



Proposal and Habitation: The Temporality
and Authority of Interpretation in and
about a Scene of Richardson's *Clarissa*

William Beatty Warner

I

To propose is to "place before" — to pose before another, to pose before it happens. And in all its meanings "to propose" entails an act of will, a posing so as "to put forward for consideration, discussion, solution, imitation; to put forward for acceptance; to put forward as a scheme or plan to be adopted" (*OED*). But what may begin as an individual act of will (a posing) is immediately shaped and compromised by what it is posed before. Thus, when a person is proposed for "acceptance to some office or position," or when a formal toast is proposed to the assembled company, or when one proposes to give oneself and take another in marriage — in each of these instances the proposal is a fragment of discourse cast into an intermediate space, where response is suddenly uncertain. Here proposing is a risk — because the proposal might be rejected — and not "real" — because what is proposed has not yet happened. Proposing does not have the aura of authority we associate with the act of positing in geometry and philosophy. For proposal is not a logical move, it is a socio-political gesture. It is always already part of an incomplete transaction.

This paper proposes to interpret interpretation in the light of

proposal, to interpret proposals as a type of interpretation. Why this conjunction? In Richardson's *Clarissa*, the crisis in the action, and the critical crux for the interpreters of the action, focuses on one issue — will Clarissa and Lovelace marry, and should they? — and one scene — the proposal scene where this might have come about.¹ By attending to the many different interpreters in and about this scene — Clarissa, Lovelace, Anna Howe, Belford, Richardson's correspondents, Richardson, and myself — and by correlating their activity, one finds two types of interpretation. There is an active risk-taking interpretation that opens possibilities and functions like a proposal, and there is a reactive mode of interpretation, which coordinates several activities: the interpreter elaborates a representation of the object to be interpreted, articulates a stabilizing temporality of presence, creates a dwelling for the interiority of the interpreter, and affirms the authority of this interpretation by insisting that this interpretation is adequate to its object. By studying the interpretive field set going by Richardson's novel, we can probe the relationship between active and reactive modes of interpretation, and the way the uneasy coexistence of these two "moments" of interpretation helps to delimit the authority and truth-value of interpretation.

Why is the proposal scene so important in *Clarissa*? Up to this point in the novel, events seem to open equally onto marriage and death. What happens in the proposal scene (which is not one episode, for this scene is repeatedly re-opened) will decide this question. What pushes Clarissa and Lovelace toward marriage? Most importantly, the whole situation of new comedy throws Clarissa and Lovelace together: an unwilling father, a jealous older sister, and an ugly rival suitor, all unite the protagonists in opposition to their avaricious designs. When the story is seen in the light of comic design, even the constant struggles between Clarissa and Lovelace can be seen as new and lively episodes in the battle of the sexes. There are other factors which project Clarissa and Lovelace toward marriage: Lovelace's sense of fair play — if Clarissa should withstand the tests he designs for her, he promises to marry her; the urgings of Anna Howe and Belford; and finally the love each feels for the other, a love Clarissa hides so well and Lovelace parades too freely — but a love that is not less real for all that. What propels events toward death? The perverse ambition and hostility of the Harlowe family; Lovelace's pride, his love for stratagems, his deceit and game-playing, and his determination to be of some account in "rakish annals"; Clarissa's self-centeredness, her sense of inner virtue, her predilection for the reflective and meaningful, and a melodramatic imagination that determines her to turn her life to some significant account — whether in marriage or death.

With so much at stake, it is little wonder that the proposal scene comes in for the most ardent retrospective analysis — with some arguing that Clarissa should have accepted Lovelace and others insisting that she

was correct to spurn such indelicate advances. We will examine the scene with the utmost care, for it bears the seeds of all the struggles of interpretation which engulf this text. Here is the first and most important of the three genuine proposal scenes. Clarissa and Lovelace are staying at an inn at St. Albans. It is after Clarissa's departure from Harlowe Place and before she takes up residence in London at Mrs. Sinclair's. We must approach this scene with a measure of circumspection, because the narratives Clarissa and Lovelace provide the reader function as much to conceal and repress what is happening in this scene as to report it. If we reduce the two accounts to a common factual thread, we come up with this:

The encounter begins like many others — with each sparring for advantage. Lovelace reproaches Clarissa for putting trust in a family that has shown it doesn't deserve it rather than in himself, who has shown he does. Clarissa girds for battle, telling Anna, "[I] resolved not to desert myself." Then Lovelace unexpectedly makes his proposal, but in a harsh and discouraging manner. Clarissa finds herself suddenly weakened and in a position of unaccustomed vacillation. She feels anger at Lovelace's cunning way of blending love and reproach, but she recalls Anna's politic advice to seize the first opportunity to marry. She feels Lovelace's eyes upon her, taking in her whole person. She does not know that Lovelace is composing a portrait of her which he finds inexpressibly beautiful. She bursts into tears, turns to go, and he throws his arms around her waist. He promises not to take unfair advantage of her difficult situation with her relatives but holds back from repeating the proposal. Clarissa chafes under the embarrassing silence that seems to ask that she take the initiative. She feels "fresh tears" and declares she is "very unhappy." Lovelace becomes more mild in manner but still keeps some reserve as he savors the freedom she has given him in allowing him to hold her close. Then there occurs a sudden turn in Clarissa's disposition. She "recollects" what a "tame fool" she must look like, gathers herself together, and turns to fling herself from him. Overcome by the brilliance of her anger, he suddenly relinquishes all manipulative control, seizes her hand, and gives a "clear" and "explicit" proposal of marriage. But the moment of Clarissa's opening towards him is gone. She adopts a pose calculated to gail him: all the chafing vacillation he has witnessed is not a sign of budding affection or dependence, it is merely her distress with her family's cruelty. This validates Lovelace's worst suspicions and he explodes in wrath.²

The accounts Clarissa and Lovelace offer of this scene work to conceal the actual impact this scene has on the protagonists. Clarissa is agitated at the emergence of a stark alternative to the incessant struggles that have mediated all the transactions of her story. The proposal, however flawed and compromising, confronts her with a completely new possibility; it would involve an active reinterpretation of the whole situation Clarissa and Lovelace share. The proposal threatens to begin that

reinterpretation; the proposal is an offering and a temptation to be something radically different from the self-enclosed entity that is an adjunct of struggle. With this question what we might call an "axis of union, or comedy," with all its ability to organize the disparate threads of her life, enters the scene, crosses her story, and threatens to transform her life. Clarissa is also disturbed by the feeling she harbors for Lovelace — enough love to welcome a simple acceptance of him, a resolution of all her conflicts in an acknowledged mutuality of feeling. But this path is frightening; it demands a radical change in her public manner and her private conceptualization of herself. It is alarming that Lovelace has this power. With a few words he can penetrate her whole situation with all the terms of comic design ending in marriage — of a man's proposal, of a woman's acceptance, of EROS, and of a simple "yes" that would change everything. It is on the brink of that possibility, the sudden presence and tyranny of that "yes," that Clarissa chafes, frets, and hesitates. It is completely appropriate that at this moment Lovelace, who has been relatively isolated from this predicament, finds himself enchanted by Clarissa's unaccustomed vulnerability; and, sensing her openness to him, he begins to move towards reconciliation and acknowledged love. That Lovelace reaches Clarissa, with a genuine proposal and a new and fervid opening toward her just moments after she has pivoted away, that their timing is off, that they are out of "synch" (coming so near but never touching), is the bit of contingency upon which the whole comedy of Clarissa and Lovelace turns towards tragedy. But there is no "fateful" necessity here. Instead, this instance of bad timing is a moment of genuine play, where "play" might be defined as a random movement of elements that frustrates every attempt at prediction or retrospective explanation, because it is a moment that really can go either way. In spite of all the causes for Lovelace's initial reticence and Clarissa's sudden withdrawal, the opening that each has suddenly sensed is quite real. We can think of it as an axis on which the story of Clarissa and Lovelace could have unfolded (as tragedy) and been refolded (as comedy). But once each has felt the force of this alternative, once they have been shaken by its brushing so near, their main efforts are directed at repressing its presence and denying the potentiality that has opened before them.

A close comparative analysis of Clarissa's and Lovelace's narratives of this scene will allow us to follow the formal means each employs to repress the potentiality for marriage. Here is Clarissa's narrative of the proposal scene:

I was forced to hear him.
You condescended, dearest creature, said he, to
ask my advice. It is very easy, give me leave to say, to
advise you what to do. I hope I may, on this *new*
occasion, speak without offence, *notwithstanding your*

formal injunctions. You see that there can be no hope of reconciliation with your relations. Can you, madam, consent to honour with your hand a wretch whom you have never yet obliged with one *voluntary* favor?

What a *recriminating*, what a *reproachful way*, my dear, was this of putting a question of this nature!

