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Model Letters, Moral Living: Letter-Writing Manuals by Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson

VICTORIA MYERS

Eighteenth-century England saw a profuse flowering of the epistolary genre—not only with the publication of the remarkable collections of so-called private letters by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, William Cowper, Horace Walpole, and others,¹ but also with the development of the epistolary novel under the hand of Samuel Richardson. The letter-writing manual also flourished in the eighteenth century. In 1725 Defoe's *The Complete English Tradesman*, and in 1741 Richardson's *Letters Written to and for Particular Friends, on the Most Important Occasions*, joined what had become an exceedingly popular genre of how-to manuals.² While many letter-writing manuals had been produced in England, Defoe's and Richardson's took a new turn, or re-turn, to their moral function. Urged on by what they perceived as a moral crisis in English society, particularly among the newly well-off middle classes, Defoe and Richardson pressed letter-writing instruction into the service of moral resuscitation and thereby not only gave new vitality to the genre but also laid the essential foundation for transforming collections of epistles into the epistolary novel.³ During the Renaissance, classical humanists, reintegrating *verba* and *res*, inculcated students with desire for *virtue*, the indispensable quality for the active public citizen;

1. On the publication of private letters in the eighteenth century, see Howard Anderson, Philip B. Daglian, and Irvin Ehrenpreis, eds. *The Familiar Letter in the Eighteenth Century* (Lawrence, Kan., 1966); Maude Bingham Hansche, *The Formative Period of English Familiar Letter-Writers and Their Contribution to the English Essay* (Ph.D. diss., Philadelphia, 1902); William Henry Irving, *The Providence of Wit in the English Letter Writers* (Durham, N.C., 1955); and Bruce Redford, *The Converse of the Pen: Acts of Intimacy in the Eighteenth-Century Familiar Letter* (Chicago, 1986).
2. Daniel Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman* . . . , 2d ed., with supplement (London, 1727); Samuel Richardson, *Letters Written to and for Particular Friends, on the Most Important Occasions* . . . (London, 1741); cited hereafter as *Familiar Letters*.
3. The transformation of epistle into epistolary novel is treated in Shari Benstock, "From Letters to Literature: La Carte Postale and the Epistolary Genre," *Genre* 18 (Fall 1985): 257–95; Robert A. Day, *Told in Letters: Epistolary Fiction before Richardson* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1966); and Helen Sard Hughes, "English Epistolary Fiction before *Pamela*," *Manly Anniversary Studies* (Chicago, 1928), 256–69.

and letter writing played a key role in this pedagogical agenda.⁴ Although it was turned to increasingly ambiguous and conflicting political purposes, the tradition linking moral instruction with letter writing continued into the eighteenth century. Defoe and Richardson, new-modeling the epistolary persona, significantly altered its aristocratic valences in the direction of what would come to be known as bourgeois values.

Defoe resuscitated the moral function of epistolary instruction by giving it a particularly topical direction, in his preface to the second edition of *The Complete English Tradesman* (1727) explicitly connecting his advice to the proliferating business failures of his day. Many writers of this period remarked upon the increased prosperity—and increased luxury—among the middle orders of society, which, they observed, had affected the character of tradesmen by encouraging them in presumptuousness and ostentatious display.⁵ The result in many cases was the destruction of both businesses and families. Defoe does more, however, than refer to the standard topos of sermon and satire—the deplorable state of the times—does more, even, than locate the cause in a degeneracy of character. Between the tradesman's character and the times he describes a complex relation evoking what must have been a common feeling of moral helplessness: “the young Tradesman cannot resist [ostentatious spending]; he must live as others do, or lose the credit of living, and be run down as if he was Broke: In a word, he must spend more than he can afford to spend, and so be undone, or not spend it, and so be undone” (p. viii). It is the power of appearances to determine one's reality as well as one's *sense* of reality with which Defoe's tradesman must contend. Defoe, however, will offer the tradesman a new self-concept, a new character for emulation, and thus free him from the futile and self-destructive task of imitating aristocracy. *The Complete English Tradesman*, with only two chapters devoted to letter writing, is a guide to conducting business in all its facets, and, still more, a guide to remaining steady, frugal, rational, and honest in the face of great temptations to do otherwise. It is no less one's moral, than one's economic, survival that is at stake.

In the two chapters of advice on letter writing, Defoe attends to some important rhetorical concepts. His first and most substantial advice, treated in Letter II (the chapters in the early editions are denominated “Letters”), concerns “how to write good Tradesman's language, how to indite his letters in a Tradesman's stile” (p. 17). Writing, he says, should resemble speaking yet be more

4. See Paul Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning, 1300–1600* (Baltimore, 1989), 117–18, 214–15, 233–34.

5. Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England, 1727–1783* (Oxford, 1992), 3–4; and G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago, 1992), 154–61.

concise. To a tradesman rightly belongs a conversational style, not a courtly or poetic one, or one that attempts either to intimidate or to impress. This rhetorical advice (a pragmatic instance of *decorum*) is also consistent with Defoe's analysis of business failure in his preface—namely, that it is due to ostentation, an attempt to abandon the tradesman's character for another, more glamorous character. The style he recommends, furthermore, entails economic consequences: it would divorce the writer from the bad company of tradesmen who spend more than they take in; announcing to his correspondent that he is none of that tribe, he would instill confidence in his skill and dependability and thus bring about that solid success for which the glamorous character is a poor substitute.

