



Austen's Urban Redemption: Rejecting Richardson's View of the City

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WHEN WILLIAM HOGARTH BRINGS a country girl to town in the first panel of his *Harlot's Progress*, he shows how easily innocence is corrupted by urban seduction and temptation. Samuel Richardson, a friend of Hogarth whose novels morally parallel the artist's paintings, allows the heroine of *Sir Charles Grandison* to maintain her moral integrity, but her stay in London hardly begins before she is kidnapped, nearly raped, and spared only by a dramatic rescue in a plot structure we can call "urban romance." The urban romance is based on clear-cut moral positions, the unambiguous contrast of good and evil, right and wrong, hero and villain, country and city. Unlike the men whose work she enjoyed and admired, Jane Austen refuses to demonize urban life. She takes her heroines into the city but she trusts their merits to stand up against whatever vices the city has to offer. Although Richardson was a life-long Londoner, the city in his narratives is a place of corruption, obviously for women but just as easily for men. Jane Austen's writings transform Richardson's in many ways, beginning with narrative technique; but her novels also challenge the moral disdain with which he inflects his cityscapes. Austen trumps the eighteenth-century novelist by creating morally complex characters who visit cities of moral neutrality.

I begin with Hogarth because some of Jane Austen's characters are disturbed by a moral lesson like that of *The Harlot's Progress*, a set of paintings that visually reflect Richardson's own view of urban corruption. Between the first and second scenes from Hogarth's series, Moll Hackabout transforms from an innocent would-be servant to the mistress of a wealthy merchant who has quickly learned to cheat on her financial supporter. Like the initially willing maid in Hogarth's two-part series, *Before and After*, once she is sexually experienced Moll cannot turn back. From the glamour of being a merchant's mistress, Moll descends into common prostitution, arrest, illness, and death from syphilis.

Sound familiar? It's practically the story of Eliza Williams's mother, except that the fall of Colonel Brandon's Eliza did not begin in country ignorance. She seeks affection from another man when her husband, Colonel Brandon's brother, neglects her; like Moll, Eliza ends up with a child out of wedlock, imprisonment, illness, and death. Colonel Brandon's story is softer than Hogarth's—Eliza is arrested for debt and she dies of tuberculosis rather than venereal disease—but it would seem to bear the same moral framework. Once Eliza slips, only death will free her. In all likelihood, the "spunging house" where Colonel Brandon finds her is in London, so like Moll, she meets her end in the city.

But it is not the story of the previous generation's Eliza that provides a moral warning in *Sense and Sensibility*; it is the story of her daughter who naively accedes to Willoughby's seductions in Bath. The parallels between mother and daughter reassign responsibility from the place of their seductions to their seducers, with some acknowledgment of accountability on the women's part. Little Eliza slept with Willoughby because he told her that he loved her—and doubtless she believed he would marry her eventually. Elinor recognizes that Eliza Williams's story could have been Marianne's—and Marianne fell for Willoughby in the country, not the city. Marianne's premature pleasurable indulgence is only metaphorically sexual—riding alone in a carriage with Willoughby and touring his aunt's property—but it too was an accession to seduction, a willing abandonment of propriety and discretion. Although Willoughby confronts Marianne with cruel self-interest only when they are both in London, clearly the town is no more to blame for her distress than it is for providing an opportunity for Robert Ferrars to exhibit his vanity in the purchase of a gold toothpick case.

The more frightening parallel with Hogarth's fallen country girl is Lydia Bennet's disappearance in London when she runs away with Wickham. Her family's reaction—including her sensible sisters, Jane and Elizabeth—proves they feared that her extra-marital sexual activity would exclude her from the world of social propriety forever. "Nothing can be done; I know very well that nothing can be done," Elizabeth repeats to Darcy when she receives Jane's letter about the elopement. As I shall discuss later in this essay, Lydia chooses a brilliant strategy for hiding in plain sight by going to London, but Jane Austen does not condemn London in and of itself. Elizabeth blames Wickham—"How is such a man to be worked on?"—as well as her sister for bringing "humiliation" and "misery" on them all.

