

Clarissa Harlowe, or the History of a Young Lady (Volume I of II): 1

Samuel Richardson

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First published in 1748, "Clarissa" is the long and tragic tale of the ever-virtuous Miss Clarissa Harlowe. Though her family, newly wealthy, wishes to enter the aristocracy, they can only do so by marrying Clarissa to an unrefined and loveless man. She is soon offered protection from the selfish motives of her family by Robert Lovelace, who tricks Clarissa into running away with him. Though witty and urbane, Lovelace soon proves himself a villainous rake, eager to strike out at the Harlowes by making sexual advances on their highly moral daughter. Clarissa repeatedly refuses the vague offers of marriage Lovelace gives her, deceiving herself by denying her physical attraction to him, yet holding true to her belief in virtue, even as she grows increasingly ill from the stress of her situation. A masterful epistolary novel, "Clarissa" is a tragic heroine who remains true to her quest for virtue to the very end. Contained in this book is the first of two volumes.

Clarissa Harlowe, or the History of a Young Lady (Volume I of II): 1 Details

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From Reader Review Clarissa Harlowe, or the History of a Young Lady (Volume I of II): 1 for online ebook

Amy Wolf says

Not going to tell you this is the most scintillating thing ever written, but it is an interesting look into the development of the novel. This one is in epistolary form. Richardson was a big influence on Jane Austen.

Leah says

Epistolary novels require a certain amount of willing suspension of disbelief, and this one is no exception. Clarissa's story is a tragic one that comes across at times like a morality play, and it definitely has some strong opinions about the characters within.

Kathleen Flynn says

Longer than War & Peace, told entirely in letters, practically in real time. It's like watching paint dry, only more dark, claustrophobic and creepy. This is one of the most amazing books I have ever read, but not for the faint of heart!

Rosemary says

My goodness, she does witter on. Admittedly she's young but really very silly too. I will not be reading the other volumes - at least, not at any foreseeable time. However, Richardson does an amazing job of getting inside the head of his character.

Kristen says

Oh my goodness - I've never read a more boring book in my life. I was interested for the first quarter of the book and enjoying the writing but then it was like Groundhog day. The same thing over and over again. I forced myself to finish it but I won't be reading books 2-9.

Niniva says

A bid longer than...

The writing is very well done, the drama very thoughtful, and impressive way put together with letters. However, the main body of the drama and arguments draw much over and over and sometimes

overwhelming.

Wendy says

English 540A: English Fiction, 18th C Novel - Main characters are Clarissa, Lovelace, Anna Howe, and Clarissa's family, the Harlowes. A novel that is told completely through correspondence. A story about a young woman who tries to make decisions for herself but is thwarted by her family and societal mores of the time. A very long, confusing, boring novel (and we read the abridged version).

Scott Harris says

Having just forced myself to finish Vol.1 of this novel, I can't imagine reading the remaining volumes despite the fact that so much of the drama seems to lie ahead. This first volume seemed like an interminable self-examination of several characters getting nowhere in their argument about the appropriateness of a suitor. In the end, they all come across as whiny, self-absorbed prats. It felt droning and repetitive.

Raoul says

Way too long for the current era, but I can imagine that this was quite popular when it was published in the mid 18th century. I assume this was an effort by the author to convince young women of that era to marry as their parents desired or they would follow a similar fate as did Clarissa. I really like the way the author used the series of letters to convey the story. You just don't see that very often in current literature. I read the first volume quite some time ago and then finally found the last eight volumes on audio so I could listen while running.

Ashley W says

This novel is over 1,500 pages and luckily, I found out that it is on the Kindle for free and printed into 9 volumes, so this review is about the first volume. The novel follows titular character, Clarissa Harlowe, a young good and virtuous woman, who is lusted after by the creepy Robert Lovelace. After her brother and Lovelace duel, Clarissa is being made to marry a horrifying man named Mr. Solmes because her family believes she is in love with Lovelace. She refuses to marry Mr. Solmes because she hates him and her family basically treats her like shit for the rest of the novel.

