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Abstract
Most modern readings of *Clarissa* agree that the novel portrays a profound change in social institutions as traditional family life is vitiated by the increasing impetus towards capital accumulation; operating in tandem, the system of primogeniture and the competition for wealth and status undermine cohesion within kinship groups and in particular deny daughters their customary share of emotional and financial resources. Clarissa's objectification and exploitation, however, arise not from the ethos of possessive individualism and the pursuit of self-interest, but from the discursive system of moral obligation and gift exchange—the very practices that supposedly establish and maintain affective relationships. In its portrayal of the gift economy, *Clarissa* investigates the unstable ideological power of donation, obligation, and reciprocity: while this economy supports the patriarchal household and enables its adaptability to changing material circumstances, in the hands of Clarissa herself it eventually serves as a weapon for the destruction of that household.

Keywords
Clarissa, Samuel Richardson, capitalism, gift exchange, gift, obligation, patriarchy

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READINGS OF *Clarissa* over the past twenty years offer a compelling account of the novel as an "economic morality play." According to this interpretation, *Clarissa* represents a profound change in social institutions, as the increasing impetus towards capital accumulation vitiates traditional family life, introducing competition for wealth among kinship groups and denying daughters their share of emotional and financial resources.[1] Terry Eagleton argues that Clarissa finds herself locked in opposition to the "ruling-class power bloc" of the aristocracy and haute bourgeoisie, which, despite some ideological differences, are both fundamentally allied in their commitment to augment their status and influence by acquiring land, money, and titles.[2] John Zomchick agrees that, in Clarissa's world, "a powerful economic imperative to expand" has destroyed the emotional cohesion of

[1] Ruth Perry, *Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748–1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 65.

[2] Terry Eagleton, *The Rape of Clarissa: Writing, Sexuality and Class Struggle in Samuel Richardson* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 88–89.

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the household; instead of acting as a community bound by ties of affiliation and affection, the family "sheds its organic character and transforms itself into an opportunistic association of economic interests" in which "relationship ... [is] determined by a calculus of profit and loss" characteristic of commercial exchanges.[3] Most recently, Ruth Perry maintains that *Clarissa* "enacts ... the dispossession of daughters in the new capitalist dispensation" and portrays the traumatic emotional and financial effects of their disinheritance.[4] Operating in tandem, the system of primogeniture and the drive for capital profoundly alienate the Harlowes from each other: "too rich to be happy" and oblivious to the pain that ensues, they pursue their strategies for accumulation "till Death ... gathers them into his garner."[5]

These readings offer persuasive accounts of the novel: the depiction of the family's fragility when divided by conflicts over possessions and the portrayal of women's victimization at the hands of economically ambitious kinsmen provide the narrative with a thematic power that continues to resonate strongly. Yet in emphasizing Clarissa's sacrifice to the Harlowes' financial aggrandizement or her determined maintenance of paternalistic values in a hostile commercial culture, we risk echoing her nostalgia for a

[3] John P. Zomchick, *Family and Law in Eighteenth-Century Fiction: The Public Conscience in the Private Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 60, 69.

[4] Perry, 76. For earlier readings of the economic context of Richardson's novel, see Christopher Hill, "Clarissa Harlowe and Her Times," *Essays in Criticism* 5, no. 4 (1955): 315–40; and Margaret Anne Doody, *A Natural Passion: A Study of the Novels of Samuel Richardson* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).

[5] Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa: or, The History of a Young Lady*, ed. Angus Ross (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 68. References are to this edition. While the acquisition and consolidation of estates through marriage was a common financial strategy in the period when *Clarissa* appeared (1747–48), the Harlowes employ that strategy aggressively: Clarissa's father received "a very large portion" (53) from his marriage to Lady Charlotte, along with several estates that devolved to him upon the deaths of her relatives, and Clarissa's paternal uncles, John and Antony Harlowe, resolve to remain single so they may employ their fortunes as bargaining chips in making profitable matches for their nephews and nieces. On estate consolidation through marriage, see Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500–1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977); Randolph Trumbach, *The Rise of the Egalitarian Family: Aristocratic Kinship and Domestic Relations in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Academic Press, 1978); Lloyd Bonfield, *Marriage Settlements, 1601–1740: The Adoption of Strict Settlement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); and H.J. Habakkuk, *Marriage, Debt, and the Estates System: English Landownership, 1650–1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

golden age when "the world [was] one great family" (62), a network of kin with a common interest undisturbed by the competition for wealth. The novel itself provides the grounds for dismantling this nostalgia: Clarissa's ordeal shows that it is the very system of exchange that establishes and maintains affective relationships—and not the system of commercial transactions governed by "narrow selfishness" (62)—that proves most dangerous for women. As theorists of the gift suggest, gifts and commodities alike foster social networks in a mercantile culture, but generate very different structures of feeling in the models of exchange they establish. The value of commodities is expressed in terms of a universal equivalent the purchaser is obliged (in an implied agreement or actual contract) to provide; however, commodities create a reciprocity that usually endures no longer than the moment of their transfer. Gifts, by contrast, are often defined by the deliberate lack of precise assessments of their value, the absence of a predetermined equivalent, and the ambiguity in the length of time allowed for reciprocity (even though a return is required).[6] Clarissa's family operates within both systems, but while their calculating pursuit of their own interests certainly anchors the Harlowes in the ethos of possessive individualism, their rationale for exploiting Clarissa is supported by the emphatically aneconomic rhetoric of moral obligation and gift exchange. This discourse defines Clarissa's social identity throughout the novel, framing her roles as donor and recipient of benefits as well as her position as both agent and object in gift transactions. While initially championing the ties bestowed by relationship, Clarissa discovers that the amorphous quality of moral obligation—the impossibility of its being quantified and hence repaid—threatens her physical, psychological, and spiritual integrity. I will argue that the communal bonds that seem to guarantee Clarissa's well-being actually form the greatest threat to

[6] Discussions of the gift as a social transaction distinct from commercial activity begin in Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W.D. Halls (1954; New York: Norton, 1990). Subsequent studies of the gift's relation to capital accumulation and commodity exchange include Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); James G. Carrier, *Gifts and Commodities: Exchange and Western Capitalism since 1700* (London: Routledge, 1995); John Frow, *Time and Commodity Culture: Essays in Cultural Theory and Postmodernity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Jacques T. Godbout, *The World of the Gift*, trans. Donald Winkler (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1998); and Mark Osteen, "Gift or Commodity?," in *The Question of the Gift: Essays across Disciplines*, ed. Mark Osteen (London: Routledge, 2002), 229–47.

her survival. For Clarissa, the choice between "the cold freedom of an abstract individualism" embodied in the acquisitive self and the "warm comforts of a genuine affective life" never really exists, for her objectification arises within the affective life of her household and the gift relations on which it rests.[7] Escaping her assigned role in the economy of obligation comes at the cost of life itself, but death turns out to have substantial advantages: it enables Clarissa to become the unsurpassed donor in the network of exchange, a position of power that threatens the patriarchal structure of gift relations and the entire social order this structure supports.

