



Vanity Fea

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Una narración autoengendrada

Clarissa la crítica y su ética del buen gusto

Comentamos aquí sobre la integración de algunos aspectos éticos, estéticos, psicológicos y narrativos en la novela epistolar 'Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady' de Samuel Richardson (1747-48), en concreto la encarnación de un ideal ético-estético en el personaje de Clarissa, y la elección consciente de una técnica narrativa que va unida en esta obra a un efecto de autogénesis.



Una de las últimas cartas-capítulos de *Clarissa: Or, The History of a Young Lady* (1747-48) de Samuel Richardson, está escrita por Anna Howe, la amiga de la protagonista, y detalla las múltiples virtudes y capacidades de la difunta heroína Clarissa. Aquí encontramos unos puntos de crítica literaria y estética que sin duda corresponden también a los ideales de su autor, pues en Clarissa, dechado de perfecciones, se conjugan todas las virtudes; no sólo belleza, bondad y piedad cristiana, amén de una auténtica feminidad, sino también la inteligencia, el buen juicio, el criterio justo, el gusto, la elegancia con *sprezzatura*, el saber estar, la empatía y la atención a los demás en el trato social... un complejo equilibrado de cualidades éticas y estéticas que también se aplican a la literatura y la crítica, y no sólo al carácter moral o al trato social.

Richardson no era bello ni apuesto caballero (es un poco el trasunto real del Mr. Hickman de esta novela), pero intentaba imitar a la heroína en sus demás cualidades, quizá pecando como ella un tanto por el lado de la excesiva insistencia moralizante (pecando de franco puritanismo, vamos, en su caso):

In all her readings, and in her conversations upon them, she was fonder of finding beauties than blemishes, and chose to applaud both authors and books, where she could find the least room for it. Yet she used to lament that certain writers of the first class, who were capable of exalting virtue, and of putting vice out of countenance, too generally employed themselves in works of *imagination only*, upon subjects *merely speculative, disinteresting, and unedifying*; from which no useful moral or example could be drawn.

But she was a severe censurer of pieces of a *light* or *indecent* turn, which had a tendency to corrupt the morals of

youth, to convey polluted images, or to wound religion, whether in itself, or through the sides of its professors, and this, whoever were the authors, and how admirable soever the execution. She often pitied the celebrated Dr. Swift for so employing his admirable pen that a pure eye was afraid of looking into his works, and a pure ear of hearing anything quoted from them. "Such authors, she used to say, were not *honest* to their own talents, nor grateful to the God who gave them." Nor would she, on these occasions, admit their beauties as a palliation; on the contrary, she held it an aggravation of their crime, that they, who were so capable of *mending the heart*, should in any places show a *corrupt one* in themselves; which must weaken the influences of their good works; and pull down with one hand what they built up with the other.

All she said, and all she did, was accompanied with a natural ease and dignity, which set her above affectation, or the suspicion of it; insomuch that this degrading fault, so generally imputed to a learned woman, was never laid to her charge. For, with all her excellences, she was forwarder to *hear* than *speak*, and hence no doubt derived no small part of her improvement.

Although she was well read in the English, French, and Italian poets, and had read the best translations of the Latin classics; yet seldom did she quote or repeat from them, either in her letters or conversation, though exceedingly happy in a tenacious memory; principally through modesty and to avoid the imputation of that *affectation* which I have just mentioned.

Mr. Wyerley once said of her, she had such a fund of knowledge of her own, and made naturally such fine observations upon persons and things, being capable, *by the* EGG [that was his familiar expression], *of judging of the* BIRD, that she had seldom either room or necessity for foreign assistances.

