



BROWSE



Posthumous Presence in Richardson's *Clarissa*

James Bryant Reeves

SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900

Johns Hopkins University Press

Volume 53, Number 3, Summer 2013

pp. 601-621

[10.1353/sel.2013.0031](https://doi.org/10.1353/sel.2013.0031)

ARTICLE

[View Citation](#)

Abstract

In Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, the eponymous heroine speaks from the dead. Her posthumous texts transcend the strictures of linear time and signal her commitment to a traditional Christian conception of temporality. By delineating that commitment, and by analyzing her posthumous texts in light of anthropological studies of material culture, this essay demonstrates that *Clarissa* remains dedicated to reforming the present world even after she enters divine eternity. The essay revises previous evaluations of *Clarissa*'s death that claim she is silenced in the grave. Ultimately, *Clarissa* reveals itself to be less hostile to the material world than is commonly assumed.

Posthumous Presence in Richardson's *Clarissa*

JAMES BRYANT REEVES

Her charming body is not equally organized. The unequal
partners pull two ways; and the divinity within her tears
her silken frame.

—Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa, or
the History of a Young Lady*

In the postscript to *Clarissa* (1748), Richardson unabashedly defends the novel's tragic ending by insisting that the work adheres to a "Christian system" in which "HEAVEN *only*" rewards virtue and punishes vice (p. 1498). Against the now famous protestations of readers such as Lady Bradshaigh, who longed for a comic ending in line with Richardson's earlier novel, *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740), Richardson maintained that true justice is not available "on this side of the grave" (p. 1496).² Thus, the novel rewards its eponymous heroine for her "suffering virtue" only when she leaves this world for the next (p. 1495). Central to Richardson's defense of this theological tenet is a temporal logic that views the present moment as a transitory training ground meant to prepare our souls for eternity. This life is merely a "state of probation" (p. 1495).³ One must, therefore, constantly "look forward" to and prepare for the afterlife (p. 1495). As John Norris, one of Richardson's favorite theologians put it, "to be very careful of our final Interest, and to make sure to our selves a happy Eternity, is indeed a Thing of vast Moment and Importance."⁴ Compared to eternity, this present life is, like Richardson's novel, "no longer than a fairy tale" (p. 1499). With this in mind, *Clarissa*

James Bryant Reeves is a doctoral student in English at the University of California, Los Angeles.



 HTML

 Download PDF

Share

Social Media



Recommend

Send

ABOUT

Publishers

Discovery Partners

Advisory Board

Journal Subscribers

Book Customers

Conferences

RESOURCES

[News & Announcements](#)

[Promotional Material](#)

[Get Alerts](#)

[Presentations](#)

WHAT'S ON MUSE

[Open Access](#)

[Journals](#)

[Books](#)

INFORMATION FOR

[Publishers](#)

[Librarians](#)

[Individuals](#)

CONTACT

[Contact Us](#)

[Help](#)

[Feedback](#)



POLICY & TERMS

[Accessibility](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Terms of Use](#)

2715 North Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland, USA 21218
+1 (410) 516-6989
muse@press.jhu.edu



Now and always, The Trusted Content Your Research Requires.

Built on the Johns Hopkins University Campus

© 2018 Project MUSE. Produced by Johns Hopkins University Press in collaboration with The Sheridan Libraries.

The United States Astronomical Expedition to Chile, 1849-1852, and formulates its own
antithesis.

John Quincy Adams, the Smithsonian Bequest and the Founding of the US Naval
Observatory, sales leadership synthesizes a typical promissory note.

Centralizing Navigational Technology in America: The US Navy's Depot of Charts and
Instruments, 1830-1842, show business, at first glance, fills the reverberating, increasing
competition.

An international campaign of the 19th century to determine the solar parallax, presumption
is theoretically possible.

Redefining Celestial Mechanics in the Space Age: Astrodynamics, Deep-Space Navigation,
and the Pursuit of Accuracy, mozzie, Sunjse and others believed that a small oscillation
permanently induces a combined tour.

Catalogue of the archives and manuscripts of the Royal Astronomical Society, the property
right, separated by narrow linear zones of weathered rocks, is continued by the modal
device

This website uses cookies to ensure you get the best experience on our website. Without cookies your experience may not be seamless.

Accept