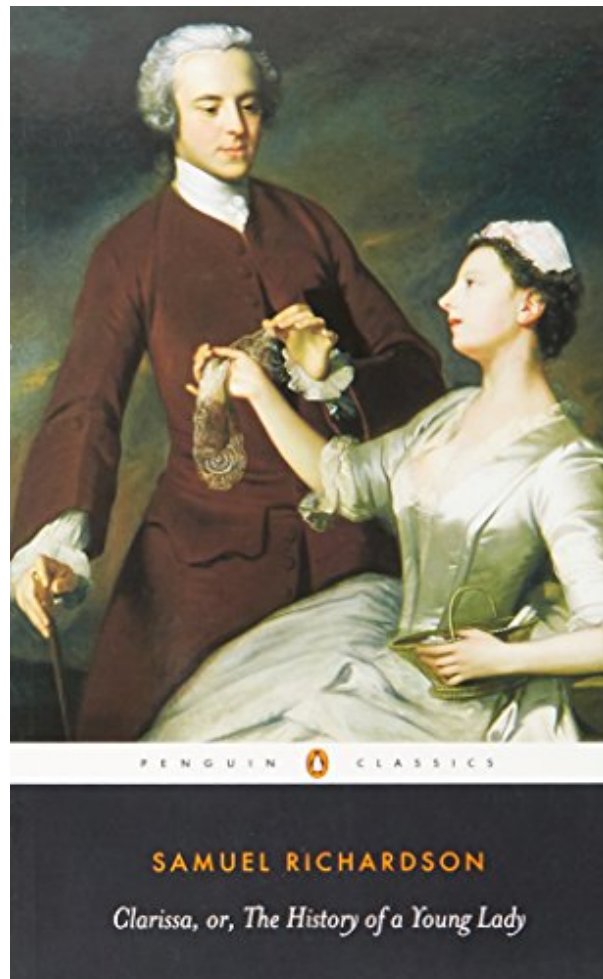


**CLARISSA: OR THE HISTORY OF A YOUNG
LADY (PENGUIN CLASSICS) BY SAMUEL
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Clarissa, or, The History of a Young Lady

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Review

Epistolary novel by Samuel Richardson, published in 1747-48. Richardson first presents the heroine, Clarissa Harlowe, when she is discovering the barely masked motives of her family, who want to force her into a loveless marriage to improve their fortunes. When Lovelace, a romantic who holds the code of the Harlowes in contempt, offers her protection, she runs off with him. She is physically attracted by if not actually in love with Lovelace, but she is to discover that he wants her only on his own terms and she refuses to marry him. In Lovelace's letters to his friend Belford, Richardson shows that what is driving him to conquest and finally to rape is really revenge for her family's insults and his sense of Clarissa's moral superiority. For Clarissa, however, accepting marriage as a convenience is no better than accepting the opportunistic moral code of her family. As the novel comes to its long-drawn-out close, she is removed from the world of both the Harlowes and the Lovelaces, and she dies true to herself to the end. -- The Merriam-Webster Encyclopedia of Literature

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CLARISSA: OR THE HISTORY OF A YOUNG LADY (PENGUIN CLASSICS) BY SAMUEL RICHARDSON PDF

"Oh thou savage-hearted monster! What work hast thou made in one guilty hour, for a whole age of repentance!"

Pressured by her unscrupulous family to marry a wealthy man she detests, the young Clarissa Harlowe is tricked into fleeing with the witty and debonair Robert Lovelace and places herself under his protection. Lovelace, however, proves himself to be an untrustworthy rake whose vague promises of marriage are accompanied by unwelcome and increasingly brutal sexual advances. And yet, Clarissa finds his charm alluring, her scrupulous sense of virtue tinged with unconfessed desire. Told through a complex series of interweaving letters, Clarissa is a richly ambiguous study of a fatally attracted couple and a work of astonishing power and immediacy. A huge success when it first appeared in 1747, and translated into French and German, it remains one of the greatest of all European novels.

In his introduction, Angus Ross examines characterization, the epistolary style, the role of the family and the position of women in Clarissa. This edition also includes a chronology, suggestions for further reading, tables of letters, notes, a glossary and an appendix on the music for the "Ode to Wisdom."

