The spiritual side of Samuel Richardson

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Conclusion

As set forth in the Introduction my objective was to investigate the spiritual side of Samuel Richardson. I started with discussing certain books Richardson had printed which reflect his fascination with spiritual or mystical matters as well as his interest in science and history. Then I explored Richardson's relationships with Cheyne and Law, whose works he printed. He printed some of Byrom's work and kept two poems by Byrom among his treasured possessions. I found that Richardson was familiar with the ideas of Boehme, Fénelon, Bourignon and Guyon, and possibly even with Fiore's trinitarian conception of the whole of history, viewed in three great periods. Moreover, I found that he was acquainted with the works of Poiret, whose books had been published by Wetstein. He may have read the *Theologia Germanica*. Richardson was also interested in the East and even printed some books relating to this subject.

Richardson worked with the bookseller James Hutton, the man responsible for the beginning of the Moravian work in London, and received an invitation from the Moravians, who admired his work. He also worked closely with Bishop Thomas Wilson and his son.

All of the above mentioned influences permeate Richardson's work, especially that of *Clarissa* and *Sir Charles Grandison*. As I have shown, *Clarissa* represents the quest for the freedom of conscience or religious freedom, the right to choose. In imitation of Christ, she suffers all the trials and mortifications on earth, which are followed by a reward in heaven. At the same time, *Clarissa* is concerned with the quest for perfection, depicting the process of regeneration or rebirth. Clarissa symbolizes the enlightened soul, representing heaven. Very important in *Clarissa* is the fire-scene in which Lovelace, in Boehme's terminology the Turba or destroyer of the soul, opts for "hell", or darkness, as confirmed in Lovelace's dream. For Lovelace does not merely represent hell, but, having a free will which he exercises, he actively chooses hell over heaven after the crucial fire-scene. It is essential for the correct understanding of *Clarissa* that Lovelace had a choice, he could "choose or refuse" as Cheyne put it. Lovelace lives on in a self-created hell, (a hell within), though briefly, but is finally lost, whereas Clarissa dies and becomes the Bride of Christ.

It is this free will to which Law refers when he asserts that an angel naturally possesses "a strong Will", a spark of the Divine omnipotence, since he could not be an angel of light with less freedom. What he desired, he had: as his imagination worked, so he came to be. This is why Law concluded that everybody is his own maker, his own "carver", everybody is that which he

wills.[587] Or, in Cheyne's words, one can choose or refuse.[588]

Clarissa is depicted as a broken lily ("the lily will not be found in strife or wars"),[589] for she did not achieve freedom of conscience in this life. However, in the mystical sense we find that Clarissa has reached the final stage, or Illumination (light), as the Bride of Christ, and as such she becomes a source, a parent of the fresh, active, spiritual life. In other words we find that "death" on the literal level is "life" on the mystical level. We have seen how Richardson kept among his manuscripts a poem which deals with this issue. Clarissa, the light, returns to earth in the form of the Holy Spirit, represented by the irenic Sir Charles Grandison, whose task it is to spread righteousness and the freedom of conscience for which Clarissa had died.

Grandison's main objective as the comforter is to heal the breaches and to unite the divided branches of Christianity. If *Clarissa* represented the Second Age of the New Testament (or Christ), it is *Sir Charles Grandison* which represents the Third Age of the Holy Spirit or Boehme's *Lilienzeit*. This image is also reflected by Law's comparison of fire, light and air with God, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

It is Sir Charles who gathers the truly pious and harbours them at Grandison Hall, a holy spot or a place of refuge in the world's last tribulations: a remnant to be saved for the impending millennium, as depicted in the Book of Revelation. When the Holy Spirit has achieved his objective, Christ will return (the Parousia). Immediately thereafter, the Last Judgment will take place, to be followed by the end of world history. It is only then that the millennium will begin, beyond world history.

Richardson depicted an ecumenical vision similar to the one which made William Penn set out to establish Pennsylvania in the seventeenth century, and which in the eighteenth century caused Zinzendorf to establish his settlement at Herrnhut from which sprang the Moravian Church. Both men were guided by the Inner Light, pursuing a religion of the heart, and tried to achieve their goal: the Philadelphian dream of "brotherly love" among men and women, liberty and freedom of conscience, tolerance and peace.

Sir Charles Grandison contains Richardson's Utopian vision of a new world, a vision which seemed not to be limited to the Christian world, but extended perhaps to the whole world. It was to be his *Magnum Opus*, evolved out of his two earlier novels. In it he depicted his vision by a combination of his great imagination and his deep insight into human nature, tinctured with mysticism and Behmenism. Since truth lies in the whole, it is against the background of the three ages of world history that, as I have argued in this study, we should interpret Richardson's novels. For though, as I have mentioned in the opening lines of the Introduction, his novels were hugely popular in

[587] William Law, *Works*, V, p. 100.
[588] *Philosophical Principles*, Part II, p. 68.
[589] Boehme, *Three Principles of the Divine Essence*, London, 1648, (27:32).

England[590] and abroad, both in the eighteenth century and afterwards, and had a distinctive influence on subsequent writers of fiction, this was mainly for other reasons than those discussed in this study. Most readers, as "carvers" of his novels, seemed unable to go beyond the literal interpretation.

The prevalent tendency to secularize his novels and to deny any spiritual meaning to them explains Richardson's disappointed reaction that he would never write again until his last two novels were properly understood. In a letter to Susanna Highmore, dated 31 January 1754, he wrote that he would only think of another work, as some people had requested, when he had "reason to believe" that *Sir Charles Grandison* as well as *Clarissa* were "generally understood and attended to". And he added that a man must be a "duce" always to be writing without "hope of amending the inconsiderate", even though he had "the good fortune to please those who want not his instructions".[591] In a letter to Lady Bradshaigh, dated 14 February 1754, he wrote that if "this hasty-judging world" would be convinced that they had seen "the *last work* of this too-voluminous writer", they would give it perhaps more attention. And he added that his own interest had been "less his motive" than that of their children. For only then would be discovered that he was not a "false prophet".[592]

[590] Richardson's influence on for instance Jane Austen, the Brönte s, George Eliot and Charles Dickens has been extensively discussed by critics such as Gordon Haight, Jocelyn Harris, Marijke Rudnik-Smalbraak, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, and, of course, Eaves and Kimpel. Brian W. Downs mentions that the correspondence files, which are now at the Victoria and Albert Museum (six folio volumes), were collected by Mrs Barbauld and were passed into the hands of John Forster, the friend and biographer of Charles Dickens. (Cf. Brian W. Downs, *Richardson*, (1928), London, 1969, p. 3). The Cambridge University Press announced in October 2002 that the first ever scholarly edition of the Works and Correspondence of Samuel Richardson will be published in 25 volumes beginning 2007. It is to include the whole of Richardson's correspondence for the first time.
[591] John Carroll, *Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson*, Oxford, 1964, p. 275.
[592] Ibid., pp. 289-290.