A contrasting pair of examples reinforces the point. The occasion is a common one—namely, to announce to a chapman or factor that one is beginning a business of one's own and would like to place an order. The first letter exemplifies the inappropriate tone:

Sir, The destinies having so appointed it, and my dark stars concurring, that I, who by nature was fram'd for better things, should be put out to a trade, and the Gods having been so propitious to me in the time of my servitude, that at length the days are expir'd; I am now launch'd forth into the great ocean of Business, I thought fit to acquaint you, that last month I receiv'd my fortune, which by my father's will had been my due two years past, at which time I arriv'd to man's estate, and became major; whereupon I have taken a house in one of the principal streets of the town of ———— where I am entred upon my business, and hereby let you know that I shall have occasion for the goods hereafter mention'd, which you may send to me by the carrier. (P. 18)

Calling this letter a “fine flourish” that “put his correspondent in *London* into a fit of laughter” (p. 18), Defoe here exemplifies many of the faults of a pretentious style—poeticisms, prolixity, digressions. He marks the writer's volubility as not only a stylistic fault but also a practical and moral one, for the apparent openness is mere pretense masking condescension, a naive attempt to assume superiority over his correspondent. The London factor's damning laughter is one of Defoe's many excursions into realistic fictional detail, which carries conviction by clearly linking cause with effect: this style of writing (this style of living!) neither impresses men of experience nor leads to success. Defoe, moreover, associates it with certain fashionable but passive and therefore self-destructive assumptions—for example, that fate overrules will and that one is owed a living. In Defoe's Presbyterian creed, God certainly dispenses and determines, yet human beings are not

thereby absolved of responsibility for themselves. As Defoe writes in the 1727 edition, "A Man that will lie still, should never hope to rise; he that will lie in a Ditch and pray, may depend upon it he shall lie in the Ditch and die."⁶

The contrasting example also comes from a young man just launching on business, one who also is subject to the vicissitudes of circumstances but who has well prepared himself to meet them. About this letter Defoe comments, "This was writing like a man that understood what he was doing" (p. 19), and he adds that the factor subsequently treated the newcomer like a man of business:

Being obliged, Sir, by my late master's decease to enter immediately upon his business, and consequently open my shop without coming up to *London* to furnish my self with such goods as at present I want, I have here sent you a small order, as underwritten; I hope you will think your self obliged to use me well, and particularly that the goods may be good of the sorts, tho' I cannot be at *London* to look them out my self. I have enclosed a bill of exchange for 75 *l.* on Messrs. *A*——— and *B*——— and company, payable to you or your order at one and twenty days sight; be pleased to get it accepted, and if the goods amount to more than that sum, I shall, when I have your bill of parcels, send you the remainder. I repeat my desire, that you send me the goods well sorted, and well chosen, and as cheap as possible, that I may be encourag'd to a farther correspondence. (Pp. 18–19)

Defoe sums up approvingly the qualities of this letter: "a Tradesman's letters should be plain, concise, and to the purpose; no quaint expressions, no book-phrases, no flourishes; and yet they must be full and sufficient to express what he means, so as not to be doubtful, much less unintelligible" (p. 19). Again, this epistolary advice is completely interwoven with moral modeling. This (the reader is invited to surmise) is a man who (unlike the poetically inclined young man) has spent his apprenticeship learning what pertains to business and has not dishonestly wasted the time of his master in pursuing the distractions of the town. This young tradesman does not attempt to impress the factor with his superiority to his own situation in life, but knows his place in the world and the duties pertaining to that place. With due modesty, he nonetheless can be active in his own salvation.

6. Quoted in Paula Backscheider, *Daniel Defoe: His Life* (Baltimore, 1989), 21.



Recalling the integral part rhetoric played in a theory of community in ancient Greece and Rome and in the European Renaissance, we must ask what changes in the concept of community Defoe's tradesman-model entails. This question possesses great importance in view of the rereading given to classical rhetoric in eighteenth-century England. As Adam Potkay shows, the vocabulary of liberty, virtue, and the life of active service to the *patria* in ancient rhetoric had been thoroughly assimilated by an English oligarchy to a systematic defense of its much-touted mixed form of government of king, lords, and commons. In Defoe's day, however, this vocabulary was being claimed by the Jacobite opposition to the reigning Hanoverians as their peculiar province. Writers such as David Hume, says Potkay, were seeking in a modification of the plain style an alternative to the Ciceronian eloquence claimed by such Jacobites as Lord Bolingbroke.⁷ Where does Defoe stand in this contest? Does he advocate a special style for tradesmen, one that enforces upon them their inferior status and delimited sphere of activity, in order to divorce himself from faction and announce his loyalty to the existing hierarchy? Or does he require a revision of values that would reorder, and improve, society? His England had not forgotten the leveling behavior of the forebears of many Dissenters; it was, after all, the reason for continuing to deny them civil rights (Defoe's lifelong concern). A historically sensitive reading of Defoe's text would associate the pretentious young tradesman of the first model letter with politically dangerous figures like the Jacobites, but what about the plain-speaking tradesman?

In Letter III, Defoe spells out the civic consequences of his recommended style:

[T]he Tradesman need not be offended at my condemning him *as it were* to a plain and homely stile; easy, plain, and familiar language is the beauty of Speech in general, and is the excellency of all writing, on whatever subject, or to whatever persons they are that we write or speak. The end of Speech is that men might understand one another's meaning; certainly that speech, or that way of speaking which is most easily understood, is the best. If any man was to ask me, what I would suppose to be a perfect stile or language, I would answer, that in which a man speaking to five hundred people, of all common and various capacities, Ideots and

7. Adam Potkay, *The Fate of Eloquence in the Age of Hume* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1994), chap. 1.

