EPISTOLARY TECHNIQUE IN RICHARDSON'S NOVELS

IN PASSING from Samuel Richardson's little volume of familiar letters to *Pamela* we find, in place of a collection of brief letters touching on various situations, a massive collection of long letters developing a single situation. Richardson calls his new method "writing to the moment"; he uses a letter-writer who records the passing thought, gesture, and incident in great detail while moving toward the novelist's foreordained end. But the story told in this way is not merely a series of direct communications from the correspondent. Richardson, as an experienced printer, knew every step in the making of a book, and saw the completed and published novel as the result of a long and intricate process; he extended "writing to the moment" to include every step in the history of a published correspondence. The writing of the letters is only the beginning; they are copied, sent, received, shown about, discussed, answered, even perhaps hidden, intercepted, stolen, altered, or forged. The relation of the earlier letters in an epistolary novel to the later may thus be quite different from the relation of the earlier chapters of a novel to the later. It may seem obvious to say that the writing of the letters is an important part of the action of an epistolary novel, but this is not always so; the letters may be just sections of a narrative told in the first person, or may otherwise be submerged in the story. In a scholarly and well documented study of the subject, Professor Frank Gees Black makes the significant comment: "Though skill in particular cases qualifies the statement, it would seem that in letter fiction the epistle should be kept as a means of presenting the story and not be unduly ob-
truded as an agent in the narrative.″ But in Richardson’s work the emphasis on the letter is almost incessant and highly characteristic. And his putting the writing of the novel into the novel itself is far from artless. One would have to go no farther than Cervantes to find an author who puts the discovery of documents conveying the story into the story, and who represents the characters thinking of themselves as in a book. But the device of writing, editing, and even reading the novel within the novel is, I think, essentially new in Richardson—it has even been taken to be new and ingenious as recently as Gide’s Les Faux-Monnayeurs (1925).

A brief survey of the ways in which letter-writing, or, as we may say more pompously and accurately, the provision and transmission of documents, figures in Richardson’s novels, may help to dispel the idea that Richardson simply cut up his moralizing narrative into long lengths which he called letters.

It is appropriate that Mr. B. should find Pamela in the first letter writing a letter, and that he should soon order her not to spend so much time in correspondence. The first complication appears when the servant John regularly shows what she writes to Mr. B. before he carries her messages to her parents, as he later confesses in a surreptitious note. Then Pamela’s pen gains momentum, and she begins to keep a continuous record which is relatively independent of the receipt and delivery of letters: “I will write as I have Time, and as Matters happen, and send the Scribble to you as I have Opportunity.” She even writes a letter when she expects to see her parents within twenty-four hours: “I will continue my Writing still, because, may-be, I shall like to read it, when I am with you, to see what Dangers I have been enabled to escape; and tho’ I bring it along with me.”
There is an underlying compulsion to explain that Richardson's major correspondents love writing in the epistolary way for its own sake.

When Pamela is removed to Lincolnshire and kept a prisoner there, the novelist himself has to intervene for several pages to tell the incidents leading to the visit of her father to Mr. B., since he has no one on hand to make the record—something that would never happen in Richardson's fully developed work. Pamela is now forbidden to carry on correspondence, and Richardson extends the principle of continuous record and has her keep a journal. Since she is expected to show all that she has written to her keeper Mrs. Jewkes, she has to conceal writing materials and smuggle out letters, as to the friendly Parson Williams. These letters are included in the journal; the process includes not only the writing but the copying of letters—one's own and those lent one to read. It is sobering to reflect that unless we remember this duplication of copies, we underestimate the paperwork done by Richardson's characters. Richardson, at least after 1740, kept copies of letters sent and sometimes of letters received, and his characters follow the same plan after they have hit their epistolary stride. This begins in Pamela's journal, and develops enormously. She becomes to a large extent her own compiler and editor. Much of this may seem mere paperasserie, such as the formal set of proposals for keeping her as his mistress which Mr. B. submits in writing: "I took a Copy of this for your Perusal, my dear Parents." Richardson also begins in a small way the device of the fabricated or falsified letter when he has Mr. B. prescribe a short letter to be sent to her parents. There is occasional dramatic use of letters, such as the misdelivery and interchange of letters from Mr. B. to Pamela and Mrs.
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Jewkes, so that Pamela discovers his plot against Parson Williams, and later the anonymous note warning her that Mr. B. intends to use the device of a mock-marriage—both important in raising and prolonging Pamela’s suspicions. Even more important is the impact of the journal on the later action. Pamela had managed to send the early part of the record to her parents by way of Williams; the second part she hid under a rosebush in the garden, and Mrs. Jewkes seized it. Thereafter the prudent girl kept the rest of the journal “sew’d in my Under-coat, about my Hips.” The part seized by Jewkes is turned over to Mr. B. Just as Pamela is represented as the author and editor of her own story, so Mr. B. is represented as the first reader.

