‘SUFFICIENT TO THE DAY’: ANXIETY IN
SIR CHARLES GRANDISON
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Abstract

Critical opinion has categorized Richardson’s Sir Charles Grandison as a disastrous foray into social realism, one that abandons the psychological and religious profundity of Clarissa. The critics have complained that this new approach to reality entailed a moral complacency, an unquestioning faith in the efficacy and benevolence of social institutions. It is true that Richardson in his last novel offers no program of social reform, not even of the grossly unfair anti-Catholic laws. Yet his toleration is not complacency; rather it constitutes the most radical criticism possible, a criticism that, assuming the inevitable inadequacy of the social structure and the total impossibility of meaningful change, criticizes society from above, not from within.

In fact, more than any other novel by Richardson, Grandison conveys a sense of precariousness by illuminating the perpetual need for deliverance and by reminding us constantly about what we have been delivered from. A certain degree of anxiety was considered psychologically normal, spiritually healthy, and even ethically essential in a providential universe. Excessive or obsessive anxiety, however, became an insult to Providence, and the divines warned against it. Their injunctions centered around the Biblical text: “Take no thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself, sufficient to the day is the evil thereof.”

If polite society “stands” after the linguistic events of Grandison it does not do so by virtue of its politeness -- and it trembles as it stands.

Critics have generally dismissed Samuel Richardson’s last novel, The History of Sir Charles Grandison, as a disastrous foray into social comedy in which he abandoned the religious profundity and psychological complexity of Clarissa. Richardson’s new approach allegedly entailed a moral complacency—unquestioning faith in the efficacy and benevolence of social institutions. Few critics have challenged Alan D. McKillop’s long-standing excoriation of Grandison for its “complacent assumption that polite society can stand, when properly purged of vice and error.”

To confute these truisms, we can take our cue from Gerald Levin who, in a psychoanalytic study of Richardson’s novels, warns that an exaggeratedly assured tone is actually “a sign of uncertainty or anxiety.” But if Levin’s approach to Richardson’s canon is orthodox Freudian, my own study makes primary use of Anglican homiletic motifs from Richardson’s own milieu to pry beneath the misleading superficial pomposities of Grandison. By exposing and exploring disquieting veins in Grandison, which both complicate and enrich its text, I hope to fulfill Susan Stave’s recent recommendation that “...more critics should follow [Jocelyn Harris] lead in thinking and writing about the novel.”

It is true Richardson, in this his last novel, offers no program of social reform. Even with regard to the grossly unfair anti-Catholic laws, we hear from Charles that
"A great deal... may be said on this subject. I think it sufficient to answer for myself, and my own conduct." Yet this toleration is not complacency: rather, it constitutes the most radical criticism possible, one which, assuming an inevitable inadequacy of social institutions and a total impossibility of meaningful change, criticizes society from above, not from within.

In Clarissa, social justice is shown to be a farce, and in Grandison, rather than relaxing his grim vision of the inefficacy of human law, Richardson actually intensifies this critique. A large portion of the novel is taken up in displaying the miscarriages—even misuses—of the law. To be sure, many of the most flagitious crimes—like the attempted assassinations of the merchant Mr. Danby, and of Jeronimo, Clementina's brother; the imprisonment of the clergyman Dr. Bartlett upon false charges—occur on the imputably more sinister terrain of the Continent; nevertheless, I find it astonishing that Cynthia Griffin Wolff can speak of Grandison as placing its "faith... in British justice"—that very British justice whose "delays and chicaneries" Sir Charles refers to with scorn (III, 3). In England itself, Sir Thomas Grandison, Sir Hargrave Pollexfen and Mr. Greville all defy the law by duelling or attempting to duel. Sir Thomas' seduction of his girls' governess is effected with impunity, as are the dishonest dealings of his own stewards. If in Italy the vamp, Olivia, feels free to send bravos to abduct Charles, she is equally at ease in knitting him herself on his own territory when she follows him there to prevent his marrying someone else. Not only do these felons escape the proverbial clutches of the law, but the dishonest manipulate that law to their own advantage. The disreputable Mrs. O'hara starts legal proceedings against Charles to gain power over the inheritance of her daughter, Charles' ward; Everard Grandison, Sir Charles's cousin, who has seduced a flock of innocents with impunity, eventually suffers legal harassment from a whore as guilty as he who has "framed" him; and the Mansfields, defrauded of their rightful inheritance, have been bested in litigation by their opponents.

The limitations of social justice were offered by Anglican preachers like Isaac Barrow as traditional proof of "The Reasonableness and Equity of a Future Judgement":

As for human laws, made to encourage and requite virtue, or to check and chastize vice, it is also manifest that they do extend to cases in comparison very few: and... they are so easily eluded, or evaded, that without entrenching upon them... or coming within the verge of their correction, men may be very bad in themselves, extremely injurious to their neighbours, and hugely troublesome to the world: so that such laws hardly can make tolerable citizens, much less thoroughly good men."