I expected not from him at the time, and just as I was very angry with him, either the question or the manner. I am ashamed to recollect the confusion I was thrown into; all your advice in my head at the moment; yet his words so prohibitory. He confidently seemed to enjoy my confusion (*indeed, my dear, he knows not what respectful love is!*); and gazed upon me as if he would have looked me through.

He was still more declarative afterwards, indeed, as I shall mention by and by; but it was half extorted from him.

My heart struggles violently between resentment and shame, to be thus teased by one who seemed to have all *his* passions at command at a time when I had very little over *mine*; till at last I burst into tears, and was going from him in high disgust, when throwing his arms about me, with an air, however, the most tenderly respectful, he gave a *stupid* turn to the subject.

It was far from his heart, he said, to take so much *advantage* of the *strait* which the discovery of my brother's foolish project had brought me into, as to renew, *without my permission*, a proposal which I had hitherto discountenanced, and which for *that* reason —

And then he come with his *half-sentences*, apologizing for what he had not so much as *half proposed*.

Surely he had not the insolence to *intend* to tease me, to see if I could be brought to speak what became me not to speak. But whether he had or not, it *did* tease me; insomuch that my very heart was fretted, and I broke out at last into fresh tears, and a declaration that I was very unhappy. And just then recollecting how like a tame fool I stood with his arms about me, I flung from him with indignation. But he seized my hand as I was going out of the room, and upon his knees besought my stay for one moment; and then, in words the most clear and explicit, tendered himself to my acceptance, as

the most effectual means to disappoint my brother's scheme and set all right.

But what could I say to this? — Extorted from him, as it seemed to me, rather as the effect of his compassion than of his love? What *could* I say? I paused, I looked silly — I am *sure* I looked very silly. He suffered me to pause and look silly, *waiting for me to say something*; and at last (ashamed of my confusion, and aiming to make an *excuse for it*) I told him that I desired he would avoid such measures as might add to the uneasiness which it must be visible to him I had, when he reflected upon the irreconcilableness of my friends, and upon what might follow from this unaccountable project of my brother.

He promised to be governed by me in everything. And again the wretch, instead of pressing his former question, asked me *if I forgave him for the humble suit he had made to me?* What had I to do but to try for a palliation of my confusion, since it served me not?

I told him I had hopes it would not be long before Mr. Morden arrived; and doubted not that that gentlemen would be the readier to engage in my favour when he found that I made no other use of *his* (Mr. Lovelace's) assistance, than to free myself from the addresses of a man so disagreeable to me as Mr. Solmes; I must therefore wish that everything might remain as it was till I could hear from my cousin.

This, although teased by him as I was, was not, you see, my dear, a *denial*. But he must throw himself into a heat rather than try to persuade; which any other man in his situation, I should think, would have done; and this warmth obliged me to adhere to my seeming negative.

This was what he said, with a vehemence that must harden any woman's mind who had a spirit above being frightened into passiveness:

Good God! and will you, madam, still resolve to show me that I am to hope for no share in your favour, while any the remotest prospect remains that you will be received by my bitterest enemies, at the price of my utter rejection?

This was what I returned, with warmth, and with a salving art *too*: You have seen, Mr. Lovelace, how much my brother's violence can affect me; but you will

be mistaken if you let loose yours upon me, with a thought of terrifying me into measures the contrary of which you have acquiesced with. (II, 137-38)

Lovelace's account is written in a less ardent and more playful key:

And now, Belford, what wilt thou say, if, like the fly buzzing about the bright taper, I had like to have singed the silken wings of my liberty? Never was man in greater danger of being caught in his own snares; all my views anticipated; all my schemes untried; the admirable creature not brought to town; nor one effort made to know if she be really angel or woman.

I offered myself to her acceptance with a suddenness, 'tis true, that gave her no time to wrap herself in reserves; and in terms *less tender* than *fervent*, tending to upbraid her for her past indifference, and to remind her of her injunctions; for it was the fear of her brother, not her love of me, that had inclined her to dispense with those injunctions.

I never beheld so sweet a confusion. What a glory to the pencil, could it do justice to it, and to the mingled impatience which visibly informed every feature of the most meaning and most beautiful face in the world! She hemmed twice or thrice; her look, now so charmingly silly, then so sweetly significant; till at last the lovely teaser, teased by my hesitating expectation of her answer, out of all power of articulate speech, burst into tears, and was turning from me with precipitation when, presuming to fold her in my happy arms — oh, think not, best beloved of my heart, said I, think not that this motion, which you may believe to be so contrary to your former injunctions, proceeds from a design to avail myself of the cruelty of your relations; if I have disobligeed you by it (and you know with what respectful tenderness I have presumed to hint it), it shall be my utmost care for the future — there I stopped.

Then she spoke, but with vexation: I am — I am — very unhappy — tears trickling down her crimson cheeks, and her sweet face, as my arms still encircled the finest waist in the world, sinking upon my shoulder; the dear creature was so absent that she knew not the honour she permitted me.

But why, but why unhappy, my dearest life? said I — all the gratitude that ever overflowed the heart

of the most obliged of men —

Justice to myself there stopped my mouth; for what gratitude did I owe her for obligations so involuntary?

Then recovering herself and her usual reserves, and struggling to free herself from my clasp arms: How now, sir! said she, with a cheek more indignantly glowing and eyes of a fiercer lustre.

I gave way to her angry struggle; but, absolutely overcome by so charming a display of innocent confusion, I caught hold of her hand as she was flying from me, and kneeling at her feet, O my angel, said I (quite destitute of reserve, and hardly knowing the tenor of my own speech; and had a parson been there, I had certainly been a gone man), receive the vows of your faithful Lovelace. Make him yours, and only yours, for ever. This will answer every end. Who will dare to form plots and stratagems against my wife? That you are not so is the ground of all their foolish attempts, and of their insolent hopes in Solmes's favour. O be mine! — I beseech you (thus on my knee I beseech you) to be mine. We shall then have all the world with us; and everybody will applaud an event that everybody expects.

Was the devil in me! I no more intended all this ecstatic nonsense than I thought the same moment of flying in the air! All power is with this charming creature. . . . It is I, not she, at this rate, that must fail in the arduous trail.

Didst thou ever before hear of a man uttering solemn things by an involuntary impulse, in defiance of premeditation, and of all his own proud schemes? But this sweet creature is able to make a man forego every purpose of his heart that is not favourable to her. And I verily think I should be inclined to spare her all further trial (and yet what trial has she had?) were it not for the contention that her vigilance has set on foot, which shall overcome the other. Thou knowest my generosity to my uncontenting Rosebud — and sometimes do I qualify my ardent aspirations after even this very fine creature by this reflection: That the most charming woman on earth, were she an empress, can excel the meanest in the customary visibles only. Such is the equality of the dispensation, to the prince and the peasant, in this prime gift, WOMAN.

Well, but what was the result of this

involuntary impulse on my part? Wouldst thou not think I was taken at my offer? — an offer so solemnly made, and on one knee too?

No such thing! The pretty trifler let me off as easily as I could have wished.

Her brother's project; and to find that there were no hopes of a reconciliation for her; and the apprehension she had of the mischiefs that might ensue; these, not my offer, nor love of me, were the causes to which she ascribed all her sweet confusion — an ascription that is high treason against my sovereign pride — to make marriage with me but a second-place refuge; and as good as to tell me that her confusion was owing to her concern that there were no hopes that my enemies would accept of her intended offer to renounce a man who had ventured his life for her, and was still ready to run the same risk in her behalf!

I re-urged her to make me happy; but I was to be postponed to her Cousin Morden's arrival. On him are now placed all her hopes.

I raved; but to no purpose. (II, 140-42)

Clarissa defends herself against the coercive pressure of an active reinterpretation of her life that the proposal entails by organizing her narrative around an explicit argument: Lovelace's manipulative and provoking way of proposing, and the embarrassing initiatives he would impose on her, leaves her no choice but to put him off with a "saving art." Thus Clarissa follows the quotation of Lovelace's opening proposal with the rhetorical question, "What a *recriminalating*, what a *reproachful way*, my dear, was this of putting a question of this nature?" Clarissa's narrative is punctuated with apology: she justifies her reticence logically (thus, it's not love that paralyzes her, it's weighing Anna's advice against Lovelace's harshness); she reproaches his way of wooing: "He knows not . . . respectful love"; she confesses to being vexed and chafed by the discrepancy between his self-possession and her weakness; and finally, she repeatedly insists that he refuses to press his proposal — thus their failure to get together is *his* fault. In his account to Belford, Lovelace's narrative pose neatly complements Clarissa's: he claims a manipulative control over events that is punctuated by a lapse in which he proposes earnestly only to be rejected. Lovelace asserts his control by mocking himself with a light-hearted analogy: "And now, Belford, what wilt thou say, if, like the fly buzzing about the bright taper, I had like to have singed the silken wings of my liberty?" This gay manner eases the transition to the narrative of his lapse towards love and comedy. After the narrative of his second proposal — which is highly charged and urgent — Lovelace steps back and

asks, "Was the devil in me! I no more intended all this ecstatic nonsense. . . It is I, not she, at this rate, that must fail in the arduous trial." And after this long aside, which reestablishes the whole situation of struggle that has dominated the novel ("the contention," Lovelace calls it, "that her vigilance has set on foot, which shall overcome the *other*"), Lovelace brushes his genuine proposal aside with gratitude that "the pretty trifler let me off as easily as I could have wished." In order to hold the other at a distance, each adopts a rigid pose: Lovelace claims to be engaging in a callous manipulation, even after he loses control; and Clarissa, after turning away from Lovelace, claims that her vacillation and emotion come from worry about her family, though it is obviously a function of Lovelace's proposal. Now, ironically, each accepts this radically simplified pose as an adequate account of the *other's* motives and is thereby led to an essential error about the other. Clarissa feels Lovelace's genuine proposal was "half extorted" from him and more the result of "compassion" than "love." Thus she fails to perceive the very genuine passion he feels for her. Lovelace feels that Clarissa's willingness to listen to a proposal comes from "fear of her brother" and "not her love of me," so that "marriage" with him would become a "second-place refuge." Thus he fails to take full account of the signs of love and openness implicit in her hesitation, her letting him encircle her waist, her fit of anxiety and flight, and the very intensity of her alibis.

