

GIVE MY HEART EASE

Filiality and Responsibility in *Clarissa* in Light of Levinasian and Confucian Ethics

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Abstract

Much has been said about the elements of plot, allegorical allusions, and the Christian design underlying character tendencies in Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*. That said, few scholars notice the intricate mechanism of filiality and responsibility that constantly functions in Clarissa's ethical quest. Arguably, there are two categories of filiality in *Clarissa*, one being Levinasian, which always responds to the absolute singularity of the Other, and the other being Confucian, which demands responsibility to a totality. Judging from her struggle, one surmises that two ethical principles colliding within Clarissa's mind as she responds to her relations mainly arise from her Levinasian sense of responsibility to the Other, which articulates itself as Clarissa's parenting of the other characters in the novel, and her Confucian, consanguineous love towards her parents expressed in her spirited defense of her family even when they go against her will or treat her terribly. The alternation of these two ethical impulses—which stresses a strain of moral command that contradicts Clarissa's consistent practice of ethics, a practice that identifies herself as “[a]nother,” or as a self that cannot fully constitute itself without “pass[ing] into the other”—comes to shape her conflicting filiation. Not only do the two incompatible ethical principles agonize Clarissa to a great extent, but it is also this incompatibility that makes her tragedy inevitable. By rereading *Clarissa* through the prisms of Confucian and Levinasian ethics, this essay attempts to address the ethical principles underlying Clarissa's many choices germane to her pursuit of peace of mind, namely, an appropriate human distance and the ideal of humanity. It is demonstrable that Clarissa's insistence on prioritizing optative ethics over the imperative moral norms testifies to her phronesis, which becomes a source of valor for her to do justice to all others than to secure justice for herself in not-so-friendly situations of distress, injustice, and violence.

Keywords

Confucian ethics, filiality, Levinasian ethics, responsibility, Samuel Richardson

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INTRODUCTION

Clarissa, or the *History of a Young Lady*, is an epistolary novel by Samuel Richardson, an eighteenth-century English novelist who expanded the dramatic possibilities of the novel via the inventive use of the letter form. Published in 1748, the work is the longest novel in the English language. It articulates the tragic story of the eponymous heroine Clarissa Harlowe, whose desperate quests for freedom and virtue are constantly thwarted by Robert Lovelace, the villainous hero, and by the heroine's own family. In the postscript to his monumental novel, Richardson exculpates himself from claims that he intentionally ended the story tragically, by arguing that *Clarissa* is formed on a "religious plan" that seeks to "extricate suffering virtue till it meets with the completion of its reward," and thus for him the calamity that befalls Clarissa is well justified (1,495). For Richardson, the highly valued *poetical justice* of his time, due to which readers rained pointed critiques upon Clarissa's demise, was less important than a religious dispensation of Providence that would soften the audience's heart with the sentiment of commiseration and the terror of retribution. Scholars like Allen Wendt and James Bryant Reeves point out that Richardson, informed by the Cambridge Platonists, literally "presents the spiritual realm of the ideal as inherently superior to material existence" (Reeves 603). And as commonly assumed by critics of Richardson's magnum opus, *Clarissa* tends to conceive of a dualism inexorably hostile to the constructive reformation of the material world.

Recent studies focus on Clarissa's Puritan accounts of the self as entangled in the eighteenth-century romance/trial narrative, her senses of shame and glory as affective pivots that rationalize her self-revelation, or the emblems on her coffin and her posthumous texts that signify the extension of her mortal presence and her successful transcendence of "human interpretation" (Castle 26). That said, few scholars notice the intricate mechanism of filiality and responsibility that constantly functions in Clarissa's ethical quest, which eventually brings about her perdition. Though Richardson defends the story's tragic ending with the power of religion, he also sheds light on alternative interpretive possibilities: in *Clarissa*, the "Christian system" (Richardson 1498) rewards its disciples only after moral confrontations are settled, for religious redemption promises posthumous justice for Clarissa in the novel.

In discussing "[human] actions refigured by narrative fictions," Paul Ricoeur shows us that "anticipations of an ethical nature" render these actions much more complex than in reality (*Oneself as Another* 170). After all, the intervention of an ethical perspective usually means "aiming at the good life with and for others in just institutions" (Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* 180). Ricoeur reminds us of the intricacy of the distinction between the two often interchangeable terms: ethics

and morality. He submits that while ethics and morality etymologically refer to a common phenomenon, namely, “that of *mores*” (Ricoeur, “The Moral, the Ethical, and the Political” 13), they lexically derive from the Greek and the Latin, respectively, and thus this implied distinction cannot be justified on a personal level or at any institutional level alone: too many factors should be taken into account, much less in “an imaginary space for thought experiments in which moral judgment operates in a hypothetical mode” (Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* 170). By convention, and in reference to the commonly accepted twofold connotation of *mores* (namely, *to be considered good*, and *to be imposed as obligatory*), Ricoeur chooses to “reserve the term ‘ethics’ for the *aim* of an accomplished life and the term ‘morality’ for the articulation of this aim in *norms* characterized at once by the claim to universality and by an effect of constraint” (*Oneself as Another* 170). Ricoeur defines this distinction between *aim* and *norm* as one between two philosophical heritages: one being the Aristotelian imprint on *ethics* as a *teleological* concept, the other being Kant’s *deontological* characterization of *morality* as being intrinsically defined by “the obligation to respect the norm” (*Oneself as Another* 170). Clarissa’s moral dilemma, which arises from her idiosyncratic Ricoeurean perception of herself as another (“*Soi-même comme un autre*”) (Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* 3), will by no means escape the aforesaid tension between ethics and morality. In fact, it essentially comes about from this tension, for her conundrum is virtually one between her optional wish for “living well” (Ricoeur, “The Moral, the Ethical, and the Political” 16) and the obligatory “imperative of duty” (Ricoeur, “The Moral, the Ethical, and the Political” 16). Either way would fail to proceed without “violence inflicted by one human agent upon another” (Ricoeur, “The Moral, the Ethical, and the Political” 16), out of self-interest “at the cost of another” (Ricoeur, “The Moral, the Ethical, and the Political” 16). To simplify matters, Ricoeur’s proposed idea to reinstate the Aristotelian discourse on *mores*, after Baruch Spinoza, is adopted here, which allies ethics with an optative desire for the good and morality with an imperative command that sides with obligation.