"This prime gift, WOMAN*"*

Echoing religious authorities such as Jeremy Taylor, Richard Allestree, and William Fleetwood on the exchanges that cement family relationships, Samuel Richardson, in a letter following the publication of *Clarissa*, articulates the "Great Rule" that informs his entire novel: the performance of filial "Duty and Observance" is absolute, since if children neglect their obligations to their parents, all discipline and hierarchy will vanish. "We will be a Family of Revellers as well as Levellers," he warns.[8] For the Harlowes, Clarissa's very status as a daughter of the family—her right to be acknowledged as kin—depends upon her returning an equivalent of their initial gift to her. Their assumptions about the duties of children find support in the legal writings of William Blackstone, who maintains that "to those, who gave us existence, we naturally owe subjection and obedience during our minority, and honour and reverence ever after."[9] Repayment for filial care, however, becomes an interminable process for daughters. Reaching adulthood and inheriting property effectively liberate James Harlowe, Junior, from deference to his father (who instead

[7] Zomchick, 60.

[8] Richardson to Frances Grainger, 22 January 1749/50, *Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson*, ed. John Carroll (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 144–45. For accounts of filial obligation, see Jeremy Taylor, *Holy Living*, ed. P.G. Stanwood (1650; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); Richard Allestree, *The Whole Duty of Man* (London, 1658); and William Fleetwood, *The Relative Duties of Parents and Children, Husbands and Wives, Masters and Servants* (London, 1716).

[9] William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, 4 vols. (Oxford, 1765), 1:441. Hélène Cixous articulates the exchange this relationship demands: "The child *owes* his parents his life and his problem is exactly to *repay* them." Cixous, "Castration or Decapitation?," trans. Annette Kuhn, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 7, no. 1 (1981): 48.

would "determine nothing without his son" [46]), but Clarissa, despite the inheritance she receives from her grandfather, remains in effect a child requiring paternal support. Her culture's prevailing sexual contract, in which women supposedly relinquished their autonomy for protection, nullified their ability to act as agents while securing their status as objects of exchange.[10] As Richardson insists, "a child never can make its Parent amends for her Pains in Childbirth, in Dentition, and for the Anxiousness and Sleepless Nights throughout every stage of her Infantile Life—on to Adolescency, &c. &c."[11] The female child described here is especially obliged, since maternal and paternal solicitude must extend even past adolescence into the period of her maturity ("&c. &c."). Presuming to choose a husband for herself, then, becomes one of the highest "acts of disobedience" for a daughter: Allestree maintains that "Children are so much the goods, the possessions of their Parent, that they cannot, without a kind of theft, give away themselves without the allowance of those that have the right in them; and therefore we see under the Law, *the Maid that had made any vow, was not suffered to perform it, without the consent of the Parent, Numb.* 30.5."[12] Compliant with the ideology of her time, Clarissa herself holds that no terminus exists for female dependency, which has its roots in biology and culture alike: "the gentleness of the sex, and the manner of our training-up and education, make us need the protection of the brave, and the countenance of the generous" (182–83), a protection that only a father or husband can reliably provide.

The first rupture between Clarissa—"an obliged and favoured child" (168)—and her parents occurs when she resists the exchange they propose for her with Roger Solmes. Her protest against being "given up to a strange man, [and] engrafted into a strange family" (148) richly details the metamorphosis that this exchange effects: if gifts, as Lewis Hyde maintains, are "agents of transformation" or catalysts and markers for new forms of

10 Carole Pateman identifies how, in classic social contract theory, gender determines the political status of the subject: "Relations of superiority between *men* must, if they are to be legitimate, originate in contract. Women [by contrast] are born into subjection." Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 41.

11 Richardson to Frances Grainger, 22 January 1749/50, *Selected Letters*, 145–46.

12 Allestree, 112.

life and new connections, then Clarissa, in serving as a gift herself, realizes that she will bear on her psyche and on her body the trauma of the relationship being forged between her family and Solmes.[13] Clarissa's resistance to such a role and the loss of identity it requires infuriates and frustrates the Harlowes, who of course would prefer their gift to be silent and void of any desire that did not reflect their own wills; her disruption of her passage from father to husband threatens what Luce Irigaray calls the "reign of masculine hom(m)o-sexuality," or the connections between men that ensure the maintenance of patriarchal power.[14] Clarissa's repudiation of the "promises and honour" (150) that engage the Harlowes to Solmes deeply disturbs her family and suitor because circulation and exchange—the defining features of female life—were naturalized throughout the eighteenth century as necessary rites of passage in a woman's move from childhood to full maturity. Richardson himself in *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753–54) repeatedly articulates this principle. Harriet Byron's Uncle Selby declares that "a woman out of wedlock is half useless to the end of her being," and her late grandfather had explained why this is so: the creation of families, or "little communities," helps secure "the great community, of which they are so many miniatures."[15]

While highly sentimentalized, the emphasis on women's function in creating community reveals the core purpose of their exchange in marriage: in Claude Lévi-Strauss's phrase, women serve as the "supreme gift" allowing for the establishment of civil life, since exogamy deflects hostility between groups by transforming strangers into kin.[16] But, as Gayle Rubin observes, rather than allowing the "cultural necessity" that Lévi-Strauss identifies, the exchange of women presupposes "a system in which women do not have full rights to themselves."[17] *Clarissa*

13 Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 45.

14 Luce Irigaray, "Women on the Market," in *The Logic of the Gift: Toward an Ethic of Generosity*, ed. Alan D. Schrift (New York: Routledge, 1997), 175.

