READING RAPE: MARXIST-FEMINIST FIGURATIONS OF THE LITERAL

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And again and again the human race will decree from time to time: "There is something at which it is absolutely forbidden henceforth to laugh."
— Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*

Terry Castle. CLARISSA'S CIPHERS: MEANING AND DISRUPTION IN RICHARDSON'S *CLARISSA*. *Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982.*

Terry Eagleton. THE RAPE OF CLARISSA: WRITING, SEXUALITY, AND CLASS STRUGGLE IN SAMUEL RICHARDSON. *Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1982.*

There is something new in the winds of criticism. It is a shift in theory and away from theory; it involves both an assimilation or recuperation of the language-centered critical theory of the last fifteen years, as well as a call toward concerns that are social, political, and historical. This turn in criticism is marked by two related tendencies: a desire to take account of the concrete realities experienced by men and women inhabiting a particular historical moment; a new concern accorded the fact of suffering. Experiencing one's suffering as scandalous and unjust has been the generative ground and focus of all the world movements of the last two centuries. In socialism, in feminism, in Zionism, in the struggles against racism and imperialism, the unjust suffering of workers, women, Jews, blacks, and third world peoples, is moved to center stage where it becomes the crucial historical drama, and the very epitome of the real. This helps explain the special importance accorded rape in feminism, and in the two books this essay will consider. From Ovid to today's paper, what could be more indisputably "there" than rape; and what could be a more blatant instance of unjust suffering? Little wonder that this social-political criticism sustains an ongoing critical dialogue with recent "theory" that questions its fastidious concerns for method, its self-reflexive turns over the epistemological abyss, and the many forms of biographical, historical, and literary criticism it puts out of play. Most often "deconstruction," as the most rigorous and influential species of theory, draws the most intense fire on these issues.[1]

Into the juncture between a theoretically advanced criticism, and a social-political criticism, have come two new books on Richardson's monumental eighteenth century novel *Clarissa*: Terry Eagleton's *The Rape of Clarissa: Writing, Sexuality and Class Struggle in Samuel Richardson* and Terry Castle's *Clarissa's Ciphers: Meaning and Disruption in Richardson's* Clarissa. If what happens at this locus is to be more than a mere regression to old, less rigorous ways of thinking and reading literature and culture, if we are to have more than bad reading in a good cause, the how's and why's and wherefore's of this practice of criticism, as well as of the theory of that practice, will be decisive. This set of questions gives these books an added register of significance. Both of these books advance the study of Richardson and eighteenth-century literature; but they also explicitly engage more general theoretical questions about the way reading should take place. They do so effectively because both books are written by critics in touch with contemporary theory; each is carefully conceptualized and vividly written. The renewed interest in Richardson their work heralds is both the effect of, and an incitement to, a turn toward a more social and political criticism.

We can focus our critical attention upon these books by noting that they rest at the intersection of two particular debates. The first is a debate unfolding of late within feminism about the meaning of rape and the way feminists should read rape. Susan Brownmiller's book *Against Our Will* helped make rape a pervasive metaphor, perhaps *the* master metaphor, for defining the violation of woman by patriarchy. But most recently the work of a number of feminists — Diana George, Helen Hazen, and Nina Auerbach — is challenging this position by arguing, either directly or indirectly, that all representations of rape are not equivalent to the crime of rape. They do not see rape as a single virtual reality, but as multiple and heterogeneous. Thus they argue that rape has an important role in individual and collective life as myth, imagination, and fantasy.[2] The second is perhaps the oldest epistemological issue in criticism. It is at issue in both practical and theoretical criticism, and is of urgent consequence to Marxism, feminism, and deconstruction: how does a reader of literature construe the relationship between art and life, the sign and the referent, the text and "the world"? In the essay review which follows, I will show why these two debates are really aspects of the same debate, and why rape would assume new imaginative resonance in the plot of these readings. For what sets these two readings apart from earlier criticism of *Clarissa* is the pivotal place each accords the rape of Clarissa. Each makes use of a certain idea of rape for an appropriation of "theory" for a new reading formation that is social and political in its reference, and finally moral in its goals. Since this idea of rape is native to a broad segment of feminist thought, it is to this reading of rape that I will turn first.

The Moral Inscription of Rape as the Figure of the Literal

Terry Castle explains the particular pertinence of Clarissa's rape to feminism and her reading.

> *Clarissa's powerlessness . . . models in little a historical condition of women in patriarchal cultures. Her linguistic oppression is linked to other sorts of oppression: economic, social, psychological — and most basically — vulnerability to physical abuse, archetypically confirmed in the ancient violence of rape itself. [Rape] points to a larger, multileveled pattern of sexual and political exploitation . . . . As Susan Brownmiller has suggested, rape in fact implicitly underpins patriarchal society because it at once asserts and enforces — on all levels — the ideology of male supremacy. The quintessential act of violence against women, it is that hidden physical threat held over the woman who tries, wittingly or unwittingly, to overstep any of the fundamental restrictions on her power — in any arena.* [116–17]

If rape figures and explains so much of woman's oppression, then it is easier to understand why *Clarissa* has become a crucial text for feminism. For while there are many seductions in literature, there are few rapes of a heroine outside romance. And the centrality of

[1] *For an example of critical comments on "deconstruction" from this point of view by two influential critics, see the introductory chapters of Fredric Jameson's* The Political Unconscious *[(Ithaca: Cornell, 1981), 17–18]; and Edward Said's* The World, the Text, and the Critic *[(Cambridge: Harvard, 1983), 3–5]. But it is far from clear that this shift toward the social and political is not compatible with unexplored aspects of the theory it seems to displace. So while this shift is led by several strands of feminism, and a resurgent Marxist criticism, it is also at work in Derrida's own study of institutions, his founding of an International School of Philosophy, and the theoretical work done by him in this area. My deep thanks to Devon Hodges for her subtle critique of this paper before its final revision.*

[2] *Diana Hume George, "The Myth of Mythlessness and the New Mythology of Love: Feminist Theory on Rape and Pornography,"* enclitic *4.2:29–45; Nina Auerbach,* Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth *[Cambridge, Mass.: 1982]; Helen Hazen,* Endless Rapture: Rape, Romance, and the Female Imagination *[New York: 1983].*

rape to feminism helps to explain why Castle and Eagleton would shape feminist readings of *Clarissa* in terms of the rape—and why their very titles would announce the way their readings of *Clarissa* are inscribed in the scene of Lovelace's rape of Clarissa.

But why does Castle separate rape from other forms of violence and oppression in the social sphere and call it "the most basic," the "archetypically confirmed" and "quintessential" act of violence against women? We can answer this question, and gauge the effects for feminism of this special positioning of rape, by turning to what is perhaps the most influential and comprehensive discussion of rape from a feminist perspective, Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*.

Brownmiller begins by postulating and then describing the "violent landscape" of prehistoric men and women, where "some woman" had a "vision of her right to her own physical integrity, and in my mind's eye I can picture her fighting like hell to preserve it." But, since this heroic early fighter "could not retaliate in kind,"

> *Rape became not only a male prerogative, but man's basic weapon of force against woman, the principal agent of his will and her fear. His forcible entry into her body, despite her physical protestations and struggle, became the vehicle of his victorious conquest over her being, the ultimate test of his superior strength, the triumph of his manhood. Man's discovery that his genitalia could serve as a weapon to generate fear must rank as one of the most important discoveries of prehistoric times, along with the use of fire and the first crude stone axe. From prehistoric times to the present, I believe, rape has played a critical function. It is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear.* [5]

This relation is not an arbitrary historical or cultural construct, but one shaped by biological necessity. "By anatomical fiat—the inescapable construction of their genital organs—the human male was a natural predator and the human female served as his natural prey" [6]. It is so powerful a fact that it undergirds all apparently positive relationships between men and women.

> *But among those creatures who were her predators, some might serve as her chosen protectors. Perhaps it was thus that the risky bargain was struck. Female fear of an open season of rape, and not a natural inclination toward monogamy, motherhood or love, was probably the single causative factor in the original subjugation of woman by man, the most important key to her historic dependence, her domestication by protective mating.* [6]

Through an ingenious movement of her analysis, Brownmiller transports this primitive scene of intimidation into the present, by making the "police-blotter rapists" who commit most of the rapes in our society the agents who provide an insidious service for their law-abiding brothers:

> *On the shoulders of these unthinking, predictable, insensitive, violence-prone young men there rests an age old burden that amounts to an historic mission: the perpetuation of male domination over women by force. The Greek warrior Achilles used a swarm of men descended from ants, the Myrmidons, to do his bidding as hired henchmen in battle. Loyal and unquestioning, the Myrmidons served their master well, functioning in anonymity as effective agents of terror. Police-blotter rapists in a very real sense perform a myrmidon function for all men in our society. Cloaked in myths that obscure their identity, they, too, function as anonymous agents of terror. Although they are the ones who do the dirty work, the actual attentat, to other men, their superiors in class and station, the lasting benefits of their simple-minded evil have always accrued. . . . Rather than society's aberrants or "spoilers of purity," men who commit rape have served in effect as front-line masculine shock troops, terrorist guerrillas in the longest sustained battle the world has ever known.* [228–29]

Helen Hazen, in her recent book *Endless Rapture: Rape, Romance, and the Female Imagination*, is correct in describing Brownmiller's book as a "political tract . . . [whose] purpose is to prove that women have reason to live in fear, due cause to hate, and full justice in fighting back" [Hazen 79]. But it is important to read Brownmiller carefully even if one is skeptical of her tendentious prehistory of sexuality, or the sweeping quality of her claims. For Brownmiller's book first mobilized the imaginative power of rape for a significant spectrum of feminism; and in doing so it evidences a way of reading, an ethos of reading and a tone for reading which operates in the more nuanced reading acts of Eagleton and Castle, and helps to give their reading formation its coherence.[3]

If followed through the arch of its explicit claims, this little narrative gives the scene of rape a certain trans-historical power as a template for reading. If rape defines the relationship between all men and women—not just a rapist and a victim, but between any two intimate people of the opposite sex—if the intimacy between men and women is really founded upon a forgotten but decisive moment of intimidation, where the only alternative to rape was a woman's finding a man to give her body for protection, then this moment of the threat of rape, upheld by men through the ages by their very solicitude for their women's "safety," becomes a very particular kind of master metaphor. It is a metaphor that figures the single real scene for reading the relationship between men and women; a scene where the brutality and seriousness of events forecloses any drift of meaning; a scene where there unfolds a melodrama of meaning which announces its own singularity and literality: here, surely, if anywhere, something means one unequivocal thing. In this scene, nothing of significance is happening but rape. As in all the monumental and tragic and melodramatic scenes of life, meaning here comes to the surface to disclose itself with perfect lucidity. The scene of rape figures the literal. Rape becomes a figure or metaphor that closes down the figural drift of words and language and meaning, or seems to. And the literality of this figure is made more plausible by Brownmiller through her appeal to the very anatomy of men and women. And what meaning does rape figure? All can surely see: it figures the brutal unilateral victimization of women by men.