Equally important is Ricoeur’s reflection on “selfhood” (*Oneself as Another* 170), which adequately accounts for the inescapable limitation of morality as legitimate actualization of the ethical aim. In Ricoeur’s footnote to his seminal treatise, he states that he is partially indebted to Emmanuel Levinas for an interdisciplinary exploration of the intimacy between one’s selfhood and “otherness” (*Oneself as Another* 189), a pertinent concept for understanding the nexus between unrequited love and unconditional kind deeds in Hegelian terms and the fulfillment of “selfhood” (*Oneself as Another* 170). Likewise, Levinas’s ethics becomes the philosophical lens through which one counters the recalcitrant series of actions Clarissa carries out against the moral command in conventional ethics with her practical wisdom. By rereading *Clarissa* through the prisms of Confucian and Levinasian ethics, I readdress such critical problems as the nature of Clarissa’s familial and interpersonal

associations, as well as the ethical impulses underlying her many choices germane to her impossible pursuit of an appropriate human distance and the ideal of humanity (namely, the ideal of benevolence, being humane, or the Confucian *ren*). To put it differently, I venture beyond an inspection of the psychological tensions within the heroine's spiritual intentions and "private passions" (Taylor 92) as she attempts to exonerate her family and reform her "lover." In doing so, I return to Samuel Johnson's suggestion to judge the book's exquisite display of the human heart from a comparative-ethical perspective. It is through this lens that I intend to present my view, complementing current scholarship by teasing out factors that render Clarissa's calamity ineluctable in light of Levinasian and Confucian ethics.

Filiation, a leading trope in Levinasian ethics, is one of the ways to characterize Levinas's notion of infinite responsibility to the Other. The Levinasian assumptions create a metaphysical boundary between self and other (that is, a boundary beyond human limits and the physical laws of the world) so as to contain the violence of totalization, as totalization tends to "giv[e] rise to war" (Tahmasebi-Birgani 46) and "exten[d] its horizon beyond the set framework of liberal democratic values" (51), which shapes a world so unfathomable and encompassing that this world seems to share no *lingua franca* with any other land. Small wonder that the metaphorical notion of filiality, understood as a way of caring for others, can provide a common language (or at least a *patois*) in which people from different worlds meet and interact. With that in mind, the idea of filiality, as "the root of *ren*" (Kim 279), the Confucian sense of humanity, is also to be found in multiple places in the *Analects* and in *Mencius*. *Ren*, the Confucian virtue *par excellence*, is conventionally interpreted in two different but often compatible ways: filial piety (*xiao*) as a social virtue, and an "affect[ive]" (Chan 180) sentiment of commiseration. But there are also opponents of this interpretation. As Qingping Liu points out, affection is not necessarily a feature of filial piety, for the original form of Confucianism, though admmissive of the instrumental role of human nature in its crucial teachings, was essentially "consanguinitism" due to its rational observance of "kinship loyalty" (Liu 238) and consanguineous responsibility (234, 246). Given that commiseration is characteristically Mohist because compassion eventually leads to universal love, filiality invariably contains an internal tension generated by the inevitable contradiction between the "particularism of filiality" and the "universalism of commiseration" (Kim 280). For this reason, Confucian filiality—with its often anti-liberal, nepotistic element—has always been deemed uncondusive or even an obstacle to the realization of freedom, personal autonomy, and democracy (Liu 246). Arguably, there are two categories of filiality in *Clarissa*, one being Levinasian, which always responds to the absolute singularity of the Other, and the other category being Confucian, which demands responsibility to a totality. It is arguable that the alternation of these two ethical impulses—which stresses a strain of moral command that contradicts Clarissa's consistent practice of ethics, a practice that

identifies herself as “[a]nother,” or as a self that cannot fully constitute itself without “pass[ing] into the other” (Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* 3)—comes to shape Clarissa’s conflicting filiation, which finally impels her to a dead end.

FILIALITY, TOTALITY, AND THE HEGEMONY OF LI: THE HARLOW COUPLE AS CONFUCIAN PARENTS

In Clarissa’s epistolary accounts of her personal history and the domestic history of the Harlowes, her relationship with her family members—especially with her parents—plays a crucial role in the evolution of her own storyline. Alternatively speaking, Clarissa’s sensible, or say, often too conscious involvement in her relationship with Mr. and Mrs. Harlowe constitutes a considerable portion of her sense of responsibility as a daughter. Hence, to examine the ethical impulses underlying Clarissa’s actions in the novel, it is essential to investigate the nature of Clarissa’s familial and interpersonal associations in the first place. There are many signs in the letters exchanged among the main characters to show that the Harlowe couple exerts pressure on their child in order to attain their own ideal of familial perfection. Clarissa’s attachment to the Harlowes, then, comprises both moral responsibility and a Confucian sense of humanity (*ren*), which galvanizes people to love others but to put their *qin* (relation between parents and their children) first when doing so. When discussing the Levinasian sense of Other in *Oneself as Another* (1992), Ricoeur also touches upon the topic of “humanity” (Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* 190) by excavating “the ethical” (Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* 189) from under the “categorical imperative” of obligation (Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* 183, 190). But this notion of humanity walks a very fine line between an imperative obedience to established norms and an optative “solicitude” (Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* 190) that seeks to complete the self via caring for others “as an end in itself and not simply as a means” (Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* 190), and thus slightly differs from *ren* in the Confucian sense.