Why do the protagonists — who have on so many occasions demonstrated themselves to be astute psychologists — experience these lapses in evaluating their antagonists? These lapses help Lovelace and Clarissa swerve away from the opening toward marriage and spare them the burden and anxiety of seriously entertaining an alternative to the whole mode of struggle both have adopted. This also explains the many minute ways Clarissa and Lovelace sculpt their narratives so as to end up with widely divergent versions of the same scene. Each is faithful to a common factual sequence, but their narratives of the proposal scenes give radically different impressions. Clarissa quotes the first, manipulative and insincere, proposal (which Lovelace only alludes to), while she only refers to Lovelace's "clear" and "explicit" proposal, which Lovelace quotes in full. Clarissa omits evidence of Lovelace's vacillation between anger and sympathy between the two proposals, while Lovelace omits the "half sentences" and half-hearted apology for proposing he utters during the long embarrassing period while he is gazing at Clarissa. Clarissa insists that he refused to take the available chances to propose again, while in direct contradiction Lovelace says that he "re-urged" the question. Perhaps the most striking contrast between the two accounts comes with regard to Lovelace's promise, after her first hesitations, not to take advantage of her family difficulties. In Clarissa's account his words come after her awkward vacillation between anger and love, and then only prolong Clarissa's trial. They seem artfully designed by Lovelace to make her suffer while he

parades his own good intentions. In Lovelace's narrative, he has just finished his hushed rapture over Clarissa's "most meaning and . . . beautiful face," so that when "fresh tears" come to her, he puts his arms around her, and his speech has a very different force. The language is very different, and though — like much in the novel — it can be read two ways, it is much less taunting than Clarissa's version and implies Lovelace is extending genuine sympathy to Clarissa.

How are Clarissa and Lovelace able to swerve away from the genuine possibility of marriage which opens in this scene? They do so by elaborating a representation of the scene, as a pure sequence of "nows," such that every moment is present to itself and present to the narrating consciousness. Temporality becomes something stable and stabilizing — a continuous sequence of present-past, present-present, and present-future which unfold into one another — and establishes an apparent inevitability about the course of the action.³ The narrative becomes a woven locus or habitation within which each narrator may dwell, an interpretive inscape or interior where the self may assert the authority of its roles, fictions, and visions. And each narrative ends being offered as an authoritative account of what actually happened. But the reader has two narratives of the same scene, so each narrative is exterior to the other; each challenges the authority of the other. The reader can see what lies outside the perimeters of each narrative — that Clarissa's account fails to give credence to the passion with which Lovelace offers himself to her and that Lovelace fails to see and accept the evidences of Clarissa's love. These are the crucial realities that Clarissa and Lovelace, as characters and narrators, are losing, the exteriority each narrative fails to recuperate in its repetition of the proposal scene. In the small but decisive discrepancies between these two narratives the reader can see that every apparently present instant of this proposal scene crackles with potentialities absent to one or the other of the persons who experienced them. For this reason the reader can locate a radical contingency in the midst of a scene narrated in such a way as to efface this contingency.

During the course of *Clarissa*, the heroine repeatedly engages in acts of interpretation which represent her life in terms of a stabilizing temporality of presence: the narrative accounts she sends to Anna Howe plot her life in an intelligible cause-effect sequence; the meditations that come at moments of crisis coordinate past, present, and future in the light of God's power to master temporality; victories in her melodramatic encounters with Lovelace hinge on her ability to offer compelling versions of past and future within a histrionic rendering of the present; and the book Clarissa arranges to have edited will tell the story of the temptations and trials of a virtue which is finally triumphant.⁴ But it is only by deciding to die that Clarissa can begin to acquire genuine interpretive power over her life, her adversaries, and the unstable temporality that accompanies their transactions. See what her death does. Death as an

ending makes the apparent cause of death — the rape — the climax and center of the story. And it is from the standpoint of the rape that Clarissa can compose the sequence of apparently accessible present-moments into the book that will tell her story. Thus when, late in her trials, Cousin Morden writes to Clarissa urging her to marry Lovelace, Clarissa replies, in a very important letter, with the reasons she will not form a "composition" between Lovelace's evil and her own virtue (IV, 250-51).

Clarissa goes beyond assertions and vows not to marry, and shows real daring and imagination in the way she articulates her relationship with Lovelace. Clarissa does not name or describe the rape, but she weaves the language of desire and seduction into her passage, so that the rape, as the crucial fact of Clarissa's history, will never be far from the reader's mind. These suggestive phrases are scattered through the letter: "weak creature," "to take ungenerous advantage," "form an attempt," "crimes," "vile opinion," "violator," and "chastity." By writing her text in the margins of the rape scene, Clarissa concedes Lovelace a physical dominance which ensures her moral superiority; she summons their moment of greatest intimacy to give credence to the idea of their essential separateness; she acknowledges the body's penetration as a way of asserting the self's inviolable integrity. With her story inscribed into the rape scene, Clarissa gives plausibility to her presentation of Lovelace as the "violator," herself as the "violated," and their mutual transactions as an elaborate one-sided plot against her innocence. The rape will be the unspeakable deed which Clarissa's whole life and story will speak over and over again. Morden's letter reintroduces Clarissa to the active temporality of the genuine proposal — the moment of multiple futures and critical choices. Clarissa answers from the standpoint of another scene, the rape, and another whole version of the Clarissa-Lovelace relationship — one where there is evidently only one role for Clarissa (the virtuous victim), one future (death), and no apparent choices. Clarissa writes her answer so the rape appears as a single still point, a vivid moment of clarity from which she can overcome the destabilizing temporality of proposals (Lovelace's, Morden's). By writing of her life and situation from within the rape scene, Clarissa can make her life seem to stand still. She situates herself within an "interpretive present" where she can characterize herself and Lovelace, plot past present and future, and thematize their story. The subtle evocation of one compelling melodramatic image (Clarissa being raped) has made a character-plot-theme interpretation of the story plausible; and this interpretation attempts to swallow active temporality, attempts to put "time" and its uncertainties out of play. Little wonder that, several pages after Clarissa's letter to Morden, Belford reports to Lovelace that Clarissa has chosen to adorn her casket with the device of "a crowned serpent, with its tail in its mouth, forming a ring, the emblem of eternity" (IV, 257).

The earliest readers of *Pamela* and *Clarissa* rarely failed to remark on a particular property of Richardson's art: its power to engage its reader in its fictional illusions. In writing *Clarissa*, Richardson took steps to heighten the reader's sense of the autonomous reality of the characters and the immediacy of the story: he writes a novel in letters where we are given moment-to-moment first-person narratives; he creates a very circumscribed role for the editor, a love story to engage attention, and a wayward heroine to stir up debate. Most importantly, Richardson publishes the novel in three widely spaced installments (of two volumes, two volumes, and three volumes), and this encouraged readers to imagine or invent an ending of their own. As Richardson explains to one correspondent, "You and others . . . by Reason of the distant Publication of two Volumes, and two Volumes, have formed from the Four a Catastrophe of your own; and are therefore the more unwilling to part with it, in favour of that which I think from the Premises the only natural one" (SL, 103; December 15, 1748).

