

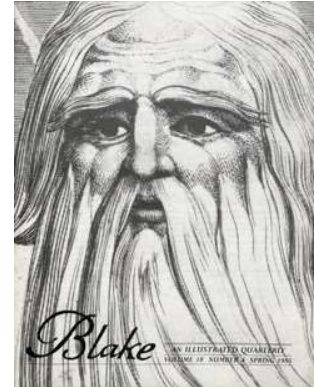
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D I S C U S S I O N

Richardson and Blake

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moved?) testicles, or sperm "removed" by being "fibred" over to/by Enitharmon: a sort of conceptual representation of intercourse (note how one collateral fibre does branch off toward/from the area of Los's heart). The difficulty in seeing such images—as this addendum witnesses—is that they are, at first, so unexpected. Here the viewer has to be able to enter the image and make some of the connections: to focus on the shaded body of the leg, treating it as one form, to continue the outline of the penis-form through the ankle lines, to disregard the light area of the foot, even to see the upper outline of the left leg as no outline but another fibre (not that difficult if one tries to conceive how, as an outline, it connects to the trunk of the body). The foreskin is marked by the kneecap and the orifice by the small circle, resembling an indentation, across from the top of the lower cluster of grapes. One need only trust the initial impression that there's something oddly emphasized about this (third) leg, that it seems to possess a life and existence of its own. This erection might serve to explain why Los and Enitharmon are so emphatically looking away from each other, not wishing to acknowledge the (pictorially-speaking, anyway) most important thing between them.

Which leads us to a reconsideration of the implied ascetic message of the lines quoted from "My Spectre" in "Some Sexual Connotations," p. 171 (ll. 49–52 [erroneously cited as 67–70]; see also Ostriker's remarks in the same issue, p. 161). It now seems to me that a truly "radical" argument might be read as, in effect, "let's forget about 'Love' and get physical—really 'tear up,' 'root up' the 'infernal grove.' Then, having disposed of the lineaments of gratified desire, may we 'return & see / The worlds of happy Eternity.'" The crucial point, what allows the return and vision of the worlds, is the initial mutual agreement. This might explain why the phrase is repeated. Thus the speaker argues, at first:

Till I turn from Female Love  
And root up the Infernal Grove  
I shall never worthy be  
To Step into Eternity (41–44)

But it can't be done alone. Eternity, in fact, is nothing but this ongoing process of agreeing, rooting up, and returning. So, the speaker concludes:

Let us agree to give up Love  
And root up the infernal grove  
Then shall we return & see  
The worlds of happy Eternity  
& Throughout all Eternity  
I forgive you you forgive me  
As our Dear Redeemer said  
This the Wine & this the Bread (49–56)

So should all couples consummate "the fleshly bread . . . the nervous wine" (FZ 12.44).

## Richardson and Blake

Jean H. Hagstrum

Alicia Ostriker's brisk and "emancipated" view of *Clarissa* in the Summer, 1984, issue of *Blake* (pp. 52–53) is no doubt in part intended to make mine seem solemn, priggish, or otherwise old-fashioned. But it is in fact hers which is traditional or conventional, and I myself for many years clung to a version of it. This prejudice—for I now so regard what I once believed—I doubtless inherited from a learned and witty teacher at Yale, who used to wonder aloud whether anyone could possibly learn anything from that middle-class printer with a paunch. But when I came to read Richardson entire, from *within*, as it were, trying to understand why so many great critics and artists admired *Clarissa*, I came to see how unfair to Richardson and other great masters of sensibility the usual epithets about tearful, moralistic sentimentalism really were. No doubt the radically revised views of Richardson that have emanated from stream-of-consciousness novelists and from Marxist, Modernist, psychoanalytical, and, yes, even feminist criticism have also helped make Ostriker's judgments seem to me a bit archaic, deeply felt though they surely are. In any case, anyone interested in the context, the details, and the nuances of my position on *Clarissa* is advised to read my chapter on Richardson in *Sex and Sensibility*.

What interests the readers of this journal is of course how Blake reacted to Richardson. I do not have the time here—nor did I when I wrote my longish chapter on Blake for my forthcoming book, *The Romantic Body* (Tennessee, 1986)—to do justice to Blake's encounter with and absorption of a great predecessor. But I must record my view that Ostriker's speculation (" . . . the novel, and the feminization of culture it represents, would have deeply offended and irritated Blake") is much too simple and could lead to serious misapprehension. We should of course not neglect what Blake himself said. In a letter to Hayley dated 16 July 1804 he wrote: "Richardson has won my heart I will again read *Clarissa* &c they must be admirable I was too hasty in my perusal of them to perceive all their beauty." I take this to mean that Blake had once read all of Richardson—perhaps back in the 1780s when all the novels were popularly produced in *The Novelist's Magazine* and when Blake engraved a scene from *Grandison* after Stothard—and that now, perhaps on the advice of Hayley, he intended to re-read them, having had time so far to look at them only long enough to know that he was once more attracted. We may want to make considerable deduction from Blake's praise, remembering that he was



not always above flattering Hayley's tastes. We certainly do not want to be guided by a sympathetic judgment as un-nuanced in its way as Ostriker's witty denigration.