James Harlowe, Sr., Clarissa’s father and also the leading authority of Harlowe Place,¹ makes his first appearance in Clarissa’s third letter to her confidante Anna Howe. In that letter, Clarissa shares that her father has made the declaration in measured terms that he is about to hand over his familial authority to his son as to whether or not Lovelace is permitted to visit his daughters. The father’s dislike of Lovelace derives from the latter’s flawed reputation and, tellingly, from his son’s personal grudge against the man, which surely intensifies the already negative impression the father has of Lovelace. When old James Harlowe’s character is passed through a Levinasian prism, some may find that he exemplifies those who fail to see the infinity of the Other, for he merely focuses on the “color of [one’s] eyes” (Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity* 85). But one should not ignore the fact that the father’s antipathy toward Lovelace is essentially grounded in his genuine concern

for the well-being of the Harlowe family. As Clarissa recalls in her correspondence with Anna, “[...] he knew, indeed, there was an old grudge between them; [but] [...], being desirous to prevent all occasions of disunion and animosity in his family, he would suspend the declaration of his own mind, till his son arrived and till he had heard his further objections; that he was the more inclined to make his son this compliment, as Mr Lovelace’s general character gave but too much ground for his son’s dislike of him, adding, that he had heard (so he supposed had everyone) that he was a very extravagant man; that he had contracted debts in his travels; and indeed, he was pleased to say, he had the air of a spendthrift” (Richardson 45–46). In Letter 41, Mrs. Harlowe, the peacemaker between Clarissa and her father, and also old James’s mouthpiece, recapitulates her husband’s message to their daughter in one resolute statement: “On your single will, my child, depends all our present happiness!—” (188) By this token, the father’s acquiescence (and even indulgence) toward the son’s (i.e., James, Jr.’s) abuse of patriarchal authority later in the book originates from a prudence about his responsibility to a totality²—namely, the Harlowe family as a collective—at the expense of the infinite singularity of *one single* child (i.e., Clarissa). For old James, Clarissa’s marriage to Solmes is the best possible hope for adding a certain patina to the family’s social status and will undoubtedly bring them financial benefits in the future.

While Clarissa makes a painstaking effort to balance her pursuit of freedom and virtue with the despotic power of the Harlowe family, her struggle reveals the classic English feudalism underpinning the family’s fundamentally patriarchal structure. With that in mind, the vehement face-to-face confrontation between old James and Clarissa in Letter 9, which foregrounds the father’s violent suppression of Clarissa’s “protestations of duty” (Richardson 64), is also suggestive of the scene in Genesis 22:5 and 22:8 in which Abraham begins to sacrifice Isaac—his only son, whom God promised him in his old age—and is suddenly given a vision of God’s weightier promise of his fatherhood of many generations to come.³ In *Fear and Trembling*, Søren Kierkegaard maintains that Abraham must give up moral law and optative ethical choice for the sake of a higher religious realm. In other words, Abraham’s paradoxical belief (i.e., in both God’s promise of Isaac and God’s command that Isaac be sacrificed in exchange for future generations of Israel) dissociates Abraham from the secular realm into the realm of religion (or faith), which engenders a tension between ethics and morality (Kierkegaard 52). Jacques Derrida reads Abraham’s relationship to God as a relationship to the *wholly* other, with the filiation between Abraham and Isaac being an affinity of duty to family, ethics, and law. For Derrida, Abraham’s aporia of responsibility is the core of ethics, which straddles the universal and the individual at the same time, for “responsibility [...] demands on the one hand an accounting, a general answering-for-oneself with respect to the general and before the generality, hence the idea of substitution,

and, on the other hand, uniqueness, absolute singularity, hence nonsubstitution, nonrepetition, silence, and secrecy” (61).

Old James Harlowe’s dedication to the general welfare of the Harlowe family much resembles Abraham’s piety to God: both respond to a totality, a *wholly* other, at the cost of the infinity of *one single* other; both find themselves in a quandary because they have to choose between two irreconcilable responsibilities as parents. In *The Gift of Death*, Derrida also suggests that the child’s submission is necessary because God has promised him that he will inherit everything and take over the position of the parent from his father. This may also explain why James Harlowe chooses Clarissa as the “ram” instead of his other children. This Derridean insight may also help us construe Harlowe’s ensuing rage against Clarissa’s disobedience: for Derrida, Isaac’s obedience is a tacit agreement in the biblical story of Abraham, which violates Isaac’s singularity and infinity yet guarantees his inheritance of Abraham’s paternity, namely, the promised continuity of their progeny. Likewise, Clarissa, as her mother indicates in their altercation in Letter 17, is made independent by her grandfather’s will, which is a signal that she also bears some kind of “promise.” In such a light, it is not difficult to conjecture that what her father expects from her is the promise of a booming future for the Harlowe clan, which much resembles the biblical duty of future parenthood. In addition, old James Harlowe’s conduct also coincides with Abraham’s disenfranchisement of his wife Sarah, whose infinity and singularity are brutally infringed by the fulfillment of her husband’s responsibility to the totality, the *wholly* other.