Every single character in this book deserved to get punched in the face, except for Anna Howe, Clarissa's best friend. Clarissa's brother, James, is an asshole as is her sister, Arabella, her father, her uncles, and etc. Never mind that Clarissa tells them that she doesn't even like Mr. Lovelace over and over again, they still treat her like crap. They force her to stay in her room so they don't have to look at her, dismiss her favorite maid because they think the maid is carrying messages from her to Lovelace, don't let her write to her friends, and I just hated everyone. Lovelace says he's in love with her, but of course, he's really only pursuing her out of lust and because he hates her brother.

Even Clarissa annoyed me. Her friend Anna tells her over and over again that she should go live on the estate left to her by her grandfather, and I'm like, "YES, GO DO THAT!" but she can't leave because she still must fulfill her duty by her father. The father that currently keeps her a prisoner because he thinks she loves Mr. Lovelace only because her idiot brother told him that. Never mind the fact that her brother and sister are jealous of her because of their grandfather's estate.

At this point, I don't know if I want to continue reading the other volumes, if it just repeats Clarissa complaining about not wanting to marry Mr. Solmes and not being in love with Lovelace. If I was her, I would have left a long time ago...anywhere...I even would have hopped on a ship bound for the colonies if need be.

This book just reads like a "lesson" about what happens when good girls go bad and don't listen to their parents or other males in the family. One of the characters, Clarissa's uncle, literally spends a whole letter bashing women because women are fickle and it's a good thing that he's still a bachelor because he totally hates women.

Classic or not, this book was just not my cup of tea...I give it 2/5 stars.

And now I feel like Samuel Richardson's ghost is going to haunt me now. The writing is incredible, but I am obviously too modern to like this work of art.

Lisa says

Lot of letters between friends - could have said as much in less but there you go!

So far, Mr Lovelace has been introduced to Clarissa's sister when really he meant to be introduced to Clarissa; he therefore turns the sister down and turns his addresses to Clarissa, who is not interested. Sister Bella is not happy with this and joins forces with spoilt, selfish brother James who is displeased that Clarissa has been left independent property by their grandfather - property that would normally have gone to him. Between brother and sister they conspire to convince their parents that Clarissa should marry the hideous Mr Solmes; when Clarissa refuses she finds herself in isolation with her whole family turned against her and her only means of communication with the outside world being the letters to her friends, sent by means of secret delivery.

The first volume ends with Clarissa under no illusions that she WILL be marrying the dreadful Solmes.

As I said, lots of letters about how Clarissa is not interested in either Lovelace or Solmes but has been manipulated by her siblings into a regrettable position. Interesting and an easy enough read that keeps the interest but could have been condensed with no real loss as there is a lot of repetition.

Looking forward to the next volume.

Corinna says

I'm just so happy I finally finished it. And I read the abridged version...

Nicole says

Ooookay... so Volume 1 of 9. Here is a quick synopsis of nearly 200 pages:

Clarissa (with the back of her hand pressed to her forehead in classically melodramatic style): "I shant! I shant marry Mr. Solmes. Please just let me be single!"

Various family members: "Why must you be so obstinate and spoiled? You're locked in the house until you learn to obey."

Mr. Lovelace lurks in the shadows and plots how he can conquer Clarissa, although her family despises him since he tried to kill her brother in a duel.

Mr. Solmes hovers on the edges of the plot and wrings his hands while he waits for the family to prevail in convincing Clarissa to marry him.

For the first two-thirds of the volume, Clarissa insists she has no interest in Mr. Lovelace, only to inexplicably change her mind after he accosts her in the garden.

In usual Richardson style, the story is presented in a series of letters written by Clarissa and various other characters - it's a bit of a tedious format for a book this long. Really, it's just tedious period. I'm hoping it gets better, but I'm a good way into the second volume and not much has changed.