Lunaticks excepted, should be understood by them all, in the same manner with one another, and in the same sense which the speaker intended to be understood, this would certainly be a most perfect stile. (P. 26)

Rather than confining the tradesman to a specialized style, Defoe generalizes the style recommended to the tradesman into the preferred style for all writers. Unlike earlier letter-writing manuals, Defoe's includes no instructions on how to address correspondents of different ranks and callings, no letters exhibiting the decorous variation of manner from humility to familiarity to peremptory superiority, no key to proper superscriptions and subscriptions. As this passage suggests, he instead homogenizes the tradesman's style and manner and, further, recommends them as the style and manner for every writer, no matter their rank or calling.

Such an interpretation may seem inconsistent with Defoe's explicit practical advice to tradesmen (in the fourth letter) "to converse with tradesmen chiefly" and to stick to their businesses. But Defoe qualifies this advice. He would have the tradesman earn his recognition and intercourse with important men and, more significantly, he would have that intercourse occasioned by topics and actions of national import. Far from confining the tradesman to one sphere or to a single rank, he sketches the honest means for acquiring the authority to act in other spheres and to rise beyond his rank, namely by acquiring expertise and respect in his own calling:

A Tradesman may on occasion keep company with Gentlemen as well as other people; nor is a trading man, if he is a man of sense, unsuitable or unprofitable for a Gentleman to converse with, as occasion requires; and you will often find, that not private gentlemen only, but even ministers of state, privy-counsellors, members of parliament, and persons of all ranks in the government, find it for their purpose to converse with Tradesmen, and are not asham'd to acknowledge, that a Tradesman is sometimes qualified to inform them in the most difficult and intricate, as well as the most urgent affairs of government; and this has been the reason why so many tradesmen have been advanc'd to honours and dignities above their ordinary rank. (P. 39)

Defoe's conception of the tradesman in other works, moreover—such as *A Tour thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724), *A Plan of the English Commerce* (1728), and *The Compleat English Gentleman* (published posthumously)—confirms the view that his complete tradesman is not disabled from occupying the status of

gentleman, and (conversely) that this status entails no requirements of education and literacy that the tradesman does not meet. Indeed, as the last work mentioned suggests, these requirements are perfectly consistent with that general and homogeneous style of writing advocated in *The Complete English Tradesman*.⁸ What Defoe describes is not precisely leveling in the dangerous political sense, however, and his rhetoric (he might hope) cannot, therefore, become the tool of faction and demagoguery. Rather, he sketches the process for *safe* ambition; his tradesman rises by deserving, and (one must infer) the gentleman can maintain his status in a similar way—namely by deserving it, through service to the community. “A Commonwealth,” Defoe said during this period of his life, “is a Machine actuated by many Wheels. . . . Every Man ought therefore as much as in him lies, to contribute in his Station, to the publick Welfare.”⁹ Both tradesman and gentleman would thus endow a real referent upon the classical (and hitherto aristocratic) term *honor*.¹⁰

The issue of linguistic fidelity, so much at the heart of the plain style, and a constant concern of Defoe’s, also surfaces when he admonishes the tradesman not to eschew “terms of art,” the phrase Defoe uses to refer to the technical vocabulary of trade: “The nicety of writing in Business,” he says, “consists chiefly in giving every species of goods their trading names; for there are certain peculiarities in the trading language, which are to be observ’d as the greatest proprieties, and without which the language your letters are written in would be obscure” (p. 27). Everything has its proper name, and the tradesman must simply give each thing its name.¹¹ Defoe, however, qualifies this logic in two ways: First, “even these terms of art or customary expressions, are not to be used with affectation, and with a needless repetition, [where] they are not called for” (p. 29). And second, “Nor should a Tradesman write those *out of the way words*, tho’ ’tis in the way of

8. Daniel Defoe, *The Compleat English Gentleman*, ed. and intro. Karl D. Buelbring (London, 1890), 21, 99, 110–16.

9. Quoted in Backscheider, *Defoe*, 17.

10. See Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1660–1740* (Baltimore, 1987), 150–58.

11. Defoe is no doubt feeling the diffusive influence of Locke and Bacon in this stricture. Wilbur Samuel Howell offers some useful evidence on the rhetorical desiderata of the Royal Society, which clearly are paralleled by Defoe’s stylistic advice; see *Eighteenth-Century British Logic and Rhetoric* (Princeton, N.J., 1971), 456, 467, 486, 497, 500. For a more skeptical account, as well as reflections on Defoe’s ambiguity on the epistemological issues, see McKeon, *Origins of the English Novel*, chaps. 2–3, esp. pp. 120–22. Defoe’s stylistic desiderata of clarity and brevity are not new, but may be found in letter-writing manuals as early as the Middle Ages; see Martin Camargo, *Ars Dictaminis Ars Dictandi* (Turnhout, Belgium, 1991), 23–24. Cf. Katherine Gee Hornbeak, “The Complete Letter Writer in English, 1568–1800,” *Smith College Studies in Modern Languages* 15.3–4 (1934), chap. 2, on the development of preciosity and euphuism, to the residue of which Defoe perhaps was reacting.

the business, he writes about, to any other person, who he knows, or has reason to believe, does not understand them, . . . unless at the very same time you add an explanation of the terms" (p. 29). Clearly this advice is meant not to separate correspondents by profession (any more than by rank), but rather to overcome potential barriers and to promote understanding; thus, each must speak to his correspondent in that person's "dialect," just as one would expect to speak to a Frenchman in his own language (p. 29). Such understanding, in turn, begets both harmony and prosperity, which Defoe envisions ideally as propagating itself from person to person throughout the whole series of transactions (pp. 24–25). Like Locke, then, Defoe is describing the parameters for an ideal commonwealth and for ideal communication within that commonwealth.¹²