Not only is this an apt description of what we see in Grandison, but Sir Charles himself sermonizes in a similar vein:

The laws were not made so much for the direction of good men, as to circumscribe the bad. Would a man of honour wish to be considered as one of the latter, rather than as one of those who would have distinguished the fit from the unfit, had they not been discriminated by human sanctions? Men are to approve themselves at a higher tribunal than at that of men. (II, 140)

Such sentiments help to explain the continuity of Richardson's scorn for the word "legal" from Clarissa to Grandison, in both of which he uses it ironically to con-
denm the narrow vision of his villains: Lovelace exposes himself when he declares, after the rapc, "My whole view, at the present, is to do her legal justice," as does Sir Hargrave, who hopes to prove he is "a moral man" by making the kidnapped Harriet "legally" his (I.152); both remarks can be juxtaposed to Sir Charles's reproach to his sisters when speaking of disposition of his father's housekeeper/mistress: "Shall we do nothing but legal Justice?" (I.372).

Just as society fails to restrain the evil elements impinging on it, so "punctilio"—the rigid code of social manners, decorum and civility which is the equivalent of legal order in the human microcosm—fails to safeguard the individual's integrity, as Harriet, like Clarissa, eventually discovers. Early in the novel Harriet glimpses the heart of darkness underlying social forms:

I can deal pretty well with those, who will be kept at arm's length; but I own, I should be very much perplex'd with resolute wretches. The civility I think myself obliged to pay everyone who professes a regard for me, might subject me to inconveniences with violent spirits, which, protected as I have been ... I never yet have known... To what evils, but for that protection, might I not, as a sole, an independent young woman, have been exposed? Since men, many men, are to be look'd upon as savages, as wild beasts of the desert....(I.64).

Forgetting this insight, however, she complacently remarks on the success of her punctilious handling of Sir Hargrave on the very evening of the fatal masquerade: "You will now therefore hear very little farther in my letters of this Sir Hargrave Pollexfen" (I, 115). Ironically, this letter is immediately followed by one in which her cousin Reeves frantically records her abduction from the masquerade, it being a typical Richardsonian technique to juxtapose these kinds of assured statements with facts that mock them (Clarissa's confident declaration that "a steadfast adherence to that my written mind is all that will be necessary" (I,470) to break off with Lovelace is, we know, shockingly succeeded by the letter posted from St. Albans). To rub the point in, Richardson has Hargrave sarcastically taunt Harriet for her famous "civility" throughout her nightmarish abduction (I,152,155,165). Because she had defeated Sir Hargrave in social repartee and had broken with him through the social form of rejecting his marriage suit, Harriet had assumed she was safe, but social mores provide only tenuous and fragile safeguards against the ever-present violence of human passions.

To be sure, most of the rampant villainy in the novel is eventually checked, but by a higher agency which bypasses, transcends and occasionally conflicts with the social sphere. This divine agency is symbolized by Sir Charles himself in his role as a providence surrogate. Various epistolary strategies in Grandison indicate Richardson's intention to keep Charles aloof, mysterious and suggestively abstract. For instance, it is difficult to believe that after having his letter-writers preach the virtues of being "particular" and of "writing to the moment" in every novel including Grandison, Richardson did not know what he was about when calling attention to the lack of these qualities in the representation of Charles. The Reverend Dr. Bartlett, from whose papers an account of Charles's early adventures are "extracted," warns us we are reading about events on a different plane of reality when he apologises to Harriet: "[the account] is not what it might have been: but mere facts, I presume, will answer your intentions" (I, 456). Moreover, for a good part of the novel, the events with which Charles is connected, like the wondrous tales of the Old Testament, are set in the past and conveyed to us primarily by a
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clergyman. Even when we have caught up to Charles's present, more often than not there tends to be a medium between him and us through which we see him but darkly. His adventures in France are reported through Charlotte, who has received them from others; the rest of his Continental Journey, through Mr. Lowther, the surgeon. When Charles arrives back in England--our geographical foreground--after his second trip to Italy, where he has written several letters, his actions are filtered through Dr. Bartlett or Harriet.

This abstracted rendering permits us to accept the suggestion of a providential role that would otherwise be incongruous in a more fully-realized character, though admittedly at the expense of the vividness and verisimilitude that Charles needs for the novel's central love story. In fact the episodes in which he rescues characters stand out as obvious religious apolologies in work of an otherwise fastidiously mundane texture. Besides Harriet's rescue--"a providential accident" as Richardson referred to it in his synoptic table of contents"--there is, just as one of many examples, Mr. Danby's stated reason for making Charles his residuary legatee: "...he had been the principal instrument in the hand of Providence, of saving his life" (I,448).

Perhaps the most significant indication of Charles's role as a benevolent providence surrogate is his symbolic position as the lord of Grandison Hall, an estate "...situated in a spacious park" (III,272) whose chief characteristics are its amplitude and variety--the stream "abounding" with fish, the multiple lawns and prospects, the "rich-appearing clumps" of "large" trees, the vast spectrum of fruits and blossoms in the neatly graded orchard (III,272-73)--suggesting the Creation itself, increasingly defined during this period by its plentitude as well as its order. Charles's course of study has prepared him to serve this estate, as God does the world, in the dual capacity of a preserving and a governing providence: "...for while he was abroad, he studied Husbandry and Law... the one to qualify him to preserve, the other to manage, his estate" (III,288). Even his almost perpetual absence from this English estate imitates a deity at once transcendent and immanent: "Tho' absent, he gives such orders, as but few persons on the spot would think of" (III, 288). Charles as God-like master is summed up by Mr. Lowther: "For humanity, benevolence, providence for others, to his very servants, I never met with his equal" (I,448).