But it was plain, from her whole conduct and behaviour, that she had not so good an opinion of herself, however deserved; since, whenever she was urged to give her sentiments on any subject, although all she thought fit to say was clear and intelligible, yet she seemed in haste to have done speaking. Her reason for it, I know, was twofold; that she might not lose the benefit of other people's sentiments, by engrossing the conversation; and lest, as were her words, she should be praised into *loquaciousness*, and so forfeit the good opinion which a person always maintains with her friends, who knows when she has said enough. It was, finally, a rule with her, "to leave her hearers wishing for her to say more, rather than to give them cause to show, by their *inattention*, an uneasiness that she had said so much." (*Clarissa*, IV, 504-5, Letter CLXVIII—Miss Howe to John Belford, Esq. - uso la edición de Everyman en 4 vols.)

Lo bueno si breve dos veces bueno, viene a convenir Clarissa con gracia y con Gracián.

Además Clarissa es una artista del bordado, del buen gusto y de la originalidad en el vestir; y en su vaquería hace unas cuajadas admirables —también ordeña en persona, no contentándose con ordenar ordeñar. Y dibuja bien; no llega a pintar gran cosa, pero lo haría si se dedicase a ello. En suma acumula dotes, algunas de ellas que tienen que ver con el juicio y la apreciación crítica, tanto del arte como del carácter y de la vida en sociedad. Un poquito antes encontramos este pasaje:

Her skill and dexterity in every branch of family management, seem to be the only excellence of her innumerable ones which she owed to her family: whose narrowness, immensely rich, and immensely carking, put them upon indulging her in the turn she took to this part of

knowledge; while her elder sister affected dress without being graceful in it; and the fine lady, which she could never be; and which her sister was without studying for it, or seeming to know she was so.

It was usual with the one sister, when company was expected, to be half the morning dressing; while the other would give directions for the whole business and entertainment of the day; and then go up to her dressing-room, and, before she could well be missed [*having all her things in admirable order*], come down fit to receive company, and with all that graceful ease [*la famosa sprezzatura a la que aludíamos antes*] and tranquillity as if she had nothing else to think of.

Long after *her* [hours perhaps of previous preparation having passed], down would come rustling and bustling the tawdry and awkward Bella, disordering more her native disorderliness at the sight of her serene sister, by her sullen envy, to see herself so much surpassed with such little pains, and in a sixth part of the time.

Yet was this admirable creature mistress of all these domestic qualifications without the least intermixture of narrowness. She knew how to distinguish between *frugality*, a necessary virtue, and *niggardliness*, an odious vice: and used to say, "That to define generosity, it must be called the happy medium between parsimony and profusion."

She was the most graceful *reader* I ever knew. She added, by her melodious voice, graces to those she found in the parts of books she read out to her friends, and gave grace and signification to others where they were not. She had no tone, no whine. Her accent was always admirably placed. The emphasis she always forcibly laid as the subject required. No buskin elevation, no tragedy-pomp, could mislead her; and yet poetry was poetry *indeed* when she read it.

But if her voice was melodious when she *read*, it as all harmony when she *sang*. And the delight she gave by that, and by her skill and great compass, was heightened by the ease and gracefulness of her air and manner, and by the alacrity with which she obliged.

Nevertheless, she generally chose rather to hear others sing or play, than either to play or sing herself.

She delighted to give praise where deserved: yet she always bestowed it in such a manner as gave not the least suspicion that she laid out for a return of it to herself, though so universally allowed to be her due.

She had a talent of saying uncommon things in such an easy manner that everybody thought they could have said the same; and which yet required both genius and observation to say them.

Este último ejemplo del arte de la conversación de Clarissa —o arte del juicio, o del discernimiento y percepción, o del ingenio — merece algo más de comentario. Richardson conocía sin duda la definición del ingenio de Alexander Pope,

True wit is nature to advantage dressed

What oft was thought, but never so well expressed.

(Essay on Criticism)

Pero parece Richardson aquí adelantarse a la objeción que le haría Samuel Johnson a la formulación de Pope:

If wit be well described by Pope, as being "that which has been often thought, but was never before so well expressed," they certainly never attained, nor ever sought it; for they endeavoured to be singular in their thoughts, and were careless of their diction. But Pope's account of wit is undoubtedly erroneous: he depresses it below its natural dignity, and reduces it from strength of thought to happiness of language.