THE RULES OF THE CITY

To demonstrate Richardson's different take on life in the city, I'd like to begin with some of the writing he did before he became a novelist. Samuel Richardson's first publication was a handbook for apprentices, developed out of a letter he wrote to his nephew Thomas, who was scheduled to work under his uncle's guidance. Thomas died in 1732 before he entered Richardson's printing shop, but Richardson chose to expand the letter and publish it, anonymously, in 1734. *The Apprentice's Vade Mecum, or, The Young Man's Pocket Companion* sets out the responsibilities of apprentices to be industrious and obedient to their master's will. Much like the apprentice Francis Goodchild in Hogarth's progress, *Industry and Idleness*, Richardson's ideal young worker avoids the distractions of urban life and maintains a clean moral character. The world of the apprentice in London, as Richardson sets it forth, is idealized and simple: if a young man follows the rules he will reap the rewards of his profession. In focusing on keeping the young person in line, Richardson the writer ignores the real complexities of urban life—including the fact that many apprentices were subject to the arbitrary will of their masters, physical punishment, and abuse.

Austen uses the language of indenture and responsibility to teasingly set forth Catherine Morland's "apprenticeship" in the city of Bath: "Every morning now brought its regular duties—shops were to be visited; some new part of the town to be looked at; and the pump room to be attended, where they paraded up and down for an hour, looking at everybody and speaking to no one" (*NA* 25). This passage at the beginning of *Northanger Abbey's* third chapter introduces Henry Tilney's parodies of the city's social regulations. Catherine learns that such duties lack a logical order: the Allens cannot give

her a rule that will save her from John Thorpe's manipulations; General Tilney abandons all rules of propriety when he sends Catherine home without warning or protection. It is the comical and satirized characters like Isabella Thorpe who appeal to "rules" in order to define and restrict behavior: "I tell him that it is a most improper thing, and entirely against the rules," she informs Catherine, when James asks her to dance with him twice in a row (*NA* 57). Isabella is the least regulated of any character in *Northanger Abbey*, which makes her appeal to "the rules" more amusing since she uses them merely to underscore the attention James shows her.

The Apprentice's Vade Mecum calls the rules recorded in a contract of indenture "commandments," requiring apprentices to keep their masters' secrets, do their work cheerfully, abstain from sex, refrain from marriage, avoid gambling, shun drinking, and keep away from playhouses (2-20). That last commandment, to which Richardson devotes twelve pages, underscores Richardson's warnings about the moral threat of the city. Young men encounter "lewd Women" in playhouses, "where the Temptation is made the stronger, by the Impressions which the Musick and the Entertainment are liable to make on young and unguarded Minds" (10). Playhouses in the city, in the midst of business and commerce, distract apprentices from their duty—they should work until 8:00 or 9:00 pm but the plays begin at 6:00 pm. They also affect the morals of young women: Richardson calls the theater a "strange school" for the daughters of the tradesmen in the city, "impudently propagating, by heightened Action and Scenical Example, to an *underbred* and *unwary* Audience, Fornication, Adultery, Rapes and Murders" (17).

The clear difference between Richardson and Austen here is one of class—Austen only minimally describes the conditions of working people. But Richardson's distrust of urban morality applies to the middle and upper classes as well.

The book considered by most readers to be his inspiration for *Pamela* is a collection of model letters Richardson wrote, anticipating a profitable publication through sales to literate middle class people who might be at a loss when it came to writing a letter to hire or fire a worker, to ask for an extension on a loan, or to inquire about a business affair. But Richardson went beyond commercial subject matter in *Familiar Letters on Important Occasions*. His letters between parents and children who announce their intention to marry, who act contrary to their parents' values, or who complain that household masters are hitting on their maids easily led him to see how he could compose a whole story in an exchange of personal letters, giving rise to *Pamela*, *Clarissa*, and *The History of Sir Charles Grandison*.