Patriarchal hegemony aside, Mrs. Harlowe, as Clarissa’s mother, opts for the role of an accomplice in carrying out her husband’s duties, though what she does is essentially against her will. This is made manifest in the mirror scene in Letter 18, where Clarissa “saw [by the glass before her] the *mother* in [Mrs. Harlowe’s] softened eye cast towards [her]—But her words confirmed not the hoped-for tenderness” (Richardson 102). Mrs. Harlowe’s deplorable yearning to restore peace to the disordered family overrules her motherhood and compels her to approve the overbearing fatherhood of her husband. Her intention is perceptible as she persuades her daughter to comply with her “absolute duty” (93) in Letter 16 by remarking that “[...] [a]s you value your father’s blessing and mine, and the satisfaction of all the family, resolve to comply. [...] [A]nd since *your heart is free*, let your duty govern it” (91). Interestingly enough, old James Harlowe’s prohibition of Lovelace’s visit to Clarissa in Letter 4 is also announced on account of “the peace-sake of the family” (51), which may suggest that the father’s eagerness to marry Clarissa to Solmes is more for “peace-sake” than for personal covetousness (which differs from his son James Harlowe, Jr.). If we see Mrs. Harlowe’s image as an animated projection of old James Harlowe’s fatherhood, we may discover in both characters traces of the

Confucian hegemony of *li*—rites, norms, or “a hierarchical order” (Zito 336), which end up positioning the individual “I” *vis-à-vis* “an imagined whole.”

Daniel Star holds that Confucians do not have care ethics and thus are unable to care. In other words, Confucian ethics, unlike Levinasian ethics, does not respond sensitively to the particular needs and vulnerabilities of other individuals, “though [people abiding by Confucianism] may be better placed to do other morally good things” (Star 79). Rather, Confucian ethics tends to be described as a role-based ethics, where roles and virtues are often seen as particular to different kinds of relationships, that is, roles are relational—which is a paramount view to be found in the *Mencius* (IIIA:4). While the five essential human relationships (*wu lun*) are between fathers and sons, husbands and wives, elder brothers and younger brothers, rulers and subjects, and friends, “the *li* [rites or norms] fix the different sorts of human relationships” (qtd. in Cua 281) and virtues. For Mencius, the centrality of the patriarchal family demands that all five human relations (with the possible exception of friendship) are to be understood as hierarchical relationships between superiors and inferiors. And it is this close affinity among these patriarchal relationships and the rites governing them that determine the vital significance of the child’s obedience to the father (or, the child’s filial piety to both parents) in Confucian moral relations in order to maintain harmony in the family. This categorical supremacy of the totality and the command of an obedient *ren* (here meaning “benevolence”) are established early in the *Analects*: “It is rare for a man whose character is such that he is good as a son and obedient as a young man to have the inclination to transgress against his superiors. [...] The gentleman devotes his efforts to the roots, for once the roots are established, the Way will grow therefrom. Being good as a son and obedient as a young man is, perhaps, the root of a man’s character” (1:2). That is, Confucian ethics seeks to respond to a network of relations by assimilating the infinite singularity of the individual into the collective so as to strike a balance within such a network. Suffice to say, old James Harlowe’s despotism over Clarissa and Mrs. Harlowe’s unwitting conspiracy are both in line with Confucian ethics. The couple are parents in a Confucian sense *per se*.

FILIALITY AS RESPONSIBILITY: CLARISSA AS THE LEVINASIAN PARENT

While the Harlowe couple conforms to Confucian ethics, which emphasizes responsibility toward one’s country, family, and self-cultivation by virtue of a detachment from the Other, Clarissa, by declaring “my heart is free” (Richardson 136, 568) throughout her tragedy, interprets filiality and responsibility in a very

different light. Her non-reciprocal response to the infinity and singularity of her friends and her enemies alike makes her an undisputable “Levinasian parent.” This Levinasian filiation is most exemplified in her private correspondence with Lovelace and her refusal of Anna’s offer to help her escape, which would otherwise alter her tragic ending thoroughly. With all that said, it is Clarissa’s handling of her relationship with Lovelace that best demonstrates her uniqueness in the Harlowe family as a Levinasian parent.

Levinas conceptualizes a paternity that cannot be reduced to a law or a threat but must instead be a promise. Unlike Ricoeur’s or Freudian notions of promise,⁴ the promise of paternity for Levinas is neither a promise from the past, nor a promise that returns to itself; it “is not of recognition but of nonrecognition, of strangeness, of an open future, of infinity, of singularity” (Oliver, “Fatherhood” 48). Though in Levinas’s theory there is an analogical nexus between death and paternity, fatherhood requires neither murder nor sacrifice. For Levinas, filiation is a special case of alterity that informs all other relations. “It is the only relation in which the self becomes other and survives.” (Oliver, “Fatherhood” 48) In other words, filiation can be spiritual, a “paternal attitude” (Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity* 71) to a stranger “who, entirely while being Other, is me” (Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity* 71). For that very reason, it does not return us to the Hegelian battle of wills that “reinscribes the subject and turns the self back onto itself even in self-dispossession and abandonment” (Oliver, “Fatherhood” 48), which Ricoeur calls sacrifice. As a corollary, Levinasian filiation unfolds a different structure of subjectivity that opens up the self toward the other, an independent subjectivity that responds to the Other while still retaining its own ego (or self). This filiality, thus, also points to what Ricoeur calls “humanity in my own person and in that of others as an end in itself and not simply as a means” (*Oneself as Another* 190).