You have so beautiful a Manner, that it is partly that, and partly my Love for you, that has made me desirous of reading all you write; tho’ a great deal of it is against myself: for which you must expect to suffer a little. And as I have furnish’d you with a Subject, I have a Title to see the Fruits of your Pen.—Besides, said he, there is such a pretty Air of Romance, as you relate them, in your Plots, and my Plots, that I shall be better directed in what manner to wind up the Catastrophe of the pretty Novel.

At his demand Pamela gives him the later part, including the account of her attempted escape. His comments and reactions are at this point a delayed response to the journal, though not of course an epistolary response; assuming that the reader has been interested in the original narrative, Mr. B.’s responses reënforce this original appeal and at the same time advance the action. Even if we do not agree that Richardson is completely successful in putting over this device, we should recognize the novelist’s ingenuity.

Mr. B. is now in melting mood, and finds Pamela’s insistence on returning to her parents perverse. The action moves quickly here; Richardson is not always tedious, and
letters may precipitate as well as suspend the action. After
the parting, as Pamela stops for the night, she sees in ad-
vance a letter which was to have been delivered to her at
noon the next day, a letter which tells her that Mr. B. had
been about to make honorable addresses to her when she
expressed the preference for a return to her parents. A
record of Mr. B.'s underlying intentions is thus put before
Pamela in time to dispose her to accept another letter the
next day imploring her to return, the result of Mr. B.'s read-
ing the rest of the journal. Perhaps, as the moralists tell us,
she should not have gone back, but at least the premature
opening of the first letter, with its touch of feminine curiosity,
is ingeniously timed, and the climactic action produced by
the reading of the journal is skillfully presented.

This climax is the most effective use of documentation in
Pamela. The rest of the two-volume novel published in No-
vember 1740, which we may call Pamela I, is of less interest
for epistolary technique, though Mr. B.'s sister Lady Davers,
the strongest opponent of the marriage, is well presented in
some vigorous quarrel scenes. The epistolary methods used
in the two-volume sequel Pamela II of December 1741 do
not show successful experimentation. The device of repeat-
ing and commenting on the earlier action is ineffectively ex-
tended, as when Mr. B. tardily supplements Pamela's original
report of the early situation. One of the most effective
episodes in Pamela II, the showdown with Mr. B. about his
incipient affair with a beautiful countess, is told by Pamela
to Lady Davers in letters which are then read and supple-
mented by Mr. B., but without heightening the dramatic
effect. The new social perspectives of Pamela II make the
eyear story seem crude and awkward in retrospect: Pamela
comments on the elevation of her own style, is ashamed to
have strangers read her account of Mr. B.'s clumsy attempts at seduction, and remarks regretfully that she knew no "polite Courtship." Some comparatively light social notation on the new level is developed in the letters of Polly Darnford, Pamela herself, and Lady Davers, and points forward to the later novels. The novelist at times tries to keep up an evenly balanced two-way correspondence. But the decline of dramatic interest invites digression and interpolation, always a threatening possibility in the epistolary novel.