I now refer to a few passages in Richardson's greatest novel that seem to me to have in them possible seeds of Blakean response—an incomplete survey which I believe does suggest that Blake responded to a great predecessor, not indeed with the admiring revisionary ratios he applied to the greater Milton but with something like their combination of positive, negative, and mixed response. I have the strong sense that Blake honored Richardson in both his favorable and pejorative reactions. Blake, who was so deeply concerned in his *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* and in closely contemporaneous works with virgins on the edge of experience, seems to have absorbed the sentimental writers' preoccupation with sexual initiation, and he could scarcely have failed to respond to Clarissa's melodramatic and forced dash across the frontier of innocence, with all the psychological probing Richardson gives that traumatic experience. Young Lyca in "The Little Girl Lost and Found," with her deep concern for her mother as she goes into the desert of erotic experience and independence, recalls Clarissa, who in her trials was most of all concerned with "the peace of my mother's mind" (Everyman ed., I, 61). Clarissa's firm belief that "prudence . . . ought of itself to be conformed to in everything" (I, 61) might well have provoked the angry Proverb of Hell in *The Marriage*, but that well-known coupling of a rich ugly old maid and incapacity may be even more indebted—this time directly and without inversion—to the lively Anna Howe's own response to her cousin. She chides Clarissa for not owning up to her real feelings of attraction for Lovelace and is impatient with "your PRUDE-encies (mind how I spell the word) in a case, that with every other person defies all prudence—" (I, 188).

The Blake of *Tiriel* loathed fear and terror in father-daughter relations, and *The Visions of the Daughters of Albion* laments the presence of like emotions in heterosexual love. Richardson is equally strong, though not equally frank or overt, in expressing sexuality perverted by fright, when he portrays the loathsome suitor of Clarissa, Solmes, who wanted "fear and terror" in a bride and who, if he could not get love, would strive to perpetuate fear (see I, 284). And Clarissa's Aunt Hervey argues on behalf of Solmes that "true love was best known by fear and reverence" (I, 372). Such ideas were as odious to Clarissa as they were to Blake: "O my dear," she wrote to her cousin, "how I hate that man . . ." (I, 63).

Lovelace must have made the same powerful impression on Blake that he has made on almost everyone who knows *Clarissa* well. Cut to the quick by Clarissa's reference to his "unprecedented wickedness," Richardson's

magnificent Satan writes to a rakish friend: ". . . she has heard that the devil is black; and having a mind to make one of me, brays together, in the mortar of her wild fancy, twenty chimney-sweepers, in order to make one sootier than ordinary rise out of the dirty mass" (IV, 88). In *The Marriage* (plate 23) an Angel who has turned successively blue, yellow, white, and pink at a Devil's blasphemies, chides him for insulting the conventional view of Jesus as the revelation of God. The Devil, now really agitated, bursts out: "bray a fool in a mortar with wheat, yet shall not his folly be beaten out of him." Both Richardson's and Blake's devils are quoting Proverbs 27:22; but the earlier passage with its black devil, chimney-sweeps, and dismay with conventional piety, to say nothing of the exact coincidence of language and quotation, does produce a notably Blakean ring.

It is not only the Urizenic Solmes and the Orcan Lovelace who adumbrate important moments in Blake. The poet, who came to maturity under impulses from sensibility, strains that never deserted him, is truly *sensible* (in the French sense) from his early representations of Jane Shore to his later portrayals of the suffering Jerusalem. There is no reason to believe he would have been amused at Clarissa's sufferings. Even Lovelace is moved by the afflicted girl: "And down on her bosom, like a half-broken-stalked lily, top-heavy with the overcharging dews of the morning, sunk her head, with a sigh that went to my heart" (III, 193). Blake prefers a sturdier flower: "While the Lilly white, shall in Love delight, / Nor a thorn nor a threat stain her beauty bright—" and indeed his ideal woman may in part be a revision of Richardson's.

But Clarissa's own flower- and leaf-imagery may have gone deep into Blake's consciousness, as Mark Kinkhead-Weekes has so penetratingly seen (*Samuel Richardson*, 1973, p. 237 and n. 1). Clarissa in her agony addresses one of her torn fragments of paper to her destroyer:

Thou pernicious caterpillar, that preyest upon the fair leaf of virgin fame, and poisonest those leaves which thou canst not devour!  
Thou fell blight, thou eastern blast, thou overspreading mildew, that destroyest the early promises of the shining year! . . .  
Thou fretting moth, that corruptest the fairest garment!  
Thou eating canker-worm, that preyest upon the opening bud, and turnest the damask rose into livid yellowness! [III, 207]

Blake would no doubt have felt with modern sensibility that all this baroque suffering leading to death was unnecessary. But Clarissa in her agony may have given him an unforgettable image which in word and design became one of his most haunting pages. "O Rose thou art sick."