If by a more noble and more adequate conception that be considered as wit which is at once natural and new, that which, though not obvious, is, upon its first production, acknowledged to be just; if it be that which he that never found it wonders how he missed, to wit of this kind the metaphysical poets have seldom risen. Their thoughts are often new, but seldom natural; they are not obvious, but neither are they just; and the reader, far from wondering that he missed them, wonders more frequently by what perverseness of industry they were found. (Johnson, "Life of Cowley").

Vemos que, a diferencia del ingenio barroco de los poetas metafísicos, las observaciones y juicios de Clarissa son a la vez novedosos y naturales, el ejemplo perfecto de este segundo y más acertado tipo de ingenio definido por Johnson. Y que producen el efecto observado también por Johnson: una sensación de iluminación como de haber traído a la luz algo que se intuía imperfectamente, o que se tenía en la punta de la lengua del entendimiento sin poder expresarlo. O bien son juicios y observaciones que, por un curioso efecto de retrospectión, producen esa sensación (quizá engañosa) de "eso debería haberlo dicho yo, pues casi lo había pensado si bien no de manera tan redonda".

Y todo ello, como decimos, con la necesaria soltura, discreción y *sprezzatura*, sin forzar la situación y su fluidez natural para

desviar la atención hacia sí misma:

She was as much above reserve as disguise. So communicative, that no young lady could be in her company half an hour and not carry away instruction with her, whatever was the topic. Yet all sweetly insinuated; nothing given with the aire of prescription: so that while she seemed to ask a question for information sake, she dropped in the needful instruction, and left the instructed unable to decide whether the thought (which being started, she, the instructed, could improve) came primarily from herself, or from the sweet instructress.

(*Clarissa*, IV, 500).

Es un arte al cual sin duda aspira Richardson, que en su historia de Clarissa, o mejor dicho, nos dice, su "dramatic narrative" (IV, 554), quiere instruir deleitando y haciendo que la moral se extraiga espontáneamente de la historia. Es un arte del escritor basado en un arte previo de sus escritores-narradores, potenciado por ellos, pues Clarissa también es gran escritora de cartas, casi tanto como el propio Richardson, y hasta en las cartas del maquiavélico Lovelace se observan observaciones inteligentes y penetrantes sobre el mundo y las personas.

(Entre paréntesis, no deja de llamar la atención que el puritano y benevolente Richardson pudiera extraer de su mente un personaje tan moralmente encallecido como Lovelace y darle vida espontánea y credibilidad; eso quizá hizo que muchos como Henry Fielding sospecharan de la autenticidad y sinceridad del puritanismo de Richardson. Como mínimo, un rincón de su mente contenía un Lovelace con todas sus artimañas y cínicos razonamientos).

"Women, born to be controul'd,
Stoop to the forward and the bold."

Says Waller—and Lovelace too! (IV, 562)

Ay, and Richardson too...

Sobre Clarissa como *escritora* y crítica de la escritura, también tiene juicios atinados su amiga del alma Anna Howe, una segunda Clarissa en muchos aspectos, aunque con menos empatía y paciencia, y con una dosis adicional de feminismo agresivo. Pero si Clarissa sabe escribir y apreciar, lo mismo puede decirse de Anna, que aprecia sus apreciaciones en lo que valen:

She was an admirable mistress of all the graces of elocution. The hand she wrote, for the neat and free cut of her letters (like her mind, solid, and above all *flourish*), for its fairness, evenness, and swiftness, distinguished her as much as the correctness of her orthography, and even punctuation, from the generality of her won sex, and left her none, amongst the most accurate of the other, who excelled her.

And here you may, if you please, take occasion to throw in one hint for the benefit of such of our sex as are too careless in their orthography [a consciousness of a defect in which generally keeps them from writing]. She was used to say, "It was a proof that a woman understood the derivation as well as sense of the words she used, and that she stopped not at *sound*, when she spelt accurately."