In line with the social setting, the action, and the psychology, Clarissa shows a more elaborate epistolary structure. Pamela is the only major correspondent in her story; whereas all readers of Clarissa are likely to remember the enormous narrative in terms of parallel series of two-way communications between Clarissa Harlowe and Anna Howe on the one hand, Robert Lovelace and John Belford on the other. Yet this is not the scheme as actually worked out; for a considerable span we are likely to find that one correspondent dominates, often writing long letters journal-wise, in which other letters or documents may be included or absorbed. The early action centers with morbid intensity on Harlowe Place, and Clarissa reports the crisis in the family circle in practically continuous narrative. The correspondence is carried on under difficulties; Clarissa is imprisoned by her family, and has to smuggle out letters to Anna Howe with the aid of trusted servants. There is also a carefully motivated secret correspondence with Lovelace: she wishes to pacify him so that he will not take violent action; she seeks a line of retreat in case her family forces the repulsive Solmes upon her; and, more vaguely, it is intimated that Lovelace appears as a possible lover and husband. But Lovelace's letters are not immediately pushed to the fore; as
summarized and reported by Clarissa to Anna, they at first fall into the predominant line. We are told that Clarissa keeps complete files—"I have promised to lay before you all his Letters and my Answers." Her task of copying is even more laborious than Pamela's. The arrangement seems clumsy, but the total effect is impressive: the elaborate documents connect Clarissa with the world and at the same time emphasize her tragic isolation. She carries on written negotiations with her family, even though they are under the same roof; Lovelace's world of pride and passion threatens in this sequence, but is kept at a distance; Anna Howe's world of normal social relationships, in which girls can innocently indulge their whims and quarrel harmlessly with parents and suitors, comes tantalizingly close, but Clarissa can never reach it. Anna's is sometimes a light epistolary comedy with Richardson's characteristic devices; thus in the long communication containing her sketch of Solmes, the earlier part of the letter is the theme of a discussion with her mother reported in the later part.  

Richardson does not go about his work simply by having everybody in the story write letters. No protracted correspondence ever takes place between Lovelace and Clarissa; their ambiguous relationship is described, always imperfectly, in letters to and by others, and does not allow the sharp commitments of direct written communication between principals. The novelist uses his secondary correspondents with great skill. Anna, like Belford later in the other series, gains for a time in importance; the crescendo of her letters presents the happy normal world denied to Clarissa and the shrewd yet inadequate judgments of that world; she sides against the Harlowes more sharply than the heroine herself, and points out that Clarissa is in love with Lovelace,
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and that if she takes flight with him, marriage is her only choice. After the actual flight, we come closer to parallel series, Clarissa to Anna and Lovelace to Belford, but the scheme does not become mechanical. Where there would be excessive duplication, Richardson continues to abridge and summarize Lovelace’s letters, and sometimes to omit letters which the formal scheme of the novel would require. The originals of such letters may have existed, in some part, in the novelist’s writing desk. He “restored” letters and passages to Clarissa in the third edition, and later made additions on a smaller scale to Grandison; no doubt other letters produced in the working out of the plans for the novels remained unpublished.