Now, although the moral rhetoric of such a scene is hardly a mystery, it is worth noting the elements of its representation of social life, because it is the scene both Castle and Eagleton have used as a basis for their reading of *Clarissa* and shapes many other feminist readings as well. Given some loss that brings suffering, then responsibility is located in some controlling Agent; the other, being passive and vulnerable, and thus devoid of responsibility, is the innocent Victim. If those who cause the Victim's suffering take pleasure in this experience, then they are not merely criminal, but Evil. Because of the fundamentally oppositional structure of this scene, there will be a strong presumption that the Victim is Good. Here there are no collaborative, complicitous transactions between two people where what happens is reciprocally shaped. Instead we have sharply polarized roles that produce a moral judgment in any humane observer. The proper way to watch this scene is in a mood of high seriousness, with empathy for the Victim and moral indignation with the Agent. Any observer who takes pleasure in this scene, or is callous enough to adopt a neutral analytical attitude toward it, will be assimilated to the morally contaminated position of the Evil Agent.

A great deal of the power of Brownmiller's positioning of rape comes from the way her book gets rape to multiply and transpose itself so that it becomes the hidden referent and true meaning of a lot of social forms that are not rape: from sexual harassment, to who does

[3]*Some might dispute the central place I am giving Brownmiller's analysis of rape in the present argument, by saying that it belongs to a polemical "first wave" of feminist thinking. But Diana George shows how this idea of rape operates in the conceptual chain by which the "Women Against Pornography" go from their insistence upon rape as the "clear and present danger" to women, through the proposition that "pornography is the theory, rape the practice," to the advocacy of forms of censorship to insure that potential rapists are denied access to pornography. The writings of the feminist theologian Mary Daly also are compatible with Brownmiller's idea of rape, as are the conclusions reached in Monique Plaza's article, "Our Damages and Their Compensation; Rape: The Will Not to Know of Michel Foucault." In exposing the tendentious means by which Foucault becomes an apologist for male rapists, Plaza insists that, "what should be done . . . is to bring contemporary heterosexuality to a position very close to rape, and to take great care not to dissociate them . . . . All of us women have to constitute ourselves as 'the plaintiff' in order to become at last the real counsel for the defense: that is, to defend the victims of oppression, raped women." See* Feminist Issues *1.3 (Summer 1981): 33–34.*

the dishes, to what appears as the antithesis of rape—the institution of marriage. In an analogous fashion Terry Castle gets almost all Clarissa's social experience to read as a version of the kind of violent victimization that finds its final, overt expression in the rape. Castle calls this behavior "hermeneutic violence," the arbitrary imposition of meaning upon another person. This is the central subject of Castle's book, and the pervasive practice of the social sphere that repeatedly violates Clarissa. Included here are the interruptions of her speech and writing, the way she is silenced by those with greater authority or power, the fragmentation of her letters, and finally, and above all, the sort of hermeneutic violence which is practiced on her, when even her dearest friend Anna interprets Clarissa as harboring more feelings of attraction for Lovelace than she dare acknowledge. But surely it is a bit strange to make Clarissa the victim of "silencing" since "she" has managed to put more of her words into the canon of English literature than any other heroine. Within the novel, the whole aim and struggle of the socially or intellectually ambitious is to find a way to interrupt, or intervene in, the great dull concourse of the world. Clarissa and Lovelace, Elizabeth Bennett and Darcy, Dorthea Brooke and Will Ladislaw are heroes and heroines who find different ways to take up this common task of making their "lives" significant.

Rape not only expands to lend an unexpected coherence to the disparate elements of the social terrain Brownmiller explicates or the novel Castle reads. Rape can even define a scene of victimization which makes readers inside the text morally equivalent to readers outside the text. Thus Castle writes about the reading scene around Clarissa's coffin: "As Clarissa dies, then, a multitude of readers are born—her 'Friends,' her enemies, and of course the real reader, who may be friend or enemy" [146–47]. By Castle's interpretation, Clarissa, as sensate victim, lies at the center of a scene, with an open boundary, which expands to encompass each new reader—including me, including you—so each may act one of two pre-assigned roles in the confines of this stark, homogeneous moral drama. Rape as a univocal scene with a self-evident moral meaning lends an analogous coherence to Terry Eagleton's *The Rape of Clarissa.* Rape is catalyst to the struggle carried forward by three partisans and allies: Clarissa Harlowe, Samuel Richardson, and Terry Eagleton. It is to the detailed shape of this triple narrative we will now turn.

A Tale of Three in One

Part of the brilliant readability, and narrative adventure of *The Rape of Clarissa* comes from the way Terry Eagleton tells the story of three protagonists of class struggle, so that each has a pointed significance for the other: Clarissa's heroic and ingenious struggle against the patriarchal system arrayed against her; Richardson's struggle to create a new syntax of thought and feeling in his novels; and Eagleton's own warfare in criticism against liberalism on the one hand and "deconstruction" on the other, on behalf of the historical materialism he champions. The long central section of Eagleton's book is entitled "The Rape of Clarissa," and it is there that we hear Clarissa's story as recounted by Eagleton. In Clarissa's struggle with the Harlowe family, in her "solidarity" with her friend and correspondent Anna Howe, and in her victimization by Lovelace, Clarissa carries the ideals of her class to a scandalous limit. By being willing to die rather than marry the man who has raped her, Clarissa exposes the contradictions between patriarchy and human freedom, between aristocratic license and bourgeois pieties. This death is a public event which is "in a profound sense a political gesture, a shocking, surreal act of resignation from a society whose power system she has seen in part for what it is" [74]. By making herself an "eloquent ideologue of bourgeois pieties," *and* refusing the alliance with the ruling class that *Pamela* had seemed to consolidate, Clarissa's death exceeds the intentions of its author, and the patriarchal ideology he so explicitly endorses. By Eagleton's ingenious interpretation, Clarissa's death, expressing the stark, subversive independence of one eighteenth-century heroine, achieves its full, collective life-affirming meaning, after the fact, through the women's movement of our day [94].

If the life and trials of Clarissa allow her to be powerfully and subversively engaged in the ideological struggles of her day, then Richardson's *Clarissa* becomes a model for Eagleton of the politically engaged text. In the Preface and Postscript to *The Rape of Clarissa* Eagleton represents Richardson and his writings as part of the daring movement by which the emergent bourgeois of the mid-eighteenth century created a new culture to challenge the aristocratic class they were intent on displacing. As printer and editor and novelist Richardson functioned as one of the "organic intelligentsia" (the term is Gramsci's) which will "do more than reflect the interests of those for whom it speaks: it will prove an active force in the very framing of such interests, shaping them into a 'world view' rich and coherent enough to challenge the dominant ideology. [The] organic intellectuals become a focus in which the new class may find its fragmentary impulses united, a medium in which it achieves self-consciousness" [2]. Richardson's novels give him a direct role in the class struggle of his day: "[They] are not mere images of conflicts fought out on another terrain, representations of a history which happens elsewhere; they are themselves a material part of those struggles, pitched standards around which battle is joined, instruments which help to constitute social interests rather than lenses which reflect them. . . . Pamela, Clarissa and Sir Charles Grandison are not only fictional characters: they are also public mythologies, coordinates of a mighty moral debate, symbolic spaces within which dialogues may be conducted, pacts concluded and ideological battle waged." This account makes Richardson a resourceful protagonist whose works helped to effect a "paradigm shift" toward a focusing of values and affect around the nuclear family. There, Richardson can help foster the emergence of "new forms of subjectivity of which the birth of 'childhood,' the hymning of spiritual companionship within marriage and the proliferating cults of 'sentiment' and 'sensibility' are major signs" [14]. Richardson's concern with affecting social practice helps explain why he made his texts the communicating network and medium for arduous debates about the behavior and destiny of his characters. He was ready to sacrifice the production of a "sleek literary product" to participation in "a wider social discourse" from which his art is inseparable part [11–12].

The radical work of both these "stories" receives its full charge and exemplary power in a struggle Eagleton does not merely recount, but actually enacts: his own warfare in criticism against liberalism, "deconstruction," and other less current ideologies, for being guilty of a cavalier criticism of Clarissa. In one way or another most have vitiated the criminality of her rape. In the first half of his essay, Clarissa is analyzed, by turns, in relationship to her "ideology of representation"; the letter as an instance of Derridian "ecriture"; Freud's concept of the fetish; gifts, exchange, and the daughter as construed by both Freud and Levi-Strauss; gold as that which "magically unchanging" triggers transformation (Marx); the "real," the phallus, and the transcendental signifier of Lacan. The very fluency of these paragraph blocks, some brilliant little essays in their own right, the extraordinary range of their native theoretical habitations, and Eagleton's disinclination to subordinate and coordinate them into a single argument, defends his book against focused summary. But this may be less an error than a conscious strategy. For the coherent center of this book, as it emerges in the second half of the central essay, is its spirited defense of Clarissa against those who have, by reasons of perversity, misogyny, or ideology, misread her most cruelly. A certain conceptual drift or overload may advance a very practical aim. If Terry Eagleton's use of theory will allow him to expose and defeat the critical positions of his adversaries, then *The Rape of Clarissa* will have served its purpose.