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One of the Seminal Novels in English

By mp

Samuel Richardson's massive 1747-8 novel, "*Clarissa*," is not only the longest novel I've ever read, but one of the best and most complex. Much like Richardson's first novel, "*Pamela*," "*Clarissa*" deals with the torments of a virtuous young lady abducted by a rake/libertine (in modern parlance, a rapist) who submits the heroine to a series of trials. Unlike *Pamela*, a lower class maiden, *Clarissa* is a member of an established and wealthy family. This change in social situation allows Richardson to explore a host of new issues, with the primary goal of moral didacticism remaining intact between the two.

Clarissa Harlowe, the most beautiful and exemplary of her sex, is being imposed upon by her implacable family to marry one Mr. Solmes, a man of no mean fortune, but whose ethics, especially with regard to his own family, are suspect. Simultaneously, *Clarissa's* sister, *Arabella*, has just rejected a proposal from one Robert Lovelace, the heir of a nobleman, educated and refined, but known for his libertinism - his tendency and enjoyment of seducing young women and then abandoning them. Lovelace falls in love, or in lust, with *Clarissa*, and after he and *Clarissa's* brother James, heir to the Harlowe fortune, engage in a near fatal duel, *Clarissa's* continued correspondence with Lovelace becomes a major thorn in the side of the Harlowes' plans for *Clarissa*. The Harlowes continue to urge the addresses of Mr. Solmes while vilifying Lovelace - *Clarissa* not approving of either - and when her family's insistence becomes insupportable to *Clarissa*, the utterly demonic Lovelace takes advantage, whisking her away from a seemingly inevitable union with Solmes. Thus begins an absolutely terrifying journey for *Clarissa* through the darkness of humanity, as Lovelace plots and executes his seduction of the 'divine' *Clarissa*.

An epistolary novel, "*Clarissa*" is written in the form of a series of letters spanning nine months, principally between *Clarissa* and her best friend and iconoclast, *Anna Howe*, and between Lovelace and a fellow libertine, *John Belford*. Richardson's 'to the moment' style of writing gives a minute account of everything that happens to the main characters almost as it happens, giving the novel a highly dramatic sense of urgency. The four major correspondents, as well as others, also give the novel a well-developed sense of perspective, as we get not only the events, but biased opinions and readings of all the other characters, making the events at times difficult to follow, but at the same time, marvelously rich and complex.

Some of the most interesting facets of this novel are its interactions with the law, primarily inheritance law, the contrast between history and story, and at the forefront, the debate over gender roles in marriage. Almost of a piece with the novel's legal issues, Richardson examines the vagueries of semantics - what do words mean? How are words regarded and used differently by men and women? Richardson also confronts the way we read and interpret 'truth' - in a book composed of letters, subjectively written and read, where can we look to for 'truth'?

Among the characters in the novel, by far the most captivating and challenging in "Clarissa" is the aforementioned Anna Howe. The ways she clashes with tradition and propriety throughout the novel are entertaining, and very much reminiscent of the eponymous heroine of Defoe's "Moll Flanders." An amazing and influential novel to say the least, anyone with a few weeks on their hands who is interested in the history of the novel in English should pick up and give "Clarissa" some serious attention, stat!

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Read the UNABRIDGED Clarissa!

By A Customer

The UNABRIDGED Clarissa (Penguin ed.) is a powerful, moving eighteenth-century English masterpiece, the first great psychological novel. Its length may seem daunting and it does take at least six weeks to read, but you will be rewarded by finding yourself immersed in the minds of Clarissa and Lovelace. You will feel as though you are living in their world, facing their moral dilemmas, deciding on courses of action, predicting consequences. However, if you accidentally pick up the Sherburn ABRIDGEMENT of Clarissa, you will NOT be able to savor Richardson's famous "writing to the moment." If you doubt me, take a look at Mary Anne Doody and Florian Stuber's article, "Clarissa Censored," in the journal *Modern Language Studies* (1988). The abridgement is a travesty of Richardson's greatest novel.

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Not a book to be read in abridgement--be patient!

By A Customer

Once you've read this book, you can barely read anything written in England post-1750 without finding and feeling Richardson's influence. An English epic, a sometimes infuriatingly detailed exploration of men and women under pressure, a masterfully crafted depiction of bewilderment, betrayal, and the kind of religious ecstasy that's difficult to read. Don't miss Letter 246. Stay with this book, even if it takes you weeks (it took me 7)--it's well worth it, a one-of-a-kind reading experience.

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