Letters 42-45 give Richardson's readers a good sense of his contrast between the values of the country and the city. The first letter from a "Country Correspondent" politely addresses a businessman who owes him money, explaining that his own circumstances force him to collect on the account, but noting with kindness, "If it suits you not to pay the whole, I beg, sir, you will remit me as much towards it as you can" (48). The debtor's reply is polite and apologetic with promises to be more prompt in repayment in the future. The third letter, introduced as "A more pressing and angry Letter, from a City Dealer, on the Same Account," berates the client for "ill usage," lectures him on punctuality, and threatens him with "harsh methods" of procuring justice unless a handsome remittance is made immediately (49). The final response from the client obsequiously acknowledges the lessons of the city dealer's letters, promising future amendment. The anger and short temper of the city dealer do not characterize him as morally inferior, just less amiable and flexible than his country equivalent. In distinct contrast, *Pride and Prejudice's* Mr. Gardiner is shown to be a very successful city businessman and yet also a man of feeling, devoted to his extended family and slow to anger, with the patience of a contented fly fisherman.

THE SEDUCTION OF INNOCENTS

But evil may well await naïve visitors from the country. In letter 62, Richardson creates "A young Woman in Town to her Sister in the Country, recounting her narrow Escape from a Snare laid for her, on her first Arrival, by a wicked Procuress": essentially the narrative of the first panel of Hogarth's *Harlot's Progress*, which was painted nine years earlier. "Dear Sister," she begins, "We have often, by our good mother, been warned against the dangers that would too probably attend us on coming to London; tho' I must own, her admonitions had not always the weight I am now convinced they deserved" (72). The writer describes being offered a position as a lady's maid, then plied with liquor to prevent her leaving the house to consult with her aunt about the propriety of accepting the position. She learns the house is a London brothel and is able to escape only because another young recruit takes pity on her before she can be locked in overnight.

Such seduction of country innocents is a popular theme in Richardson's day, as much for its moral warning as its potential for satire and comedy. John Cleland's *Fanny Hill* follows this narrative to a tee up until the point of escape, for she discovers that the pleasures of sex make the profits of prostitution doubly rewarding. Following Richardson's publication of his novel of attempted seduction, *Pamela*, Henry Fielding parodies country innocence not

only in *Shamela* but more extensively in *Joseph Andrews*, positing a lascivious older woman trying to lure the country innocent, Joseph, into her bed. While Willoughby's seduction of Eliza Williams follows Richardson's narrative, Austen elsewhere sounds more like Fielding. When Captain Tilney makes a play for Isabella Thorpe, shocking Catherine Morland and insulting her on her brother's behalf, Isabella's flirtatious response to his propositions deconstructs the notion that country girls are helpless and naïve. Isabella, as Henry Tilney assures Catherine, knows what she's doing.

Samuel Richardson created smart and insightful female characters, but he wrapped them in a web of helplessness just thick enough to convince them not to depend on themselves for survival. His novels draw both cheers and jeers from readers who see that Pamela, Clarissa, and Harriet are moments away from freedom, if only they would take the necessary leap: "Runaway now, Pamela! Don't wait to finish the waistcoat!" "Get out of that house, Clarissa! Don't you see those women are prostitutes?" "Jump out of the carriage, Harriet! How fast can it be moving?" In the case of the last two novels, the city sets the trap for Clarissa and Harriet. But Jane Austen's fiction rejects this snare: if a woman gets lost in the city in a Jane Austen novel, she wants to be lost.