To stop here would be merely to replace social with religious complacency. Further probing into the doctrine of providence, however, reveals the potential for a religious complexity which Richardson developed and intensified, and explains how the providential interpositions which Charles enacts ultimately create anxiety in the world of the novel. The moral order created by such interpositions was never in fact seen as final and complete, but rather as a palpable hint of what was to come. As William Sherlock explained in his popular tract on providence, the justice of providence was the justice of government, not the justice of the final judgment and had as its aim not execution but exemplary correction and reward:

And therefore, though every particular good man be not rewarded, nor every bad man punished in this world, yet the divine providence furnishes us with numerous examples of justice, in the protection and defense of good men, and in the punishment of the wicked....

Archbishop John Tillotson too, distinguished between "miraculous and extraordinary judgments which are immediately inflicted by God for the punishments of
some crying sins, and the example of the world, to deter others from the like'" and
everday evils caused either by "a necessity of nature" which "can make no dis-
tinction between the good and the bad" or by the voluntary acts of men which
"many times will make no difference between the righteous and the wicked..."11
Richardson, moreover, clearly subscribed to this view. Defending his treatment of
Lovelace to Lady Bradshaigh he explained:

Nor that I should do well if I punished not so premeditated a violation: and
thereby made Pity on her Account, and Terror on his, join to complete my
great End, for the sake of Example and Warning12.

He also had Anna Howe explain that Clarissa's harsh punishment in this life for
her "one false step" was "for example's sake, in a case of such importance"
(III,330). Providential intervention, then, was seen by Richardson and his con-
temporaries as a didactic and fragmentary imposition of order upon a world of
widespread depredation and suffering.

This understanding has a double-edged psychological effect upon human beings.
On the one hand, it creates immense spiritual gratitude. Robert South, the famous
High-Church preacher, speaks for a whole Christian tradition when he exclaims in a
sermon "'On the Mercy of God'": "We live by a perpetual Deliverance."13 On the
other hand, such a view places humanity in a passive, helpless, infantile position.
Significantly, at one point in Grandison Emily Jervois recites a poem which cul-
minates in the comparison of providence to a "fond mother encircled by her child,"
parent figure whose benevolent omnipotence is laced with gratuitousness: "... so
it watches over us; comforting these: providing for those; ...assisting every one;
and if sometimes it denies the favour we implore, it denies but to invite our more
earnest prayers" (I,432). In addition, that very same Emily later on exclaims to
Charles, the providence surrogate: "'O Sir, you made us all infants!'" (III,171) In
fact, awareness of the vulnerability of humanity and its enormous dependence on
providential aid could lead, as Tillotson admits, to "... an anxious care about
events, a care that is accompanied with trouble and disquiet of mind about what may
befall us ..."14

It is this double-edged attitude towards the human condition that we find in
Grandison rather than an attitude of complacency. When Charles has been menaced
by Mr. Greville, another unsuccessful suitor of Harriet's, the heroine affirms her
grateful faith: "... is he not the care of Providence--I humbly trust he is " (III,181).
Yet, after hearing news of Charles's safe arrival, her friend Charlotte articulates the
other side of the coin: "I tremble, nevertheless, at the thought of what might have
been" (III,197). In fact the novel engenders anxiety throughout, by exposing the
need for perpetual deliverance and by dogging its characters with constant reminders
of what they have been delivered from. To do this Richardson uses two narrative
techniques.

The precariousness of human fate is dramatized first of all by the presence of
alter egos that embody alternative options. Richardson was well aware that the best
of us bear within a dark potential self: Charlotte Grandison, teased by her brother,
says of that paragon: "Had he been a wicked man, he would have been a very
wicked one" (I,297). Richardson first experimented with the use of "doubles" in
Pamela, where the effect of the Sally Godfrey story is to make Pamela literally rea-
ize that 'there but for the grace of God go I': "I have had the grace to escape the
like unhappiness with this poor gentlewoman...." However, there Richardson made his point blatantly, appending Sally's story at the end like the finger-wagging conclusion of a sermon. In Grandison, such parallels pervade the book in both time and space, among the most minor as well as the major characters.

Take the young Obrien girl, who was being used by Sir Thomas Grandison's scheming steward Filmer to draw the lord into a second marriage: she has as her alter ego the steward Bolton's young whore, who succeeds in marrying old Mr. Calvert in order to secure the inheritance which rightfully belongs to the Mansfield family. Miss Obrien, a more innocent if equally weak young woman, was literally saved from her own worst self, in this instance, by the timeliness of Sir Thomas's death.