Near the end of his essay, Terry Eagleton finally gives a clear shape to his reading of *Clarissa* by arranging all the terms he has explored into a series of superimposed dialectical patterns. Thus Clarissa is connected with the letter and body as fetish, a "representational model of truth," a "self-identical self," the values of liberal humanists, and the critic Kinkead-Weekes. In an antithetical relationship to Clarissa stands Lovelace, with all his linguistic fluidity, a "dangerously diffusive self," "epistemological skepticism," "jouissance," "deconstruction," and the critic William Warner. The work of Eagleton's essay is to take us beyond this opposition, to a more advanced third position, from which we will recognize Lovelace, and everything connected with him, as a dangerous "indulgence." Clarissa's system of values, her desire for a unified self, and her position as a fetishistic object for all who behold her, are not affirmed by Eagleton in their own right, but as that which gives her the force to make her dying a revolutionary act. It is that act which makes *Clarissa* a "seamless fetish of a novel alive with subversive force." Through his reading, Terry Eagleton hopes to cement a Marxist-feminist alliance powerful enough to prevail at this critical moment.[4]

[4] *In organizing the initial opposition of Clarissa and Lovelace, Eagleton is, as he at one point hints, indebted to my* Reading Clarissa: The Struggles of Interpretation *[New Haven: Yale, 1979]. See especially chapters one, two, and six.*

In the telling of these three stories, and in folding them into one another, Eagleton practices a distinct form of critical questioning. He does not bring to the text the abstract ontological question, "what is?"; nor does he pose the epistemological questions "what do we know?" or "what can we know?" Instead, Eagleton frames his reading of *Clarissa* through a question that engages specific historical contexts so as to have practical political and social effects: "Out of all the many things that can be said, what now needs to be said?" Thus, this criticism is less an attempt to read literature "for its own sake," if that ever happened, than to make reading a species of political and moral action. Eagleton's triple narrative makes *Clarissa* a representation of this kind of action, Richardson's writing an instance of it, and Eagleton's own critical writing a catalyst to it. In doing so, Eagleton clearly feels he has done archeology in the seldom frequented archives of literary history, so as, in the words of the dust cover, to "reclaim Richardson for our own time." He can only do this by "forging conjunctures between our own moment [of history] and a redeemed bit of the past, imbuing works with retroactive significance so that in them we may better read the signs of our own times" [vii]. This narrative practice perfectly realizes the injunction laid down by Jameson in *The Political Unconscious*, to link the narratives of history and criticism to the single great story of all time.

> *These matters can recover their original urgency for us only if they are retold within the unity of a single great collective story; only if, in however disguised and symbolic a form, they are seen as sharing a single fundamental theme – for Marxism, the collective struggle to wrest a realm of Freedom from a realm of Necessity; only if they are grasped as vital episodes in a single vast unfinished plot: "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles: freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman – in a word, oppressor and oppressed – stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large or in the common ruin of the contending classes."* [The Communist Manifesto] *It is in detecting the traces of that uninterrupted narrative, in restoring to the surface of the text the repressed and buried reality of this fundamental history, that the doctrine of a political unconscious finds its function and necessity.* [(Ithaca: Cornell, 1981), 20–21]

There is a very vivid narrative magic effected by Eagleton's graceful telling of his three stories as moments of one great unfinished story. It gives its reader a bracing sense of mastery, a sense that we are at a lucid center of knowledge, where all of history becomes one scene arranged around the text of *Clarissa*. The artwork is no longer the occasion for isolated aesthetic pleasure, solitary interpretive work, or unfathomable epistemological abysses; instead *Clarissa* suddenly seems capable of propelling us into the performative present of a revolutionary movement that Eagleton's own act of writing makes seem about to begin. And what is happening in that scene and that moment? The rape of Clarissa, and her inventive responses to that rape. A rape of the oppressed by the oppressor; but also the ongoing struggle against this constantly repeated rape, a struggle for liberation which Eagleton's book joins, and calls us all to share.

The Teachers of the Purpose of Existence

In 1982 there was another book published on *Clarissa* which has important implications for a social-political criticism: Terry Castle's *Clarissa's Ciphers*. While Eagleton's book is feminist in its assertions and thematics, it is finally Marxist in design. By contrast, Terry Castle's book is more pervasively and explicitly feminist. But in both their similarities and differences there are deep affiliations between these two readings of *Clarissa* which it will be most useful to articulate. These books define a new reading formation which has a quite distinct set of conceptual commitments, interpretive moves, and affective tonalities. I will try to show how each parameter of this reading formation relies upon interpreting rape as the figure of literal violation. We can investigate this mode of reading by focusing upon the four most telling common elements of these two texts: their way of construing and identifying with Clarissa's victimization within the novel; their stinging rebuke to the mistreatment that they insist Clarissa has suffered at the hands of nearly all previous critics; their subtle use of critical theory to idealize Clarissa and make her the heroine of their readings; and their concept of the relationship between text, criticism, and life that undergirds this criticism and advances goals which are finally moral.

For Terry Castle and Terry Eagleton, the central fact about *Clarissa*, the touchstone of their readings, and what justifies its moral project is Clarissa's suffering. Clarissa's suffering is the text's ultra-real event, the spectacle that compels our attention and calls forth the redressing of wrongs their readings are intended to effect. We have seen that Eagleton responds to this suffering by celebrating the spirit and ingenuity of Clarissa's combat with patriarchy. By contrast, Terry Castle makes Clarissa an exemplary victim of the unbridled, willful, and arbitrary interpretations practiced by everyone around Clarissa.[5] Whether it is Harlowe's determination to bend Clarissa into a marriage that will advance the family fortunes, or Lovelace's plans to seduce and dominate the young heroine, or Anna Howe's fascination with the romantic possibilities of her best friend's situation – each and every one of these characters

constructs an arbitrary interpretation of Clarissa, based less on her nature than on their own will and desire. Although Castle finally attributes this construction to the fundamental violence of interpretation, what initiates and grounds Castle's critical response to *Clarissa* is a heartfelt identification with the trials of its heroine. We can hear the intensity of this sympathy in the first lines of her book, and in the words with which she describes the brutal, silencing effect of Lovelace's rape of Clarissa.

> *One might imagine the present book as gloss for a single line of* Clarissa, *"I am but a cypher, to give him significance, and myself pain." The words are Clarissa's, written at Sinclair's, in the midst of her evil time. And "he" of course is Lovelace – jailer, bogey, courtier – fixer of that intimate, brutal anguish she is made to suffer . . . . Clarissa's startling image – the body as cipher – stays with the reader. Once again, as so often in reading Clarissa, we may feel the heroine has said more than she knows . . . . Clarissa's words register distress. They mark the fact of pain . . . . Clarissa stumbles, half-consciously, on a precise symbol for her bondage. She has become a cipher to Lovelace, a sort of text – and he, her exegete. "Clarissa Harlowe" is but a sign – the letter – from which, obscurely, he takes away significance. She herself receives nothing from this act of penetration – nothing, that*

[5] *See my "Redeeming Interpretation" forthcoming in* Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation.

is, except grief. She remains the subject of his interpretation, without pleasure of power as such: a hermeneutic casualty. [15–16]

Most readers who have followed Clarissa's life and letters with any degree of sympathy will register Clarissa's experience of Lovelace's violation of her as startling and disturbing. But in dramatizing this aspect of the novel, as literally and vividly as she does, Castle makes it like imagining the last moments of the life of a loved one who falls victim to a brutal crime. Terry Castle negates its fictionality and lifts this moment out of the reciprocal exchanges and temporal flow of the novel, so as to give this moment an absolute value as the epitome of Clarissa's life, and woman's suffering. This reification of the rape allows Castle to construe Clarissa's words about her value as carrying a haunting truth, justifies Castle's hermeneutic solicitude, and the comprehensiveness of Castle's identification with the heroine. But this representation of Clarissa's rape also leads to a sustained emotional hyperbole, and a concomitant refusal to read each event within a larger context, and from many points of view. Thus, at the climax of her reading, Castle figures Clarissa's rape as a kind of hermeneutic assassination of the heroine, which expels her from the articulation of meaning: "As Lovelace acts out on her his own triumphant reading, she is herself 'cut off' from the possibility of reading. Her own 'heartfelt' inscription of the world, the fragmentary and poignant interpretation of things which she has tried to produce, and which we have seen replicated in her damaged and disrupted correspondence, is erased entirely" [117–18]. In fact, Clarissa's interpretation of things is never "erased"; the rape does not arrest an interpretive activity which continues even in the torn papers written just after the rape, and builds steadily thereafter. Her violation at Lovelace's hands only enhances the power and effectiveness of that interpretation, where even the assertion of her own worthlessness—"I am but a cipher . . ."—can circulate within a narrative of her story which will increase her influence and value. Clarissa's figure of herself, and the explication of it by which Castle chooses to accept the literal truth of that figure, is based on a calculated exaggeration. If Clarissa's violation can make her seem to be worth nothing, then this will justify a reversal that will make her worth everything. Then every other character and value circulating in this interpretive matrix will become Clarissa's cipher.[6]