Clarissa Harlowe leaves her parents' home for London to escape their tyrannical insistence that she marry the repulsive Mr. Solmes. Robert Lovelace, who effects her removal, manipulates her into thinking that London is her choice by pushing her to go instead to Windsor. But London, he knows, will best assist his villainy: "A prince begging for her upon his knees should not prevail upon me to spare her if I can but get her to London," he writes to his fellow rake, John Belford (vol. 2, 100). Richardson's London is a place of deceit and substitutions. The landlady, represented as a widow fallen on hard times who recently rented lodgings to a clergyman and his family, is the notorious bawd, Mrs. Sinclair. Her "nieces," who impress Clarissa as "genteel young women" (vol. 2, 192) are prostitutes who laugh at Lovelace for not forcing himself sooner on Clarissa. Lovelace pays other prostitutes to pretend to be his aunt and cousin and he seems to be able to buy information from any footman or cab driver in the city. When Clarissa manages to escape from Mrs. Sinclair's house and take lodgings in Hampstead, Lovelace revels in how easy it is to find her and keep a servant spying upon her. In very little time he cons her back to Mrs. Sinclair's and shortly thereafter rapes her.

When Lydia runs away from Brighton with George Wickham, the Bennets, unlike the Harlowes, are angry with their daughter but anxious to find her. Initially comforted by Lydia's stated intention to elope to Gretna Green,

they are confounded when the couple stops in London. Lydia and Wickham successfully hide in the city, where no one but Mr. Darcy will be able to find them.

SEARCHING FOR LYDIA BENNET

Why can't Mr. Bennet find Lydia? Aside from the narrative necessity of displaying Darcy's quiet heroism, three obstacles impede Mr. Bennet's discovery of Lydia and Wickham: the restrictions of a country gentleman; geographic ignorance of London; and his own masochistic spirituality. When Mr. Bennet does go to London to look for his daughter, he forces himself into a city he despises as a self-imposed penance for his incompetence as a father.

Why is Mr. Bennet so ignorant of London, and why does he despise it so? When Lady Catherine comments to Elizabeth that her mother should have brought the Bennet girls regularly "to town" to study the classic female arts—drawing, singing, and playing—with "the masters," Elizabeth replies, "My mother would have had no objection, but my father hates London" (*PP* 164). Austen herself was a happy visitor to London, spending time at her brother's house, and enjoying the theatre and the shops.

At the early gathering at Sir William Lucas's house, the host interrogates Darcy about London life. Here Austen might have inserted a hint of Richardsonian urban moral judgment when Sir William reflects on his own lack of a house "in town":

"You have a house in town, I conclude?"

Mr. Darcy bowed.

"I had once some thoughts of fixing in town myself—for I am fond of superior society; but I did not feel quite certain that the air of London would agree with Lady Lucas." (*PP* 26)

Is it London's physical or moral pollution that alienates country dwellers? For Jane Austen, the disagreeable "air" of London is not figurative. Even in the late eighteenth century, few houses had access to sewers to carry away waste; at best there were cesspits in the garden, exposed to the open air. Among the crowded poor, chamber pots might be emptied into streets and into water sources (Schwartz 14–15). The London air held thick coal smoke from fires that heated homes and served the needs of tradesmen like blacksmiths (Schwartz 16).

Mr. Bennet's antipathy to London cannot be explained by its smells and annoyances, however, nor does he seem to fear the criminal element that pervades Richardson's novels. Keeping away from London means denying his wife access to shops, but nothing in the novel suggests he stays out of town

to save money. He turns away from Mrs. Bennet whenever she mentions lace, fashions, parties, and partners because he prefers to spend his time in his study with a book, never supposing that his lack of experience in London will detrimentally affect his life and his family.

The London of “high life,” which occupies Sir William Lucas’s fantasies, Mrs. Bennet’s shopping dreams, and the Bingley sisters’ social aspirations, is complemented in Jane Austen’s novels by the London of commerce and business. Austen anticipates a time of bourgeois advancement, tying status to money rather than family and estate, but many of her characters have not yet reached that insight. Social climbers like Sir William and the Bingleys quickly try to erase the fact that their wealth originated in trade. The Bennets’ relatives in London, however, make no claims for social status and unashamedly support themselves and their large family in great comfort by running a successful—if unnamed—business. It is clear that although he has no fashionable address or landed estate, Mrs. Bennet’s brother, Mr. Gardiner, is a far wealthier man than Mr. Bennet. His self-earned money is not entailed, and no one can deprive his children of his fortune when he dies. Yet Mr. Gardiner’s London, with his warehouse on Gracechurch Street, is also off-limits to Mr. Bennet. The inability or unwillingness of a gentleman to become a businessman unfortunately prevents Mr. Bennet from improving his family’s prospects. If he had money independent of his estate, his daughters’ futures would not be as desperate as his wife constantly reminds him they are.

