



Clarissa: Or the History of a Young Lady (Penguin Classics)

By Samuel Richardson

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Clarissa: Or the History of a Young Lady (Penguin Classics) By Samuel Richardson

"Oh thou savage-hearted monster! What work hast thou made in one guilty hour, for a whole age of repentance!"

Pressured by her unscrupulous family to marry a wealthy man she detests, the young Clarissa Harlowe is tricked into fleeing with the witty and debonair Robert Lovelace and places herself under his protection. Lovelace, however, proves himself to be an untrustworthy rake whose vague promises of marriage are accompanied by unwelcome and increasingly brutal sexual advances. And yet, Clarissa finds his charm alluring, her scrupulous sense of virtue tinged with unconfessed desire. Told through a complex series of interweaving letters, *Clarissa* is a richly ambiguous study of a fatally attracted couple and a work of astonishing power and immediacy. A huge success when it first appeared in 1747, and translated into French and German, it remains one of the greatest of all European novels.

In his introduction, Angus Ross examines characterization, the epistolary style, the role of the family and the position of women in *Clarissa*. This edition also includes a chronology, suggestions for further reading, tables of letters, notes, a glossary and an appendix on the music for the "Ode to Wisdom."

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Editorial Review

Review

Epistolary novel by Samuel Richardson, published in 1747-48. Richardson first presents the heroine, Clarissa Harlowe, when she is discovering the barely masked motives of her family, who want to force her into a loveless marriage to improve their fortunes. When Lovelace, a romantic who holds the code of the Harlowes in contempt, offers her protection, she runs off with him. She is physically attracted by if not actually in love with Lovelace, but she is to discover that he wants her only on his own terms and she refuses to marry him. In Lovelace's letters to his friend Belford, Richardson shows that what is driving him to conquest and finally to rape is really revenge for her family's insults and his sense of Clarissa's moral superiority. For Clarissa, however, accepting marriage as a convenience is no better than accepting the opportunistic moral code of her family. As the novel comes to its long-drawn-out close, she is removed from the world of both the Harlowes and the Lovelaces, and she dies true to herself to the end. -- *The Merriam-Webster Encyclopedia of Literature*

About the Author

Samuel Richardson (1689-1761) was born in Derbyshire, the son of a joiner. He received little formal education and in 1706 was apprenticed to a printer in London. Thirteen years later he set himself up as a stationer and printer and became one of the leading figures in the trade. He printed political material, newspapers and literature. He began writing *Pamela* as a result of a suggestion from friends that he should compile a book of model letters for use by unskilled writers. *Pamela* was a great success and went on to write *Clarissa*, one of the masterpieces of European literature.

Angus Ross is Emeritus Professor of English at the University of Sussex. He writes on eighteenth-century and other literature and has edited Swift as well as a number of anthologies.

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Tenesha Little:

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