If Defoe does not go to the extreme position of Thomas Paine, at the end of the century, in supporting the proposal that tradesmen be entrusted with the business of state, it is probably because his ideal vision is constantly shadowed by a devout awareness that he lives in a fallen world. Throughout *The Complete English Tradesman*, Defoe narrates instances in which inexperience, or even the mere appearance of inexperience, subjects the young tradesman to the attempts of others to defraud and cheat him. For example, Defoe describes the tradesman's encounter with distillers who attempt to sell him adulterated liquors because he arrived without a taster (Letter I). Again, he describes the man who took poor bricks because he did not know that the best were gray and because the dealers were not about to enlighten him (p. 33). In regard to terms of art, too, he recommends deep study, not only to understand and be understood but also to avoid being "imposed upon . . . by other tradesmen" (p. 30), who, if they see that one understands their language, assume he understands their business and conclude he is "not to be cheated" (p. 31). The rules of discourse Defoe recommends enable the writer both to compel the world into honest dealings with him and to ensure his own economic survival. Defoe's intention, therefore, is more defensive than aggressive.

Furthermore, as his preface emphasizes, he is aware (no doubt through painful experience as well as theological training) of humankind's inveterate van-

12. The connection between the quality of rhetoric and the quality of the commonwealth is as old as Cicero; see, for example, *De Oratore* 1:14, 18–24; cf. Howell, *Logic and Rhetoric*, 460, 484–85, on the controversy over the source of the plain style. Defoe's ideas about the connection between rhetoric and the commonwealth, with his experimentalist and projecting bent, are more likely to have their source in scientific than literary writings; see Backscheider, *Defoe*, 510–17. For political background bearing on the topic (that is, what sort of commonwealth Defoe would favor), see Carol Kay, *Political Constructions: Defoe, Richardson, and Sterne in Relation to Hobbes, Hume, and Burke* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1988), 66–75; Maximilian E. Novak, *Defoe and the Nature of Man* (London, 1963), 60–64; and Manuel Schonhorn, *Defoe's Politics: Parliament, Power, Kingship, and Robinson Crusoe* (Cambridge, 1991), chap. 6.

ity and capacity for self-delusion. In keeping with the Puritan conception of fallen man, his pedagogical technique aims at imposing a rational curb on the overweening passions set free by original sin; through the accumulation of narrative accounts, he impresses the fallen heart in the way it can best be convinced—namely, through the experience of cause and effect, which is God’s way of operating in the world and upon the human psyche.¹³ We can connect this theological assumption also with his strictures on the use of figurative language, which he distrusts as truth-distorting and self-delusive. In *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719), he had depicted a young man who ignores the precarious situation of fallen man, undutifully flouting the advice of his father to stick to the middle station in life, instead throwing himself upon the ocean of experience, which with time brings him to a right knowledge of himself. Defoe’s pragmatic consideration of the concrete case, teasing out its moral implications—a method he had learned early on in Morton’s Dissenting Academy—fertilized both his fiction and his nonfiction.¹⁴ For him they did not differ in purpose. While the novel depicted the consequences for the character who ignores the rational way, the manual created both the rhetorical instrument and the persona of the honest, plain-dealing, and modest man, which modeled the rational way to salvation in this world and the next.



Despite differences in method and form, Samuel Richardson’s manual reveals intentions similar to Defoe’s, deriving from the similar challenges of their economic and political circumstances, including their middle-class backgrounds. Like Defoe, Richardson perceived a moral infirmity among the members of his society, and like Defoe, he traced it to the effect of luxury on the development of mental capabilities of discernment, judgment, and will—the moral sense. As a result of his greater personal interest in sensibility, and especially that of women, however, Richardson expended much more effort than Defoe in integrating psychological factors into his rhetorical and moral concerns.¹⁵ Hence, he phrases his intentions differently: his model letters demonstrate the appropriate epistolary forms, “but, what is more to the Purpose, by the Rules and Instructions contained in them, contribute to *mend the Heart*, and *improve the Understanding*”

13. Novak, *Defoe and the Nature of Man*, chap. 1.

14. Backscheider, *Defoe*, 18; G. A. Starr, *Defoe and Casuistry* (Princeton, N.J., 1971), 1–50.

15. See John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (1988; corr. reprint ed., Oxford, 1990), chaps. 2 and 5; Hornbeak, “Complete Letter Writer,” 106.

(preface). The division of the psyche, with its opposition of the passions to the reason, was traditional, of course, and similarly expressed by Defoe; but what particularly exercised Richardson and other midcentury writers was the need to recognize the role of the emotions in both aesthetic and moral matters, and hence to define with greater precision the quality and relation of the head and the heart.

Although Richardson's particular shade of Anglicanism has not been precisely determined, he evidently subscribed to the traditional belief that in fallen man the passions were untrustworthy and must be brought under the control of the reason. At the same time, however, he felt the growing influence of the various manifestations of "heart religion," such as the Evangelical Revival and Methodism, as well as other pervasive transformations that the sentiment movement effected in eighteenth-century culture.¹⁶ The benign passions were being distinguished from the dangerous ones by philosophers, in particular Francis Hutcheson and David Hume, and the helplessness of reason without the motive force of passion was raised to new significance in their hands. Yet in the context of an increasingly consumerist society, writers were going so far as to rehabilitate the passions—even the desire for luxury—into a constructive force.¹⁷ These moves challenged the moralist in Richardson. As his model letters show, he not only intended to work out the proper relation between head and heart, so as to support the traditional hierarchy of authority, but also aimed to ameliorate each faculty, informing the feelings by the reflections of reason and easing the authority of the reason by the promptings of sentiment. The cultural revaluation of sentiment, so compatible with Richardson's own predilections for the company of women and for the private sphere, explains why he found the familiar letter an attractive locus for negotiating the reformation of the public sphere, and continued that task in the epistolary novel.¹⁸