15 Richardson, *Sir Charles Grandison*, ed. Jocelyn Harris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 1:25. References are to this edition.

16 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, ed. Rodney Needham, trans. James Harle Bell and John Richard von Sturmer (Boston: Beacon, 1969), 480–81.

17 Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, ed. Linda Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1997), 38. The "exchange of women" indicates a

renders the sexual politics of this system unmistakable. The men of the Harlowe family recognize Clarissa's value in promoting social bonds and demand her compliance with the marriage they arrange; the other women in the family—Clarissa's mother, her maternal Aunt Hervey, and her sister Arabella—either willingly identify with the interests of their male relations or bow to their pressure, yet their stance is ultimately irrelevant. When Clarissa resists her role as gift, her father threatens to disown her, for at the heart of their relationship lies his right to bestow her upon the man of his choice: "he declared, he had rather have no daughter ... than one he could not dispose of for her own good" (109). The property that James Senior asserts in his daughter is, according to Lynda Boose, "explicitly sexual": his right is "acquired not by economic transaction but from ... sexual expenditure and his own family bloodline—which makes the father's loss of her a distinctively personal loss of himself." The father's ability to negotiate the exchange of his daughter—and his own emotionally fraught separation from her—"defines the father's control over inner family space" as well as "his authority in the space of the outside, cultural world," or his status in relation to other men.[18] Aging and crippled with gout, James Senior fears he will be unable to exert that control and responds to his daughter's objections with tyrannical demands for unconditional obedience. Describing the Harlowe clan as an "*embattled phalanx*" (150) positioned against Clarissa, Uncle John, who is James Senior's deputy, reveals how seriously her resistance threatens patriarchal dominance of the kinship structure.

These anxieties prove misplaced. James Senior's power to exchange his daughter has already been compromised, not by the "cursed rake" (177) Robert Lovelace, whose pursuit of Clarissa terrifies the family, but by another patriarch, Grandfather Harlowe, whose will has made her his "own peculiar child" (53) in its disbursements. His gifts of an estate, as well as the family pictures and plate, in effect emasculate his son James, while infuriating and alienating "uncles, brother, [and] sister," all of

kinship system wherein "men have certain rights in their female kin," while women "do not have the same rights either to themselves or to their male kin" (38–39).

18 Lynda E. Boose, "The Father's House and the Daughter in It: The Structures of Western Culture's Daughter-Father Relationship," in *Daughters and Fathers*, ed. Lynda E. Boose and Betty S. Flowers (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 46.

whom "thought themselves postponed as to matter of right" (78) over the property. James Senior in particular views this "unjust bequest" as an act of hostility against his paternal authority, for the will could allow Clarissa to renege on the duty and obedience she owes him. By presenting Clarissa with the opportunity to possess rather than embody property, Grandfather Harlowe's gift threatens to destroy the hierarchy of the parent/child exchange that was naturalized and celebrated in both conduct literature and legal theory of the time.[19] Although insisting that she will not exempt herself from this exchange, Clarissa reports to Anna that "my father himself could not bear that I should be made sole, as I may call it, and independent, for such the will as to that estate and the powers it gave (unaccountably, as they all said), made me" (78). Stripping Clarissa's father of his sex-right over the disposal of Clarissa and bypassing male relations in its distribution of property, Grandfather Harlowe's will becomes the focus of a concerted attack by the Harlowe clan, who dispute its legality ("the will *may* be set aside, and *shall*" [177]) and vilify the testator himself as a senile dotard whose weak head and soft heart are carefully manipulated by Clarissa to her own advantage.

Yet it is not only her grandfather's gift of property but also Clarissa's new status as potential donor that throws her family into "*tumults.*" While Clarissa's father initially is satisfied when she relinquishes control of the estate and its proceeds to him (78), her brother James and sister Arabella are not: they see Clarissa's voluntary transfer of her property as a "vehicle for exercising power" rather than as a display of filial duty, since it makes her father and uncles perceive her favourably, as if obliged to her for her display of largesse.[20] Attacking Clarissa for her

[19] See Ioan Schwarz, "Family Dynamics and Property Acquisitions in *Clarissa*," in *Reading the Family Dance: Family Systems Therapy and Literary Study*, ed. John V. Knapp and Kenneth Womack (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003), 111–12. Schwarz's review of Parliamentary concerns over wills during the period from the 1720s to the 1740s suggests that while Grandfather Harlowe's will conforms to the law, the dynamics of inheritance and the family hierarchy are upset by an "excess daughter" attaining power and influence (116, 120).

[20] Aafke E. Komter, "Women, Gifts and Power," in *The Gift: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, ed. Aafke E. Komter (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996), 119. Janice Haney-Peritz calls Clarissa's transfer of her estate's management "nothing more than a stopgap measure," since it makes her father indebted to her for her obedience, and thus "undercuts the very male dominance that Clarissa's deference might otherwise effect." Haney-Peritz,

"*fetches*," Arabella charges her sister with reaping significant material advantages from her gift: "For did it not engage my fond papa (as no doubt you thought it would) to tell you that, since you had done so grateful and dutiful a thing, he would keep entire, for your use, all the produce of the estate left you" (195). In dismantling Clarissa's construction of this exchange as an act of filial deference and accusing her of self-interested motives, James and Arabella repudiate the idea of the family in Clarissa's debt. Moreover, James plots to reinstate his sister's status as a gift rather than a donor by proposing different suitors for her hand, the last one being Solmes. James can so easily usurp his father's role because their positions in the kinship system are analogous: both are poised to benefit financially and psychologically from a patriarchal social order that demands the exchange of Clarissa. Viewing his grandfather and uncles as his "stewards" in preserving the wealth that he assumes will devolve to him as a result of primogeniture, James feels a "*mortifying stroke*" (79) in the prospect of Clarissa's union with Lovelace, especially since her uncles initially plan to support her ascent in class by making her their heir. In response, James appropriates his sister as his sexual property, reinstates her status as gift, and proclaims his power to deprive her of kinship if she refuses the exchange with Solmes: "Here, sir, said he, take the rebel daughter's hand; I give it you now; she shall confirm the gift in a week's time, or will have neither father, mother, nor uncles, to boast of" (306). As James declares, "the honour of the rest of the family" (57), and especially the Harlowe men, depends upon their ability to give, or withhold, access to Clarissa.