The second installment takes the reader down to the fire scene, Clarissa's escape from Sinclair's, and Lovelace's discovery of her whereabouts. Between April 1748, when the second installment was published, and the Fall of 1748, when the final installment is published, many readers were busy imagining ways that the story of Lovelace and Clarissa might end. By October rumors of a tragic ending reach a woman named Lady Bradshaigh, so she writes to Richardson incognito under the name "Belfour," to appeal for a happy ending. We do not have space to linger over the remarkable charm, wit, and intelligence "Belfour" brings to bear on this question, in her extensive correspondence with Richardson. In writing she is protecting her own very passionately sustained ideas of what Lovelace and Clarissa are, and what they can become. She even refuses to read the remainder of the novel, if Richardson should let Clarissa die. The author sends "Belfour" the fifth volume, where the rape occurs, and Belfour's suffering, upon reading this volume, and in reading the last two volumes, seems to echo that of the heroine she adores: "My spirits are strangely seized, my sleep is disturbed; waking in the night, I burst into a passion of crying; so I did at breakfast this morning, and just now again" (C, IV, 242).

The fifth volume read, it did not take much of Belfour's imagination to see that Richardson was sending his story toward a tragic conclusion. Belfour is shocked by the rape, but she quickly rallies to offer Richardson her revision of the anticipated ending. Here is Belfour's proposal; this ingenious piece of interpretation and composition saves Lovelace and Clarissa from the disaster the rape seems to portend:

Suppose Clarissa, after having been brought to the verge of the grave by the ill treatment she has received; suppose she should, by using proper means, assisted by her own divine reflections, and a consciousness of her innocence, so far compose her mind, that she is in a great measure restored to her former state of health, but still steady in her refusal of Lovelace; upon which, he, being overwhelmed with grief, remorse, and self condemnation, is thrown into a dangerous fever, or any other illness, so as to make his life despaired of. At the desire of a dying man, the good Dr. Lewen intreats and prevails with compassionate Clarissa to make him a visit, as a charitable act. (What an interesting scene might you there introduce!) He endeavours to excite her pity and forgiveness. She promises him her prayers, and a second visit; when we will suppose him given over by his physicians, and in all appearance very near his end; and, after receiving the communion together, as a token of their perfect charity to each other, would the following request be inconsistent with his present circumstances? That she would condescend, in her great charity and goodness, to suffer Dr. Lewen to join their hands, that he might have the blessing and satisfaction of dying her husband; which would enable him to bear with greater resignation, the tremendous change just now commencing; and, as he should think himself united to her spotless soul, he might hope, as a part of it, to be admitted into the awful presence of the great God, whom for some time past he has worshipped with as much zeal, as she once kindly wished him to do. Might not this move her to comply, at least to a promise of marriage in case of his recovery? From which promise, by proper care and application, his disorder may take an unexpected turn, and he be restored to life, to health, and to Clarissa. What joy must she feel to have so much good in her power, to perform at her will!

Methinks I see her his wife, or wife elect, kindly attending and administering means for his recovery, (which we will imagine for some time doubtful); he eagerly receiving it, as draughts of life from her hands. This goodness is accompanied with her constant and fervent prayers for the success of such means, which, if they prove effectual, may establish them in mutual and uninterrupted happiness; I see her resentment over, her stifled love returning with double force; with the

addition of an esteem for him, to which, from his former demerits, she was before a stranger. (C. IV, 205)

Belfour's suggested ending is not only outrageously sentimental. It is also an ingenious way to undo the damage of the rape, return the story to the comic-romantic possibilities of the proposal scenes, and then exploit those possibilities. By going to the verge of death, and then recovering her health, Clarissa does not regain her lost virginity, but she does earn back a semblance of wholeness and purity. Lovelace's illness is a penalty for his evil deeds and a way to do penance for them. Dr. Lewen's appeal, Clarissa's Christian charity, and Lovelace's weakened state combine to bring the estranged lovers together on his deathbed. By taking communion with Clarissa, Lovelace acknowledges the power of religion. This represents a victory for the values Clarissa has always championed and shows that Lovelace has finally embarked on the journey toward reformation she had always planned for him. At this point in the story, Belfour shows herself to be a mistress of sentimental invention. She uses the chief obstacle to reformation — the evil of the rape — to add poignancy to Lovelace's request that she marry him on his deathbed. For only with Clarissa as his mediator with God can he have hopes of heaven. When his health takes "an unexpected turn" for the better, Lovelace is "restored to life, to health, and to Clarissa." But something very important has changed. Power relations are completely inverted from what they were before the rape. Clarissa is no longer an encircled victim. She is a gentle, but masterful, physician who labours to heal Lovelace's body and soul. He is "eagerly receiving" her care, "as draughts of life from her hands." Clarissa is safe to feel redoubled "love" and a new "esteem," because she has become the angelic guarantor of Lovelace's permanent reformation. This ending qualifies Belfour's deepest wishes. She adores Clarissa and confesses to being "fond" of Lovelace, and has imagined him "a faultless husband" of Clarissa, "up to my heart's wish" (C, IV, 190-91; October 10, 1748). Belfour's proposed ending gives Clarissa a position of unquestioned glory and mastery, such that Belfour can save and enjoy Lovelace, in fantasy, through Clarissa.

What does Belfour's ending do to the text? While Belfour was writing this letter, the sixth and seventh volumes were moving through the presses. In those volumes Clarissa is busy perfecting a very different design. We have seen that Clarissa's acceptance of death, and her construction of a book around the event, enables her to confer a special value on all the earlier events of her life. Now the rape is the decisive center of her story, and all the events before the rape take their value, as causes and effects, in relation to the rape. Belfour has worked in a very similar way. By contriving to marry Lovelace and Clarissa, the rape is not the critical event in Clarissa's life. Instead, it is merely the last in a long succession of trials, building toward a climactic reversal in the protagonist's deathbed marriage.

In designing things this way, Belfour merely reactivates the comic strata of the text that Clarissa worked to put out of play: the romantic evocations of the initial situation, the battle of the sexes, and the openings toward love and marriage. Belfour also offers resistance to Clarissa's willingness to die, her melancholy tendency to find a "strange fatality" in her life, and the whole pattern of meaning and virtue she uncovers there. Belfour's proposed ending puts her on the same side of this issue as characters like Anna, Belford, Lovelace, and others, who labor to win a reconciliation through marriage. All were perfectly aware that marriage was the one event which could atone for the violence of the rape. Ironically, Lovelace wishfully imagines something very close to Belfour's resolution — with Clarissa rushing back to him during his serious illness (IV, 297). Belfour was not the only reader of the novel who felt the story could and should end in marriage. Colley Cibber and Henry Fielding are only the most eminent of a host of readers who advised Richardson to end the novel happily.

In writing her suggested ending to the story, Belfour feels she is offering Richardson a way to perfect his own artwork. Belfour communicates this idea with firmness and grace in the paragraphs that follow her suggested ending. The metaphor and myth she employs to explain the artist's activity will give us a deeper understanding of Belfour's response to *Clarissa*:

I know not whether the above scheme be new or not, but it appears to me very delightful. I said before, I did believe you had a noble one within you; I wish you would produce it, though sure I am it would make all I have produced appear like nothing.

You are in love with your image as it is, and you will still be more so, by giving it additional and enlivening graces. A picture, by being touched and retouched by an unskillful hand, might be defaced and spoiled; but a master must, by each stroke, add a new beauty, and heighten his piece.

Can you be in love, and be pleased with the death of what you love? It is not in nature; nor can you be a *perfect Pygmalion* without giving *life* to your image. (C, IV, 206)

Now we can see the subtlety of what Belfour has done. She offers a revised ending of *Clarissa* — one that is comic, affirmative, and conciliatory — and then she gently backs off, giving Richardson back his brush, as if to say, But really, I've just been showing you one way to save Clarissa and Lovelace — it is you, the "master," who must add new touches to your portrait so as to complete your own scheme. Belfour

assumes the role of a solicitous advisor who sees that Richardson has a "noble" design "within" him but fears he is in danger of losing it. She tempts and woos Richardson toward a revised ending by comparing him to a master painter. He must add brush strokes to retouch and "heighten" an image that is almost complete. The analogy is significant, because the very slightness of brush strokes makes this activity seem innocent. Belfour has offered an imperfect model for a new ending. If done properly, a new ending will not deface but enliven. It will be a supplement which will complete or perfect the image Richardson has *already* sketched. This helps us to reassess the meaning of Belfour's proposed ending. It is less a plausible conclusion to the story than an interpretation of the text. Thus Belfour claims to understand, and wishes to determine, what the text is. She has read the first five volumes with consummate attention. She feels that the love, marriage, and good feelings invoked by the novel are more important than the violence and ill will that add shades of darkness to the story — so, she constructs her ending accordingly. Her ending takes the form of a natural-looking temporal sequence which takes what seems to breach the text, and threaten her life in the story (the rape), and incorporates it into a new fictional design where the whole range of her affective attachments might dwell again. Belfour looks upon this ending the way Richardson looks at his — it is "from the Premises the only natural one." Like most interpreters, they pretend not to have added anything to the text that is not, in some sense, already there. Of course, Richardson and Belfour are each keenly aware of the importance of winning this struggle. Both expect their ending to be a crucial increment — one which will have the power to control the meaning of the whole text.