Generally, however, what makes Richardson's alter egos or "doubles" so anxiety-producing and fictively unique, is his characters' verbalized self-awareness of them. Harriet, for example, cannot even wait for the full account of Clementina's imbroglio before running a double-columned, nearly full-page "parallel between our two cases..." (II, 158) for her own readers. In addition, the passionate Olivia becomes an instructive parallel for both these heroines after her rash flight to England in pursuit of Charles. Harriet, as she explains, "could not help reflecting, on the occasion of this Lady's conduct..." that she shares with Olivia the absence of parental guidance which explains that lady's erratic behaviour and makes her own good conduct the lucky exception (II, 368). Clementina, too, perceives both the similarity and the difference:

Olivia, Sir,... reflects upon me. It was indeed a rash step which I took, when I fled to England: How has it countenanced the excursion she made hither! The God knows, our motives were widely different: Hers was to obtain what mine was intended to avoid. (III, 428).

Note the use by both Harriet and Clementina of the poetic verb "reflect": through reflections such as these, the larger cast of characters and more varied incidents of Grandison are brought to serve the same recursive, psychological purposes that we associate with Richardson's other novels.

In a similar self-recriminating vein, Charlotte tells the story of a Miss Hurste, who, like herself, became infatuated with a callow military man for no very good reasons. Unlike Charlotte, however, Miss Hurste marries her soldier, and Charlotte is very much aware of both the gratifying and terrifying implications of this doppelgänger:

Somebody met with an escape! Yet now-and-then I blush for Somebody. Yet between this Somebody and Miss Hurste's case there was this difference—a father's apprehended—Tyranny—... Impress the one: a thinder fit the other. In the one a timely recovery; in the other, the first folly deliberately confirmed. (II, 551-52)

The word "timely" anxiously underscores the sheer grace, the slender contingency of Charlotte's "deliverance".

Even when the character who has been graced with the happier of two potential fates does not voice his or her own self-awareness, somebody in the cast of characters intervenes, turning action into "reflection"—in both senses of the word. Mrs. Giffard, the mistress of Charles's uncle, as Harriet is aware, is the dark double
of Mrs. Oldham, the mistress of his father, and Harriet reviews the subtle differences in their situation in an effort to justify the contrasting Grandisonian (and therefore providential) treatment each mistress receives:

When the poor children are in the world, ...When the poor women are penitents, true penitents--Your brother's treatment of Mrs. Giffard was different. He is in both instances an imitator of the Almighty: an humbler of the impenitent, and an encourager of those who repent. (II.307)

In fact, however, the officious appositive, "true penitents," unconsciously introduces an element of uncertainty into the distinction being made. Richardson's mirror images, rather than removing the threat of evil from his more positive characters, as John Sitter claims, actually reassert that threat, because the differences that have led to more melancholy fates are not so evident to the unreflecting majority.

Anxiety is intensified by a second pervasive technique of an even more original cast, one that allows the many criminal attempts discussed earlier to have a psychological effect even though they were foiled by providential agency. The more Harriet dwells gratefully on her rescue, the more she is also forced to acknowledge with a shudder the multiplicity of possible evils cancelled out by this one act of somewhat arbitrary deliverance: "My mind has been disturbed by Sir Hargrave's violence; and by apprehensions of fatal mischiefs that might too probably have followed the generous protection given me" (I,284). Not only was there the danger of Charles being wounded or killed, but her very rescue might have imperilled her further: "It would have been very hard, had I fallen from bad to bad; had the sacred name of protector been abused by another Sir Hargrave...." (I.166).

Harriet's comments on her rescue epitomize the prevailing syntactical pattern of the Grandisonian world--the language of possibility, of conditionality, or statement contrary to fact. In a word, the subjunctive, in particular the retrospective or past perfect subjunctive, dominates the characters' reflections, ranging from brief parenthetical comments--"O my good lady Grandison, how might your choice have punished your children!" (I,331)--to extended meditations on what might have been. At one point in Charles's relations with Clementina's bellicose brother the General, a whole scene is expended recreating the scene that might have occurred. For two pages the conversation proceeds in the following manner: "[Charles:] Had you made demands upon me that I had not chosen to answer, I would have expostulated with you. I could perhaps have done so as calmly as I now speak" (II.250)

Characters even project entire hypothetical lifetimes in the subjunctive mood. Hargrave expands upon an alternative chain of cause and effect which is entirely plausible:

... if [Charles] had not interposed so hellishly as he did on Hounslow-heath, I had been the husband of Miss Byron in two hours: and she would have thought it her duty to reform me: And, ... I swear, it was my intention to be reformed, and to make her, if I could have had but her civility, tho' not her Love, the best of husbands .... what a happy man had I been! -- Then had I never undertaken that d----d expedition to France, which I have rued ever since. (III.144).

Significantly, Hargrave's chagrined regrets overlap with the nervous conjectures of
Harriet to corroborate the lack of inevitability in the heroine's escape:

Drawn in by his professions of love, and by 8000 l. a year, I might have married him: and, when too late, found myself miserable, yoked with a tyrant and madman, for the remainder of a life begun with happy prospects... (I, 97).