So London is distasteful for the country gentleman, Mr. Bennet, in these two respects: he is disinterested in objects of fashion and fashionable entertainment, and he prefers not to be reminded of his financial irresponsibility. But this preference for his country home has left him unprepared for a task he never thought he would have to undertake. He goes to London to find his daughter, but he has no idea where to search for her.

Austen provides her readers with several geographic pointers, though she reports most of the characters’ activities in London through their letters, not by direct narration. When Jane Bennet visits her Aunt and Uncle Gardiner, their home on Gracechurch Street is contrasted with the house on Grosvenor Street where Bingley and his sister live while they are in London. The streets off Grosvenor Square, in Mayfair, continue to be the exclusive and desirable streets Austen would have been familiar with in the late the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Gracechurch Street, quite close to Christopher Wren’s Monument commemorating the Great Fire, is near Pudding Lane and Fish Street Hill and within walking distance of the Thames. In

Austen's day, its lack of desirability came from the proximity of the businesses and warehouses to the houses of those who ran them.

Mr. Bennet leaves for London accompanied by Colonel Forster, who believes himself answerable both for the irresponsible soldier who walked away from his command and for the irresponsible teenager who had been a guest in his household, but the Colonel's assistance brings him no closer to his daughter. Lydia and Wickham had been seen to leave the chaise that would have carried them toward Scotland and enter a hackney coach headed toward London (*PP* 282). Jane Bennet recounts Mr. Bennet's search strategy in her letter to Elizabeth, then touring Derbyshire with their Aunt and Uncle Gardiner. He would go "to Epsom," Jane explains, "the place where they last changed horses, see the postilions, and try if any thing could be made out from them. His principal object must be, to discover the number of the hackney coach which took them from Clapham" (*PP* 293). Mr. Bennet believed that the coach switching might have been noticed by a coachman, who might remember the address to which he had brought the couple.

Nothing comes of Mr. Bennet's inquiries among the coachmen, although his plan to discover the coach number is reasonable. London government, under an ordinance published by Cromwell in 1654, had strictly regulated hackney coachmen. Each coachman was licensed and each coach required to display its license number on a fixed tin plate (Fielding 123-24). Hackney coachmen were subject to steep fines for deviating from the fares sent by the Hackney Coach Office. Other regulations forbade them to deface the license number displayed on the coach and required them to use horses at least fourteen hands high to draw the coaches. Tabs were kept on Hackney coachmen, both by fellow coachmen and by the passengers who employed them, but the coachmen themselves were workers who followed their routes, not romantic spies keeping track of young runaways.

Austen makes no mention of Mr. Bennet following Lovelace's lead in finding a runaway by bribing the coachmen. This is perhaps an example of his ignorance of the city. However unsavory he finds it, Darcy, in contrast to Mr. Bennet, does not hesitate to offer money to either Mrs. Younge or George Wickham to obtain the information and outcome he desires.

When Mr. Gardiner joins his brother-in-law in London, he learns that Mr. Bennet's trips to Epsom and Clapham have produced no information. Mr. Bennet next thinks to inquire for his daughter and Wickham in "all the principal hotels in town" (*PP* 295). His ignorance of London blinds him to the uselessness of this pursuit: Lydia and Wickham, after all, have very little

money; but Mr. Bennet cannot fathom where people with very little money live in London. Finally, Mr. Bennet returns to his family at Longbourn, “rendered spiritless” by his fruitless search (*PP* 298).