Clarissa's suffering triggers a retributive anger in Castle and Eagleton. The first target of this anger is Lovelace, but its sheer virulence is a clue that Lovelace is receiving an anger more properly directed elsewhere. So in each of these readings, Lovelace, and his rape of Clarissa, becomes a figure for a collective body of critical practice which is cruel, cavalier, and immoral. Though Lovelace may be fictional, the critics who handle Clarissa just as unfairly are not. This is why both Castle and Eagleton evince such enormous anger at the way Clarissa has been treated by generations of critics, where each accuses this whole tradition of criticism of a spectrum of misdeeds from carelessness to perversity to unconscious misogyny. This stirs Eagleton into being combative, where he shows great zest in polemics. He describes critics as natural "cavaliers," condemns for misogyny those "debunking liberals" who blame Clarissa for failings that are merely human, and characterizes those who enjoy or admire Lovelace as "devil worshipping" [65, 71]. The mistreatment of Clarissa more often makes Castle feel hurt or disbelieving.[7] For both, their representation of Clarissa's violation at the hands of the critics transforms Clarissa's rape into something of a "gang-bang."[8]

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[6] *Clarissa constantly reminds us that values are not virtual but relational, and reciprocally determined. Thus Castle does not note the irony that Clarissa's line about being a "cypher" to others is an echo of an early complaint of Bella about the way Clarissa has effected Bella's value in the family. Clarissa paraphrases Bella's words in a letter to Anna: "That I half-bewitched people by my insinuating address? That nobody could be valued or respected, but must stand like cyphers wherever I came" [62; 1:316]. Through the strange turns of the textual network, Bella's words name the purpose of Castle's book: to make every character and critic stand like ciphers, or place markers, behind Clarissa, so as to increase her value.*

[7] *There is at least one place where Castle mobilizes a most energetic polemical stance. In her bibliographic postscript she offers a sweeping condemnation of my reading of* Clarissa. *In doing so, she utilizes the very same mechanisms of arbitrary "construction" and hermeneutic violence it has been her hope to take us beyond.*

[8] *Sue Warvick Doederlein, writing in the forum section of* Eighteenth-Century Studies, *summarizes all the injustices committed in critical discussions of the rape of Clarissa—where even efforts to defend Clarissa inevitably fall prey to a reification of the "feminine"—and concludes that critical commentary on Clarissa's rape resembles nothing so much as a "gang-rape." See "Clarissa in the Hands of the Critics," ECS 16.4 (Summer 1983): 401–14.*

Castle and Eagleton have very different explanations for the critical violence directed at Clarissa. For Eagleton there are powerful mediating ideologies at work. For Terry Castle, Clarissa's victimization is symptomatic of a global fact about interpretation: it always proceeds by constructing arbitrary meanings that serve the interpreting self, and victimize the other. These different diagnoses of the problem lead to very different remedies. Eagleton feels quite comfortable with the exercise of power that would accrue to the winner of an interpretive war. His concern is to see to it that the right hands, and the right moral sensibility, wield the instruments of interpretation. By contrast, Castle warns that more Hobbesian wars of interpretation, even in the name of legitimate grievances named by feminism, will only perpetuate the cycle of interpretive violence by which interpretive hegemony is built on nothing more than the ebb and flow of force and fashion, and the arbitrary "constructions" of meaning to suit one's own desire. This is why she ends enjoining her readers to engage in a strenuous moral reflection into the origins and effects of their own interpretative constructions [185–87].

Although Castle and Eagleton often read *Clarissa* in compatible ways, there is a very different tone to their argumentation. While Castle evinces her surprise and pain with the misreadings of *Clarissa*, Eagleton is aggressively self-righteous. In the rigor of his castigation, and the one-sidedness of his exposition, Eagleton often seems like nothing so much as an indignant prosecutor offering his summary argument to a jury. We can catch this tone, and his way of reducing all the complications of this text to a stark moral ratio, by reading the fold in his essay where he shifts his attentions from Lovelace to Clarissa.

> *Thoroughly narcissistic and regressive, Lovelace's 'rakishness,' for all its virile panache, is nothing less than a crippling incapacity for adult sexual relationship. His misogyny and infantile sadism achieve their appropriate expression in the virulently anti-sexual act of rape. It is this pathetic character who has been celebrated by the critics as Byronic hero, Satanic vitalist or post-modernist artist.*
>
> * * *
>
> Clarissa *is the story of a young woman of outstanding kindness, virtue and intelligence who is made to suffer under a violently oppressive family, is tricked away from home by a notorious sexual predator, deceived, imprisoned, persecuted, drugged and raped, and finally impelled to her death. What have the critics made of this narrative?* [63–64]

Here is not the place to contest the psychologism used to trivialize Lovelace's position in the text, or the innocence of description used to exalt Clarissa. Such a reduction of the action, by returning the story to a simplicity and clarity it never had in the novel, has a long tradition in criticism of this text. It is the same polemically motivated strategy that led Samuel Richardson to write absurdly unfaithful summaries of the action for the second edition. It is used by Eagleton at the crucial fold of his text, where he effects a telling transition in the argument, and divides his essay into two coordinated parts. In the first part of the text Eagleton draws widely upon "theory" to discuss language, the fetish, desire, and a critique of Lovelace's "own terrible lack of being." After the passage I have just cited, Eagleton turns these theoretical discussions to focused practical use in his polemical struggle with the critics. Part two advances this polemic by reading Clarissa's death as a defeat of patriarchy and Lovelace, and a victory for feminism, morality, and "the real" that is Clarissa. This two-part division of Eagleton's essay—never explicitly marked by the author—is a symptom of one of the most important movements of this text: the subordination of critical theory to political practice. For Eagleton "theory" is a technique, a technology, or tool to be used in the service of the higher ends of a social political criticism. If we understand how "theory" is turned to use by Castle and Eagleton, we will have gone a long way toward understanding this reading formation.

The Use and Abuse of Theory

Castle and Eagleton sustain a double relationship to the vast proliferation of "theory" of the last fifteen years. On the one hand, we have seen the way their work is steeped in this theory; on the other hand, each is clearly troubled by the uncontrolled drift and wild pro-

liferation of meanings produced by a theoretically advanced interpretation which is disinclined to take account of social and political realities, and fails finally, to be morally responsible. Lovelace is the main figure in their readings for this licentiousness interpretation. Eagleton puts this idea into a ringing formula: "Linguistic lawlessness is the other face of his sexual libertinism: a writing which brooks no closure is a desire which knows no mercy" [83]. But perhaps the double relationship to theory sustained by these critics is neither contradictory, nor paradoxical. I suspect that the recent radical critique of the epistemological claims of traditional criticism, by challenging the assumption that criticism must necessarily repeat the historical, formal, intentional, or psychoanalytic determinants of what the text is presumed to be, has cleared the way for a social political criticism to decide, in a second but related movement, to marshal its reading around a meaning for the text which is socially and politically useful. In this way a social-political criticism is enabled by the very theory it now intends to reign in and turn to good use.

The higher moral purposes of Eagleton's readings can lead to an interpretive voluntarism in his use of theory. Thus in describing the political imperative that justifies Richardson's affirmation of Clarissa's values over those of Lovelace, Eagleton aligns his own way of making conscious choices with Richardson's.

> *Lovelace, however, cannot ultimately be indulged: the political price is too high. Richardson does not allow the unconscious to seduce him from the primacy of class struggle. The coherent bourgeois subject must be affirmed, and jouissance consciously sacrificed, if ruling-class rapacity is to be defeated.* [85]

Here the "unconscious" clearly does not connote ideas and affect that are inaccessible to consciousness. Instead, it has become displaced out of any one of the careful definitions Freud gave it, to become a region of seductive pleasures which a political consciousness may dispense with in pursuing its goals. Eagleton's text here makes it seem that he can simply choose to be immune to the effects of an unconscious that could, by Freud's analysis, operate in subterranean ways, within the very political will that chooses that choice.

One of the goals of Eagleton's summary of Clarissa's story, as quoted above, is to resimplify the text. Then, *Clarissa* might repossess the essential moral clarity both Castle and Eagleton imply it originally had, but has been stripped from the text by those cavalier critics who read with Lovelace. Now, one factor that makes Clarissa's story complex is the evidence that Clarissa is raped by a man she loves, and Lovelace rapes a woman he loves.[9] Castle's reading eludes this complexity, and surprisingly enough, theoretical concepts which usually deepen complexity can actually aid in this process. Thus, when Lovelace reads one of Clarissa's blushes as a sign of hidden desire, Castle insists that,

> *[Lovelace] is imposing meaning, arbitrarily, upon her. Lovelace's model of interpretation is founded upon binary opposition: he assumes that Clarissa's words and gestures automatically mean the opposite of what she seems to intend. Thus the conventional sign relation (blush = modesty) is transformed into a new relation that accords with the fiction of "Woman's" intrusive sexuality (blush = eros). Too many critics, indeed, have tended to read Clarissa's behavior in the light of Lovelace's classically misogynist model, that is assuming that a subliminal sexual content is part of her "message." Yet whether or not it is remains indeterminate. The fiction does not clarify the nature of Clarissa's desire. To read her blush, then, as Lovelace does, is to produce a meaning for it, but one that has no necessary relation to truth, which remains elusive, absent.* [88–89]

Something very strange is happening here. In critical language reminiscent of "deconstruction" and psychoanalysis, Castle asserts the fundamental indeterminacy of the blush as sign, the radical absence from the text of any certain meaning with regard to Clarissa's desire for Lovelace. But if one notes the effect of this use of theoretical language within her analysis of *Clarissa*, the tendency of her analysis changes radically from what it first seems to be. Thus Clarissa's blush before Lovelace is not "overdetermined" in its meaning, as Freud might say, so that it can express "modesty" and "desire" and a range of other terms that the context might disclose. Nor does this blush trigger an "undecideable" relation between Clarissa's modesty and desire, as a Derridian analysis might try to show. Instead, the absence and indeterminacy of truth returns us to the most literal possible meaning for this social sign. Clarissa's blush evidences her modesty; a blush is after all just a blush. Castle has used the language of theoretical complexity to guard Clarissa's innocence and simplicity.