III

There are several reasons Richardson is more than happy to involve himself with the responses of early readers, such as Belfour and Aaron Hill. He takes the magnitude of their involvement as a complement to his own art. He also is anxious to attend to the details of their response because his modulation of that response will be of crucial import in his program to soften and reform the hearts of his readers. Thus, when Aaron Hill "misreads" an early handwritten copy of *Clarissa*, Richardson spends a year revising the text for publication. When Belfour urges a happy ending to the story, Richardson opens an extensive correspondence designed to explain the reasons for the ending he has composed, an ending he is sure will satisfy every attentive reader. Sometimes Richardson's defense of his ending takes on an urgent personal tone — with himself cast in the role of the gallant protector of Clarissa. After the second installment, he writes Aaron Hill:

I intend another sort of happiness for my heroine, than that which was to depend upon the will and pleasure, and uncertain reformation of a vile libertine to whom I could not think of giving a lady of such excellence — And to rescue her from a rake, and give a triumph to her not only over him but over all her oppressors, and the world besides, in a triumphant death — I thought as noble a view, as it was new. (SL, 87; April 10, 1748)

When the completed novel is delivered to the public and readers *still* persist in asserting a misguided understanding of the novel, a new tone of irritation enters Richardson's correspondence. At best, these readers are guilty of flagrant inattention to the novel's design; at worst, an immoral admiration for Lovelace. Richardson meets this challenge to his art by carrying out significant changes in the body of *Clarissa*. These modifications come in two waves. In April 1749, six months after releasing the final installment of the first edition, Richardson publishes a second edition that includes footnotes and a long index summary of the novel, placed at the beginning of the text. Over the next two years, serious "errors" of reading continue, so in the Spring of 1751 Richardson publishes a third edition that weaves two hundred pages of additional material into the text.

What is Richardson doing in contriving these addenda to his novel? In large degree, arguments against marrying advanced by Clarissa late in the novel, and arguments advanced by Richardson to justify his ending, are simply "read back" into the earlier action. These addenda give new rigidity and clarity to the character of the characters (Clairissa's virtue, Lovelace's evil), place new emphasis on Lovelace's plots so as to increase his apparent control over the action, and repeat certain morals that may be adduced from the story (the need for parental discretion, a child's obedience, and a woman's watchfulness). All this helps to condemn Lovelace, clear Clarissa, and justify the final form of Richardson's novel. But the revisions also have important consequences for the temporality in the text. For through these addenda, the past is redefined in terms of its future; the past is scattered with evidence, reasons, and causes for subsequent events; and gradually, an aura of necessity, a melancholy but ultimately reassuring fatality, overtakes the reader's sense of the relationship between the text's past and its subsequent future. With the pressure of these changes, Richardson tries to attenuate the volatility of certain earlier dramatic moments — where the sheer force of agents contending seemed capable of transforming (in any one of several ways) the novel's entire social configuration.

No moments are more critical for the "futures" of this text than the three genuine proposal scenes. This is why Richardson directs his most subtle corrective surgery at the moments of genuine proposal; the

elaborateness of these efforts is the surest evidence of the immense generative potential of these moments. The proposal scenes are, in the most literal sense, the moments of "crisis" in this text: they are "turning points," as in the progress of a disease, the motion of the stars, or any course of action which has "decisive importance for the issue of the event" (life/death, success/failure, etc.). It is in the proposal scenes that the density of the text's potential futures reaches its apogee: it is this scene, in its various forms, which becomes a critical, or interpretive, crux for the many readers of Clarissa's situation both inside and outside the book. If one remembers the etymological affiliations between "crisis," "critical," and "critic," it will seem appropriate that the "critic" or interpreter of this story bring his judgment and discernment to bear here. Little wonder that when an interpreter like Belfour sets out to change the shape of the fiction, she directs her compositional invention at precisely this point in the text. Belfour finds an ingenious way to satisfy her own desire and make the text her own, even after the rape. In her proposed ending, she re-enacts the proposal scene on Lovelace's deathbed, changing Clarissa's book-long negative to a "yes." But because the desire of different interpreters keeps converging on this scene, it becomes difficult for any one "critic" to convincingly control this moment of "crisis" for very long.

How does Richardson labor to overcome the disequilibrium the proposal scenes engender? He adds a long new proposal scene, very early in the Clarissa-Lovelace transactions (II, 75-84, 98-100). In some ways, this proposal scene is very similar to the three proposal scenes in the first edition — scenes that come later in the story and which we have already examined. But in certain subtle ways this scene is decisively different. And these differences embody important evidence of the way Richardson works to modify his own text. The "proposal" comes rather unexpectedly, while Lovelace and Clarissa are arguing about whether she should assume control of her grandfather's estate (Lovelace argues "yes," Clarissa "no"). Clarissa's narrative of this scene communicates her skepticism about the very frail methods of Lovelace's proposal:

he urged me to make a demand of my estate.

He knew it, I told him, to be my resolution not to litigate with my father.

Nor would he put me upon it, he replied, but as the *last* thing. But if my spirit would not permit me to be *obliged*, as I called it, to anybody, and yet if my relations would refuse me my own, he knew not how I could keep at that spirit without being put to inconveniences which would give him infinite concern — unless — unless — unless, he said hesitating, as if afraid I *could* speak out — unless I would take the only method I *could* take to obtain the possession of my own.

What is *that*, sir?

Sure the man saw by my looks, when he came with his creeping *unleses*, that I guessed what he meant. Ah, madam! can you be at a loss to know what that method is? They will not dispute with a *man*, that right which they would contest with *you*.

Why said he with a *man*, instead of with *him*? Yet he looked as if he wanted to be encouraged to say more.

So, sir, you would have me employ a lawyer, would you, notwithstanding what I have ever declared as to litigating with my papa?

No, I would not, my dearest creature, snatching my hand, and pressing it with his lips — except you would make *me* the lawyer.

I blushed. The man pursued not the subject so ardently, but that it was more easy as well as more natural to avoid than to fall into it. Would to Heaven he might, without offending! But I so overawed him! (*Overawed* him — *your* notion, my dear Anna.) And so the overawed, bashful man went off from the subject, repeating his proposal that I would demand my own estate, or empower some man of the law to demand it; if I *would not* (he put in) empower a happier man to demand it. (II, 75-76)

As before, Clarissa is nettled by Lovelace's way of bringing up marriage: she suggests he leave her presence immediately so she may be reconciled with her family. Her motive: "I was willing to try whether he had the regard to *all* my previous declarations which he pretends to have to some of them." Thus, the chess game goes forward: Lovelace uses his early promise not to mention marriage as a way of embarrassing Clarissa; Clarissa uses his vow to leave her presence as a way to upset Lovelace. Other similarities are apparent: in this scene, the protagonists have evidently drifted into the topic of marriage almost accidentally; Clarissa begins feeling some embarrassment but ends quite angry; Lovelace begins in control but then drifts into a state of rapture, where he offers himself to Clarissa unequivocally; finally, both of the protagonists' narratives are hostile to the opening toward marriage their accounts disclose.

But even before considering Lovelace's account of this scene, certain significant differences between this proposal scene and the others are evident. Throughout this scene, Clarissa never loses her air of detachment and control. She is in the early stages of her relationship with Lovelace, so she displays none of the emotional entanglement which disturbs her assurance later. Also, her situation has not yet taken on the

aspect of an urgent personal crisis. She still has not heard about her father's curse. This is one reason Clarissa never loses control in this scene. Lovelace's allusion to marriage only provokes a single blush. She is never hushed with thought or paralyzed with indecision, so there does not seem to be any genuine potential for a sudden reorganization of this independent woman into Lovelace's bride.

Richardson's new proposal scene works a complementary change in Lovelace. His opening allusion to marriage is exceedingly circumpect, and when he finally does feel unequivocal rapture before Clarissa, he never actually mentions marriage. But more significantly, Lovelace's rapture has taken on a completely different tone and value. In other moments of proposal, Clarissa's dramatic art intersects with Lovelace's penchant for adorning the object of his desire, and, at this moment, Clarissa is experienced as someone of overpowering beauty, capable of reconciling opposites effortlessly. This experience induces Lovelace's awe, stillness, and passivity. He suddenly wants to assimilate himself to Clarissa. This leads to a heartfelt proposal. But in this scene, Clarissa's gestures and statements trigger his physical desire to possess, and even swallow, the heroine. When Lovelace reproaches Clarissa for having nothing but "kind thoughts" for her family, while she judges Lovelace very strictly, Clarissa responds, "Excuse me, *good* Mr. Lovelace (waving my hand and bowing), that I am willing to think the best of my father. Charming creature! said he, with what a bewitching air is that said! — And with a vehemence in his manner, would have snatched my hand" (II, 76). Clarissa reports that, a bit later, "snatching my hand . . . his behavior was so strangely wild and fervent that I was perfectly frightened. I thought he would have devoured my hand" (II, 80-81). At these moments, Lovelace's rapture is neither still nor silent. He becomes a ranter who uses all the over-inflated language of the heroic drama to proclaim Clarissa's powers and offer himself to her:

Darkness, light; light darkness; by my soul! — just as you please to have it. O charmer of my heart! Snatching my hand, and pressing it between both his, to his lips, in a strange wild way, take me, take me to yourself; mould me as you please; I am wax in your hands; give me your impression, and seal me for ever yours. We were born for each other! — you to make me happy, and save a soul — I am all error, all crime. (II, 80)

With the "restoration" of this fantastic language to the text, Richardson does his best to show his readers that Lovelace is not the man to make a suitable husband for a nice girl like Clarissa.