Darcy’s reputation for arrogance makes most people believe he would know even less than Mr. Bennet about cheap rooms in questionable neighborhoods. But his acquaintance with Mrs. Younge, who assisted Wickham in his earlier attempt to seduce Georgiana Darcy, takes him to the couple’s rented rooms after a few days of bribing and threatening the former governess. We are told that Mrs. Younge’s boarding house on Edward Street had no room for them. In Mrs. Gardiner’s letter to Elizabeth, Austen inserts a blank line to mask the name of the street on which Wickham and Lydia were living. But the lodgings Lydia and Wickham rented were in the parish of St. Clement’s Church, as Lydia explains when she describes her wedding to her sister.

Neither St. Clement Eastcheap, a church re-built by Christopher Wren, near the Monument in the neighborhood adjoining the Gardiners’ (coincidentally the church where Samuel Richardson married his second wife) nor St. Clement Dane on the Strand would have been the kind of church visited by those who stay at “principal hotels.” A local guidebook calls Wren’s St. Clement’s “a very plain neat structure with a tower crowned only by a battlement” (*London and its Environs*, 142), in a neighborhood requiring as many ablutions to re-purify visitors as Elizabeth predicts for an appearance by Darcy in Gracechurch Street (*PP* 141). Conmen, whom John Fielding called “duffers,” gathered on the steps of St. Clement Dane on the Strand (Fielding appendix 85). Both St. Clement’s churches would conjure in Austen’s readers’ mind a less-than-savory view of London.

Yet Mr. Bennet expresses no alarm at needing to confront commercial London. In fact, given his self-imposed geographical ignorance, his speeding off on the quest for Lydia suggests he has no fears of the city at all; his torment comes from within. For the first time he faces his long-ignored sense of responsibility; Mr. Bennet punishes himself by rushing toward the city he despises. Echoing, or perhaps parodying a duel fantasy from either *Clarissa* or *Charles Grandison*, Mrs. Bennet both fears and hopes her husband will find Wickham and fight with him for Lydia’s honor. Mr. Bennet acts as though he would have been personally comforted by death at Wickham’s hands.

Once he is home, the Bennet daughters find their father subdued and silent about his time in London. His emotions explode, and quickly retreat into sarcasm, when Elizabeth finally approaches the subject, sympathizing with his ordeal:

“Say nothing of that. Who should suffer but myself? It has been my own doing, and I ought to feel it.”

“You must not be too severe upon yourself,” replied Elizabeth.

“You may well warn me against such an evil. Human nature is so prone to fall into it! No, Lizzy, let me once in my life feel how much I have been to blame. I am not afraid of being overpowered by the impression. It will pass away soon enough.” (*PP* 299)

Before his trip to London, her father had never expressed remorse for failing his family, for exposing his own wife, as Austen puts it, “to the contempt of her children” (*PP* 236). He goes to London to suffer in self-blame, because he is helpless to do anything else.

THE UNHOLY GRAIL

It is Darcy who finds Lydia, of course, and in constructing her plot this way Austen consciously subverts Richardson’s plot of urban romance, inscribed in *Sir Charles Grandison*. Mr. Bennet cannot be the hero who rescues the maiden; he suffers without reward. And Darcy, who does find Lydia, neither wants the maiden nor earns her thanks. Searching for Lydia Bennet means seeking the object that does not wish to be found. Lydia is not an elusive, holy article; she is a sexual, self-centered girl. Austen transforms the narrative of rescue in practical terms: this urban quest was only barely worth undertaking, and the seekers are rewarded by spite.

Not so in Richardson’s third novel, *Sir Charles Grandison*. He sets up Harriet Byron as the country girl nearly undone by a London villain, saved in the nick of time by an urban knight. London offers Harriet Byron men who insult her, women who seek nothing but marriage, masquerade balls, corruptible servants, and the dastardly Sir Hargrave Pollexfen. As his name suggests, *Grandison*’s villain is more comical than Lovelace, but as great a threat to a woman’s virtue. Clarissa leaves with Lovelace voluntarily, but Harriet is kidnapped by Sir Hargrave in a plot devised for torment, sex, and revenge.