Within the sexual economy of patrilineal systems, keeping women from circulation—particularly a circulation they initiate themselves—is the complement to exchanging them at will; daughters and sisters are responsible for upholding the status of the group, since "the perceived worth of the family appreciates in proportion to the daughter's absence from outside space."[21] Clarissa's confinement to her chamber, which she finds disgraceful, highlights her role as the unreliable repository of the Harlowes' honour; their solution to the problem of keeping Clarissa is to exchange her without really exchanging her at all. Solmes

"Engendering the Exemplary Daughter: The Deployment of Sexuality in Richardson's *Clarissa*," in *Daughters and Fathers*, 190.

21 Boose, 63.

appears the ideal recipient of this gift, principally because he is the most unworthy. And all parties know that something is wrong in this proposed union: the compulsion and resistance that it produces reveal that this transaction does not meet the implicit norm of equivalence, and the Harlowes make a "tacit confession" of this imbalance in their attempts to badger Clarissa into compliance. Not even the "noble settlements," "fine annual allowance," and sets of jewels that Solmes offers persuade Clarissa of his magnanimity; rather, they arouse her suspicion that his gifts "are to make up for [an] acknowledged want of merit," a "deficiency so apparent that he himself sees it, as well as everybody else" (300). Calling Solmes "the only man in the world ... that could offer so much, and deserve so little" (101), Clarissa refuses her family's demand that she willingly engage in this exchange, believing the "balance of debt"—the shifts of value between the gift received and the gift returned—cannot be allowed to fluctuate too broadly without exposing the bad faith of both participants: "The *giver* and the *accepter* are principally answerable, in an unjust donation. While I think of it in this light, I should be inexcusable to be the latter" (203).[22] Insisting that gifts are a moral commerce subject to considerations of equity, Clarissa prefigures Adam Smith's discussion of gratitude in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). Smith argues that gifts, while not accountable to the rules of justice, nevertheless depend upon collective social approval for their validation; the tribunal of collective approval also determines the returns that recipients are expected to make: "whenever we cannot sympathize with the affections of the agent, wherever there seems to be no propriety in the motives which influenced his conduct, we are less disposed to enter into the gratitude of the person who received the benefit of actions. A very small return seems due to that foolish and profuse generosity which confers the greatest benefits from the most trivial motives."[23] Since the extravagance that Solmes

22 Barry Schwartz, "The Social Psychology of the Gift," in *The Gift: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, 77. In her foreword to Mauss's foundational study of gift transactions, Mary Douglas notes that the gift, rather than being free and disinterested, "is part of a system of reciprocity in which the honour of the giver and recipient are engaged." Douglas, foreword to *The Gift* by Marcel Mauss, viii.

23 Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 72. Eun Kyung Min discusses Smith's distinction between justice and virtue in "Adam Smith and the Debt of Gratitude," in *The Question of the Gift*, 132–46.

displays—"he talks of laying out two or three thousand pounds in presents" (204)—reveals both his lust and his consciousness that "his merit will not procure him respect" (81)—Clarissa finds it impossible to accept such gifts without compromising her integrity as well.

For the Harlowe men, by contrast, the inequality of this match makes it all the more attractive, mostly because they relinquish nothing in the proposed exchange. Rather than taking Clarissa and her portion from the Harlowe family (as Lovelace presumably would have done), Solmes offers them bride-wealth by settling his fortune on Clarissa's kin and even forgoes sexual possession of the bride, at least until she can be brought to endure him. The retention of property, money, and the very body of Clarissa by the Harlowes after the wedding seems to thwart the principle of reciprocity implicit within the marriage contract and thereby undermines the communal bonds created by the exchange of women. But, as Annette Weiner observes, the expectations for reciprocal exchange occlude the importance of retention in human transactions: "What motivates reciprocity is its reverse—the desire to keep something back from the pressures of give and take. This something is a possession that speaks to and for an individual's or a group's social identity and, in doing so, affirms the difference between one person or group and another." Such "inalienable possessions" function as markers of political, social, and cultural identity for those who own them; the loss of these possessions is equivalent to a loss of identity, and an erasure of what sets the owners apart from all others.[24] The estate that Clarissa inherited from her grandfather falls into this category, along with the family portraits and silver that he bestowed upon her; the will's diversion of this property from the patriarchal line of succession throws the Harlowe family into crisis, for the men consider these gifts to Clarissa as an alienation of the objects that signify their wealth and rank through several generations. Solmes's offer to return this property if he remains childless restores status symbols to the Harlowe men and provides a

[24] Annette B. Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 43. Examining the psychology of kinship relations in *Clarissa*, John Allen Stevenson argues that a "radically endogamous urge" underlies the Harlowes' rejection of Lovelace in favour of Solmes; however, the dynamics of gift exchange explain why endogamy produces social capital for the family. See Stevenson, "The Courtship of the Family: Clarissa and the Harlowes Once More," *ELH* 48, no. 4 (1981): 757–77.

reason for their apparently absurd faith in a reversion that seems unlikely to occur. Clarissa is another inalienable possession, and the agreement with Solmes promises likewise to retain her in the family. After Clarissa's elopement with Lovelace, her mother laments not only the loss of her daughter, but also the erasure of the Harlowes' social distinction: "The dear creature ... gave an eminence to us all. And now that she has left us ... we are stripped of our ornament, and are but a common family!" (584).

Most significantly, Solmes's physical, mental, and moral inferiority to Clarissa both elevates the value of the gift that the Harlowe men bestow and certifies that gift's utter subjection to their will. As Lynda Boose notes, "paternal bestowal psychologically functions in a way analogous to the Big Man gift systems of highland New Guinea, in which the father can imaginatively humiliate his rival and expose his inferiority by giving him something too valuable ever *to be* reciprocated."[25] The terms of the marriage articles reveal how deeply this humiliation has set in: Clarissa's undisguised abhorrence of Solmes and his own concession that she has qualities "which, of *themselves*, will be a full equivalent ... for the settlements he is to make" (80) highlight both the magnitude of the Harlowes' gift and their power over its dispensation. By contrast, Lovelace—supremely confident in his social authority and sexual attractiveness—threatens to take full possession of Clarissa, both appropriating the estate inherited from her grandfather and weaning her away from the "cradle-prejudices" (145) that tie her to her family. The curse that James Senior bestows upon Clarissa (after Lovelace spirits her away in terror from Harlowe Place)—"that you may meet in your punishment, both *here* and *hereafter*, by means of the very wretch in whom you have chosen to place your wicked confidence" (509)—is a cry of sexual defeat and frustration and suggests the magnitude of the Harlowes' loss. Clarissa's elopement not only results in the collapse of a phenomenal financial bargain for the Harlowes, but also publicly weakens her father's and brother's status as Big Men in the patriarchal economy of the gift, making them "ashamed before the multitude" (1196).