On this head you may notice, that it was always matter of surprise to her that the sex are generally so averse as they

are to writing; since the pen, next to the needle, of all employments is the most proper, and best adapted to their geniuses; and this as well for improvement as amusement: "Who sees not, would she say, that those women who take delight in writing, excel the men in all the graces of the familiar style? The gentleness of their minds, the delicacy of their sentiments (improved by the manner of their education), and the liveliness of their imaginations, qualify them to a high degree of preference for this employment: while men of learning, as they are called (that is to say, of *mere* learning), aiming to get above that natural ease and freedom which distinguish this (and indeed every other) kind of writing, when they think they have best succeeded, and got above, or rather *beneath*, all natural beauty."

Then, stiffened and starched [let *me* [, Anna Howe,] add] into dry and indelectable affectation, *one sort* of these scholars assume a style as rough as frequently are their manners: they spangle over their productions with *metaphors*: they rumple into *bombast*: the *sublime*, with them, lying in *words* and not in *sentiment*, they fancy themselves most exalted when least understood; and down they sit, fully satisfied with their own performances, and call them MASCULINE. While a *second sort*, aiming at *wit*, that wicked misleader, forfeit all title to *judgment*. And a *third*, sinking into the *classical pits*, there poke and scramble about, never seeming to show genius of their own; all their lives spent in commonplace *quotation*; fit only to write *notes* and *comments* upon other people's *texts*; all their pride, that they know those beauties of two thousand years old in *another* tongue, which they can only *admire*, but not *imitate*, in their own.

And these, truly, must be learned men, and despisers of our *insipid sex*!

But I need not mention the exceptions which my beloved friend always made [and to which I subscribe] in favour of men of sound learning, true taste, and extensive abilities:

nor, in particular, her respect even to reverence for gentlemen of the cloth, which, I dare say, will appear in every paragraph of her letters wherever any of the clergy are mentioned. Indeed the pious Dr. Lewen, the worthy Dr. Blome, the ingenious Mr. Arnold, and Mr. Tompkins, gentlemen whom she names, in one article of her will, as learned divines with whom she held an *early* correspondence, well deserved her respect; since to their conversation and correspondence she owed many of her valuable acquirements.

Nor were the little slights she would now and then (following, as I must own, my lead) put upon such *mere* scholars [and her stupid and pedantic brother was one of those who deserved those slights] as despised not only *our* sex, but all such as had not had their opportunities of being acquainted with the *parts of speech* [I cannot speak low enough of such] and with the dead languages, owing to that contempt which some affect for what they have not been able to master; for she had an admirable facility in learning languages, and read with great ease both Italian and French. She had begun to apply herself to Latin; and having such a critical knowledge of her own tongue, and such a foundation from the two others, would soon have made herself an adept in it. (IV, 494-96)

Añade el autor en las ediciones subsiguientes un "Postscript" en el que comenta sobre las reacciones del público lector, y defiende tanto el final trágico de su historia como su moralidad y, con cierto interés especial, el método narrativo que ha elegido. Transcribo unos párrafos de esta Defensa del Método Epistolar, aquí ya en propia persona no interpuesta (hay que suponer) de Richardson, desenmascarado aquí ya no como el "Editor" de unas cartas sino como el "Autor" de una historia.

"Some have wished that the story had been told in the usual narrative way of telling stories designed to amuse and divert, and not in letters written by the respective persons whose history is given in them. The author thinks he ought not to prescribe to the taste of others; but imagined himself at liberty to follow his own. He perhaps mistrusted his talents for the narrative kind of writing. He had the good fortune to succeed in the epistolary way once before [with *Pamela*]. A story in which so many persons were concerned either principally or collaterally, and of characters and dispositions so various, carried on with tolerable connection and perspicuity, in a series of letters from different persons, without the aid of digressions and episodes foreign to the principal end and design, he thought had novelty to be pleaded for it: and that, in the present age, he supposed would not be a slight recommendation.