One of the most fundamental currents of the contemporary French theory indebted to Freud and Nietzsche is its critique of all those modes of idealization at work in traditional critical categories. That is why it becomes quite perverse when this theory is used as an instrument in the movement by which Clarissa is idealized. For Castle, this happens in a negative way. She gets her basic concept of interpretation from contemporary French theory, and becomes convinced of the dead-end this unbridled interpretive assertion brings. By her reading, Clarissa's renunciation of this violent hermeneutic practice makes her the locus of heroic virtue in the text. But for Eagleton, an idealization of Clarissa is much more explicit and spectacular. It is worth following in some detail the interpretive trajectory by which Eagleton routes his discussion of Clarissa through the Lacanian notion of the "real" so as to arrive at the much more prosaic assertion that she is "rich and real" [71].

Eagleton's idealization of Clarissa begins by considering Clarissa as she must appear to Lovelace as Eagleton reads him. For Lovelace, Clarissa is a fetish, and thus a "substitute for the 'missing' female phallus" [59]. In order to protect "himself from his own terrible lack of being," Lovelace attempts the rape which will enable him to "have" Clarissa as a phallic plenitude. But much to his "despair" he discovers that Clarissa is "not to be possessed." Here drawing upon, but never explicating, that most complex Lacanian notion of the "real," as that which can not be represented within the "imaginary" or the "symbolic," Eagleton describes the series of absences that Clarissa becomes to Lovelace. In the course of this analysis Clarissa undergoes a subtle and somewhat miraculous metamorphosis from an Absence to a Spiritual Plenitude.

> *She is absolutely impenetrable, least of all by rape. Forced into this sole shocking encounter with the "real," Lovelace's precarious self, fantasmal to the core, enters upon its steady dissolution. In raping Clarissa he unmasks not the "nothing" of her "castration," but a rather more subversive absence: the reality of the woman's body, a body which resists all representation and remains stubbornly recalcitrant to his fictions . . . . Lovelace's post-structuralist fictions stand revealed in their true gratuitousness: they are powerless to inscribe the "real" of the woman's body, that outer limit upon all language . . . . [Clarissa's reference to her own body as nothing], together with her assertion that "I am nobody's" [is] a radical refusal of any place within the "symbolic order," a rebuffing of all patriarchal claims over her person. The dying Clarissa is nothing, errant, schizoid, a mere empty place and non-person; her body occasions writing . . . but is itself absent from it. Clarissa, like another, rather more influential text of Western history, is the testimony left to a dead, consecrated body. The subject Clarissa is that which escapes, obstinately self-identical, as in some frustrating fantasy where an ever-fragmenting medium always inexorably reunites.* [61–62]

Here Eagleton uses (and misuses) the Lacanian analysis of desire as founded in an irreducible lack in the desiring subject.[10] But as with Castle's description of Clarissa as a mere "cipher," the sheer comprehensiveness and absoluteness of the absence ascribed to Clarissa – she is absent to the rape, Lovelace's fictions, to the "symbolic order" of patriarchy, to all writing – prepares for the sudden reversal by which she becomes an elusive spiritual presence, like some uncanny ghostly medium which "ever-fragmenting" "inexorably

[9] *The first part of this argument is used against Eagleton, in a piece by Ann Barton devoted to Richardson in the* New York Review of Books. *See "What's a Girl to Do?" [(July 21, 1983), 30–32].*

[10] *In his use of Lacan, Eagleton is clearly indebted to the Marxist translation of Lacanian categories effected by* Screen Magazine, *and those working around Stephen Heath. However he is much less scrupulous than many of them in his use of Lacan's thought.*

reunites." Little wonder that Eagleton can announce that Clarissa, as both body and spirit, has escaped, "obstinately self-identical." The book which bears her name can now be compared by Eagleton to the New Testament; his reading has made *Clarissa* the vehicle for a spiritual reality hardly less total in its claims. Thus when, a few pages later, Eagleton defends Clarissa against "the fashionable liberal assumption that virtue is boring," the word "real" has lost its quote marks, and the concept of the real all its Lacanian ardors: "Here is a novel whose protagonist is not only kind, chaste and conscientious but also embarrassingly rich and real" [71]. Terry Eagleton may have taken us on a circuit through a theory where the "real" was nearly impossible to know, but he has brought us home at last.

Lest the spiritualization of Clarissa and her text effected here seem but a single, gratuitous moment of Eagleton's reading, it is worth reading the final two sentences of the essay. There Eagleton takes the explicit spirituality of Clarissa's final reliance upon God in death, and transfers this faith to the "women's movement" of our own historical moment. In doing so he links Clarissa to this movement in two ways: he proffers Clarissa as an early patron saint of this movement, and he stages her rescue by the saving powers the "advent" of this movement has released. This enables Eagleton to end his essay in the role of Spiritual Brother, offering hope to all those who are weary and heavy-laden from the struggles for liberation in our own day.

> *There is a source of power and solace beyond Clarissa, for which her dying is no merely individualistic act but a sign of human solidarity. If for Richardson and his heroine that absent dimension has the name of God, we ourselves, reading the novel after the advent of the women's movement, may perhaps give a more precise name to those sources of power and solace, with the historical emergence of which a modern Clarissa would not need to die.* [94]

Rape as Primal Scene

For Castle, Eagleton and Brownmiller, the centering power of the scene of rape allows them to elide the difference and distance between myth and history, past and present, art and reality. We have seen how Eagleton's reading makes the ideological struggles of Richardson and Clarissa part of the same single story of the struggle against oppression that drives his own discourse. Castle introduces the passage on rape cited above by saying that "the power relationship between Lovelace and Clarissa invites feminist commentary. Indeed, it is clear, I hope, that the hermeneutic theme we have been following here *can easily be given* a historical and sociological expansion in just such terms" [116, my emphasis]. Castle's use of passive verbal forms in these sentences makes her appeal to a historical and sociological outside of the text seem easy and natural. In this way her own applications of interpretive force, through an appeal to an external historical reality that simple is, seems devoid of that "hermeneutic violence" that is the explicit theme of her book. The very vehemence of the defenses of Clarissa's behavior staged by Castle and Eagleton make her seem part of our own social space. Ian Watt's suggestion that "Clarissa and Lovelace are equally cocooned in false consciousness" is, Eagleton insists, "to cast a slur upon Clarissa" [69]. While some of the critics' "charges" against Clarissa are "merely false," other "accusations" are "slanderous" [72]. By casting his critical arguments in the form of a defense of Clarissa's maligned reputation, Eagleton does not establish a parallel between events inside and outside the text; he weaves them into a common social fabric, where the same laws of social decorum should apply.

Both Castle and Eagleton have a specific purpose for effacing the distance between art and reality, the social "world" within the text and those outside the text. Each reads *Clarissa* as offering a representation of the world, which can, through the work of a responsible critical commentary, deliver a guide to readers for leading a more just social life. In order for each of their readings to deliver its moral message – for Castle, a warning about the cycle of "hermeneutic violence," for Eagleton, a call to the struggle against oppression – there must be a moment of issue in their readings where the representations within the text are delivered to the social sphere of readers outside the text. This is what leads them to assume a kind of moral mimesis and radical correspondence between art and reality. This will be easier to manage if the fundamental differences between a literary text and the social

sphere – however they are construed – are simply forgotten.[11] This forgetting allows Eagleton's book to stage a comeback for the voice of the social critic, who coordinates his or her reading of literature, history, and society in view of the moral and political ends of the moment. Eagleton's ability to do so wins the heartfelt plaudits of David Mikics in *The Village Voice*, who evinces his impatience with deconstruction for its inability to take up a political position, "without being outmaneuvered by 'discourse.'"[12] Mikics and Brownmiller would have, I suspect, little trouble endorsing the new rules for criticism implicit in the reading practice of Eagleton and Castle's books: interpretation should not busy itself with discovering dizzying aporias of the text, but should be reined in so that it serves humane, human ends; to do so it should think not for the individual but for the group; and in reading texts it must attend to the historical and social contexts that give a text a useful moral and political meaning.

In the last few years several feminists have stepped forward to interrogate and challenge the univocal reading of rape of the sort Brownmiller epitomizes, and Castle and Eagleton engage. In an article entitled "The Myth of Mythlessness and the New Mythology of Love: Feminist Theory on Rape and Pornography," Diana George asserts the value of images of rape in popular culture, pornography, and her own dreams as expressive of the "inner conflict in the sexuality of both sexes," a conflict that needs investigation. If a woman dreams of being raped, and one of the feelings associated with this dream-rape is pleasure, then what is the status of this rape? George doubts that this rape is merely the unconscious residue of patriarchal culture, which could or should be uprooted by feminist social engineering. Helen Hazen, in reading rape, romance, and feminism against each other, asks different but analogous questions. Why is it that millions of women, but virtually no men, buy and consume romances which invariably include in their plot-line a rape which can be pleasing and arousing to women readers? In exploring and valuing the modes of fantasy at work in romances, Hazen rejects the kind of orthodox feminist view echoed by Eagleton – that romance is a "monstrously debased" and "degraded fiction" which is "a cynical displacement of women's sufferings into consolatory myth, a false, insulting 'resolution' of sexual combat which merely consolidates patriarchal power" [37]. If Brownmiller assimilates all representations of rape, and a good deal more, to a homogeneous scene of rape that is morally equivalent to the crime of rape, then George and Hazen get us wondering about the difference between fantasies of rape, and rape as a social fact. It is the intended effect of Brownmiller's analysis, and Castle and Eagleton's readings of *Clarissa*, to make the marking of such a difference a moral scandal. Any equivocation on the nature of rape, any marking of the differences between actual rapes and rapes in fiction, or between an indisputable rape and some more complex boundary situation, leads to headshaking and finger-wagging. If the word "misogynist" is not dropped, then there are grave suggestions that the critic in question is entering into complicity with the agents of victimization.[13]