The turbulent course of this scene also invites the reader to wonder about Lovelace's actual disposition towards Clarissa. At the end of her letter to Anna, Clarissa guides the reader in formulating suspicions:

Yet you see he but touches upon the edges of matrimony neither. And that at a time, generally, when he has either excited one's passions or apprehensions; so that one cannot at once descend. But surely this cannot be his design. And yet such seemed to be his behavior to my sister, when he provoked her to refuse him, and so tamely submitted, as he did, to her refusal. But he dare not — (II, 81)

Suspensions of Lovelace's behavior are deepened by Clarissa's next letter, which is part of the same third edition "restoration." There Clarissa informs Anna that Lovelace is suddenly polite, pliant, and willing to follow all her orders. He presents Clarissa with kind letters from his relatives. After quoting his speeches Clarissa pointedly asks Anna, "What think you, Miss Howe? Do you believe he can have any view in this?" (II, 83). The reader of this "restored" proposal scene may still be in doubt as to Lovelace's motives. But Lovelace's narrative of this scene, in a "restored" letter to Belford, gives a precise explanation of the events of the proposal scene and some ominous answers to Clarissa's questions (II, 98-100). Lovelace's tempestuous enthusiasm for Clarissa is not a momentary passion — it is attributed to a relentless desire for the lady, which must be satisfied. When Clarissa defends her father with a charming gesture, Lovelace writes, "I could hardly forbear taking her into my arms on it. . . . So much wit, so much beauty, such a lively manner. . . . O Belford! she must be nobody's but mine." Lovelace compares himself with the most determined and desperate lovers of the past: "I can now account for and justify Herod's command to destroy his Mariamne, if he returned not alive from his interview with Caesar"; Clarissa's panic is like that of "Semele . . . when the Thunderer . . . was about to scorch her to a cinder." The magnitude of this passion almost drives Lovelace to a rape: "had I not, just in time, recollected that she was not so much in my power but that she might abandon me at her pleasure, having more friends in that house than I had, I should at that moment . . . have decided all" (II, 98). Through the subtle art of Richardson's "restorations," the proposal is no longer a moment that opens the participants onto new futures. Instead, Lovelace is a confirmed libertine and schemer who is determined to achieve Clarissa's seduction. A series of remarks, made while Lovelace is describing the scene, demonstrates how he is pushing the present toward an apparently inevitable catastrophe:

- He makes a wish: "Lord send us once happily to London!"
- He makes a prediction: "I saw she was frightened; and she would have had reason had the scene been long, and that place in London

which I have in view" (he'll have his way at Sinclair's).

He analyzes the consequences of Clarissa's caution: "But, O Belford! had she had but the least patience with me; had she but made me think that she would forgive this initiatory ardour; surely she will not always be thus guarded" (thus, if she relents at all, he'll get her).

He reflects on his own loss of control: "It is exceedingly difficult, thou seest, for an honest man to act in disguises; as the poet says, *Thrust Nature back with a pitchfork*, it will return" (this makes Lovelace's love for Clarissa a "drive" which must eventually express itself).

He feels a surge of anger and revenge: "Curse upon her perverse tyranny! How she makes me wait for an humble audience. . . . A prince begging for her upon his knees should not prevail upon me to spare her if I can get her to London — Oons! Jack, I believe I have bit my lip through for vexation! But one day *hers* shall smart for it."

He may decree her fate: "Nor . . . would the presence of her Norton, or of her aunt, or even of her mother, have saved the dear creature had I decreed her fall."

After his outburst, his plan takes another turn: he acts kind and conciliatory. Since he has "stepped out of the *gentle*, the *polite* part I had so newly engaged to act, I thought a ready obedience was the best atonement. . . . I was resolved to sacrifice a leg or arm to make up all again, before she had time to determine upon any new measures."

The violence of Lovelace's language indicates something about Richardson's retrospective interpretation of the proposal scene. He has begun to superimpose the rape scene on the proposal scene — and of course this is fully compatible with Clarissa's final interpretive position. Now the proposal scene is made to look like a tormenting and manipulative detour on the way to the rape. This whole scene, and these passages from Lovelace's letter, involves Richardson in a massive intervention in the text of Clarissa. By attributing this kind of language to Lovelace, Richardson tries to make all that subsequently happens seem pre-ordained.

Why does Richardson interpolate this long new proposal scene into the text? This proposal scene is not a genuine proposal scene; it is counterfeit. It is not a moment of crisis or play. It could not invent or disclose a new future for the protagonists. This counterfeit proposal scene bears the same relationship to the genuine proposal scenes which follow it that a simulation bears to a space shot. It is designed to turn an open-ended event into a repeatable, predictable, comprehensible process — where Lovelace's designing ways and malevolent passions interact with Clarissa's entirely justifiable "delicacy" to create the impasse that leads to disaster. With this simulated proposal scene, Richardson gives the reader a (false) guide to reading and interpreting the proposal scenes which follow. To compose this counterfeit proposal, Richardson has had to parody elements of his own text. He does this to diminish the force, the authority, and the disruptive potential of the original proposal scenes.

There is another way to state what Richardson is doing. All of his addenda work to replace one kind of temporality with another. There is an active temporality in the text of Clarissa which is the result of the collision of the opposing interpretive positions sustained by the protagonists in struggle. This temporality is discontinuous from one moment to the next; it is essentially unpredictable; it is able to accommodate either member of a simple stark alternative — like the choices between marriage and death, or "yes" and "no" which organize the proposal scenes. This kind of temporality is contingent, suspenseful, and uncertain. It is not based on the model of a sequence of self-present moments. But as Richardson begins to (try to) close down the struggles of interpretation, and as he offers his own interpretation of this text, we find him trying to organize his text with a very different type of temporality. Here temporality is the stabilizing and intelligible process we associate with the unfolding of a course of action or the development of knowable subjects. As with Richardson's "restorations" to the text of Clarissa, this second kind of temporality belongs to a single authoritative moment of retrospective interpretation. It holds few surprises because it is an adjunct to the act of explanation. From this standpoint, the different possibilities active in the temporality of the past just fade into a sequence of fateful-looking events.

IV

We have narrated a sequence of presentations and representations of one scene — the scene where Clarissa and Lovelace meet and struggle around the possibilities opened by a proposal. By analyzing this sequence of interpretations, we hope to respond to this question: what is the relationship between the active destabilizing interpretation of a proposal and interpretation as the construction of a secure habitation for the interpreter. Our response to this question will allow us to propose two

other related ideas about interpretation: interpretation can never have the final authority which we associate with an ideal epistemology based upon an adequation between an interpretation and the object interpreted, and because of this, interpretation is interminable.

Let us revisit our sequence of overlapping interpretations. For Clarissa and Lovelace the proposal is suddenly there in their midst as a "real" possibility. They react to it as an intrusion, and they work to repress the "yes" that appears within each and to conceal the "yes" that has appeared outside (for Lovelace, in Clarissa's compliant bewilderment; for Clarissa, in Lovelace's urgent proposal). They do this by constructing a representation of the scene as a pure sequence of "nows" such that the multiple possibilities in each moment are obscured. But Richardson's correspondent Belfour sees and exploits these possibilities. For her, Richardson's proposed ending — rape for Clarissa and death for her and heroine — seems like a perversion of the story's proper course. Belfour's proposal involves an aggressive revision of the Clarissa-Lovelace encounter. For while her proposal activates some of the dormant possibilities of the text, it suppresses others (Clarissa's self-centeredness and masochism, Lovelace's pride and cruelty, and the sheer violence of the rape). Belfour's ending tries to conceal and overcome all these resistances to her reading in waves of sentimental rapture. Richardson, in his turn, experiences Belfour's interpretation as a violation of "his" text. In response he invents his counterfeit proposal scene so as to turn Lovelace into a fiend, the proposal into a calculated act of manipulation, and the whole course of the Clarissa-Lovelace relationship into a predictable temporal sequence. Corrective surgery for the "inside" of the text enables Richardson to anticipate and forestall the wayward steps of "outside" readers. But to do this, Richardson, like Clarissa, Lovelace, and Belfour before him, has had to repress and conceal the genuine possibilities we found in the first genuine proposal scene.