With the advance of Lovelace to the foreground of the correspondence, about the time of the removal of Clarissa from Hertfordshire to London, he enters on an elaborate series of forged and garbled letters, beginning with the faked letter from “Doleman” which tricks Clarissa into thinking that the lodging with the infamous widow Sinclair is eligible and respectable. Clarissa is plied with forged letters purporting to come from Lovelace’s relatives, and is cruelly duped by an agent of Lovelace’s, “Tomlinson,” who pretends to be negotiating on behalf of her uncle. Lovelace also gets access to the Anna-Clarissa letters, and of course sends copious extracts to Belford. Thus one of the two main lines of letters is presented as impacted in the other. As the crisis approaches, Lovelace intercepts a letter in which Anna tells Clarissa the truth about the plots against her; since he knows Clarissa would expect a letter, he imitates Anna’s hand and garbles the text. His libido dominandi does not adequately motivate these cumbersome devices, yet Clarissa’s tragic isolation can still evoke an imaginative response. While, with
mingled credulity and pride, she thinks that marriage negotiations are under way and that the situation is still largely within her control, a veil of deceptive documentation cuts her off from normal and rational humanity. Outrage follows deception. Clarissa escapes to Hampstead, is traced thither and confronted by Lovelace, lured back to London, and there drugged and violated. Lovelace's reports still enlarge upon his tricks and stratagems, but the curtain drops temporarily at the curt sentence, "The affair is over. Clarissa lives." After Clarissa's later escape to Covent Garden she again becomes principal correspondent for a time and resumes connections with the outer world. She unravels the web of Lovelace's deceptions, and in unimpeded letters to Anna tells for the first time the details of the tragic return from Hampstead. This is a masterly piece of narrative, surcharged with almost intolerable apprehension and agony; its power is partly due to the skill with which Richardson has held it back until Clarissa could tell the story with the tremendous weight of deliberate recollection. It is after all the complex letter mechanism that produces this powerful delayed effect, this merciless iteration of doom.

With the false arrest of Clarissa at the suit of the bawd Sinclair, her temporary imprisonment at Rowland's, and her final asylum at Smith's in Covent Garden, Belford intervenes and becomes for the first time the reporter of important matters; indeed for a considerable time he gains what we may call epistolary dominance not only in the Lovelace-Belford series but in the whole system of the book. His is the pen of a ready writer; both he and Lovelace use shorthand for their confidential correspondence with each other and for other records. He begins his new role as an intermediary between Lovelace and Clarissa. Clarissa would be ready to tell her
story herself, if she could; but after seeing specimens of Lovelace’s letters and finding that Belford is worthy to be “the protector of her memory,” she makes him her executor and the editor of the letters that tell her story. As a reformed rake, he offers too much edifying comment to suit our taste; he divagates, for example, into the warning tale of the sad end of his fellow-rake Belton, and into a comparison between Rowe’s *Fair Penitent* and Clarissa’s story, yet he is by no means superfluous. In the reprisals and regrets of the latter part of the story the correspondence is more widely scattered; various members of the family have their say, including Colonel Morden, Clarissa’s one true friend among her kinsfolk, and it is Belford’s part to keep the story from running into excessive fragmentation. Though Anna Howe is directed to collaborate with him, he remains in control. Anna’s wit and spirit become irrelevant, and she naturally drops into the background, though Richardson goes too far when he sends her on a trip to the Isle of Wight during the last days of Clarissa’s life. Yet Belford is never dramatically central, like Clarissa and Lovelace, and Richardson slackens his grip at the end when he says that the Conclusion is “supposed to be written by Mr. Belford.”

The story runs its course to a foreseen conclusion, yet the shock of surprise can still be felt. The inept letters of the pedant Brand almost at the hour of Clarissa’s death may remind us that Richardson had sought comic relief even in this tragedy; and now that Anna Howe and Lovelace can no longer write with gusto, he offers this heavy and heartless humor, with its remarkable burlesque of formal and didactic letter-writing. Finally, in contrast to the protracted reports and discussions connected with Clarissa’s death, we have the swift denouement in which Lovelace goes to the Continent
and falls in a duel with Morden—a short span in which Lovelace uses epistolary dominance only for a few curt words.

In summing up the use of letters in *Clarissa*, we may say that the correspondents report conflict and offer commentary. The conflict is not typically a head-on collision between one correspondent and another, assertion and reply; rather it is presented largely within the letters of a dominant correspondent, who may report dialogue in great detail, sometimes with dramatic notation, interpreting all signs and considerations in their bearing upon motives, intentions, and future action. A report of conflict thus becomes an elaborate assertion of personality, and here Richardson often dramatizes "the divided mind." This is preeminently true of the principal characters, Clarissa and Lovelace. For Miss Howe and Belford, the provision of comment outweighs the report of conflict, but when Richardson is at his best there is an organic connection. Secondary characters may be given over to one aspect or another; thus the Harlowe family represent conflict in its most brutal and sullen form, and are not enlightened enough to provide a significant commentary. Other secondary characters show a considerable variety of function.