George and Hazen and Auerbach are united in the insistence that art and "reality" cannot be simply conflated on the matter of rape. For this reason there is for them not one scene of rape, but many. I suspect that Brownmiller, and those who witness on rape with her, need

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[11] *Neither Castle, who does an extended critique of Watt's concept of "formal realism," nor Eagleton, who characterizes Clarissa's death as anti-mimetic, is interested in asserting the aesthetic realism of this text. Instead, this text's reality is asserted on other grounds. Thus Eagleton insists Clarissa "is no trashy escapism, no idle 'imaginative' creation, but the true history of women's oppression at the hands of eighteenth-century patriarch . . . . It is true that Clarissa Harlowe never existed, but not important" [17].*

[12] *David Mikics praises Eagleton and Jameson for a "full court press" which "involves wresting deconstruction from bourgeois ideology and putting it to work on areas of contemporary life impervious to other interpretative methods" [*Voice Literary Supplement *(June, 1983), 5–6].*

[13] *Although rape is peripheral to her focus of discussion, Nina Auerbach's book,* Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth *suggests another way of marking the difference between the fictions and fact of woman's victimization. By tracing a series of myths of woman through the art and literature of Victorian culture – myths of victims and queens, of angels and demons, of old maids and fallen women – Auerbach is able to read these as moments in the career of a mobile, magical woman with a "disruptive spiritual energy" which "engorges the divine," and attains "holiness in defiance of three cherished Victorian institutions: the family, the patriarchal state, and God the Father" [(Cambridge, Mass.: 1982), 1]. What emerges is a popular secular religion which crowns "a disobedient woman" as "heir of the ages and demonic savior of the race" [3].*

to see rape as a single, homogeneous, all-encompassing scene, so that it can function as a primal scene for a certain variety of feminism. Thus, if one considers this feminism as an outgrowth of a collective psychic experience, then rape has an analogous relationship to feminism as the "primal scene" has for those patients that Freud studied in the 1890's, and for himself in his self-analysis. On this analogy, the scene of rape is *neither* simply the sum of the incidences of crimes of rape, *nor* simply the projections of fantasy. Freud's investigations of the primal scene drove him to the discovery of an uneasy non-synthetic interaction of the memory of an actual event, and an ongoing work of fantasy. Brownmiller's analysis of rape acquires its power from the way it is produced out of history and myth, fact and fantasy, statistics and suppositions. In Brownmiller's hands, the scene of rape, like the primal scene in Freud, becomes self-constituting for her feminism at the moment it is uncovered and projected back as the moment of an original wounding or trauma. This scene, as it is staged in Brownmiller's writing, becomes the origin – at once disturbing and fascinating – of that feminism predicated upon a belief in woman's victimization by man. The challenges to and rewritings of rape suggested by the work of George, Hazen, Auerbach, and others, indicates that feminism, or another feminism, is recomposing this founding myth. Ironically, Brownmiller's own inventive practice had opened the possibility for this revision. By making rape a master-metaphor for reading the patriarch as rapist, Brownmiller initiated the figural play that made rape more than a loathsome crime. Those who find, in Diana George's words, that a "blindly unified front" on rape "can be efficacious in the political short-run, but depleting in the personal long-run," need only reactivate the figurative movement hidden but active at the center of this fantasmatic scene of rape.

Chances Missed; Paths Not Taken

Castle and Eagleton can only achieve the moral clarity of their readings of *Clarissa* through the expunging of its love-story. They accomplish this by repeating the interpretive gestures Clarissa (and Richardson) make near the end of her story: they inscribe all of Clarissa's life into the scene of rape, by excluding chances missed and paths not taken earlier in the fiction. [See *Clarissa* 4:250–51, and *Reading Clarissa* 209–14.] These chances and paths all have, one way or another, to do with what virtually all recorded eighteenth century readings acknowledge, and most modern readers accept as at least *part* of this text: a love story between Clarissa and Lovelace. This is an explicit possibility from the earliest unfolding of the fiction, because the new comedy formulas which govern aspects of the first two installments give Lovelace the position of the "desirable suitor" opposed by an arbitrary and overbearing father. In addition, Lovelace and Clarissa dwarf those around them, and though the heroine's sentiments about the hero are delicately veiled, her jealousy on hearing of Rosebud, the electricity of their brief encounter at the wood-house, and her alarm at Lovelace's apparently dangerous illness, all invite the reader to complete a very romantic tableau. [See also Lovelace's thoughts when Clarissa escapes from Sinclair's the first time.]

Though the love between Clarissa and Lovelace finally miscarries, at moments in the first edition, there are three genuine proposal scenes where the right words (and interpretations) at the right instant, could have turned the story of Clarissa and Lovelace from tragedy and death to love and comedy.[14] While Castle sees the turn toward tragedy and rape as a fateful byproduct of "hermeneutic violence," and Eagleton celebrates Clarissa's death as the only viable way for her to subvert the patriarchal order, I see this turn of the action as the result of a willful, arbitrary, and therefore *non-necessary* chain of interpretations: Lovelace's interpretation of Clarissa as a woman of prideful virtue whom he must attempt to humble as part of his own career of seduction; Clarissa's interpretation of herself as a paragon of virtue with the strength and independence of will to reform a rake of corrupt principles; and, at the level of authorial determinations, Richardson's interpretation of Clarissa and Lovelace as characters that will allow him to stage a tragic moral victory of a middle class woman of the

[14] *This fact is partly concealed by Richardson's addition in the third edition of a proposal scene, inserted before the others, where Lovelace is obviously manipulative and insincere in his elliptical references to marriage. Richardson included this scene to condition his reader to discount the radical contingency, and concomitant possibilities opened by the later, genuine proposal scenes. I discuss these crucial scenes in some detail in my* Reading Clarissa: The Struggles of Interpretation *[81–87, 201–9].*

highest principles over an aristocratic rake with all the advantages of worldly power and attraction. But because none of these three interpretations is the only one possible by these interpreters about the characters they interpret, because the text circulates other possible interpretations at every point in its trajectory, many of the readers of the first and second installments were able to weave radically different stories than the one Richardson was intent on telling. Little wonder that struggles of interpretation open between Richardson and his readers in the months before the third and final installment is published. The persistence of these "errant" readings, even after the publication of the final installment of the first edition, encouraged Richardson to add footnotes and a table of contents summary of the action for the second edition. In the third edition Richardson goes much further: he makes "restorations" of new letters to the text.

What do these struggles of interpretation evidence? Richardson's accretions to the text bring to the very surface of the text the way *Clarissa* is not a natural seamless completed artifact, with one inevitable narrative trajectory. *Clarissa* is several stories, and potential stories, in tension with one another. Thus both those readers who argued for a happy comic resolution, and Richardson in his efforts to make his tragic ending seem necessary, reduce the full force and valence of this text's insight into the conjunction Clarissa/Lovelace. Why? Because no one scene of meaning can control this text. Thus the scene of rape is not what Castle and Eagleton try to make it: one, virtual, homogeneous all-encompassing scene – made pure by its evil and its violence. Instead, it is imbricated, crosshatched, and in covert correspondence with other scenes, both potential and actual: the proposal scenes, the scene of marriage, scenes of erotic strife, and the scene of death. These scenes are entangled with one another by the text of the novel. In the scenes of proposal Clarissa and Lovelace almost come together by mutual consent. Proposal opens the possibility of the scene of marriage that many characters and readers envision for these antagonists, and comes into the text as Lovelace's dream. Three melodramatic scenes – at the garden gate, the "fire-scene," and the "pen-knife" scene – articulate the enormous erotic potentials of this relationship. These receive a vacant negative expression in the rape. In the scene of the heroine's death Clarissa administers a moral revenge for the violations and frustrations she has suffered.

The rape of Clarissa *should* be a disturbing event for the reader. But not because this rape can be assimilated to the crime of rape. Rather rape in the frame of this fiction is unsettling because it subsists in relationship to scenes of proposal, marriage, sexual intensities, and death. Proposal and rape become disturbingly coimplicated because the proposal scenes in *Clarissa* are never what they are in the tradition of romantic love – a magical spontaneous merger of two souls. These proposal scenes, with their wrangles, ploys and deceptions, circulate what is disturbingly self-assertive and irreducibly egotistical about human desire. In *Clarissa* love between the protagonists is never far from hate, marriage from death, and a mutuality and congress between two is always about to resolve into the separateness of unilateral action. For Lovelace self-assertion takes the form of his lies and language play, his aggressivity, and the rape. For Clarissa, self-assertion takes the form of her determination to elaborate her life into an icon of value, stabilized by a rigid calculus of moral judgments of others and herself, and given final expression in her decision to die. Now I can well imagine both Castle and Eagleton briskly responding that these two forms of self-assertion are hardly symmetrical. Thus, Castle writes, the "battles of interpretation, in the text, in the world, are seldom fair fights . . . Clarissa and Lovelace . . . are nowhere equal combatants in a political sense" [193]. Yes, if these events did unfold in a political or social sphere, Castle would be quite right. But in the text named *Clarissa*, Lovelace's effort to dominate Clarissa by raping her, and Clarissa's death and the book she has edited to give that death the power to control the world she is leaving, become mirror opposites and essential equivalents. Both are abstract, anti-social assertions of self.