Although Richardson's manual is aimed largely at domestic rather than commercial concerns, and although he relies almost solely upon models and offers lit-

16. "Head" and "heart," and their relationship, are commonplaces in the eighteenth century. Recent works on what Langford calls "the sentimental revolution" (*Polite and Commercial People*, 463) are legion; for useful background, see *Polite and Commercial People*, chap. 10; Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph* (Princeton, N.J., 1977), 9–66; and Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660–1780*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1991), 185–204, and chap. 5. Compare Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility*, 66–72, 86–103, on the redirection of the passions into "heart religion" by Latitudinarians.
17. Bernard Mandeville's *The Fable of the Bees* was the most provocative work along these lines. For extensive discussion of the moral ambiguity of the developments in both consumerism and sentiment, see Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility*, 9–15, 61–63.
18. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass., 1991), 43–56. Through increasing bourgeois control of public discourse, made possible by the market economy and

tle or no explicit instruction, like Defoe he sets about his task by fusing conduct book with letter-writing manual. According to Katherine Hornbeak, whose 1934 study still contains the most extended treatment to date of *Familiar Letters* as an exemplar of the genre, Richardson is not concerned with rhetoric at all, but with ethics.¹⁹ Nevertheless, if Richardson subordinates rhetorical instruction to moral, he transforms it, like Defoe, into an effective instrument of moral improvement, one carrying different valences from the classical linking of ethics and rhetoric inherited from the Renaissance. What he says in the preface in reference to one of his predominating concerns, eloquence in the Ciceronian mode, is indicative. He has

attempted to expose the *empty Flourishes*, and *incoherent Rhapsodies*, by which *shallow Heads* and *designing Hearts*, endeavour to exalt their Mistresses into *Goddesses*, in hopes of having it in their Power to sink them into the Characters of the *most Credulous* and *Foolish* of their Sex.

Empty flourishes and incoherent rhapsodies are tools of morally degenerate faculties. Like Defoe, Richardson targets the terms of eloquence—the flourishes of figures and tropes—in his day associated with libertine aristocracy on the one hand and the vulgar mob on the other.²⁰ In his later novel *Clarissa*, it is the libertine Lovelace (a hypocrite in religion and possibly a Jacobite in politics) who wields such dangerous eloquence, whereas Clarissa possesses control of a plain middle style suitable to honest self-examination and the careful weighing of moral questions. To reform rhetoric, Richardson suggests even in the early *Familiar Letters*, one must reform character. In the preface, he sketches the complex problem: intellects are shallow because they are undeveloped by moral education, hearts designing because they have turned the intellect's capacity for calculation and planning to the subversion of virtue. By means of the model letters, Richardson will focus his readers' attention on the problem of character.

Superficially, of course, Richardson's *Familiar Letters* resembles the practice of earlier letter-writing manuals more than it does Defoe's tradesman's manual. Like John Hill, Thomas Goodman, and "G. F., Gent.,"²¹ Richardson displays a

development of genres and venues for middle-class participation, there is increasing influence of the "conjugal family's self-image of its intimate sphere" (p. 47) upon the values espoused in the public sphere. Richardson contributes to that influence through his work on the familiar letter.

19. Hornbeak, "Complete Letter Writer," 104.

20. Potkay, *Fate of Eloquence*, 20–21.

21. G. F., Gent., *The Secretary's Guide. In Four Parts* (London, [1705?]); T. Goodman, *The Experienced Secretary . . .* [London], 1699; and J. Hill, *The Young Secretary's Guide: or, a Speedy Help to Learning. In Two Parts*. 3d ed., corrected (London, 1689).

variety of letter types, including monitory, petitory, commendatory, jocular, and consolatory; but in keeping with his avowed intentions, he devotes considerably more space to the advisory kinds and often assimilates the others to the purposes of modeling exemplary behavior. Like the advisory letters of his predecessors, Richardson's contain parts readily identifiable as *exordium*, *narratio* or *propositio*, *confirmatio*, *confutatio*, and *peroratio*,²² but he has worked this form further in order to model the movements and acts of the mind appropriate to the person of good character. In Letter I, for example, *To a Father, against putting a Youth of but moderate Parts to a Profession that requires more extensive Abilities*, the great force of the discourse arises from the weight given to rational advice; the syntax testifies to the predominant movement of the mind in that direction. Attention to the possible feelings of the father—to his reluctance to have his son criticized, perhaps—is measured out sparingly, for (as it becomes evident) cool rationality will be kinder than blind sympathy in this matter. The persona defines his task wholly as a disinterested presentation of facts, alternatives, and consequences. The result for the disposition of the discourse is the following: the exordium is very brief, merely reminding the correspondent that the writer has not sought this task; the peroration likewise brief, reinforcing the writer's disinterestedness. The body of the letter appropriately interweaves the places of confirmation and confutation in an imitation of the rational course the writer would have his correspondent's mind take. Thus, he criticizes the choice of the law for young William's profession on the grounds of his lack of talent and ability to apply himself, then finds consolation in the respectability, appropriateness, and promise of trade for a second son; taking up the proposed alternative, he goes on to criticize the choice of medicine on similar grounds, and returns again to the support of trade, on the grounds of its ease and profit.