"Wherever she goes, she confers a favour"

Gift relations, however, are not uniformly oppressive to women in *Clarissa*; they also present occasions for the exercise of

[25] Boose, 32.

female authority and self-assertion, and it is these occasions that most visibly threaten male control of the gift economy. Although her construction as "this prime gift" (493) threatens to annihilate Clarissa's subjectivity and will, performing obligations gives her a position of social power apart from her relations. Being the "*cheerful giver*, whom God is said *to love*" (1407) distinguishes Clarissa from her kin, who avoid engaging in exchanges that might place them at a financial disadvantage. Albeit discreet in her complaints, Clarissa confides that her family is "a little too *uncommunicative*" for their great circumstances (249); the Harlowes prefer to retain rather than circulate their wealth, even though, as Clarissa admits, "a fame for generosity" can be purchased at the cost of only "fifty pounds a year" (101). Challenging the customary association of magnanimity with manhood, Clarissa also defines generosity as a distinctly feminine virtue: "I have ever yet observed that it is not to be met with in that sex one time in ten that it is to be found in ours" (55). The extension of monetary and emotional resources without an exactly calculable return is anathema to the Harlowe men; when they do acknowledge their obligations to aid their kin or social inferiors, they act in a manner that insures the subjection of recipients while augmenting their own authority. James Junior, for instance, assumes the "air of cruel insult" towards the "unhappy low" (180), even bullying the family of his maternal Aunt Hervey upon assuming a mortgage for her husband. Likewise, Solmes defends Clarissa from her brother's verbal and physical abuse in order to receive praise for his "wonderful generosity" and promote his courtship, which provides a display of shrewd calculation that Clarissa exposes with disgust (311). For Solmes and the Harlowe men, relationships of obligation prove the ideal vehicles for fulfilment of their ambitions, especially since they themselves determine the extent of the return expected for their largesse.

Fully aware that donation confers social authority, Clarissa understands that riches should not be despised since "they put it into one's power to *lay* obligations; while the want of them puts a person under a necessity of *receiving* favours ... perhaps, from grudging and narrow spirits" (211). The power to confer benefits allows Clarissa to manage "her poor," culling the worthy from the undeserving and thus promoting the virtues of sobriety and hard work. Her object is to relieve "the lame, the blind, the sick,

and the industrious poor, whom accident has made so, or sudden distress reduced," while leaving the "common or bred beggars ... to the public provision" (655). Despite the conservative nature of her charity, Clarissa earns public recognition for philanthropy as "the common patroness of all the honest poor in her neighbourhood" (1397) and develops an identity that transcends the limitations of her domestic life. Her rejection of Solmes partly arises from her fear that his avarice would entail her loss of agency, forcing her to curtail her management of the neighbourhood's welfare and remain "circumscribed in his narrow, selfish circle" (153). Anna Howe's management of the Poor's Fund after Clarissa's death signifies the authority that women obtain from acts of charity: in its portrayal of Anna as a contented wife under the benign patriarchal control of her husband, the narrative insists that this is "the *only* prerogative she does or has occasion to assume" (1492).

Like her insistence that generosity is a female virtue, Clarissa's impassioned defence of the term to Lovelace suggests its absence in transactions initiated by men. Juxtaposing it to politeness, good faith, honour, and justice—all of which are routinely expected of gentlemen in their exchanges with others—Clarissa champions generosity as an extension of empathy exceeding the bounds of any exact calculation of reciprocity: "TRUE GENEROSITY is greatness of soul: it incites us to do more by a fellow-creature, than can be strictly required of us: it obliges us to hasten to the relief of an object that wants relief, anticipating even hope or expectation" (594). While Clarissa identifies generous behaviour with a sympathy that she genders feminine—an ability to identify imaginatively with others' needs—the "masculine spirits" of the Harlowes insist on a strict economy of equivalence that will insulate them from whatever losses they might face in social exchanges. Clarissa also appeals to generosity, or a disregard for self-interest, as a justification for asserting her will, locating the source of her resistance to Solmes in the "greatness of soul" that prohibits her from exploiting his desire for her advantage. As she reminds her brother James, "a generous mind is not to be forced" (307).

The Harlowes, however, are quick to realize that Clarissa's principal strength is also her principal weakness, and they invoke the performance of gratitude and generosity—the conceptual foundations of the gift economy—in order to secure "the welfare

and aggrandizement of [the] family" (109) in the economy of capital accumulation. They manage this by inextricably binding her role as an object of exchange to her position as an affectionate daughter. Clarissa's frustration of her father's "earnest desire" to promote the fortunes of his kin is chastised as an instance of ingratitude, and the Harlowes' repeated attacks upon Clarissa as an "ungrateful girl" attempt to enmesh her irrevocably in familial ties—to her identity as a daughter, niece, and sister—even though they themselves had pronounced those bonds conditional; as her father declares, "I will have no child but an obedient one" (64). According to Georg Simmel, gratitude is "peculiarly irredeemable" and difficult to abjure, since it continues to bind donors and recipients even after a return has been made for a benefit received: the "atmosphere of obligation" cultivated by performances of gratitude "belongs among those 'microscopic,' but infinitely tough, threads" which tie people together in a "stable collective life."[26] When Clarissa resists her family's conception of what she owes them and balks at the personal cost of securing stability on their terms, the Harlowes change strategies and emphasize her role as donor instead of recipient: they plan a final trial in which the formerly "faultless, condescending and obliging" Clarissa would be faced with the prospect of her kneeling father begging her to marry Solmes. As her Aunt Hervey relates, "your *generosity* would have been appealed to, since your duty would have been found too weak an inducement" (504), and the family confidently and correctly expects that this scene of the patriarch's abasement would overcome Clarissa's will, indeed her very will to live. As she herself admits, "I had deserved annihilation had I suffered my father to kneel in vain" (506). Clarissa's response displays what Aafke Komter calls the "fundamental paradox" of women's generosity in a culture organized to support the political and economic power of men. For women, the process of giving gifts—including resources, time, and labour—establishes social identities and maintains networks of relationships, and Clarissa's charities reveal how effectively her donations accomplish these goals. Yet "in giving much to others, women [also] incur the risk of losing their own identities," of relinquishing their autonomy in the service of institutions and relationships that ultimately do not serve their interests or

26 Georg Simmel, "Faithfulness and Gratitude," in *The Gift: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, 48.

promote their welfare.[27] The annihilation that Clarissa believes she deserves if she refuses her father's supplications underscores the danger inherent in her willingness to oblige as well as the patriarchal power that compels her generosity. While Clarissa's forced elopement with Lovelace saves her from facing this trial, the escape from one situation immerses her within even more mystifying and lethal networks of gift relations.