The precarious thinness of the line separating the actual and the possible is emphasized by an ambiguous slip of the tongue made by Emily Jervois, near the end of the novel, when she has gone to live with Harriet's family in Northamptonshire to recover from her girlish crush on her guardian: "It is true, I was, (or I might have been I should rather say) a forward girl with regard to [Charles]; (III, 442). The cumulative effect is that these grim hypothetical events begin to subvert the 'real' providential ones, impairing the characters' confidence in a benevolent future. William Beatty Warner has argued persuasively that there lurks within Clarissa a potential for comedy: I would claim that tragedy hovers over the seemingly comic world of Grandison.

But we can go even further, spurred by Harriet's provocative observation that "... when realities disturb, shadows will officiously obtrude on the busy imagination as realities" (III, 48). The tidal wave of postmodernist criticism that has swept through Clarissa in the recent work of Warner, Terry Castle, and Terry Eagleton cannot fail to have an impact on Grandison as well. This "language-centered criticism" has found in Richardson's epistolary narrative with its characters who are self-conscious readers and writers, the very paradigm of a radically indeterminant, polysenous literary text, and critics have pointed out that Grandison, if anything, has even more epistolary self-consciousness than the earlier novel. In Clarissa, we have been told, the text has plenty of authors but no authority. None of the narrators prove to be genuinely neutral or objective, leaving us with a text that is an autonomous, recursive fabrication rather than a mimetic representation of "real" events. Hence, our traditional faith in Richardson's "realism" has been deeply undermined. In Grandison too then, from this point of view, language is the only verifiable action, and the supposedly "real" occurrences reported in the narrative are subsisting on a ground as noetic and insecure as that of the alternative possibilities articulated by the characters; which is to say, the subjunctive and the declarative events are equally "real".

In this manner, Richardson's narrative approximates the "Garden of Forking Paths," an imaginary novel that Jorge Luis Borges has written about in one of his own "fictions":

Almost instantly, I understood: the 'garden of forking paths' was the chaotic novel... In all fictional works, each time a man is confronted with several alternatives, he chooses one and eliminates the others; in the fiction of Ts'ui Pen, he chooses -- simultaneously -- all of them. He creates, in this way, diverse futures, diverse times which themselves proliferate and fork... In the work of Ts'ui Pen, all possible outcomes occur; each one is the point of departure for other forking.

I cite this description in full for several reasons: it suggests the modernity and experimental quality of Grandison, and it provides a paradigm for the entelechy which I am suggesting the subjunctive passages virtually constitute, along with a key to their fissiparous structure. Note the way Harriet, for example, beginning with a simple conjecture about her relationship to the milquetoast suitor, Mr. Fowler,
ends by projecting several contingent futures, the labyrinthine proliferation of for-
kings described by Borges:

I think I never could love Mr. Fowler, as a wife ought to love her husband—
May he meet with a worthy woman who can! And so good, so modest a man,
of such an ample fortune, easily may: While it may be my lot, if ever I marry,
to be the wife of a man, with whom I may not be so happy, as either Mr. Orme
or Mr. Fowler would probably make me, could I prevail upon myself to be the
wife of either. (1,79)

Disentangled from the gamut of modal auxiliaries and the optative subjunctive it
employs, the passage indicates that Harriet may or may not be able to love Fowler:
if she doesn't, then there are the possibilities of his meeting or not meeting
someone else who will. Harriet herself may or may not marry at all, and if she does,
it could be Mr. Orme, Mr. Fowler, or somebody else, and if it is somebody else, she
may or may not be as happy with that person as with either of the former two men.
The more she explores the logical possibilities of any situation, the more she has to
worry about.

As a model, the "garden of forking paths" differs from Richardson's entelechy
in two ways: Richardson is primarily concerned with diverse pasts rather than
"diverse futures", and the crucial "choices," as I have argued earlier, are usually
made by a providential rather than a human agent. There is actually a passage in
Richardson's own novel which can be read as a metaphor for the entire Grandisonian
cosmos: the disturbing dream that Harriet has before her wedding, when Charles
has received a mysterious threat. The account of this dream goes on for almost two
pages and is dominated by what Harriet calls "contradictory visions" (III,150):

... I was married to the best of men: I was not married: I was rejected with
scorn, as a presumptuous creature, I sought to hide myself in holes and cor-
ners. I was dragged out of a subterraneous cavern... and when I expected to
be punished for my audaciousness, and for replining at my lot, I was turned
into an Angel of light.... (III,148)

In Italy, at one time, Jeronimo's wounds were healed: at another, they were
breaking out afresh.... (III,149)

Note that Harriet's dream extends over the whole range of the novel's concerns, and
not just Charles's plight; it presents its personages as passive, as the novel itself
primarily does: and like the postmodernist interpretation of Grandison's grammar
offered above, and like the "garden of forking paths," the dream does not privilege
one or the other of the contradictory events in each pairing. If this dream--a night-
mare, the epitome of anxiety--can be taken as a paradigm of Grandison, then it is
hardly accurate to describe the novel as an optimistic comedy of manners.