It is in such a light that Clarissa regards her relationship with Anna and with Lovelace. Confined, isolated, and friendless, Clarissa seeks consolation and refuge in her friendship with Anna while still adhering to her ethical principle that any Other individual must be respected and responded to equally. This is evident in Letter 8, where she criticizes her brother’s avarice at the cost of humane concerns:

[...] I hate him more than before. One great estate is already obtained at the expense of the relations to it, though distant relations, my brother’s, I mean, by his godmother; and this has given the hope, however chimerical that hope, of procuring others, and that my own at least may revert to the family. And yet, in my opinion, the world is but one great family; originally it was so; what then is this narrow selfishness that reigns in us, but relationship remembered against relationship forgot. (Richardson 62)

This ethical principle, or rather, a sense of Levinasian justice (equality, mutuality, or reciprocity) that ranges over a responsibility “for the Other’s responsibility” (Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity* 99), drives Clarissa to defend and maintain a private correspondence with Lovelace—a man whom she finds morally repulsive—against the wishes of her own sibling. In Letter 29, she passionately explains to Anna her enigmatic conduct as follows: “It is [...] the call of justice, as I may say, to speak up a little for a man who, although provoked by my brother, did not do him all the mischief he could have done him, and which my brother had endeavoured to do *him*” (Richardson 136). Her Levinasian ethical concern is also exemplified in Letter 28, where she defends Solmes against a pungent verbal assault from Anna:

I cannot help owning, that I am pleased to have you join with me in opinion of the contempt which Mr. Solmes deserves from me. But yet, permit me to say, that he is not quite so horrible a creature as you make him; as to his *person*, I mean: For with regard to his *mind*, by all I have heard, you have done him but justice [...]. (134)

Clarissa’s Levinasian motivation and her lamentation over her family’s hurtful response to her own ethical concern are further exhibited in Letter 15, where she complains to Anna about the miserable experience of Solmes’s marriage proposal and her morally compelled correspondence with Lovelace after the duel: “[...] All of them at the same time afraid of Mr. Lovelace—yet not afraid to provoke him!—How am I entangled!—to be obliged to go on corresponding with him for *their* sakes—Heaven forbid, that their persisted-in violence should so drive me as to make it necessary for *my own*” (84). In fact, Lovelace has detected Clarissa’s nonreciprocal sense of duty toward him and her family, as he writes to his fellow debauchee and best friend John Belford in Letter 31: “All the ground I have hitherto gained with her is entirely owing to her concern for the safety of people whom I have reason to hate” (142). However, Clarissa’s obliging correspondence with Lovelace is gradually thwarted by violence from her family. It then becomes a relationship “necessary for [*her*] *own*” (84) (as she declares herself), which eventually convinces her to flee with Lovelace and to dream of “reform[ing]” (1116) him. This is another demonstration of her Levinasian parenthood.

For Levinas, filiality begins with eros and fecundity. Eros is possible due to sexual difference, which is neither a contradiction nor a complementarity between two parties. It is an event of alterity, a relationship “with what is absent in the very moment at which everything is there” (Oliver, “Fatherhood” 48). For Levinas, the caress always seeks something other, directed not toward another body but toward a space that transcends through the body and a time that he describes as “a future never future enough” (*Totality and Infinity* 254). The relationship with the other is such a promise—a paradoxical promise that cannot be fulfilled, a promise whose fulfillment would destroy the promise, which is time, not the here and now

but “the not yet, the still to come” (Oliver, “Fatherhood” 49)—something always in motion that cannot be assimilated or owned. “It is the time of love—the infinite engendered through finite beings coming together.” (Oliver, “Fatherhood” 49) “Love seeks what does not have the structure of an existent, the infinitely future, what is to be engendered,” as Levinas asserts (*Totality and Infinity* 266). For Levinas, love seeks what is beyond any possible union between two individuals and pursues “trans-substantiation” (*Totality and Infinity* 266, 269), which engenders “the child” (*Totality and Infinity* 266). Filiality, made possible through a relationship with the feminine, opens the masculine subject onto infinite time and returns him to the ethical relationship. The trans-substantiation that begets the child is possible only by virtue of the feminine other. Filiality engenders “desire” (Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* 84), which is the infinite time of the absolutely other.

It is credible that Clarissa’s definition of her attraction to Lovelace falls in this Levinasian category, for she constantly sees Lovelace’s infinity⁵ despite his notorious reputation and her family’s collective hostility toward him, whereas Lovelace holds a completely reversed view.⁶ Though Clarissa perceives Lovelace as a *leader* amongst all *Others* for his exterior excellence but, in the meantime, also discerns his finitude for killing the Other for revenge, she believes in an open possibility in him as good and as educable—as with a mother who believes that her naughty child is good by nature and thus is moldable. It is safe to say that Clarissa’s “secret pleasure” to reform Lovelace, to “reclaim such a man to the paths of virtue and honour” (Richardson 183), is *de facto* her desire to relocate her *self*. Or rather, it is a desire to promise herself a future in familial estrangement and despair through her unrequited response to a face “without even noticing the color of his eyes” (Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity* 85). As Levinas famously illuminates the absolute alterity of the Other, it is essentially “the *nudity* of the face” (Katz and Trout 200), which is “stripped of [c]ontextual marks” and thus eschews the dominance of perception, that constitutes the best and healthiest social relations. That is Clarissa, by acknowledging Lovelace’s uniqueness, or, say, “non-perceptual” face “beneath all the constraints of Being, History and the logical forms that hold it in their grip,” is responding to an absolute Other. As Levinas maintains, “[t]he relation with the child—that is, the relation with the other that is not a power, but fecundity—establishes relationship with the absolute future, or infinite time” (Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* 268). What Levinas calls “goodness” is associated with the infinity of desire engendered by a paternal attitude toward the Other: “In paternity desire maintained as insatiate desire, that is, as goodness, is accomplished” (*Totality and Infinity* 272). For Levinas, filiality is the link between desire and goodness, between eros and ethics. The desire of the caress in the erotic relationship is ultimately resolved in an imagined filiation. Thus, the perplexing fact that Clarissa declines Anna’s offer to help her escape, but does not scruple to risk her reputation by accepting Lovelace’s offer of a temporary shelter to stay, is not something to be taken for granted. Her choice may have