In some of the letters, the person of good character will grant a larger part to the passions—but only to those such as compassion or indignation, which enlist in the service of morality. For example, in Letter LXIV, *Of Expostulation from a grave Friend to a young Man, on his slighting and irreverent Behaviour to his Father*, the writer is quite direct, indeed rather abrupt and blunt, claiming to intend but also to expect “Good-will.” This sort of opening seems appropriate to

22. I take these terms from Angel Day, *The English Secretorie* (1586; facsimile reprint ed., Menston, England, 1967), 22–23; see Lawrence D. Green's essay in this volume. But Camargo asserts that the parts, besides *salutatio*, are *exordium*, *narratio*, *petitio*, and *conclusio* (*Ars Dictaminis*, 22), noting that the form did not substantially change after the thirteenth century (p. 41). I use Day's form with its adoption of *confirmatio* and *confutatio* as separate parts, instead of the single *petitio*, partly because they *are* sometimes separate in Richardson's letters, but also because he seems (as I show) consciously to be trying out different ways of relating the two to each other. *Peroratio* is probably too complex a concept to assign to Richardson's relatively brief and simple conclusions.

the superior position of the older friend, but also to his moral indignation. In keeping with this purpose and tone, the body of the letter, though like Letter I interweaving confirmation and confutation, moves back and forth between the two with greater frequency, heating up the syntax in which apparent concessions are swiftly retorted as proofs of guilt.

His Indulgence to you formerly, certainly claims better Returns on your Part, altho' it should be allow'd, as you fondly imagine, that his Affection to you is alienated [categorical assertion qualified by concession]. There may be something of Petulancy in him, which you ought to bear with; for one time or other you may be convinced by Experience, that Age itself has its insuperable Afflictions that require the Allowance of every one . . . [concession refuted]. He may be *petulant*; but are you not *fiery* and *impetuous* [concession, concession refuted]? 'Tis a very groundless Surmise to think his Affections are alienated from you. A Father *must* love his Son. He cannot help it. And is it credible even to yourself, on cool Reflexion, that the same good Man who was wont to be delighted with your childish Vanities and Foibles . . . without Reason, without Provocation, can change that Love into Hate [refutation]? (Pp. 86–87)

This manner is precisely calculated to undermine all the young man's excuses and, in arrows to the heart, to afflict him with guilt. The writer models the proper subordination of the emotions here and demonstrates how the well-informed feelings may impel the susceptible reason.

It is evident that Richardson has attended closely to types and techniques employed by the earlier model-letter manuals, adapting them to his moral purpose but often critiquing them at the same time. None of the writers identified as Richardson's predecessors by Hornbeak declares a moral intention in his preface or introduction, nor, even if they include letters with moral exhortation or reproof, do they integrate these into a coherent, pervasive didactic intention.²³ G. F.'s collection, for example, offers many "pious" and "moral" letters of advice (pp. 1–3) and even some exemplary love letters (pp. 59–62), but it also contains many examples that contradict or problematize such an instructive intention, including the letter from a young lady admitting a complete stranger to visit her (p. 40) and the (unreproved) letter from a daughter who pleads overwhelming passion as her excuse for eloping with her lover (p. 13).

23. Hornbeak, "Complete Letter Writer," 100–104.

Some of the letters in the manuals of Hill and G. F. lend themselves to an analysis of the faculties along the bifurcated lines of heart and head, but again Richardson's do so more consistently and systematically. Hill's letter (pp. 61–62) persuading a father to give his children a good education is very similar to Richardson's letter on this subject (Letter CXXX) in showing the dominance of rationality as well as the presence of appropriate feeling, but Hill does not experiment with the syntactic complexity of faculties in tension or operating each upon the other. Perhaps the key to the differences between Richardson's manual and these others is their use of humor. G. F. uses the traditional January-May courtship letters (pp. 24, 46), Hill the mock consolation letter (p. 48), and both Goodman (pp. 27–28) and G. F. (pp. 16–17) retail the letters from a rustic to his lady love. Richardson, eschewing these types, includes a *Letter Ridiculing a romantick Rhapsody in Courtship* (Letter LXXXIX), in which the very eloquent flourishes he had deplored in his preface are given their appropriate and highly amusing dismissal. Then, too, when he allows a young lady to exercise her witty and vivacious cruelty on her honest though staid lover, her letter is immediately followed by a letter of reproof and sound sense from her aunt (Letters LXXXIII and LXXXIV). Richardson's refinements signal what will also be remarkable in his epistolary novels, the deliberate integration of distinctive voices and situations with deep plumbing of character.

Richardson's treatment of both the form and style of the letters is illuminated by the concept of the moral model. This is particularly evident in letters surrounding courtship. Richardson frequently represents a series of letters of a similar type—for example, letters XIII through XXI form a series of interchanges between father and daughter, suitor and father, and others. The suitor's manner is uniformly polite, particularly deferential with regard to the daughter's filial duty and the father's legitimate concern about his means of support. By making these correct recognitions rhetorically, he signals his alignment with the moral presuppositions of his audience and aids his own success.

Sir,

I hope the Justness of my Intentions will excuse the Freedom of these few Lines, whereby I am to acquaint you of the great Affection and Esteem I have for your Daughter. I would not, Sir, offer at any indirect Address, that should have the least Appearance of Inconsistency with her Duty to you, and my honourable Views to her; chusing, by your Influence, if I may approve mayself to you worthy of that Honour, to commend myself to her Approbation. You are not insensible, Sir, by the Credit I have hitherto preserved in the World, of my Ability, by God's Blessing, to make her happy:

And this the rather imboldens me to request the Favour of an Evening's Conversation with you, at your first convenience, when I will more fully explain myself, as I earnestly hope, to your Satisfaction, and take my Encouragement or Discouragement from your own Mouth. (Pp. 26–27)

The suitor recognizes that it is with the father that responsibility lies for determining the alternative courses in the courtship, and he signals his willingness to negotiate within the framework of that traditional authority. In the various alternative responses, the father's manner—firm though polite and reticent when he disapproves the suitor, less firm though noncommittal when he believes he might rightly approve—is also determined by a rhetorical code.