Besides what has been said above, and in the Preface, on this head, the following opinion of an ingenious and candid foreigner, on this manner of writing, may not be improperly inserted here:

"The method which the author has pursued in the History of Clarissa, is the same as in the Life of Pamela: both are related in familiar letters by the parties themselves, at the very time in which the events happened: and this method has given the author great advantages, which he could not have drawn from any other species of narration. The minute particulars of events, the sentiments and conversations of the parties, are, upon this plan, exhibited with all the warmth and spirit that the passion supposed to be predominant at the very time could produce, and with all the distinguishing characteristics which memory can supply in a history of recent transactions.

"Romances in general, and Marivaux's amongst others, are wholly improbable; because they suppose the history to be written after the series of events is closed by the catastrophe: a circumstance which implies a strength of memory beyond all example and probability in the persons concerned, enabling them, at the distance of several years, to relate all the particulars of a transient conversation: or rather, it implies a yet more improbable confidence and familiarity between all these persons and the author.

"There is, however, one difficulty attending the epistolary method; for it is necessary that all the characters should have an uncommon taste for this kind of conversation, and that they should suffer no event, not even a remarkable conversation to pass, without immediately committing it to writing. But for the preservation of the letters once written, the author has provided with great judgment, so as to render this circumstance highly probable." (1).

(1). This quotation is translated from a *Critique on the History of Clarissa*, written in French, and published at Amsterdam. The whole Critique, rendered into English, was inserted in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of June and August 1749. The author has done great honour in it to the History of Clarissa; and as there are remarks published with it, which answer several objections made to different passages in the story by that candid foreigner, the reader is referred to the aforesaid magazine for both.

It is presumed that what this gentleman says of the difficulties attending a story thus given in the epistolary manner of writing, will not be found to reach the history before us. It is very well accounted for in it, how the two principal female characters came to take so great a delight in writing. Their subjects are not merely subjects of amusement; but greatly interesting to both: yett many ladies there are who now laudably correspond, when at distance from each other, on occasions that far less affect their mutual welfare and friendships, than those treated of by these ladies [Clarissa and Anna Howe]. The two principal gentlemen [Lovelace and Belford] had motives of gaiety and vainglory for their inducements. It will generally be found, that persons who have talents for familiar writing, as these correspondents are presumed to have, will not forbear amusing themselves with their pens, on less arduous occasions than what offer to these. These four (whose stories have a connection with each other) out of the great number of characters which are introduced in this history, are only eminent in the epistolary way: the rest appear but as occasional writers, and as drawn in rather by necessity than choice, from the different relations in which they stand with the four principal persons. (*Clarissa*, IV, 562-63)

Esta "motivación realista" de la narración en *Clarissa*, que tanto preocupaba a Richardson y también a su crítico, le lleva casi a explicitar la autogénesis de la novela dentro de la ficción. Culmina la historia con la recolección de las diferentes cartas que hace Belford, como amigo y ejecutor testamentario tanto de Lovelace como de Clarissa, tras la muerte de ambos. Belford será también una especie de narrador cuasi-omnisciente (retrospectivo, y en tercera persona) en una "Conclusion: Supposed to be written by Mr. Belford," Y nos lleva a plantear una estructura de la *Historia de Clarissa* como una novela autoengendrada, según veíamos aquí al hablar de ["The Self-Begetting Clarissa."](#)

El concepto de la "novela autoengendrada" lo introdujo Steven Kellman:

Kellman, Steven. "The Fiction of Self-Begetting." *Modern Language Notes* 91 (1976).

_____. *The Self-Begetting Novel*. London: Macmillan, 1980.

Y se refiere a este fenómeno estructural: que parte del movimiento argumental de una novela se dirige hacia la explicación de la génesis de la novela misma y más en concreto de su forma narrativa concreta: una historia de "cómo llegó a existir este texto", o cómo los propios acontecimientos de la novela dan lugar a la narración que hemos leído, en tanto que recreación narrativa de esos acontecimientos. Observemos que Richardson ya parte de una adhesión a la ficción convencional de presentar su novela como una "colección editada" de cartas personales escritas entre diversos interlocutores o más bien corresponsales.