"There's no obliging her"

When he initially becomes her suitor, the prospect of marriage to Lovelace appears attractive to Clarissa, not the least because he apparently shares her opposition to the acquisitiveness of the Harlowes. While insisting that she "had no *throbs*, no *glows* upon it" (79), Clarissa nevertheless feels emotionally and erotically moved at his displays of generosity towards his tenants, since his distinction from the Harlowe men in this regard is glaringly obvious: "An unhappy tenant came petitioning to my uncle Antony for forbearance, in Mr Lovelace's presence. When he had fruitlessly withdrawn, Mr Lovelace pleaded his cause so well, that the man was called in again and had his suit granted. And Mr Lovelace privately followed him out and gave him two guineas for present relief" (79). Uncle Antony himself relates this story as "proof of a generosity in [Lovelace's] spirit" (78) that shows his resemblance to and fitness for Clarissa. Lovelace's approval of Clarissa's own charities and the agency she exercises in promoting them reassure Clarissa of his compatibility with her, and his willingness to give to others seems to herald the moral reformation he promises: anxiously seeking evidence of his potential for change, Clarissa "thought of his ... kindness to his tenants" (444). While the objections to a marriage with Lovelace remain formidable, and while she rightly believes that his "tolerable qualities" are founded "more in pride than in virtue," Clarissa maintains that an obliging wife will be paid the "grateful debt of civility and good manners" by her husband (182–83), a debt that Lovelace's general beneficence suggests he will readily discharge.

27 Komter, "Women, Gifts and Power," 130–31. In contrast to women's reliance on gift exchanges, "men's greater societal and economic power not only makes it less urgent for them to engage in gift giving, but also protects them from losing their own autonomy through giving gifts to other people" (131).

In contrast to the ethos of Solmes and the Harlowes, who thrive on exploiting relations of obligation, Lovelace's aristocratic largesse towards his subordinates suggests a possibility for connections with others unmediated by self-interest: he offers Clarissa the promise of reconstituting the "one great family" torn apart by desire for profit.[28] Lewis Hyde observes that the synthetic or erotic nature of gift exchange makes it "the preferred interior commerce at those times when the psyche is in need of integration," since unlike commodities, gifts transcend boundaries between groups and establish social ties.[29] The disintegration of family that Clarissa experiences—the renunciation of her by father, mother, uncles, and siblings—makes her especially vulnerable to Lovelace's alternative economy, which, he admits, he practices because it reflects favourably on himself; he relieves his tenants of debts so that they may make a prosperous appearance ("*like* MY *tenants*" [79]), and thus reflect their landlord's own wealth. Considering Clarissa's susceptibility, Anna fears the seductive effect that Lovelace's carefully staged acts of benevolence might have on her friend's affections: "Fie, upon this *generosity!*—I think in my heart that it does as much mischief to the noble-minded, as *love* to the ignoble" (287). As Richardson observes, erotic love and gratitude were nearly inextricable in the sexual ideology of Clarissa's time, with love developing as the "natural passion" of the grateful female heart.[30] At the very least, patriarchal culture required women to compensate men for bestowing attention and affection upon them, even if the attention was unwanted, and women faced the difficulty of calibrating the extent of their thanks and the form it should take.

28 As Yota Batsaki maintains, Lovelace's "aversion to bourgeois prudence" as a motive for action makes his character difficult to interpret in the world of *Clarissa*, which assumes the pursuit of self-interest as a "normative framework" for human behaviour. I argue here that in Richardson's novel the representational economy of capitalism—with its emphasis on a human nature grounded in self-interested calculation—is both complemented and contested by the equally complex economy of gift relations. See Batsaki, "*Clarissa*; or, Rake Versus Usurer," *Representations* 93 (Winter 2006): 22–48.

29 Hyde, 58.

30 Grandmother Shirley provides this rationale for love in *Sir Charles Grandison* (2:303). For women, however, experiencing gratitude could result in the loss of agency and autonomy: although the hero of *Sir Charles Grandison* is a paragon of Christian charity, Harriet Byron fears that her gratitude towards him, when "exalted ... into Love" (2:308) might make her "an hopeless fool" (1:186).

But attracted as she is to Lovelace's performance of generosity—to a temper, she admits, "like my own"—Clarissa also shares with Lovelace a perception of the gift and the circuit of obligation it creates as potentially hostile. Acknowledging that "nothing sooner brings down a proud spirit, than a sense of lying under pecuniary obligations" (449), Lovelace limits his personal expenses to "avoid being obliged to his aunts and uncles" (50) and refuses to borrow against his rents, since that would encourage his tenants' insubordination (449). Yet Lovelace himself admits to his confidant John Belford that he intends to deploy the erotics of gift exchange in order to obtain sexual power over Clarissa:

> A strutting rascal of a cock have I beheld ... chucking his mistress to him when he has found a single barley-corn, taking it up with his bill, and letting it drop five or six times, still repeating his chucking invitation: and when two or three of his feathered ladies strive who shall be the first for't ... he directs the bill of the foremost to it; and when she has got the dirty pearl, he struts over her with an erected crest, and an exulting chuck—a chuck-aw-aw-w, circling round her, with dropped wings, sweeping the dust in humble courtship: while the obliged she, half-shy, half-willing, by her cowering tail, half stretched wings, yet seemingly affrighted eyes, and contracted neck, lets one see that she knows the barley-corn was not all he called her for. (449)