Although he resolves his urban romance in the first volume of this seven-volume novel, Richardson makes the threat against Harriet in London very real. As Sir Hargrave attempts to subdue her with a sham marriage, he is physically brutal. She attempts to flee and gets squeezed in a door, bloodying her nose, pressing her stomach, and bruising her arms (vol. 1, 232-33). Sir Hargrave stuffs her into a coach and binds her mouth with a handkerchief. “I doubted not his malice,” Harriet recalls, “his love had no tenderness in it: but how could I think of being consenting, as I may say, to such barbarous usage,

and by a man truly odious to me?" (vol. 1, 242). Sir Hargrave convinces one passing horseman that Harriet is a runaway wife, but Harriet is ultimately saved by Sir Charles Grandison who pursues the truth much further, apparently, than his fellow Londoners.

Grandison is a successful urban romance because Harriet, unlike Lydia Bennet, desperately wants to be rescued and willingly becomes the prize of her rescuer. But Jane Austen's claim that this novel was among her favorites in no way indicates a desire to imitate its narrative structure. Her very brief play based on the novel is her best commentary on the rescue narrative, reducing Richardson's lengthy work to five brief scenes that give more lines to Sir Charles's comical sister Charlotte than to the aggrieved Harriet Byron.

Catherine Morland's mother was also a fan of *The History of Sir Charles Grandison*. Even Catherine admits to finding the novel "very entertaining," not "horrid" or unreadable, as Isabella asserts, though quite unlike *Udolpho*. Yet it is Mrs. Morland on whom we can best depend to demonstrate Austen's rejection of Richardson's negative portrait of the city and its threat to innocent country girls. Catherine goes off to Bath, and Austen writes a version of Mrs. Morland's farewell from a Richardsonian perspective:

When the hour of departure drew near, the maternal anxiety of Mrs. Morland will be naturally supposed to be most severe. A thousand alarming presentiments of evil to her beloved Catherine from this terrific separation must oppress her heart with sadness, and drown her in tears for the last day or two of their being together; and advice of the most important and applicable nature must of course flow from her wise lips in their parting conference in her closet. Cautions against the violence of such noblemen and baronets as delight in forcing young ladies away to some remote farm-house, must, at such a moment, relieve the fulness of her heart. Who would not think so? (*NA* 18)

Jane Austen, as it turns out, would not think so. No matter how many times she has read *Sir Charles Grandison*, Catherine's mother will not confuse fiction and reality:

But Mrs. Morland knew so little of lords and baronets, that she entertained no notion of their general mischievousness, and was wholly unsuspecting of danger to her daughter from their machinations. Her cautions were confined to the following points. "I beg, Catherine, you will always wrap yourself up very warm about the throat, when you come from the rooms at night; and I wish you

would try to keep some account of the money you spend; I will give you this little book on purpose.” (*NA* 18-19)

Catherine takes a little longer than her mother to give up the thrill of the urban romance, and she fear chills more than kidnappers. She needs to mistake a laundry list for an ancient manuscript and construct a detective story that turns General Tilney into a murderer before she abandons the world of Richardson’s characters and settles in as one of Austen’s bright, cheerful, and practical young women.

Jane Austen buries the Richardsonian villain in *Sanditon*. Austen’s last, unfinished novel obviously does not have an urban setting; not even Mr. Parker seeks the traffic and business of a place like Bath for his seaside community. But Sir Edward Denham chooses Lovelace as his role model and he is clearly more of a fool than a threat. “Sir Edward’s great object in life was to be seductive,” Austen writes. “He felt that he was formed to be a dangerous Man—quite in the line of the Lovelaces” (*MW* 405). It is no coincidence that Sir Edward’s object is a woman whose name abbreviates Clarissa, but that is her only similarity to Richardson’s heroines. “Clara saw through him,” Austen assures her readers, “and had not the least intention of being seduced” (*MW* 405).