Of course, there is nothing abstract or funny about the crime of rape. If the letters contained in *Clarissa* were documents held in evidence by the London Police Department, reading these letters could draw me into joining Castle and Eagleton in a repudiation of the senseless suffering caused by this crime, and urging a swift conviction of the perpetrator. In looking through those police records, I might also find Gloucester's gruesome blinding by his bastard son, Tess' murder of Alex d'Urberville in revenge for his rape/seduction of her, and perhaps, in the misdemeanor section, even the "rape" of a lock. Now considering these as

real events, I would wish they never happened. But considering these crimes as fictional actions by characters who have inhabited no space but the text that gives them life, I am glad for Alex's murder, Cordelia's slaughter, Gloucester's blinding, and, yes, Clarissa's rape too.

Now paradoxically, the literary explorations of the negativity in love, that the text of *Clarissa* invites its reader to pursue, are not advanced but put out of play by the mimetic assumptions that guide Eagleton and Castle. For these critics are only justified in their indignation with Lovelace and his apologists, only secure in their moral visions, if *Clarissa* sustains a fundamental correspondence between art and reality, and if Lovelace's rape of Clarissa is assimilated to the crime of rape. By judging Lovelace as though he were a real person, these critics do two related things—they reduce the fictionality of the fiction, the textuality of the text, and its status as an artwork; they also separate themselves from the necessity and pertinence of what Clarissa and Lovelace in their dynamic encounter figure: for example, the vexed ambivalence of human desire, with its hope of making the love relationship the most splendid oasis of lived experience, and the more unsettling likelihood that there one will only encounter one's deepest anger and disappointment. The moral parameters that were to navigate an approach to the real have become means of evasion.

In these two books, Castle and Eagleton have very harsh things to say about my study of *Clarissa, Reading Clarissa: The Struggles of Interpretation.* Most of this harshness comes from their indignation that I could take Lovelace as more than a "predatory" rake, Clarissa as less than an innocent victim, and the rape as other than a morally reprehensible violation of the first by the second. *Reading Clarissa* was shaped by two reading imperatives: an aesthetic desire to restage the spare intensity of the Clarissa/Lovelace encounter; and the equally important but more elusive goal of narrating that encounter so as to take full cognizance of its resistance to simple interpretive summary—whether by rational psychology, empirical description, or moral judgment. Because the conceptual categories of novel criticism—like character, plot, and theme—constituted a built-in bias toward Clarissa's way of reading the world; and because contemporary humanism also privileged her valorization of selfhood, sincerity, and the "natural"; I began my reading with a strategic reversal of accustomed hierarchies. While I subjected Clarissa's position and narrative to a sharp critique designed to lay bare its artifice, I celebrated Lovelace as the heroic practitioner of a Nietzschean style of subversive interpretation. While plotting my reading of the text in this way risked unfairness to Clarissa, and an uncritical affirmation of Lovelace, it seemed the best way to loosen the weight and authority of the tradition of *Clarissa* criticism, so I could resee and reactivate the full scope and energies of the struggle between Clarissa and Lovelace, and the positions they represent.

In this reading of the text, Clarissa and Lovelace began as vivid representations of people. But almost immediately they evolved for me into two reciprocally dependent terms of a much more abstract nature. "Clarissa and Lovelace" became, by turns, the will to faithful mimetic representation, and the will to ironic, parodic, fictive subversion; they figure the seriousness of the moral and the laughter of the nonmoral; in expressing the desire for a centered sense of self versus the pleasures of the polymorphous adventure, they are latter day avatars of Hestia and Hermes, Penelope and Odysseus. "Clarissa and Lovelace," and the text they inhabit, are continuously exploring the possibility and impossibility of a mutually affirming exchange. Because by this reading these two have become much more than two representations of persons in a story, in the second part of my book I recast the opposition "Clarissa/Lovelace" into a struggle of a host of actual readers to control this text's meaning. Chief among these are Richardson and his most vigorous female reader, Lady Bradshaigh. Finally in the "tail-piece" to my text I incorporated both these levels of interpretation, plus my own act of interpretation, into an allegory about the lady and the serpent, and their struggle—inevitable, but forever failed—for the crown of interpretive victory. Throughout this critical narrative, my appreciation of the aesthetic ingenuity of interpretation, my restaging of the proposal scenes, and my narrative of the sedimentation of the striated text of *Clarissa* are all of a piece: they seek to foreground what is arbitrary, contingent, and artificial about this text and the interpretations which produce it. Here, at least, Art does not equal Life; characters are not equivalent to people; and the rape of Clarissa is more and less and different than the crime of rape. By adopting this essentially performative strategy for reading *Clarissa,* I hoped to involve myself in *Clarissa* as a textual field whose dynamics I could describe and rearticulate, but not control. Then reading *Clarissa* would be a way to repeat and extend the indirect, the hyperbolic, the nuanced, and the surreal ways a novel explores experience.

The Return of the Text as Double Entendre and Pleasure

The self-righteous indignation that Castle and Eagleton express at the rape of Clarissa is overtaken by this irony; neither can stand outside the rape scene they abhor. But the rape their readings circulate is not a crime of rape that can be forsworn with moral judgment. It is a more textual rape, one that is a byproduct of reading *Clarissa,* and haunts their readings in those forms of textual experience their reading formation has sought quite consciously to suppress: double entendre, coincidence, and pleasure. We can watch this involuntary solicitation of the rape at the moment in Castle's reading where she discusses a strange coincidence in the wording in one of Clarissa's late letters to Anna: Clarissa repeats the very words Lovelace has used in his letter to Belford, to announce, in cryptic fashion, that the rape has finally occurred: "I would go no further in it." In the letter to Anna, Clarissa is explaining why she is reluctant to write a first person narrative to vindicate herself. Castle explains:

> *[Clarissa] is likely, she admits, to break off unfinished my account because writing is now "so painful a task" that "could I avoid it, I would go no farther in it."* [7:47] *(Clarissa's shocking repetition of Lovelace's leitmotiv phrase raises perplexing questions, of course, about the intentions of the "author" behind the fiction. What are we to make of this apparently gratuitous, weighty, and utterly implausible epistolary coincidence?)* [127]

Castle is disturbed by the repetition of Lovelace's words in Clarissa's text because she supposes that it must involve *either* an intended meaning—some dark irony of Richardson's at Clarissa's expense?—*or* an unintended accident without meaning—an "utterly implausible epistolary coincidence." Meaning is either there or not there. There is no room for a third kind of half-present meaning—one deposited by chance, or the unconscious of the writing subject, intended by no one, but present, in such a way that it betrays some deeper relation in the textual field. In this instance, these words suggest to me the subterranean symmetry of antithetical figures like Clarissa and Lovelace, and the affiliation between Lovelace's effort at interpretive victory through rape, and Clarissa's effort at interpretive victory through arranging for a book to be edited by Anna and Belford. By the way she here refuses to write her own written narrative, Clarissa is initiating the compositional process that will eventually vindicate her. "I would go no farther in it" are the words with which both Clarissa and Lovelace lapse into silence at the moment of their greatest self-assertion.

A similar subversive drift of the signifier evidences itself in Castle's own text, when she is building to the climax of her indignant and pathetic narrative of Clarissa's rape. She writes,

> *Simultaneously penetrated above and below, the heroine is robbed of utterance. A subject of the "usage" of others, she herself passes out of the realm of speech, the realm of protest. She suffers a little death, an involuntary muting.* [115, my emphasis]

For Castle the rape is the pure loss that pushes Clarissa toward a renunciation of language and interpretation. But the precise words Castle uses to dramatize the extremity of this loss—Clarissa suffers "a little death"—has the effect of reinscribing, into the text of her reading, and obviously very much against any conscious intention, sexuality as pleasure. Let me be clear about what I mean here. The overdetermination of the phrase "a little death," "le petit mort," as the inscription of a moment of death in life as orgasm, as a paroxysm of pleasure that can leave one in a stillness which resembles death, does not mean that Castle (or I) think that Clarissa had an orgasm during the rape. But the semantic drift precipitated by that choice of words resummons that aspect of *Clarissa* which is not part of the heroine's experience, but is part of the reader's, and which Castle's whole reading had sought to suppress: sexuality as pleasure.

For both Castle and Eagleton, the rape of Clarissa becomes a metaphor for the violent appropriation of meaning by a cruel, and often misogynist, criticism. If Castle would take her reader into a moral reflection on the effects of interpretation, then Eagleton, as we have seen, offers ways to direct criticism into a scene of liberating political praxis. But in doing so he assumes a position which resembles that of Belford in *Clarissa.* As Lovelace's best friend, and the recipient of the narrative letters we read, Belford is party to every detail of the action which Lovelace records. In the few letters he writes, we see that he entertains an extravagant opinion of Clarissa's virtues, and is beginning to feel the most intense identification with her position. After the rape, and Clarissa's escape, Belford undergoes a moral conversion to Clarissa's side: he makes Lovelace's correspondence available to her, studies religion under her guidance, and is rewarded for his loyalty by being made executor of her estate and keeper of her letters. He is the apparent fictional editor of the book we read. But there is something problematic about Belford's position, and Lovelace taunts him about it after his conversion. Belford knew of Lovelace's plans, and could have exposed them to Clarissa. But he enjoyed watching Clarissa's "trial" with the not so innocent distance of a voyeur who looks but does not touch. And this irony is merely intensified by his conversion. The moral judgment he registers against Lovelace, and the moral sympathy he extends to Clarissa, allow him to get still closer to the heroine, until, upon her death, he is made the keeper of her letters, and the person who will save Clarissa's corpse from exposure to Lovelace's gaze. Belford's final mission resembles the one Eagleton's text gives himself: acting the climactic scene of a historico-sentimental drama, he is the male savior of the chaste heroine. It is he who will turn her sufferings into a triumphant and socially useful form of moral instruction.