In *Pamela* and *Clarissa* Richardson experiments with and extends epistolary technique. There is less innovation in *Grandison*, though some new effects and values appear. Instead of the isolated and distressed heroine writing her own history almost single-handed, as in *Pamela*, or with the aid of other correspondents who are primarily concerned with her affair, as in *Clarissa*, we now have an enormous expansion of social correspondence carried on without serious obstruction or threat, and usually intended to be shown about to a circle of friends. It has been noted that such work had already been done in *Pamela II* and in Anna Howe's
part of Clarissa. The story and the letters go by groups—the Selby group in Northamptonshire, the Grandisons, and later the della Porrettas in Italy. The lending and forwarding of long files of letters, so that one group may be informed about the other, is part of the pattern of the book. The groups ramify into the casual contacts of actual society. Letter-writing thus loses dramatic intensity and sometimes becomes a pastime for young ladies, while the protestations about long letters become conventional: “What a length have I run! How does this narrative Letter-writing, if one is to enter into minute and characteristic descriptions and conversations, draw one on!” Thus Richardson moves in the direction taken later by Fanny Burney and Jane Austen. The danger is that such a record will be too trivial and discursive. The age was ready to call almost any batch of sketches or essays “letters.” Richardson had already fallen into this trap in Pamela II, however, and is generally aware of the danger. Though at the beginning of Grandison he is capable of reporting a long argument about ancient and modern learning, he tries to make it part of the social record; we may well feel that there is too much set discussion here, but the dialogue is well dramatized.

In general, Richardson keeps to the relatively simple plan already described: one major correspondent is likely to dominate a considerable section of the book, and other documents are taken into this sequence. The correspondent may send installments numbered as letters (“Harriet in continuation”) which are really chapters or long entries in a record kept journal-wise. The attempt of Sir Hargrave Pollexfen to abduct Harriet and her rescue by Sir Charles Grandison introduce new characters and potential correspondents, but Harriet continues to transmit the mail. In presenting the ideal gentleman Sir Charles, Richardson has a new problem;
the hero cannot report *in propria persona* all his noble deeds and thoughts. Others must chant his praise, as in Voltaire's *Zadig*:

*Que son mérite est extrême!*  
*Que de grâce! que de grandeur!*  
*Ahl combien monseigneur*  
*Doit être content de lui-même!*

Harriet at times becomes a collector and transcriber of records about Sir Charles and the history of the Grandison family. The novelist is at some pains to provide her with documents. Thus, when Sir Charles answers Sir Hargrave's challenge to a duel, Sir Charles's own copy of the letter is shown to Mr. Reeves, who shows it to Harriet, who in turn sends it to Lucy Selby. Reeves also gives Harriet a copy of the record of the dialogue between Sir Charles and Sir Hargrave's friend Bagenhall, made by the young clerk whom Bagenhall had brought with him. When Sir Charles comes to breakfast with Sir Hargrave, he likewise brings along a precautionary stenographer. The natural inclination of Richardson's busybodies in our own enlightened times would be to tap telephones and plant dictaphones.