SELF-RESCUE

In *Persuasion*, Austen proves that women do not need men to rescue them, and that they may not only survive but thrive in an urban setting. Anne Elliot is bright and practical, but not cheerful, whether in the country or the city. Although nothing suggests that Anne shares Lady Russell’s affinity for city sounds—the cries of newspapermen, muffin-men, and milkmen—Anne never shows any fear of the city where she went to school and where she reconnects with her sickly and impoverished school chum, Mrs. Smith.

Anne relishes the cultural benefits of living in a city, enjoying concerts and trips to the theater, without a hint of the Richardsonian warning that dramatic productions threaten women’s moral lives. Austen’s appreciation for the city is best seen through Anne in the walk she takes up Milsom Street with Admiral Croft when he tells her that Louisa Musgrove will marry James Benwick:

[O]ne morning, about a week or ten days after the Crofts’ arrival, it suited her best to leave her friend, or her friend’s carriage, in the lower part of the town, and return alone to Camden Place, and in walking up Milsom Street she had the good fortune to meet with

the Admiral. He was standing by himself at a printshop window, with his hands behind him, in earnest contemplation of some print, and she not only might have passed him unseen, but was obliged to touch as well as address him before she could catch his notice. When he did perceive and acknowledge her, however, it was done with all his usual frankness and good humour. "Ha! is it you? Thank you, thank you. This is treating me like a friend. Here I am, you see, staring at a picture. I can never get by this shop without stopping. But what a thing here is, by way of a boat!" (*P* 168-69)

Admiral Croft's aesthetic tastes are governed by realism, and his fascination with the print comes from his certainty that the ship would never sustain a sail in a horse pond. Finally he turns to Anne:

"Well," (turning away), "now, where are you bound? Can I go anywhere for you, or with you? Can I be of any use?"

"None, I thank you, unless you will give me the pleasure of your company the little way our road lies together. I am going home." (*P* 169)

Admiral Croft's frankness and humor are matched by the openness of Milsom Street. It makes for an inviting walk, filled with people, including old navy officers who greet the admiral with deference. The fact that Austen provides Anne with the news that Captain Wentworth is not bound to Louisa outside in the street also confirms her delight in the city. Since the days of the early Athenians, the commercial exchanges that occur in cities have paralleled exchanges of information. Anne makes some polite remarks about Captain Benwick, defending him against the admiral's charges that he is too "piano," too soft, for his taste, and contains her excitement about Captain Wentworth's freedom. Out on the busy street, Austen gives Anne her privacy, letting Admiral Croft conclude their walk and chapter eighteen with the hope pleasing to both of them, that someone should soon "try to get" Frederick "to Bath."

In *Persuasion*, Austen rejects the gender inequality of Richardson's urban romance by elevating the Crofts' marriage to exemplary status. They are Anne's model couple, and though Frederick Wentworth seems to prefer to be the protective hero, that role is clearly undermined in this novel by his inability to protect Louisa. When he lost Anne the first time, it was not to sinister forces but to practical, persuasive relatives and friends. In bringing the couple together at last in Bath, Austen affirms her positive view of the city.

Although the countryside and great houses may more frequently be thought of as settings for Jane Austen's novels, she does not reject the city. By focusing on the moral choices of her characters, Austen redeems urban life and rejects the stereotypes of Richardson's and Hogarth's narratives. By invalidating the urban romance, Austen opens the novel to modern social change. The city is a place where people earn money, and earning money does not mark them as socially inferior. Women like Clara Brereton are not helpless victims of seduction; rather, Jane Austen's women take the reins, as Mrs. Croft does, quite literally, and make decisions about their own lives. And when they make foolish decisions—as Lydia Bennet and Maria Bertram Rushworth do—they have only themselves and not the temptations of the city to blame.

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