Of course, there is a literary precedent in Richardson's career which partly ex-
plains his predisposition to perceive life as a succession of binary oppositions. The
"forking paths" of Grandison on one level are an application of techniques of
rhetoric which Richardson exercised earlier in his Familiar Letters, where the genre
demanded the exploration of alternative possibilities such as "The Lady's Reply in
case of a Prepossession," and "The Lady's Reply in case of no Prepossession" or
that she chooses not to avow it."'''' I suggest in Grandison, however, this rhetorical
structure, that undergirds the novel's use of subjunctive, has an ontological base.
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Threatened by the rationalistic determinism emanating from Continental philosophers like Leibnitz and Spinoza, as well as from English Deists, the Anglican divines of Richardson’s period were concerned to depict a non-necessary universe, and to allow God meaningful scope for choice in his government. Hence, we find the Reverend Samuel Clarke evokes an image of the universe sub specie aeternitatis, not as a fixed chain of events, but as a vast labyrinth of potentiality very much resembling Harriet’s paradigmatic dream, and ultimately Grandison itself. God’s view, he tells us, encompasses “all the possible compositions and divisions, variations and changes, circumstances and dependencies of things; all their possible relations one to another, and Dispositions or Fitness to certain respective Ends.”

Divine liberty necessitates human uncertainty. Indeed, a certain degree of human anxiety was considered psychologically normal, spiritually healthy, and even ethically essential in a providential universe. William Sherlock points out that if providence were predictable, it would void the significance of moral choice: to choose good would be to choose happiness—“... but where the event is not certain there is room left for wise considerations, for hopes and fears which are the natural springs of a free choice.” Excessive or obsessive anxiety, however, became an insult to providence, and the divines warned against it, centering their injunctions around the Biblical text “Sufficient to the day is the evil thereof” (Matt.6:34), as in the following excerpt from a sermon by Isaac Bawor:

... this is that which our Saviour cautioneth against, as the root of discontent and sign of diffidence: Take no thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself: sufficient to the day is the evil thereof; ... Could we follow this advice, never resenting evils before they come, pre-judging about future events against God’s providence and our own quiet....

That Richardson piously subscribed to this homiletic advice is apparent by its frequent recurrence within his novels. In the continuation of Pamela, old Mr. Andrews reproaches his apprehensive daughter with that very Biblical text just prior to her first trip to London with Mr. B----, and in Grandison, just after Charles’s proposal of marriage, Harriet serves both as her own tempter and rebucker: “May nothing now happen, my dear Lady G. to overcloud—But I will not be apprehensive. I will thankfully enjoy the present moment, and leave the future to the All-wise Disposer of Events” (III,80).

Another instance, however, also in Grandison, becomes a classic case of Richardsonian technique subverting Richardsonian doctrine and transmuting it into a more profound and discomforting insight. In a passage that calls attention to the hypothetical evils we have been discussing, Richardson demonstrates the inevitability of human angst, despite the ecclesiastical remonstrances against it, by means of an exaggerated and extraordinarily selfconscious version of his “writing to the moment” that might have come right out of Fielding’s Shamela. Richardson’s most typical “writing to the moment” is actually a succession of accounts of the recent past, the only “present” rendered being that of thoughts and emotions. In the scene under discussion, however, Richardson breaks normal procedure and allows Charlotte to travesty his method by having a process of letter-writing that goes on concurrently with the event it is describing. Charlotte Grandison has just been writing a letter to Harriet in which she perversely encourages her friend’s apprehensions about Clementina’s “resolution,” when her sister, Lady L., intrudes.
The mischievous and skeptical Charlotte communicates, in her own erratic epistolary way, the subsequent efforts of her pious sister to insert that same Biblical injunction into the text of Charlotte's letter.

... But here she comes.--I love, Harriet, to write to the moment; that's a knock I had from you and my brother... I will read your Letter--Shall I? [says Lady L].

Take it; but read it out, that I may know what I have written. Now give it me again. I'll write down what you say to it, Lady L.

Lady L. I say you are a whimsical creature. But I don't like what you have last written.

Charlotte. Last written--'Tis down.--But why so, Lady L?

Lady L. How can you thus teaze our beloved Byron, with your conjectural evils?

Ch. Have I supposed an impossibility?--But 'tis down--Conjectural evils.

Lady L. If you are so whimsical, write--'My dear Miss Byron'--

Ch. My dear Miss Byron--'Tis down.

Lady L. (Looking over me) 'Do not let what this strange Charlotte has written, grieve you:'--

Ch. Very well, Caroline!--grieve you.

Lady L. 'Sufficient to the day is the evil thereof.'

Ch. Well observed.--Words of Scripture, I believe--Well--evil thereof.--

The struggles of Lady L.--we may as well read, 'of Richardson'--prove futile, because, although Lady L. eventually has the final word in the argument--"Regard not the perplexing Charlotte" (III,26)--we cannot help but regard her because it is Charlotte who is writing those words and who has made the technique of the passage run counter to Lady L.'s advice. The Biblical message--'regard the present only'--is negated by the time taken to deliver it, here exaggerated by Charlotte but actually true of all verbal communication. The injunction about living only in the present has itself been made to depend upon futurity; an exhortation to stasis has been recorded within the ongoing process of language, and of time itself.