Although formulaic, the letters are not devoid of feeling—or perhaps it is more accurate to say they are related to feeling, in an almost calibrated way. Richardson is careful to show the reader how they are related when he interprets one of the alternatives: “The Father in this Letter referring pretty much to the Daughter's Choice, the young Gentleman cannot but construe it as an Encouragement to him, to prosecute his Addresses to *her*” (p. 34). Having determined that the young man is a reliable prospect, the father can now leave it to his daughter's feelings to choose. Thus Richardson models in these letters the several moves and coded language appropriate to courtship, which must recognize the appropriate lines of authority and proceed with deliberate—rational—care.

One effect of this style (and of Richardson's didactic method) is to implant a sense of the difficulties and dangers of actions in the world, as well as of epistolary actions. It is consequently essential to adhere to a set of rules in order to come through unscathed, not merely financially but also morally. Like Defoe, Richardson believes that the fallen world is an adversary threatening both soul and body, and that one therefore must be on one's guard against it. The key to survival is docility under proper guidance; a crucial advantage, if one fortunately possesses it, is an experienced and benevolent person to act on one's behalf. In the single instance in which Richardson intervenes in the text with a long passage of instruction, he mirrors the desirable mediation of the experienced person and demonstrates the role he or she might play. Letters XCV through CI are prefaced by *Instructions to young Orphan Ladies, as well as others, how to judge of Proposals of Marriage made to them without their Guardians or Friends Consent, by their Milaners, Mantua-makers, or other Go-betweens*. Richardson first alerts the young ladies to the methods adopted by deceivers and fortune-hunters, giving instances of the false poetical flourishes and delusive arguments used by the go-betweens. By not displaying full letters, he curtails their appeal and directs the reader's reaction, instructing her to suspect such introductions and to resent them with

warmth. He then provides the young lady with examples of arguments having the appropriate tone. In the instance that there is no go-between and the affronter speaks for himself, Richardson provides short letters written by someone on behalf of the young lady, who may not properly answer the letters herself. Each differs in tone, corresponding to the lady's wishes, either to discourage and humiliate the young man, or to consider his addresses when made in the proper way. Throughout the letters, and Richardson's advice, there is reiterated reference to the standard of propriety; and clearly it is this standard that Richardson sees as the most reliable source of protection against seduction and fraud. This is the source of authority, guiding the human protector as well as dictating the appropriate tone, a bulwark against the encroaching world.

Richardson thus interposes between his vulnerable individuals and the threats of fallen society another society of shared standards and values, which does exist, if only in an ideal sense. (Perhaps we can say that this is Richardson's version of Augustine's City of God.) The letters continually point to this community as part of their communicative and persuasive strategies, and conversely these strategies are validated by the supposed existence of such a community. Richardson's technique of commenting through the response letter, especially, makes the reader aware of this community of judgment impinging upon the epistolary interchange through the voice of the respondent. For instance, Letter LXXI, *A modest Lover desiring an Aunt's Favour to her Niece*, sets up the model: the lover declares his passion, frankly exposes his fears of unworthiness, and pleads with the aunt to prepare the ground. He assures her that he is worthy (in terms of fortune), hopes that no other ground (the lady's affections?) may be found to exclude him, and in a final rush of modesty asks her to excuse his importunity (pp. 100–101). When the aunt answers, she remarks on his manner: "Diffidence is generally the companion of Merit, and a Token of Respect" (p. 101), clearly approving and encouraging his self-effacing and deferential tone. This pedagogical technique carries a number of moral lessons: first, of course, it models the appropriate deferential attitude toward authority, but second, and more subtly, it invites the moral self-consciousness and self-examination—borrowed from much Protestant literature of the time—by which the individual willingly brings himself or herself under moral authority.²⁴

Contemplating these letters may be one means, in fact, of carrying out such self-examination, as the reader compares his or her style of writing (and thinking) with that exhibited in the model. Will the young lady not ask whether her wit is cruel? Will the young man not ask whether his courtship is selfish and pre-

24. See Starr, *Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography* (New York, 1971), chap. 1.

sumptuous? Will readers not ask whether they are credulous and self-deluding? In adhering to this pedagogy, Richardson may have had in mind specifically the *imitatio Christi* tradition, with its emphasis upon example rather than precept and its invitation to a feeling identification with its object, which transforms the behavior of the individual.²⁵ That Richardson's heroine Clarissa maintained on her shelf Thomas a Kempis's *Imitation of Christ* suggests that he himself may have been much influenced by it. His problematizing of its lessons in the novel, however, suggests that he recognized an important danger in the model/imitation method: namely, that writers will imitate the style without effecting the transformation of character. The plain and rational style, and even the self-knowledge that Richardson designs through imitation of this style, could very well be turned to an instrument of deceit. In *Clarissa*, Richardson shows this eventuality in the satanic resourcefulness of his character Lovelace, but even in the letter-writing manual—in spite of his allegiance to the plain style—he shares the conservative suspicion of this mode of the new rhetoric for convincing a reader of one's honesty. Deference and modesty can both become an affectation or a fraudulent appearance. Richardson very tellingly includes a response from a young lady to a self-deprecatory courtship letter, praising her suitor's modesty as a sign of respect but then going on to explain why and in precisely what degree she praises him: "To say more, on this Occasion, would little become me. To say less, would look as if I knew not how to pay that Regard to modest Merit, which modest Merit *only* deserves. You, Sir, best know your own Heart; and if you are sincere and generous, will receive as you ought, this Frankness from *Your humble Servant*" (p. 103). Such examples not only warn against the threats from outside and model the appropriate response (the obelisk stare of honesty), but they also point to the interior threat of self-delusion (what if this young lady lets flattery make its way to her heart instead?) and testify further to the need to put oneself under the authority of a morally and linguistically experienced guide.