Despite his displays of graciousness, Clarissa quickly discovers in Lovelace a "cynical giver" and finds the circuit of obligation that he creates to be a "tool in [his] aspiration for and protection of status and control."[31] Yet, although Lovelace's regard ultimately creates more trouble than pleasure for Clarissa, the conventions of patriarchal courtship throw upon her the "guilt of ingratitude" (166) for not reciprocating his attentions. Lovelace himself argues that Clarissa's refusal of the rule of return amounts to a breach of the social contract: "She never was in a state of *independency*, nor is it fit a woman should, of any age, or in any state of life. And as to the state of obligation, there is no such thing as living without being beholden to somebody. Mutual obligation is the very essence and soul of the social and commercial life—Why should *she* be exempt from it?—I am sure the person she raves at ... would rejoice to owe *further*

[31] Schwartz, 72. Charles Haskell Hinnant analyzes the ambiguity of the courtship gift in "The Erotics of the Gift: Gender and Exchange in the Eighteenth-Century English Novel," in *The Culture of the Gift in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Linda Zionkowski and Cynthia Klekar (New York: Palgrave, 2009), 143–58.

obligations to her than he can boast of hitherto" (760). Invoking the norm of reciprocity as the foundation for civil society and its commercial economy, Lovelace characterizes Clarissa as dangerously disruptive to the mechanisms of exchange. To Lovelace, whose status and gender give him a position of dominance in the economy of obligation, Clarissa's insistence on her role as an autonomous subject is both offensive and absurd, for her claim to independence implies her equality with men and her right to self-determination. He thus adopts the patriarchal perspective of early modern contract theory that denied women the agency integral to independent subjects. By virtue of her gender, Clarissa's dependence upon Lovelace is secured and her sexual subordination to him is the debt she owes for his protection. Clarissa's rejection of this exchange, Lovelace complains, is anarchic: as Marcel Mauss explains, "To refuse to give, to fail to invite, just as to refuse to accept is tantamount to declaring war; it is to reject the bond of alliance and commonality" and thus constitutes an attack on the social order that those bonds have created.[32]

While comically justifying his own sexual predations, Lovelace unwittingly predicts Clarissa's course of action. The final part of the novel portrays her attempt to break with systems of gift exchange and circuits of obligation until she can re-enter them from a position of dominance rather than subordination. Ironically, it is Lovelace's violation of her that frees Clarissa from the sexualized cycle of gift and return. Confronting Lovelace after the rape, which has effectively cancelled the debt he believes she owes him, Clarissa proclaims the end of their relationship; unable to justify his conduct in accordance with his patriarchal function as protector, Lovelace is reduced to exclaiming against the "amazing uncharitableness" that Clarissa displays, or her refusal to resume her part in the network of obligation. Maintaining her liberty, however, requires Clarissa to reconstitute her relations with others "on an impersonal, non-sentimental level." After her escape from Lovelace, her rejection of any exchanges that are not commercial in character transforms affective or erotic transactions into primarily economic ones, wherein Clarissa can refuse "the role of grateful recipient" even when the donors are devoted to her well-being.[33]

[32] Mauss, 13.

[33] Schwartz, 74.

Unable to control the social meaning of the gift, Clarissa finds refuge in the relatively unambiguous dynamics of commercial exchange. Margaret Anne Doody observes that Clarissa, at her own choosing, "comes to her end in a crowded urban place where things are both made and sold"; her residence in London "is a tacit celebration of the man-made world," as well as an assertion of her freedom to participate in the market that sustains that environment.[34] While her willingness to commodify her possessions—the final material manifestation of her identity as a daughter of the Harlowes—shocks her friends "exceedingly," this commodification provides her with a means of achieving the self-containment that she associates with avoiding obligation. Maternal and paternal figures such as Clarissa's landlady Mrs. Smith, her physician Dr. H., and the Widow Lovick, who attends her in her final illness, are all recompensed with money or tokens of great value for their assistance to her; and in paying Belford 100 guineas for his services as executor of her will, Clarissa uses the cash nexus to secure her reputation. Most importantly, her refusal of gifts from Lovelace's family guarantees the validity of her account of the rape and justifies her unequivocal dismissal of him. Hoping to win Clarissa's consent to a marriage with Lovelace, Lord M. and his sisters, Lady Sarah Sadleir and Lady Betty Lawrance, offer "noble settlements, noble presents ... the greater in proportion for the indignities [she has] suffered" (1042), and even Anna insists that Clarissa "*must* oblige them" in order to resume her useful station as a donor in the cycle of giving (1043). Lovelace's cry of frustration and anguish—"There's no obliging her ... although she would oblige by permitting the obligation" (1202)—reveals how profoundly Clarissa has rejected the bonds of reciprocity that structure social life and how much that rejection erodes his own authority. Following Lovelace to an extent, readers have described Clarissa's death as a repudiation of the "world of social duty" whose power system she has exposed.[35]

[34] Margaret Anne Doody, "The Man-Made World of Clarissa Harlowe and Robert Lovelace," in *Samuel Richardson: Passion and Prudence*, ed. Valerie Grosvenor Myer (London: Vision, 1986), 74, 75.

[35] See Stevenson, "'Alien Spirits': The Unity of Lovelace and Clarissa," in *New Essays on Samuel Richardson*, ed. Albert J. Rivero (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 95; and Eagleton, 74. By contrast, Caroline Gonda notes the advantages death holds for Clarissa: her imminent demise allows her to stabilize her identity by claiming the name of her father while affixing it to her will and to "dispose of her real property and of herself." Gonda, *Reading*

Yet through her death, Clarissa finally becomes a master of that system, for it enables her to employ the gift economy as the painful and potent instrument of her revenge.