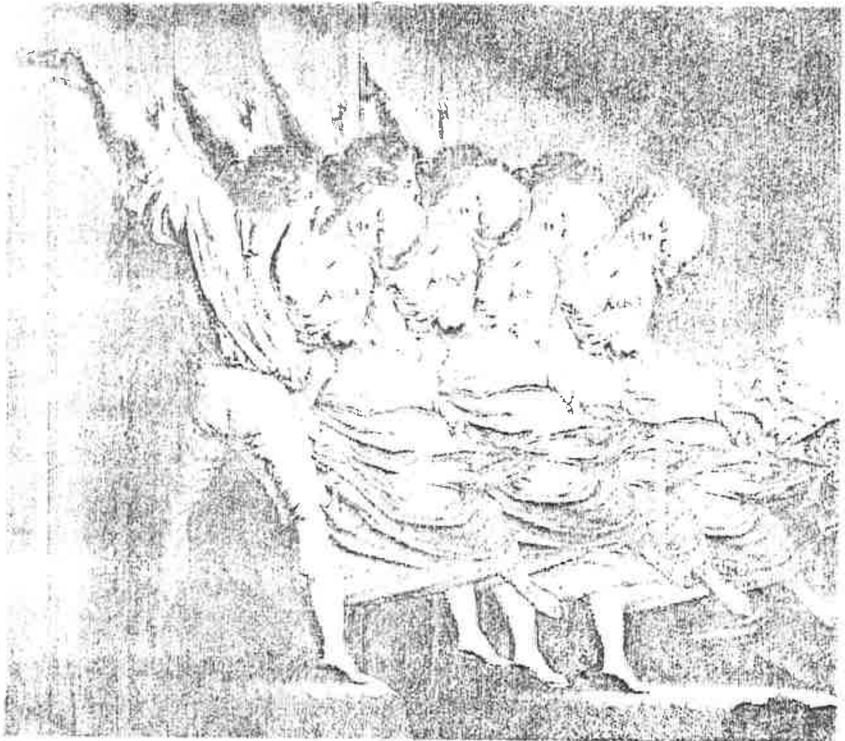
More than anything else, it is the lush extravagance of Eagleton's writing which vitiates its announced moral intentions, but makes *The Rape of Clarissa* a better reading of *Clarissa* for all that. There even seems to be a passage where Eagleton's language enacts "the rape of Clarissa." The linguistic excess of this paragraph carries his text far beyond the stated political purposes of this text, to give Eagleton's writing an exuberant erotic life his own interpretation of *Clarissa* chose to subordinate to other, more upright goals. This passage comes from near the middle of Eagleton's text, after a discussion of the protagonist's styles of letter-writing, and before a discussion of the letter as a fetish. Here Eagleton meditates upon those qualities of the letter that make it an object of erotic fascination.

> *There is no question, then, of any simple opposition between masculine and feminine, 'work' and 'text,' the possessed and protean self. The letter in* Clarissa *is masculine and feminine together. I have suggested that it lies on some troubled frontier between private and public worlds, symbol at once of the self and of its violent appropriation. Nothing could be at once more intimate and more alienable, flushed with the desire of the subject yet always ripe for distortion and dishonor. In this sense, the letters comes to signify nothing quite so much as female sexuality itself, that folded, secret place which is always open to violent intrusion. The sex/text metaphor in Richardson is so insistent that it is difficult to believe it unconscious. The male's desire to view the female's letters is shamelessly voyeuristic: Pamela wears her text around her waist, Mr. B. threatens to strip her to discover it, and Lovelace swears that 'I shall never rest until I have discovered where the dear creature puts her letters.' There is always within the letter's decorously covered body that crevice or fissured place where the stirrings of desire can be felt, that slippage of meaning within which another may brutally inscribe himself. The letter is that part of the body which is detachable: torn from the very depths of the subject, it can equally be torn from her physical possession, opened by meddling fingers, triumphantly blazoned across a master-text, hijacked as trophy or stashed away as spoils.* [54–55]

This paragraph circles insistently around a single event and scene: the (male, Lovelacean) intrusion into the letter (of the woman, of Clarissa). But it does so with two very different voices, one moral, the other erotic. The moral voice registers a judgment against this event. This violation can cause "dishonor"; the male's "desire to view" is "shamelessly voyeuristic"; his inscriptions are "brutal"; his fingers "meddling"; and the "spoils" he takes are "triumphantly blazoned," "hijacked," and "stashed." But these judgments on the rape do not lead to a discreet silence. Judgment guards and enables the purple rhythms of Eagleton's critical disclosures, like the passage where he announces that the letter signifies "female sexuality itself, that folded, secret place which is always open to violent intrusion."

There is more than the counterpoint of two voices in this passage. Why does Eagleton use language which produces an ambiguity about whether desire is located in subject or object of this "rape"? ("flushed with the desire of the subject," and "where the stirrings of desire can be felt"). Why does Eagleton repeat the same idea about the "letter's" openness to intrusion four times? If one attends to the secondary associations of the particular words Eagleton uses to repeat this idea, one finds that this paragraph enacts the whole trajectory of an erotic fantasy, especially as it belongs to the male in this culture. Thus the paragraph begins by dismissing the separateness of "any simple opposition" between men and women, but rather insists upon "the masculine and feminine together." Then there is the initial blush of those "flushed with desire," and "ripe" for engagement. There then comes a thought of the "folded, secret place" which is imagined to be "always open" to "intrusion." It is in this "fissured place" of union where "slippage" and "stirrings" "can be felt." Following the sex act there is the feeling of pride that accompanies the fantasy of one's full "possession" of another. Within the frame of the sexual fantasy enacted in this prose, the ambiguity about the agency and locus of desire is now understandable. It expresses the way a moment of pleasure and orgasm can blur identity.

This passage does not just reenact the "rape of Clarissa," first in the mode of judgment, then as erotic fantasy. It also casts this "rape" as the reading of an intimate letter, and thus as as allegory of reading, which must implicate every reader, especially the most probing and curious of all readers, the critic. Richardson played upon the pleasure of entering the intimate space of private correspondence in shaping his novel. This paragraph from Eagleton's book becomes a commentary upon the several ways this text involves us in the "rape of Clarissa." As readers we share the desire to enter private correspondence that Lovelace expresses; our sense of violating a taboo is paired with the pleasure of doing so. Our guilt at



using others for our pleasure is the price we as readers pay for finding the other and new which novelistic fiction continually promises. The "rape of Clarissa" as an imagined event which is cruel and uncalled for drifts toward, and becomes entangled with, "the rape of Clarissa" that we enjoy in reading, and repeat in our interpretations. Now the indeterminacy about agency this whole passage evidences is an index of an other than erotic reciprocity: the way the reading subject is displaced by and in turn displaces the text he/she reads.

Eagleton's reading of the rape of Clarissa, and Castle's too, can show us something useful about the objects we take up to read in literary texts. Instead of a determined event and delimitable scene, where the rape of Clarissa figures the literal fact of patriarchal violence and oppression, the "rape of Clarissa" has become – in spite of every conscious critical effort – something extravagant, overdetermined, pleasurable. In a word, it has become literary. This does not place the "rape of Clarissa" at some safe aesthetic remove from the lived experience of men and women. But it does multiply what that rape might mean, disseminate its scenic unity, and considerably complicate our approach to it. It also denies a man or a woman, a feminist or a misogynist, a realist or a skeptic any virtual point before or after or outside this "rape of Clarissa" as it unfolds inside and around us all.

A POETICS OF POSTMODERNISM?

LINDA HUTCHEON

Timothy J. Reiss. THE DISCOURSE OF MODERNISM. *Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1982.*

Edward W. Said. THE WORLD, THE TEXT, AND THE CRITIC. *Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983.*

Terry Eagleton. LITERARY THEORY: AN INTRODUCTION. *Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983.*

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In *The Discourse of Modernism* Timothy Reiss's premise – a precision and elaboration of certain key Foucaldian notions – is that at any given time or place, one discursive model or theory is dominant and so "provides the conceptual tools that make the majority of human practices meaningful" [11]. However, this prevailing theoretical model is also accompanied by a strong but occulted practice, a practice which gradually subverts the model by revealing in the theory such conflicting internal contradictions that certain forms of the practice itself begin to become tools of analysis. The dominant discursive model since the seventeenth century, Reiss argues, has been variously labelled as "positivist," "capitalist," "experimentalist," "historicist," or "modern," but Reiss calls it analytico-referential.* Its suppressed practice is that of the "enunciating subject *as discursive activity*" [42]. Science, philosophy, and art, having all worked toward the occultation of the act and responsibility of enunciation [*énonciation*], are now also becoming the site of the surfacing of that same practice and its recent subverting of notions of objectivity, of linguistic transparency, and indeed of the concept of the subject. That we seem on the verge of a crisis not unlike that of the seventeenth century will not be surprising news to readers of both contemporary theory and literature, because the advent of what Lyotard [*La Condition postmoderne* (Paris: Minuit, 1979)] has called the "post-modern condition" has been characterized by nothing if not by self-consciousness, by metadiscursive pondering on catastrophe and change. For at least the last fifteen years, literary theorists of all persuasions have been hypothesizing, as did Hans Robert Jauss in 1969 ["Paradigmawechsel in der Literaturwissenschaft," *Linguistische Berichte* 3(1969)44–56], that the old – in this case, formalist – aesthetic paradigm was exhausted and that the consolidation of a new one was imminent. Some, such as Umberto Eco [*The Role of the Reader* (Bloomington: Indiana, 1979), 57–58], have even posited parallels with contemporary science and culture.

** The entire first chapter, and in some ways the entire book, is devoted to defining this model, but its major premise is that "the 'syntactic' order of semiotic systems (particularly language) is coincident with the logical ordering of 'reason' and with the structural organization of a world given as exterior to both these orders. This relation is not taken to be simply one of analogy, but one of identity. Its exemplary formal statement is* cogito-ergo-sum *(reason–semiotic mediating system–world)" [31].*