But by writing a "case-history" of the interpretation of Clarissa and Lovelace's situation at the moment of proposal, I too am weaving a representation of a stable temporal sequence. For the articulation of these moments of proposal — no matter how unstable I assert each to be — is itself a temporal sequence that, through an act of representation, seems to make them present and accessible, so they take an aura of necessity. And this activity traces the inscape of a habitation for my interiority to come to rest. It makes the text of *Clarissa* and its subsequent interpretation the materials out of which to weave my body of interpretation — a body that seems to have incorporated so many of the moments of authenticity and inauthenticity, blindness and insight with which readers write to win authority, that none can avoid being incorporated into this (my) authoritative interpretation of interpretation and authority. But where is my own "other"? What is that which is exterior to the interiority of my interpretation and might compromise its sequential system of

representations? It only *seems* that my argument exists on an entirely different plane than the interpretations I interpret — a level of “objective” descriptions and theoretical concerns. Actually, my analysis is grounded in a series of very human attachments and desires: perhaps, a wish to protect and exalt Lovelace, or to assert the necessity and efficacy of violence. And my interpretation is predicated on a specific understanding of the proposal scene — as a succession of non-present instants that generate radical contingency and genuine play. But I must arrest my discussion here, for I cannot designate the hidden limits of my own discourse, for that is the limit of my discourse.

Let's look more closely at this succession of interpretations so that we may discover the sources and issue of this hectic activity. In each case interpretation seems to have a remarkably personal meaning. Thus all our interpreters begin their activity with a sense of surprise and anxiety as if something uncanny, which they always secretly feared, had suddenly appeared. Thus, Clarissa is surprised by the proposal, Belfour is shocked by the rape. To understand why, it must be remembered that the proposal scene and the rape scene are closely allied in *Clarissa*. Anna Howe urges Clarissa to accept Lovelace's proposal, whatever its form, so as to avoid the catastrophe of seduction or rape. The rape gives the proposal scene an urgent retrospective importance, as the scene where something fateful has happened. But beyond this, and in a more general vein, a rape and a successful proposal have more general similarities: both are suddenly transforming, both are directed at achieving the most intimate intercourse. It is as if Clarissa's encounter with Lovelace, in proposal and rape, is a “primal scene” for each of the interpreters of this text — a moment of violence they are compelled to repeat in their own act of reading. And this is their (and our) “primal scene” because it is here that the parents of each reader (Clarissa and Lovelace) are seen and imagined to be engaged in an act which is fascinating, in that it conceals the mystery of our origin as reader; disturbing, because of its mute violence; pleasurable, because it acts out our desire to appropriate or penetrate the text; and dangerous, because this desire is forbidden. And because this scene is so faint in its outlines — always a remote and dangerous memory — we must elaborate its form and meaning *après coup*, not through a dream but through an interpretation of the text which serves the same purpose as a dream: it tames unconscious material by repeating it in a form that expresses and contains repressed drives, fantasies, and longings.

But how does the interpretation do its work? The interpretation that is woven by each interpreter constructs a textual analogue of repression — a private habitation or dwelling place designed to close out that which must be denied and concealed. But, curiously, the construction of this interior space for the interiority of the interpreter, takes place on the margins of that which is exterior to the interpretation and threatens to challenge its authority. Thus Clarissa and Lovelace construct their

narrative recounting their necessary separation (and eventual rape and death) right next to a nearly accepted proposal that might have transvalued their relationship; Belfour constructs her proposal so as to blot out rape and death by throwing the lovers together in spite of rape, and on the margins of death (Lovelace's deathbed); and Richardson courts the first “misreadings” of his text, in the hope that he can, through calculated revisions, dominate the very positions that challenge the design of his text. And in each case the most careful interpretive work is done — displacement, condensation, and secondary representation — so as to solicit and appear to tame what is just exterior to the interior design of one's own interpretation.

There are some readers of *Clarissa* who might, at this juncture, have wearied of the deft maneuvers of a chain of linked interpreters. Perhaps they might offer this short-cut to an authoritative reading: Since so much ambiguity and complication emerges from multiplying the number of interpreters of this text, simply ignore these interpreters (and, even Richardson himself) and attend to the text itself — the body of language which delivers the story of Clarissa. In the eighteenth century, Joseph Spence urged Richardson to desist from consulting his own friends in the early stages of composing *Clarissa*. Spence even composed an allegory depicting the dangers of exposing Richardson's novel, a chaste and virgin Lady called “Nature,” to the assaults of a petty critic, who appears in the guise of a nasty little French miller called “Art.” More recently, Mark Kinkaid-Weekes has advocated publishing an edition of *Clarissa* based on the first edition — so as to save modern readers from being distracted by addenda to the text designed by Richardson to win his interpretive struggles with the wayward eighteenth-century readers. But by taking a look at a single compositional exchange carried on in the fall of 1746, we will see the difficulty of separating the “inside” of the text of *Clarissa* from the interpretive struggle that goes on “outside” the text.

In the fall of 1746 Richardson sends his close friend and literary advisor, Aaron Hill, an early handwritten copy of *Clarissa*. Hill's response to the manuscript greatly troubles Richardson. Hill imagines Lovelace to be a much more elegant and romantic character than Richardson would wish, and Hill finds Clarissa much more culpable for leaving Harlowe Place with Lovelace than Richardson takes her to be. Richardson is distressed enough to return to the drawing boards to carry out one more extensive revision of the novel. A Lovelace that is too dark makes Clarissa's trust of him, however slight, seem culpable. So Richardson must articulate Lovelace's evil more clearly for the reader, while keeping it hidden from Clarissa. The author hopes this will increase respect for the heroine, while it curtails sympathy for Lovelace. One passage from a letter of Richardson's gives us evidence of the decisive change that has been worked in Lovelace's character. During the Hill-Richardson debates, written a year before publication, Richardson has explained that Lovelace has honorable

intentions in first courting Clarissa: "And in his first letter to his Friend, he acknowledges honourable love; and has no Intention of other, till he finds [Clarissa] in his Power. . . . At the time of his courting her. . . he meant her no Evil" (SL, 81-82; January 26, 1746/7). After a year of revision, in the first published installment Lovelace's first letter to Belford tells of his determination to pursue Clarissa until he has seduced her to "MATRIMONIAL, or EQUAL intimacies" (I, 150). This change allows Richardson to answer one admirer of Lovelace and advocate of a happy ending: "And did you not perceive, that in the very first Letter of Lovelace all those Seeds of Wickedness were thick sown which sprouted up into Action afterwards in his Character? — Pride, Revenge, a Love of Intrigue, Plot, Contrivance!" (SL, 92; October 26, 1748). It is difficult to underestimate the importance of this revision of Lovelace's character. Behind this change, with our knowledge of the first edition, we can catch the outlines of a very different story of Lovelace and Clarissa: one where Lovelace intends "honourable love" when he first courts Clarissa, is frustrated in his marriage proposals by Clarissa's family, only conceives the idea to "test" Clarissa's virtue after the abduction, and frequently lapses away from this plan by proposing quite honestly. He is finally driven to more and more violent means of seduction by the momentum of their struggle. Richardson's revision of Lovelace's character, as perceptible in his first letter, shows the difficulty we confront in trying to find an early authoritative version of the text — a "chaste" text uncontaminated by the struggles of interpretation that engulf *Clarissa*. Here, at a crucial point of the first published edition, in the language with which Lovelace states his opening intentions toward Clarissa, are the traces of Richardson's interpretive rejoinder to Aaron Hill's act of misreading.

Aaron Hill's suggestions during composition and Richardson's revisions put in question the whole possibility of a virgin text, one that might stand apart from the vulgar assertions of readers and authors and simply fulfill a self-identical presence, a disciplined whole that magically reconciles its divergent parts into one essential, inevitable object. The very idea of a virgin text depends upon drawing a boundary between the inside of the text, the text in itself, and all that is outside of the text, and then keeping this boundary secure and inviolate. But if Richardson modifies his own text to meet the problems raised by Hill's suggestions, then Hill's response, and Richardson's counter-response, invade the text, and become part of *Clarissa*. Even if we knew the novel as it was in October 1746, we would not have a text untouched by "extrinsic" concerns such as the reader's reception of the story. For Richardson tells Hill of changes he has made to darken Lovelace even *before* Hill's suggestions:

I once read to a young lady Part of his Character, and then his End; and upon her pitying him, and wishing he had been rather a Penitent, than to be killed, I made him

still more odious, by his heighten'd Arrogance and Triumph, as well as by Vile Actions. (SL, 73; October 29, 1746)

Sometimes it seems Richardson was never *not* doing battle with anticipated misreadings. Even if we were to get back to the very first draft of *Clarissa*, we would not have effaced the presence of a potential reader and his response. Thus Richardson never tired of telling Hill, Lady Bradshaigh, and others that, in composing this piece, he was always determined to "explode . . . that pernicious Notion" now too much abroad, "that a Reformed Rake . . . makes the best Husband" (SL, 73; October 29, 1746). This is the earliest linguistic trace we have of the text of *Clarissa*. It is Richardson's seminal proposal, designed to subvert one of the interpretations of his day. And with this proposal he begins to weave an ample habitation (the novel *Clarissa*) to which others will in turn bring their proposals and around which they will design their own habitations. If one were to strip *Clarissa* of all the acts of proposal and response we have traced, there would be nothing left of the novel. For if this novel may be said to "be" any thing, it "is" this succession of overlapping interpretations.