But these are extreme cases; Richardson usually falls back on the assumption of a ready journal-keeper and letter-writer, perhaps seconded by an industrious assembler and editor of memoranda. When the Grandison sisters tell Harriet the story of their father's tyranny, Charlotte seems to be using notes—"But what say my minutes?" Characters regularly provide one another with files of letters; thus Harriet furnishes the Grandison group with the record down to the time of her abduction, letters already given in the text. When letters not already given are thus provided, the effect is that of a cut-back in the narrative. After Sir Charles has told Harriet directly the earlier part of the Italian story (she re-
members it word for word, of course), Dr. Bartlett, Sir Charles's tutor and revered friend, sends Harriet successive "pacquets" of letters recounting the story of the della Porretta family and the early stages of the long negotiations and parleys about a possible marriage of Clementina and Sir Charles. His nephew and amanuensis extracts the story from his papers. But when Sir Charles makes his second journey to Italy, and the match with Clementina seems imminent until her religious scruples come to be decisive against it, the hero himself, for the only time in any long sequence, relays the account to Dr. Bartlett in a one-way correspondence. Clementina herself is never a Richardsonian heroine in the full sense, for she never becomes a major correspondent. Her story was intended to provide dramatic suspense and a note of tragedy, but Richardson never allows her to write letters "to the moment" on a large scale. Thus the one character in Grandison who shares in some degree the tragic isolation of Clarissa is denied epistolary dominance. Somewhat similarly, though Richardson presents the jealous Olivia as a rival both to Clementina and Harriet, she does not develop as a character or a correspondent, and we may conjecture that the novelist at first intended to give her a larger place in the story and then prudently dropped her. It is almost startling to find the indefatigable Dr. Bartlett telling Harriet that it will not be necessary to give Olivia's story at length.

While Dr. Bartlett is sending his consignments and later while Sir Charles is reporting at length from Italy, Harriet and the English story might seem to be outweighed. There is a mechanical set-up by which Harriet sends the Bartlett installments to Lucy Selby; later Sir Charles's sister Charlotte likewise forwards his advices from Italy to Harriet in
Northamptonshire. But the Italian story does not keep the social comedy from developing in England, and this gives a new importance to Charlotte Grandison, now Lady G. She is obviously an extension of the character of Anna Howe, and her letters also elaborate the suggestions for a comedy of manners contained in Harriet’s London-to-Northamptonshire letters at the beginning of the story. With the Italian plot kept at arm’s length, and Harriet’s affairs at a stand, Charlotte is given more freedom to develop her wit and her temperament than Anna Howe ever had. Her husband Lord G., she feels, leaves much to be desired, and she becomes perverse, whimsical, and “arch” to a degree, and is duly rebuked by the more sedate Harriet. Her letters are of major importance in keeping us in the well-bred English world, and for the first time in the story we have a genuine two-way correspondence, Harriet and Charlotte both carrying weight.

After Clementina’s renunciation and Sir Charles’s return to England, this social tone still dominates. Richardson’s problem is to maintain interest now that the way is clear for the union of Harriet and Sir Charles. He still strives for dramatic range, and to this end Clementina and the della Porretta family invade England. When this irruption falls short, as it does, one would expect padding and digressions, along with tedious eulogies and congratulations such as we find in Pamela II. Some of our fears may be realized, but not our worst fears; Richardson does not, for example, give us extended travel letters when Harriet and her party take a tour in Northamptonshire, and even the glories of Grandison Hall are largely reported, we are told, in letters by Lucy Selby which “do not appear.”31 There are some rather set general conversations, one on the possibility of the intellectual life for women and another on young girls’ romantic no-
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tions and the folly of a first love, but Richardson does not sink his story by interpolation. The more serious difficulty is that he does not succeed in blending the Italian story and the English social comedy as they converge. Clementina and Charlotte are "scarce cater-cousins."

The vein of social notation does, however, produce ingenious variations of the device of making dramatic play with letters, and this sometimes stands in contrast to the plodding and mechanical provision of documents. At the very beginning, one of Harriet's Northamptonshire suitors, Greville, reads the company passages from a letter from Lady Frampton about Harriet, and "passages from the copy of his answer." He then lends a copy for Harriet to read, scratching out some sentences, but, it is added, only faintly.