"Shall not charity *complete my triumph?"*

Ironically for an heiress, Clarissa dies in an apparent state of debt. As part of the penalty that her family levels against Clarissa in punishment for her escape from Harlowe Place and from the marriage with Solmes, her family withholds Clarissa's personal property—her books, her money, and her jewels—"for it is wished [she] may be seen a beggar along London streets!" (510). The Harlowes are fully aware of what Clarissa would suffer from her loss of the "god-like power" to confer benefits, and they intend to humiliate her by making her "obliged almost to everybody" she encounters for sustenance and support (1249). Yet Clarissa ultimately resumes this power with the gifts that she presents posthumously: by removing her from the circuit of exchange, her death indeed renders her god-like, for what she bestows cannot be reciprocated beyond the grave. The "threshold gifts" that Clarissa offers serve as the "companion to transformation," signalling the beginning of a new (and eternal) life for her.[36] By contrast, the Harlowes and Lovelace, whose domination of Clarissa found a vehicle in the demand for equivalence and reciprocity, face a different type of passage into an eternity of obligation that resembles a living death. Since Clarissa's gifts leave their recipients distraught, they allow her an "effectual and noble" revenge (1422), and the accolades she gains from giving more than is deserved prove her strongest challenge to the oppressive economy of obligation.

Writing on the eve of Clarissa's death, Arabella conveys word of her family's forgiveness, and their expectation from her of a "grateful letter on this occasion" (1366). Instead, they each receive posthumous letters from Clarissa asking pardon for the "fatal error" that removed her from paternal protection and assuring them of her faith in God's grace. They also receive her will, a document of about eight pages that takes more than six hours to read. Through the will, the Harlowes acquire the goods that they

Daughters' Fictions, 1709–1834: Novels and Society from Manley to Edgeworth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 75.

36 Hyde, 44, 45.

hoped to retrieve from her marriage to Solmes: Clarissa redistributes her grandfather's possessions—the estate, the pictures, the silverware, even her own remains—to insure that the family's inalienable property remains intact. James Senior receives "all the real estates" that he feared would make Clarissa independent, as well as her body, over which he proclaimed his rights; his brother John is given the pictures, since he "expressed some concern that they were not left to him"; and Uncle Antony is presented with the chest of silver, an item which his own father had requested to "be kept [in the Harlowe family] *to the end of time*" (1414–15). The Harlowe men thus get the property that certifies their social status and authority, which is precisely what they had begrudged Clarissa. Yet far from accepting these items as restored to their rightful owners, Clarissa's father and uncles are so tormented by her generosity, by the very gesture of her gift, "that that they broke out into self accusations; and lamented that [she] ... was now got above all grateful acknowledgement and returns" (1421). Since Clarissa's death has removed her from the circuit of exchange, the recipients of her gifts must remain permanently indebted to her, a state of affairs that they find unbearably oppressive: her father grieves his life away in three years, while her joyless uncles condemn "without reserve, in all companies, the unnatural part they were induced to take against her" (1490). Death gives Clarissa the power her family had denied to her while alive; rather than living in a state of perpetual obligation, she becomes a donor whose status is augmented by the impossibility of their ever paying her back.

Lovelace, however, fares even worse. Although urged by her family to prosecute him for rape, and thus supposedly restore the honour lost when she is ravished rather than given in marriage, Clarissa refuses. Responding to a letter from the Reverend Dr. Lewen who advises her not to extend "Christian forgiveness" to Lovelace without first punishing him at law, Clarissa gently disputes his arguments for retribution and explains her alternative conception of mercy: "The man whom once I could have loved, I have been enabled to despise: and shall not *charity* complete my triumph? And shall I not *enjoy* it?—And where would be my triumph if he *deserved* my forgiveness?—Poor man!" (1254). Clarissa's triumph is that of the donor bestowing an undeserved gift, which she realizes will have greater effect on Lovelace than

the dubious outcome of a legal prosecution. Lovelace is all the more vulnerable to such defeat because of his confidence in his ability to reciprocate: since he believes that marriage will make "*all* the amends that can possibly be made" (909) for the rape, Clarissa's unequivocal refusal of his hand shatters his conception of himself as a benefactor in control of the system of exchange, leaving him "infinitely below" and endlessly frustrated by his "triumphant subduer" (1344).

The punitive aggression of Clarissa's gift is clear to Lovelace. Yet despite his dismantling of social pieties throughout the novel, he hesitates to criticize the transaction that affirms Clarissa's superiority, since bestowing (while refusing) obligations is the source of his own power. While pleading with Clarissa to accept him, he insists that his will is not "controlled" by the wishes of his family: as he declares to her, "There is not a person breathing but yourself, who shall prescribe to me" (1185), for he is indebted to no one else. In signing himself "eternally yours" (1189), Lovelace expresses more than a conventional epistolary conclusion; burdened by "the generosity of her mind" (1473), he realizes that his oppression is only augmented by her death. His letter provoking Colonel Morden to a duel attempts to settle scores by offering his life in return for Clarissa's dishonour, and his final words—"LET THIS EXPIATE!"—express his overwhelming if deluded desire for the attainment of reciprocity. Lovelace, however, will never be even with Clarissa. The repentance that must follow her gift of forgiveness is denied to him by Morden's superior swordplay, making his debt to her eternal indeed. For Lovelace, as for the Harlowes, Clarissa's final triumph entails destabilizing patriarchal power by transforming the circuit of obligation and positioning those in authority as recipients rather than donors in the complex cycle of gift exchange. The requirement of her death for this repositioning to occur shows how deeply the social structure resists such a shift, and how determined Clarissa is to achieve it.

While designed to inculcate the "Great Rule" of filial obligation, *Clarissa* also reveals the violence inherent in the dynamics of the gift on which this rule depends: in return for the "indulgence" she receives as a daughter of the family, she owes gratitude, which takes the form of physical and psychological subordination to the family's will. It is this system of exchange,

rather than the emergence of a commercial ethos, that threatens Clarissa most profoundly; by placing women in a constant state of debt for the protection and care afforded them, the gift system both sustains the patriarchal family and silences protests against its cruelties as violations of the norm of reciprocity. But in the novel, the ideological power of donation, obligation, and reciprocity is not confined to men. Clarissa's assumption of authority—and also her revenge—arises from the magnitude of her gift and the anguish it confers on recipients: believing that "nothing can be more wounding ... than a *generous forgiveness*" (1119), she triumphs in leaving Lovelace and her family with the unbearable burden of a debt they can never repay. At its conclusion, *Clarissa* remains a text profoundly divided on the nature of the gift, representing it simultaneously as the cornerstone of the patriarchal household and the most potent weapon for that household's destruction. Delimiting the gift or containing its volatility is impossible in the world of the novel, and this portrayal of the gift's ability both to maintain and destabilize hierarchies of power shows *Clarissa*'s ambivalence towards the foundational structure of early modern family life.

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