more to do with her Levinasian filiation with Lovelace—which she would have no hesitation in giving the preference to in an excruciating situation as hers—than a sense of responsibility toward her best friend Anna. In *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle deems “virtuous friendship” (Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* 191), a midpoint between the self and the other in which “equality” (Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* 192) is presupposed, as “the reciprocal giving and receiving of affection between persons who both have knowledge of one another’s goodwill” (Ward 14). In disagreement with Aristotelian friendship in its traditional context, which tends to be aligned with some exclusive preserve of two good men instead of women or of men and women, Ann Ward argues that Aristotelian friendship is “inclusive of women” (Ward 14) and can be enhanced through the tropes of self-sacrifice and “mothering” (18). While Anna conspicuously conceives her friendship with Clarissa as an Aristotelian one, so does Clarissa. Thus, compared with her friendship with Anna, which more resembles the classical *philia* (the Greek word for friendly feeling or affectionate regard for a friend), Clarissa’s fatal attraction to Lovelace is more like *philautia* (self-love), which is close to a good man’s “desire” (Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* 186) for his “own being” (186) and that of his friend, and thus it is also akin to “the joy of the consciousness of existing” (186) exclusive of “utility” (191) but nonexclusive of “pleasure” (Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* 186, 191). If Lovelace had shared Clarissa’s ethical principles, or at least understood her well, the history of the young lady would have been rewritten.

On a different front, Levinasian filiation transforms subjectivity from a subject defined in terms of Edmund Husserl’s “I-know” (Oliver, “Fatherhood” 50), Jean-Paul Sartre’s “I-can” (Oliver, “Fatherhood” 50), and Ricoeur’s “I-will” (Oliver, “Fatherhood” 50) as the center of meaning and values or the constitutor of the world into a subject beholden to and responsible for the other. It is a trans-substantiation of the self, the I, the ego beyond substance (Oliver, “Fatherhood” 50). When Clarissa responds to Anna, Solmes, Lovelace, and the Harlowes in a parental way, the “I” breaks free of the ego without ceasing to be “I,” which turns back to itself, yet by no means dissolves into the collective. Speaking in Levinasian terms, the parent *discovers* (rather than *recognizes*) himself in the substance and the very uniqueness of the child. Filiality engenders the parent as much as it does the child, who is both himself and not himself. As he realizes that his child is distinct—a stranger—the parent comes to discover that he too is distinct and is even a stranger to himself. Alternatively speaking, Levinasian filiality establishes the uniqueness of the subject in relation to the Other. Clarissa’s will to reform Lovelace rather than Solmes, so to speak, reminds us of the Levinasian “paternal election” (qtd. in Oliver, “Fatherhood” 50), which emphasizes the uniqueness of the subject by recalling the non-uniqueness of equals. In Levinas’s definition of the concept, one’s love for another individual must approach parental love insofar as it selects the loved one from among others. Since this love renders the loved one unique, it is necessary

rather than contingent. And this love is not for a limited time only, but for infinite time, for a future never future enough—for eternity. The child's ordinariness and singularity, as experienced by the parent, renders this relationship as distinct from the relationship between two lovers. In Levinasian erotic relations, women are chosen only for their fecundity, for which reason the relationship would eventually fade into animality; but filial relationship is social, which is capable of achieving the highest moral goal. This may also account for Clarissa's ambivalent response to Lovelace throughout the story. While Lovelace traps Clarissa by tricking her step by step into an anti-Levinasian (and erotic) relationship, Clarissa always responds with a decidedly filial composure.

When pondering the relationships among selfhood, ethical aim, and moral norm, Ricoeur initiates an "ethicomoral" (*Oneself as Another* 187) inquiry into Aristotle's and Levinas's divergent perspectives on the concepts of otherness and self, and exhibits a preference for "the primacy of the ethical over the moral" (*Oneself as Another* 189). For Ricoeur, the Levinasian "face of the Other" (189) is that of "a master of justice [...] who *instructs*" (189) and simultaneously "forbids murder" (189) and "commands justice" (189) only in the "ethical" (189) mode. Ricoeur states emphatically that by this notion, Levinas makes every effort to balance the dialectical spectrum of "self-esteem" (188) in the ethical realm, a "primordial reflexive" (188) aim of seeking "what is good for oneself" (187). This aim seeks as well a reciprocal "solicitude" (188) under the heading of "friendship" (188) built upon a "*regard* for others" (189) out of the optative wish for "goodness" (189), and "self-respect" (171) in the moral domain motivated by "obligatory" (171) observance of the "norms" (171). That said, this endeavor somehow turns out to be in vain owing to a dissymmetry or disparity between giving and receiving, resulting from the passivity of the "I" in the instruction's injunctive mode. Clarissa's filial composure may also be accounted for by a Ricoeurian critical reading of the ethical discourse of Levinas, according to which Clarissa's considerable regard or concern for Lovelace, or rather, for everybody else in the story, is a Levinasian balancing effort. This effort becomes an ethical moment of the heroine's self-esteem, of "consciousness of life" (*Oneself as Another* 186), and a deontological moment of self-respect.