There is a good deal of by-play of this kind. Letters that are being written may be shared with friends at the elbow of the ready writer; Harriet may begin a letter and Lucy finish it. Charlotte can tantalize Harriet with the possibility of reading a letter from Sir Charles to Dr. Bartlett, though Charlotte of course had no right to pick the letter up in the first place. The surface of the story is rippled with feminine curiosity about the contents of letters. Sir Charles has great reserve; he does not tell all his affairs to his sisters (a piece of masculine psychology ingeniously used by Richardson), and inquisitiveness adds point to the insistent questions as to what has been written, what should be written, what should be sent, read, shown, and to whom. The opening and extension of social relationships, the growth of friendship and love, are figured in this endless process of divulging letters and deciding just how much may be conveyed in confidence at a given time. Negotiations about letters admit of very fine shading. Thus, when the Grandison sisters ask to
see Harriet’s letters with the proviso that Harriet may omit certain passages, she resents even their assumption that some things she has written should be kept from them. Again, Sir Charles picks up a stray sheet of a letter in which Harriet says that his young ward Emily Jervois secretly loves him; he is of course too much of a gentleman to read it, but the fact that Harriet doesn’t want him to read something she has written about Emily carries appreciable weight.

Thus the characteristic contribution of Grandison is not the elaboration of epistolary mechanism, but the refining of the letter-form and the letter-situation as a device for the notation of social and psychological detail. An interesting by-product is the ingénue type of letter written, not at great length, by Emily Jervois, but destined to be developed in various ways by Fanny Burney and Jane Austen. There are even hints that the lighter letters in Grandison could be made a delicate instrument for high comedy, that is, for criticism of the basic assumptions of the book. Charlotte’s picture of the eternal friendship struck up between Harriet and Clementina, heroines both, “each admiring herself in the other,” raises large issues and opens an important page in Meredith’s Book of Egoism. The persistent interest which Meredith showed in Sir Charles Grandison is highly significant. Both Charlotte and Harriet are capable of speaking of Sir Charles with salutary irreverence. There is a minor strain of uneasiness or dissatisfaction after his return from Italy, a hint of impatience at his very proprieties and virtues. Should he come unannounced to Selby House to claim, as all expect, the hand of Harriet? Should he send word in advance? “Or does he think,” asks Harriet, “we should not be able to outlive our joyful surprize, if he gave us not notice of his arrival in these parts before he saw us?” Richardson doesn’t quite
make it, but he comes close to taxing his letter-form beyond the limits of Harriet's scrupulousness and propriety, and it may be added, beyond the limits of his own rationality as well. Once he goes so far as to record at length a troubled dream of Harriet's, recapitulating with broken imagery the principal events of the story.39 "Incoherences of incoherence!" she cries, and her "resveries" are not extended or made the staple theme of other letters; but even here Richardson can be seen experimenting with his forms and testing their possibilities to the last.

Perhaps the most common criticism of Richardson is that he had an imperfect knowledge of his own principles and themes, that he was in part duped by convention, entrapped by his underlying interest in sex, and constantly in danger of being swamped by his own verbosity. But if he falls short of classic control of his themes, the reason may be, not that he was inept or incompetent, but on the contrary that his use of the letter form led him in one direction toward a specific analysis of the enmeshing complexities of life, and in another direction toward a heightened awareness of the discontinuities and blockages, the frustrations and loose ends, that seem to make up the plight of man.

Alan D. McKillop

Notes

References to Richardson's novels are to the Shakespeare Head Edition, 18 vols., Oxford: Blackwell, 1929-31. The three novels, Pamela, Clarissa, and Grandison, are designated by the abbreviations P., Cl., and Gr. Small Roman numerals refer to the numbering of the letters in the Shakespeare Head Edition; Arabic numerals refer to pages.


5. *P.*, I, 111.
15. For further comment on Richardson’s methods in *Pamela II*, see Alan D. McKillop, *Samuel Richardson, Printer and Novelist* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1936), pp. 57-61.

17. *Cl.*, I, xxvii.
23. *Cl.*, VIII, 278.
24. *Gr.*, I, 86.
29. *Gr.*, III, 42.
31. *Gr.*, VI, 32, 75, etc.
32. *Gr.*, V, lxvii; VI, lxii.
33. *Gr.*, I, i, ii.
34. *Gr.*, II, xxxii.