We are now ready to pose a question of the acts of interpretation we have witnessed: why is it that each effort to make a particular interpretation be authoritative, and hold over time, doesn't work? What makes each act of interpretation unstable? We have seen that each act of reading responds to the urgent (and often obscure) personal needs of the reader. Thus, though the text may remain the "same," the rules for reading steadily change, and the pen that writes the readings of the text passes from reader to reader and generation to generation. And this pen will inevitably be guided by the will and desire of the one who holds it. But in addition, there is a transactional dimension to all these acts of interpretation which seems to encumber the authority of interpretation. For there is a perverse human urge gratified when a reader glides toward his text. He seems impelled to unread and reread the text he confronts. And this urge is both social, in that it engenders transactions with others, and aggressive, in that it takes pleasure from mastering others. For why is Lovelace drawn to Clarissa, or a reader to a text: it is their completeness and independence, their very look of serene detachment, which invite the creeping subduer. And the very effort to enforce closure, by insisting on the virgin purity of the text or Lady, invites suspicion and interrogation: what has been hidden away to create this image of completion and purity? Where are the stress-lines holding this spectacle together, so it seems to simply mean one thing? What very human desires, what vulgar human passions have been satisfied in the construction of this unearthly symmetry and beauty? And with these questions the interpreter mounts the wall of the garden and begins a tour to determine the vulnerable points

of this habitation. And when he has formed his plan, he huris his coiled strength into an act of interpretation (he proposes, he strikes). But in the moment after the strike, the interpreter may be surprised by yearnings as respectable and constructive as the interpretation he has disrupted. He may wish to turn his moment of truth into an institution (like marriage). At this point he does something to enforce a closure of interpretation. He shapes his interpretation to arrest subsequent acts of interpretation by presenting previous acts of interpretation in such a way that the range of all possible acts of interpretation seems to have been exhausted by his text. Clarissa and Richardson are masters at this; and the text you are reading tempts its reader and author with this delusion of mastery. And there may be a moment when this builder of an interpretation will believe he has evaded the sloppy and incessant joust of interpretations by overcoming all previous interpretive positions. And he imagines he's done this by building himself into a whole secure system and body of interpretation. And though he relishes (the memory of) his life of independence (his moment of liberating motion), those who come after will see him as hopelessly tethered to the texts he reads, condemned to repeat its gestures, an ally of the very system of meanings he (thought he) had subverted. Now he has become one who invites new proposals, and new assaults, by still another interpreter.

Once we have carefully observed this rhythm of reading and rereading we are on the way to understanding why the truth-value and authority of these interpretations is radically provisional, and interpretation interminable.⁵ Throughout our analytical narrative of this sequence we have found that interpretation may be a liberating proposal or transgression (and thus, an opening, an unveiling, an act of calculated destruction, a dis-closure); it may also be a way to build an interior space to serve as our habitation (and thus, an enclosure which is constructed to conceal, a permanent institution like marriage or a book). Now we are in a position to note that interpretation does both of these things *at the same time*. Thus Belfour's proposed ending for *Clarissa* is a radical gesture in relation to an earlier "stable" moment of interpretation. Her ending reactivates the radical contingency of the proposal scene, which Clarissa's and Lovelace's narratives attempt to obscure. And Richardson's novel, and the addenda to his novel, offers a cogent challenge to those like Belfour who would sentimentalize the wills and passions that divide men and women, Clarissa and Lovelace. But we have seen that in these interpretations what begins as a beginning, in the sense of an advent and an adventure, ends building a personal habitation of a most constraining design. As even at this moment, with these words, I labor to build a secure habitation to define and enclose, in an unwavering temporal representation, a most unstable and unpredictable act, like interpretation. In each of these cases, what was radical and innovative in relation to an earlier body of interpretation is conservative and repressive in itself; the

very movement that disclosed and activated a new strata of the text — like the unstable temporality of the proposal scene — works to conceal other strata of the text — like Clarissa's inventive desire to die. So an interpretation may exist as a moment of insight for the interpretation it displaces, and a moment of blindness in relationship to itself. And, within this transactional network of interpretations, interpreters will keep coming forward with their ardent proposals, but none will win the authority to dispose of anything; proposals will penetrate and dismantle the habitations they are designed to displace; and interpretation will be interminable — something that keeps allowing us to find things out, without ever becoming a definitive form of knowledge.

SUNY-Buffalo

NOTES

- 1 The theoretical perspectives opened in this article depend in part upon an extensive reading of *Clarissa* advanced in a book-length study forthcoming from Yale University Press (Fall 1979) entitled *Reading Clarissa: The Struggles of Interpretation*.
- 2 I am using the Everyman edition of *Clarissa*, ed. John Butt (London: Dutton, 1932). Volume and page numbers are noted after each quotation. The letters of Lady Bradshaigh and Richardson are from *The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson*, ed. Anna Barbara (London, 1804), 6 vol., and *Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson*, ed. John Carroll (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964), abbreviated C and SL, respectively.
- 3 In order to work out the relationship between temporality and interpretation in *Clarissa*, I have been aided by William Spanos' article, in the Heidegger issue of *boundary 2*, entitled "Heidegger, Kierkegaard, and the Hermeneutic Circle: Toward a Postmodern Theory of Interpretation as Dis-closure," *boundary 2*, 4 (Winter 1976), 455-88. The whole of Division Two of *Being and Time* is valuable here, especially Chapter III, sections 61-66, "Dasein's Authentic Potentiality-For-Being-A-Whole, and Temporality as the Ontological Meaning of Care." Inauthentic temporality as a "pure sequence of 'nows'" is discussed on p. 377 of *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962). Jacques Derrida seems indebted to Heidegger's discussion when considering the same question: see *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976), pp. 66-67.
- 4 All these compositional activities are discussed at great length in the study referred to above in footnote 1.
- 5 In a sense, this concluding paragraph articulates the problematic within which "deconstruction" as a mode of interpretive praxis unfolds. For "deconstruction" is a method of overcoming/living within the (apparent) impasse I have described. But, also, my analysis shows the way in which interpretation has always functioned to challenge (and de-construct) an earlier interpretive position (with proposal, with rape) at the same moment that it builds a position for successive deconstruction. See *Of Grammatology*.

CONTENTS

Revisions of the Anglo-American Tradition: Part I

- PAUL BOVÉ, Introduction: *Nietzsche's Use and Abuse of History and the Problems of Revision* / 1
- EUGENE VANCE, *Chaucer's House of Fame and the Poetics of Inflation* / 17
- MEREDITH SKURA, New Interpretations for Interpretation in *Measure for Measure* / 39
- MARGARET FERGUSON, *Sidney's A Defence of Poetry: A Retrial* / 61
- MICHAEL HAYS, *Reason's Rhetoric: King Lear and the Social Uses of Irony* / 97
- GERALD GILLESPIE, *Scientific Discourse and Postmodernity: Francis Bacon and the Empirical Birth of "Revision"* / 119
- JAMES H. BUNN, *The Tory View of Geography* / 149
- WILLIAM BEATTY WARNER, *Proposal and Habitation: Temporality and Authority in a Scene of Richardson's Clarissa* / 169
- HOMER OBED BROWN, *Tom Jones: The "Bastard" of History* / 201
- C. H. KNOBLAUCH, *Coherence Betrayed: Samuel Johnson and the "Prose of the World"* / 235

JERROLD E. HOGLE, *The Texture of the Self in Godwin's Things As They Are* / 261

THOMAS McFARLAND, *The Place beyond the Heavens: True Being, Transcendence, and the Symbolic Indication of Wholeness* / 283

Contributors / 318

Acknowledgements and Illustrations / 320

EDITOR'S NOTE

Boundary 2 originally planned to issue a special number devoted to revising the Anglo-American tradition, that is, to gathering various Postmodern critical points of view on some central and some not-so-central texts and problems in the still essentially Modernist conception of our "tradition." The very ambition of such a project has defeated it — at least in its original form. We have collected twenty-two essays ranging chronologically from Chaucer to T. S. Eliot and methodologically from phenomenology, through semiotics and Marxism, to deconstruction and archeology. As a result, boundary 2 finds it necessary to issue two separate numbers dealing with this project. Volume VII, No. 2, contains material from Chaucer to the Romantics while Volume VII, No. 3, completes the collection from the Romantics to the Moderns. While we regret any inconvenience this format may pose either to our subscribers or to our contributors — who have been generous and patient throughout — we feel that the need to represent fully the contemporary gathering of Postmodern readings we had commissioned makes some minor inconveniences unavoidable. We certainly hope that our readers agree.