Grandison's unresolved ending, with Clementina's marriage to Count Belvedere, her long-suffering suitor, left dangling as a future possibility, is surely most appropriate to a novel whose text discloses the permanent insecurity bred of humanity's existence within this temporality. Indeed, I must take issue here with that otherwise most enlightening expert on Sir Charles Grandison, Jocelyn Harris, who finds the looseness of the ending adventitious and distressing to "the tidy-minded reader."28 Her judgment rests in part on her assumption that Richardson at his best provides us with a tight, inevitable plot, but Warner has recently challenged this myth by arguing the essential arbitrariness and contingency of the narrative in Clarissa.29 In fact, Warner's general debunking of the traditional Aristotelian plot with its necessary cause and effect provides a clue to the deliberate artistic purpose served by the 'untidy' ending of Grandison: "...'plot' overcomes [human] doubts about the past and anxiety over the future."30 We have already seen how Richardson suggests the non-necessary, gratuitous nature of the providential events in Grandison through his use of alter egos and the subjunctive, and we may further imply his concurrence with Warner's criticism of the delusive complacency of plot from a comment on the human condition made by Clarissa, writing to her godmother, Mrs. Norton:
It will be a great satisfaction to me to hear... that my foster brother is out of danger. But why said I, out of danger? When can this be justly said of creatures who hold by so uncertain a tenure. This is one of those forms of common speech that proves the frailty and the presumption of poor mortals at the same time. (IV,2)

It is precisely such human presumption that Clementina punctures when she chides the over-jubilant Belvedere after she has made a new contract with her parents containing what Harris calls a "near-commitment" to marrying him:31 "I mentioned, my Lord, that it was for your own sake, that I wished you not to depend upon a contingency" (III,452).

Harris's severe judgment is also heavily influenced by what she perceives as the aetiology of Grandison's open resolution: Richardson's indecision and his susceptibility to criticism, leading to hasty, compromised revising. Her chief evidence is Richardson's various epistolary proposals to Lady Bradshaigh for the "Catastrophe" of the novel: however, the rhetorical question she poses -- "But why should he offer her such a range of alternatives if he had indeed decided upon every detail of the conclusion?"--can be answered differently by comparing these proposals to the rhetorical and psychological patterns I have been tracing in the novel. The recent iconoclastic criticism of Clarissa once again sets a precedent, in this case, for rejecting a strict boundary line between what is "inside" and what is "outside" the novel and for reading Richardson's correspondence, in particular, as an extension and a replication of his fiction31.

In his exchange of letters with Lady Bradshaigh, Richardson's employment of the past perfect subjunctive links him to his own speculating characters in Grandison: "But had Clemintina been the wife of Sir Charles, and Harriet had broken her Heart, who would not then have pitied and even preferred her?" Richardson's earlier teasing of Hester Mulso also corresponds to the subjunctive technique of the novel:

Think you not that Harriet can shine by her behaviour in some very deep distress?...Would it not be right to remove Charles?--But shall we first marry him?--Shall we shew Harriet...in her vidual glory? Mother of a posthumous son, or daughter?--Which... The case, too, so common? Or shall we remove him by a violent fever--or by the treacherous sword of Greville.... On the very day of the nuptials?... or the day before? Which?31

Here we find the same forking of alternatives within alternatives--son or daughter, married or unmarried, the day of the weddimg or the day before--as well as the insistence on the plausibility of tragedy--"the case... so common." Harris believes that Richardson was genuinely considering endings more sensational than the one we have now and gave them up only because Lady Bradshaigh did not jump at the bait,35 but we can see that the sensational alternatives in the example above echo precisely the "conjectural evils" which hover perpetually over the characters of Grandison. Moreover, in a later letter to Lady Bradshaigh, Richardson explicitly connects his "suggestion" of a childbed death for Harriet to his heroine's apprehensive nightmare in the novel--"Harriet's dream admirably made out in the fitting. Ghost-like Duration of her Nuptials"--reinforcing my contention that Richardson's gambits in the correspondence are links to the anxiety-mechanisms of Grandison, not serious proposals for a conventional plot.
Finally, it is most revealing to examine the self-portrait that emerges in yet another letter to the same lady, when Richardson sets out to prove that it is within his literary power to bring about a proposal of polygamy which has shocked Lady Bradshaigh:

But how will you bring Clementina, her Friends, &c. --How!--Let me alone for that. Cannot the Marquis and the Marchioness opportunity die?... Cannot a wound of Jeronymo's, too skinned over, break out, and kill him? Cannot I make the Bishop a Cardinal, or Archbishop may do, and send him on a Mission to China. There was a Cardinal Tournon there. Cannot the fierce General be killed in a Duel, or suffocated by the sudden Change of Wind, in going too near Vesuvius... And cannot they all bequeath her to the Care of the Chevalier... And then comes Harriet with her Proposal.... If I resolve never fear but I make it probable, and glorious for both Ladies.38

Is this not Richardson the artist playing providence to his nescient and passive audience, asserting his arbitrary and omnipotent will? In fact, may we not compare the whole play of possibilities sketched by Richardson for his various correspondents as a simulacrum of "all the compositions and divisions, variations and changes" suspended by Samuel Clarke's God in His synoptic vision of life? Richardson's circle of sensitive souls, then, like Sir Charles Grandison's, was elected to remain in a constant state of deferential anxiety.