"EASE IN THE INNER HEART": CLARISSA'S INSOLUBLE DILEMMA

Enough has been said about the categories of filiality in *Clarissa*. One thing that should not be disregarded, however, is Clarissa's filial obedience to her parents throughout the story, which seems inconsistent with her avid pursuit of individuality

and freedom as a Levinasian parent in most of her epistolary accounts. In my view, there is a touch of Confucian consanguinitism in Clarissa's filial obedience, which clashes with her fundamental ethical principles and finally brings about her tragedy.

Confucianism is often extolled as a moral creed that highlights both the individual and the social dimensions of *junzi* (gentleman, or the ideal person), for it gives special weight to such high goals as the cultivation of the self and the love of all humanity (Tu 171–81). By perusing the *Analects* (*Lun yu*) and the *Mencius* (*Meng Zi*), however, one may find that Confucius and Mencius tend to take filial piety—or more generally speaking, consanguineous affection—as not only the foundation but the supreme principle of moral life. Therefore, the social and individual dimensions are inevitably subordinate to the filial dimension and are substantially negated by the latter when placed in the framework of Confucian ethics (Liu 234). By this token, Confucianism, in essence, is neither individualism nor collectivism, but “consanguinitism.” One example of this consanguineous filiality is a statement by Confucius that occurs twice in the *Analects*: “When a man's father is alive, look at the bent of his will; when his father is dead, look at his conduct. If for three years he does not change from his father's way, he may be called filial” (1:11; 4:20). Zhu Xi paraphrases another Neo-Confucian scholar in the following statement, “If his father's way is right, he may not alter from it in all his life; if it is not right, why should not he alter from it within three years? [...] [Because] the filial son would not feel at ease in his inner heart” (Zhu 51). Though neither Confucius nor Zhu Xi further clarifies the “ease in the inner heart” statement, it is quite clear that for both intellectuals, consanguineous love is something far more ponderous than a child's autonomy in choosing “either his own way or the right Way (*Dao*) of human life, or the good in general” (Liu 240). To feel at ease in one's heart, one should unconditionally follow the parent's way. Thus, for both philosophers, “filiality alone is both the highest good and the supreme *Dao*, overriding all else” (Liu 239). This is also true of Mencius's argument that “[f]ather and son should not demand goodness from each other” (4A:18), because “[t]o do so will estrange them, and there is nothing more inauspicious than estrangement between father and son”; “To urge one another to what is good is the way of friends. But such urging between father and son is the greatest injury to the love between them” (4B:30). To urge one another to do the good and right is generally beneficial to self-cultivation. Mencius, however, radically deprecates this “urging” or mutual demand between father and son simply because it may jeopardize the loving connection—or say, kinship sentiment or consanguineous love—between the parent and the child. Mencius's view falls in line with Confucius's principle of mutual concealment between the father and the son⁷: in other words, when a conflict occurs, one is unconditionally responsible for setting aside the individuality and sociality of human nature to preserve the primacy of filiality. The filial dimension in terms of consanguineous love overrules all ethical concerns.

In Letter 28, Clarissa's defense of her own family (especially her parents, however execrably they treat her) against Anna's empathetic critique much resembles the mutual concealment between the parent and the child, which Confucius deems as a primary moral virtue. She asserts that

"[...] low as I am in spirits, that I am very angry with you for your reflections on my relations, particularly on my father, and on the memory of my grandfather. Nor, my dear, does your own mamma always escape the keen edge of vivacity. One cannot one's *self* forbear to write or speak freely of those we love and honour; that is to say, when grief wrings the heart. But it goes against one to hear anybody else take the same liberties. Then you have so very strong a manner of expression where you take a distaste, that when passion has subsided and I come by reflection to see by *your* severity what I have given occasion for I cannot help condemning myself [...]" (Richardson 134)

In this assertion, Clarissa tries to conceal the wrongs her parents have done to her and her regrets over the awful impression of her family that she has made upon Anna. Likewise in Letter 98, when Lovelace describes her father's house as "cruel and gloomy" (392), Clarissa fights back again, writing: "Not a word, sir, against my papa!—I will not bear that—" (392)

The quintessential scene that brings to light Clarissa's struggle between a Levinasian pursuit of humanity's divine filiality and a Confucian adherence to consanguineous filial piety is in Letter 83, as she reiterates her inner battle over whether to seek help from her cousin Morden against her preposterously dictatorial father: "I had thought indeed several times of writing to him. But by the time an answer could have come, I imagined all would have been over, as if it had never been— [...] And then to appeal to a *cousin* (I must have written with *warmth*, to engage him) against a *father*; this was not a desirable thing to set about!" (336) She finally gives in to this hope, because otherwise she would not feel "[at] ease in her inner heart" (Liu 239).

Judging from her struggle, there are two ethical principles colliding within Clarissa's mind as she responds to her relations: one is her Levinasian sense of responsibility to the Other, the other being her consanguineous love towards her parents. Not only do the two incompatible ethical impulses agonize Clarissa to a great extent, but it is also this incompatibility that makes her tragedy inevitable.