Within the framework of Richardson's conservatism about authority, however, he nonetheless models some less strictly authoritarian roles and less rational-sounding rhetorical strategies, for just as he recognizes that truth can be subverted by appearance, he sees the dangers of a too narrow or one-sided interpretation of one's duties. In Richardson's views one can discover particular parallels with *The Relative Duties of Parents and Children, Husbands and Wives, Masters and Servants* (1705) by William Fleetwood, whose position was considered quite moderate

25. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Growth of Medieval Theology (600–1300)*, vol. 3 of *The Christian Tradition*; and *Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300–1700)*, vol. 4 of *The Christian Tradition*, 5 vols. (Chicago, 1971–89), 3:127–29, 4:36–37.

in Richardson's day.²⁶ Fleetwood points out that in all human relations, "There is no such thing as one Mans requiring Love, Respect, Honour, Service, or Obedience, from another, without being, at the same time, oblig'd to do him some good turn for it." Instancing the parental relation, he insists: "As therefore Children are oblig'd to honour their Parents, so also are Parents oblig'd to look after, and take care of their Children" (p. 89). Fleetwood's influence on Richardson is evident in the latter's preface when he announces that "he has endeavoured to point out the Duty of a *Servant*, not a *Slave*; the Duty of a *Master*; not a *Tyrant*; that of the *Parent*, not as a Person morose and sour, and hard to be pleased; but mild, indulgent, kind, and such a one as would rather govern by *Persuasion* than *Force*."²⁷ Neither Richardson nor Fleetwood was interested in undercutting the habits of respect and obedience, which they saw as reliable protectors under most circumstances, but they sensed their ambiguity in real situations, and more important, they chose to emphasize the ultimate meaning of these duties—their function of harmoniously relating diverse interests in a difficult world—over their form.

The rhetorical implications of reciprocal duties are evident in the subtly worked reason-feeling dynamic of the letters between parents and their children, but most especially in the little masterpieces of courtship negotiation (numbers XCI, XCII, and XCIII). As might be expected, Richardson evidences the influence of rhetoric in the *topica*, or commonplaces, of argument, but more important is the influence of Fleetwood's premises upon the style of writing. In Letter XCI, the father informs his daughter that he has rejected as unsuitable for her one "weak in his Intellects" (p. 126), another well-known as a libertine, and the third a sot. He informs, and uses the style of authority appropriate to informing, but at the same time he also explains, in a style of condescension appropriate to explaining, making it evident that he has acted with care for her happiness and reputation and with respect for her rationality. Of the second young man, he says in confidently balanced syntax: "I could not think of suffering my Daughter to stand either to the Courtesy, or lie at the Mercy, of so profligate a Rake" (p. 127). Offering her instead a friend—prudent, good-natured, but somewhat older than she—the father adjusts his manner to what Richardson perceives as

26. William Fleetwood, *The Relative Duties of Parents and Children, Husbands and Wives, Masters and Servants* . . . (1705); facsimile reprint ed. (New York, 1985), 86–87. For discussion of Richardson's dependence on Fleetwood and other casuists, see Tom Keymer, *Richardson's Clarissa and the Eighteenth-Century Reader* (Cambridge, 1992), 85–105.
27. Hornbeak is correct when she emphasizes Richardson's description of duties as "reciprocal" and not merely owed by the inferior party to the superior; "Richardson's *Familiar Letters* and the Domestic Conduct Books," *Smith College Studies in Modern Languages* 19 (1938): 21–23.

the precise mental state of a caring father: confidence in his own judgment yet understanding that, since happiness in marriage rests on affection, his daughter's wishes must be consulted and respected. Richardson goes still further and exhibits conflict between authority and affection in the disjointed syntax at the end of the letter: "You'll much oblige me, if you can get this Matter [of the suitor's age] over. But if you cannot, (and be so happy as I wish you)—why then—I don't know what to say—(But I must—I think—acquiesce. But yet, I could once more wish—But I will say no more till I have your Answer, but that I am *Your most indulgent Father*". . .) (p. 128). Room is made here for strategies of eloquence, which recognize the individual's ultimate freedom of choice. For Richardson, like Defoe, is attempting to develop an appropriate counterpart to the civic eloquence of the ancient commonwealth. In some ways, Richardson's tactics recall Defoe's leveling tendency in *The Complete English Tradesman*, inasmuch as Richardson's recommended manner contributes to lowering rather than erecting barriers between correspondents.

Such letters as the caring father's readmit the rhetorical appeals to emotion on the grounds that they are most capable of precisely mirroring both what the mind thinks and what the heart feels. At the same time, the plain style was for Richardson a necessary component in performing what epistolary acts are meant to perform, the necessary negotiations for surviving—morally and economically—in the world. The plain style is a helpful instrument because it encourages character traits such as rationality, clear-headedness, and modesty, which are needed to combat deceit and self-deception. But this is not enough, and ultimately Richardson must model a rhetoric in which feeling can also have its say. Though such a rhetoric can be manipulative (and one could argue that the father in the example above performs his feelings to manipulate his daughter, though, as he believes, for her own good), it can also modify an otherwise thoroughly hierarchical and authoritarian role by revealing the individual behind the mask. In this respect, and always admitting the possibility of dissimulation, the rhetorical techniques Richardson exhibits induce the reader to re-create similar habits of writing and (letting the mind become what the hand copies) similar habits of thinking. If, like Defoe, Richardson has an even larger ambition, if he too has in mind an ideal commonwealth, it is one that takes its impetus from the domestic circle, one that begins in the relations of parent and child, extends to husband and wife and to master and servant, and ultimately would dictate the civil relations in society at large.

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