For those who still remain skeptical of there being acute unease behind the genteel facade of "polite society" in Sir Charles Grandison, I would like to conclude by proposing a tentative analogy with a most provocative theory recently limned out by Jean-Maurice Biziére. Biziére, using the tools of psycho-history, has disclosed a profound and widespread anxiety in eighteenth-century society beneath the decorous rituals of the coffee-house and the tea-table. He argues that the disproportionate increase in the consumption of tea and coffee between the beginning and end of the eighteenth-century arose largely from a conflict between the new economic impetus to social mobility and the traditional taboo against change in the providential, hierarchical ordering of society, a conflict resulting in a collective anal fixation. To relieve this anguish, he claims, individuals resorted to a device called "reversal to the opposite" in which the process of defecation was reversed by imbibing liquids that have anal characteristics--being brown, warm, and odorous.19

Though I myself have eschewed a Freudian approach to Richardson's work, it should be noted, lest my analogy seem too far-fetched, that Terry Eagleton has recently interpreted Richardsonian letters as symbolic faeces.40 Hence, it may not be amiss to generalise about a similar kind of conflict in Grandison. I have argued that a certain amount of anxiety is inherent in an orthodox providential world-view, but this anxiety is exacerbated by the disturbing new individualism which was finding ambivalent expression in novels of the period,41 and of which the widespread criminal aggression I have noted in Grandison is just one symptom. For Richardson, society was impotent to resolve these new tensions. His career did not reach into the subsequent historical period in which Evangelicism sparked off a new faith in the possibilities of a social reform which could ameliorate life on earth for the individual; yet the quietistic preachers of an earlier age that Richardson's characters frequently mouth do not really hold water in the novel either. Rather, Grandison as a whole resounds more movingly with an excessive anxiety emerging
from the conflict between the conscious desire to submit piously to a cosmic plan, and the burgeoning sense of self which cannot help but be concerned with an individual's fate in this life.
'SUFFICIENT TO THE DAY': ANXIETY IN SIR CHARLES GRANDISON

Footnotes


3 Gerald Levin, Richardson the Novelist: the Psychological Patterns, Costerus: Essays in English and American Language and Literature, NS 9 (Amsterdam: Rodolphi, 1978), p. 117. Levin is the only other critic I know of who deals at length with anxiety in Sir Charles Grandison, but his approach--treating the novel as an exemplar of the Oedipal "family romance"--is entirely divergent from mine.


6 Wolff, p. 228.

7 Isaac Barrow, Sermons and Expository Treatises (Edinburgh: T. Nelson, 1839), II, 376.

8 Samuel Richardson, Clarissa, or, the History of a Young Lady, ed. John Butt (London and New York: Dent and Dutton, 1932), III, 229. This edition is hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

9 Samuel Richardson, The History of Sir Charles Grandison, with Introd. by William Lyon Phelps (New York: Croscup and Sterling, 1901), I, xxxix. This editorializing table of contents was not included in the first edition of Grandison on which Harris's edition is based.


14 Tillotson, “Success Not Always Answerable to the Probability of Second Causes,” in *Sermons*, VII, 140.


16 Sitter, p. 204; Sitter deals with this phenomenon (“a process by which characters split in two”, as he terms it) to quite different purpose than my discussion of alter egos.


18 Warner, *Reading 'Clarissa': Terry Castle, Clarissa's Ciphers: Meaning & Disruption in Richardson's 'Clarissa'* (Ithaca and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1982); Terry Eagleton, *The Rape of Clarissa: Writing, Sexuality and Class Struggle in Samuel Richardson* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982). The subsequent summary in my paragraph in the text is culled from assumptions mentioned and employed throughout all three works mentioned, especially the first two. Warner is the most out-and-out “‘deconstructionist’” of the three, but although he accuses Castle and Eagleton of subordinating recent critical theory to socio-political ends, he concedes that “... their work is steeped in this theory...” (Warner, “Reading Rape: Marxist-Feminist Figurations of the Literal,” (Rev. of Castle, Clarissa's Ciphers and Eagleton, The Rape of Clarissa), Diacritics, 13, No. 4 (1983), 21-22).

19 The term is Warner’s, in “Reading Rape,” p.12.


22 Samuel Richardson, *Familiar Letters on Important Occasions*, ed. Brian W. Downs (New York: Mead & Co., 1928), from letter sequence cxxii-cxxvi (pp 157-62). Other examples of the same procedure are sequence lxxi-lxxiii: “A modest Lover desiring an Aunt’s Favour to her Niece, The Aunt’s Answer, supposing the Gentleman deserves Encouragement, The Answer, Supposing the Gentleman is not approved” (pp. 91-92) and sequence cix-cxxi: “An Offer of Assistance to a Friend who has received great Losses by a Person’s Failure; The Friend’s Answer, accepting the kind Offer, The Friend’s Answer, supposing he has no Occasion for the offer,” and so forth (pp. 136-44).

23 For a lengthier discussion of this development in Anglican polemics, see my article, “This Intricate Labyrinth: Order and Contingency in Eighteenth-Century Fictions,” *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 212 (1982), 188-192.