CONCLUSION

While Levinas's Jerusalem is "a land of prophecy, faith, and worship of a being so infinitely other that it is beyond being" (Alford 236), the land of Confucius, which shares the Levinasian trope of filiation, is more intricately constructed. That said, the latter does not share the former's primary concern with mutual, respectful one-on-one relationships owing to its obdurate focus on social responsibility. The two ethical systems clash in their concepts of filiation; yet the figurative power that they share is confusing and misleading because Confucius touches on the essence of virtue ethics while Levinas touches on the existential enactment of responsibility. This trope of filiation generates space for the interactive development of the two ethical streams, as well as the possibility of their extensive application in literary criticism.

With that in mind, Derrida's interpretation and development of Levinas's theories helps explain the critical treatment of Clarissa in Richardson's novel. While Ricoeur presents the father/son relationship as a relation of mutual recognition through law that ensures equality, Levinas presents the father/son relationship as a discovery of oneself through one's relation to the other that ensures singularity. Derrida foregrounds Levinas's idea by discussing a father/son relationship that brings equality and singularity into conflict. For Ricoeur, relations are necessarily mediated by contracts, laws, and ethics. For Levinas, "ethics is prior to the law and makes law possible" (Oliver, *Subjectivity without Subjects* 36). But for Derrida, ethics is "a paradox between law and the impossibility of law" (Oliver, *Subjectivity without Subjects* 36). The two categories of responsibilities—the responsibility to respect equality prior to the law and the responsibility to respect the singularity of the individual—contradict each other. This conflict is at the core of the biblical story of Abraham—a story of a father caught between his Father and his own son—as well as in Richardson's story between Clarissa and old James Harlowe, between Clarissa and Lovelace, and between all Others that Clarissa painstakingly "parents" (Alford 236).

For Derrida, ethics is "an insoluble and paradoxical contradiction between responsibility in general and absolute responsibility" (61). In Derrida's words, the father is a figuration of God within the household. The Father's authority needs no justification (when Moses asks "why," the Father threatens him with death). The reason Abraham is impelled to obey the Father and sacrifice his son is ultimately that one day Isaac will be the father and inherit his patrimonial authority so as to ensure a future for the family. But Clarissa, who prioritizes absolute responsibility (or the singularity and infinity of the Other) over the general responsibility (the collective, the community, or fraternity), chooses to disobey her father and turns to her "son" and her *self* as a stranger in her "sons." It may seem unintelligible that Clarissa

remains submissive to filial obedience under many circumstances. But arguably, what she revolts against is essentially her father's paternal authority, that is, her father as a *figuration*—rather than in a sheer consanguineous sense—and thus her virtue shares a fundamental common ground with filial piety as conceptualized in the Confucian doctrine. Though Clarissa is physically torn away from her parents for the sake of preserving her singularity and infinity, her inner heart is perpetually restless, which is why death is her only option to restore inner peace. It is also through Clarissa's anguished obedience as a Levinasian "parent" that her father's responsibility is acknowledged and evoked.

Clarissa is a contradictory character when examined in an ethical light, more so when it comes to the problematic distinction between ethics and morality. She constantly pursues a justifiable human distance—a notion that Levinas brings forth and Derrida continually questions—in spite of the fact that her persevering in this pursuit results in self-destruction and demise. That being said, her quest is also a complex moral issue that we readers probe daily. Arguably, Clarissa's insistence on prioritizing optative ethics over imperative moral norms demonstrates her phronesis, which becomes a source of valor for her to do justice to all others than to secure justice for herself in not-so-friendly situations of distress, injustice (often caused by flawed institutions), and violence. If there does exist a solution to the ethical problem in Richardson's novel, it might be psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott's recommendation that the most appropriate human distance is the distance *at play*. In other words, Winnicott encourages us to take things easy. For Winnicott, humans are not so fragile as to need the Levinasian infinite distance between self and other as protection. People neither prey on their partners, nor do they frequently run into possessive Others who tend to hold people hostage. "[A] little contact" and even "a little friction" (Alford 237) comprise the perfect space in which healthy human relations grow. With all that said, does this playful relationship truly exist? As we look at the entangled familial and social contexts that blur the demarcation between ethics and morality in *Clarissa*, we might conclude that human relationships and the ethical problems that follow are not something immaterial or that can be "played with." They arise from and are profoundly influenced by a larger context and cannot be solved alone, as the distinction between ethics and morality cannot be justified merely on a personal level or at any institutional level.

Notes

1. Though James Harlowe, Jr.—Clarissa’s brother—would usurp his authority later, he still has the final say on behalf of the entire family.
2. This atrocity lasts until Clarissa’s death.
3. God promises that Abraham will be the father of many generations of Israel.
4. The former stipulates that the son will inherit his designation from his dead father and that the son in turn will be recognized by *his* son as father; whereas the latter anticipates that the son will inherit parental power.
5. Some “good” (182) and, at the same time, “[...] of manly) behavior” (182) as she describes in Letter 40, and “capable of being influenced by *decent* company” (182).
6. He keeps talking of Clarissa as a “desirable” “object” (416) in his letter to Belford and tries to grasp every single piece of information about her, including her correspondence with Anna Howe during her imprisonment by him.
7. The Duke of She tells Confucius, “In my country there is an upright man. When his father stole a sheep, he bore witness against him.” Confucius says, “The upright men in my community are different from this. Fathers conceal the misconduct of their sons and sons conceal the misconduct of their fathers. Uprightness is just to be found in such mutual concealment” (*Analects* 13:18).

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