En el último volumen (IV), el confidente de Lovelace, Belford, alude a sus gestiones hacia el establecimiento de tal compilación editorial de la correspondencia que estamos leyendo, en tanto que ejecutor testamentario designado por Clarissa, y da todavía un paso más hacia convertirse él mismo en el primer lector de la novela, además de su (futuro) editor. Naturalmente, gran parte de la acción de *Clarissa* tiene que ver con la lectura de cartas no dirigidas a uno mismo—los personajes están constantemente prestando cartas, interceptándolas, copiándolas, censurándolas o falsificándolas, las suyas propias o las de otros. Y de este modo la experiencia de leer *Clarissa* comienza en la propia acción de *Clarissa*, y es de hecho parte de esa acción.

Aquí tenemos a Belford (IV, carta XXX) comentando en una carta dirigida a Lovelace sobre las emociones especiales inherentes a la lectura de una narración epistolar, comparada con las narraciones en primera persona subsiguiente, o

memorias autobiográficas que se basan en la retrospectiva. Clarissa ve que no necesita escribir tales memorias sobre sí, pues su historia ya está escrita:

She acknowledges that if the same decency and justice are observed in all your letters, as in the extracts I have obliged her with (as I have assured her they are), she shall think herself freed from the necessity of writing her own story: and this is an advantage to thee which thou oughtest to thank me for.

But what thinkest thou is the second request she had to make to me? No other than that I would be her *executor!* Her motives will appear before thee in proper time; and then, I dare to answer, will be satisfactory.

You cannot imagine how proud I am of this trust. I am afraid I shall too soon come into the execution of it. As she is always writing, what a melancholy pleasure will the perusal and disposition of her papers afford me! Such a sweetness of temper, so much patience and resignation, as she seems to be mistress of; yet writing of and in the midst of *present* distresses! How *much more* lively and affecting, for that reason, must her style be, her mind tortured by the pangs of uncertainty (the events then hidden in the womb of fate) *than* the dry narrative, unanimated style of a person relating difficulties and dangers surmounted; the relater perfectly at ease; and if himself unmoved by his own story, not likely greatly to affect the reader.

Queda claro que a través de estos comentarios del "compilador" o editor Belford vemos también las reflexiones narratológicas del propio autor implícito, que ofrece así en boca del personaje una justificación del estilo narrativo que Richardson eligió para *Clarissa* y para sus otras novelas. Como vemos está atento no sólo a sus consecuencias para el retrato

psicológico de los personajes y sus sentimientos sino también para la identificación del lector con esos sentimientos, y con la incertidumbre que asegura una actividad narrativa no dominante y ubicada en un punto ulterior retrospectivo, sino múltiple y atrapada en las incertidumbres de la vida, del destino, y de la interpretación ambigua de las situaciones y de las intenciones ajenas. Los efectos logrados, tanto a nivel de suspense como en la cuestión de la empatía y la caracterización, justifican plenamente la técnica narrativa seguida en *The History of Clarissa*.

Todo esto conduce tanto a Belford como a Richardson a preservar la forma epistolar como la más adecuada para el tipo de historia aquí narrada, y para el efecto estético, psicológico y ético buscado. Hay una continuidad fluida entre las cualidades morales y experiencia de Clarissa el personaje, y su imagen textual en *Clarissa* la novela. Podemos sostener, por tanto, que la novela presenta su autogénesis tanto al nivel de los acontecimientos de la historia y de los personajes, como al nivel del novelista-autor y de las opciones artísticas y narratológicas que ha elegido—para narrar su historia, y para impartir su instrucción moral y estética, a la par que desarrolla el arte y la técnica de la novela.

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El interrogatorio
(Przesluchanie)

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