourning evoked by Clarissa's death, for all its fictionality, nonetheless indicates sympathy on the part of the reader, which, in and of itself, was considered a worthy response by eighteenth-century English men and women, yet it is also sympathy that would be expected to extend outward towards others.

Finally, Richardson's readers appeared to believe "in the actuality of his created worlds. They responded to the letters as if they were addresses, spurned his characters, or fell in love with villains as real to them as their own neighbours."⁵² If so, then "fictional bereavement" becomes closely aligned with real bereavement—at least for Richardson's contemporaries—which, in turn, suggests that those who read the lengthy tome in its entirety, who wept for the loved and lost heroine, experienced a need to prolong their psychic connection to her and potentially sought a material object that might substitute for the "absent" heroine. Richardson seeks to assuage his readers' sense of loss, by offering prolonged, repeated, and renewed access to the text's moral missives,⁵³ which, in turn, represent the essence of the fictional creation that is Clarissa (much as Clarissa's locks of hair represent her corporeal whole), and which are enclosed and encased within the mourning fetish, weighty in its materiality, that is *Clarissa*.



In death, Clarissa administers her own brand of justice. Those who loved Clarissa and supported her throughout her ordeal, who offered some measure of comfort, no matter how small, will be provided with a talisman by which to conjure Clarissa, and, in doing so, receive temporary release from grief, vicarious access to Clarissa's virtue, and a sense of personal merit. Those whom Clarissa deems unworthy will come away with all that they desired—antique silverware, plots of land, ancestral portraits—

⁵¹ Schor, 37.

⁵² Harris, 6.

⁵³ *Clarissa's* moral missives were available through the *Meditations*, the collection of moral sentiments appended to the third and fourth editions; *A Collection of the Moral and Instructive Sentiments, Maxims, Cautions, and Reflexions, Contained in the Histories of Pamela, Clarissa, and Sir Charles Grandison* (1755); and, of course, *Clarissa* itself.

but nonetheless feel dissatisfied, the emptiness encircling their fingers weighing heavily in symbolic import. Similarly, through Clarissa's death, Richardson administers justice of sorts. For those readers who love Richardson's young heroine, yet acknowledge the rightness of her death in terms of securing the novel's aesthetic, moral, and didactic aims, Richardson bequeaths metaphoric mourning rings in the form of moral missives and/or aesthetic gems embedded, enclosed, and encapsulated within the massive text, the former perhaps more important to eighteenth-century readers, the latter to twenty-first-century readers. Those deemed unworthy—that is, “the Story-Lovers and Amusement-Seekers”⁵⁴—will receive precisely what they ask for, but will feel cheated nonetheless.



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⁵⁴ Samuel Richardson to Lady Bradshaigh, 15 December 1748, in *Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson*, ed. John Carroll (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 116.