Uneasy Sensibility: Richardson the Fat Man

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In one episode from his biography, Samuel Richardson, troubled with a chronic nervous disorder, rode on a chamber-horse. It is a "chair set on a long board, which must have acted like a joggling board, supported at both ends and limber in the middle, with hoops to brace the arms and a footstool to support the feet, on which Richardson was to ride while reading or dictating" (Eaves and Kimpel 63). Why did he do such a rather funny thing? It was because his doctor recommended it for his health to overcome a lack of exercise and to lose weight. The doctor recognised that Richardson's obesity accounted for his poor physical condition. Richardson the fat man riding on a chamber-horse - this image materialises his body, which might otherwise be hidden away behind the texts of his novels. Can we interpret this image and draw any implication from his actual corpulence? To take an example from sociology, Anthony Synnott provides a clear-cut model for analysing metaphorical meanings of the body. His main claim that the "body and the senses are socially constructed" (1) is elaborated by a series of dichotomies which impel value judgements:

- Bodies are highly polarised in moral terms: male/female, old/young, beautiful/ugly, fat/thin, black/white/red/yellow, and so on, with valences depending upon personal and cultural values. Furthermore, the body is also internally polarised, between public parts like the face and private parts like genitals - a polarization that coincides with other conventional dichotomies: higher and lower, and in the Western tradition, to a degree, good and bad. Other cultures, however, have other values. (3)

At a glance, Richardson cannot escape from such polarisation of cultural relativism; for example, consider where he is situated in the following dichotomies: thin/fat, healthy/unhealthy, and good/bad. Is he classified in the latter? Yet it is not so simple a matter. His doctor diagnosed Richardson with hypochondria. In the eighteenth-century English cultural and medical contexts, this nervous disorder was good and bad at the same time; it was regarded as a disease of sensible, hence virtuous, men. Thus simple metaphorical dichotomies concerning Richardson's body become ambiguous and the boundaries of the dichotomies begin to blur when his public image as an industrious printer and moralistic novelist and his private image as a fat and unhealthy man collide with each other. Riding on the chamber-horse, Richardson the moral paragon was swinging back and forth in a moral dilemma. This episode prompts us to redefine him as a cultural construct of the age of sensibility, which betrays ambivalence towards the meaning of being healthy and virtuous.

Richardson's doctor who recommended the chamber-horse, George Cheyne, is one of the most popular and acclaimed physicians in eighteenth-century England. Their relationship began when Richardson's brother-in-law, James Leake, got to know Cheyne in Bath. Richardson sought medical advice on his nervous disorder from this famous "nerve doctor" in letters. Their correspondence lasted until Cheyne's death in 1743. It covers the period Richardson made his debut as a novelist with Pamela (1740-1). He sent a copy to his doctor and received praise and advice on its sequel. In business, from 1733 onwards, Richardson printed all of Cheyne's books (Eaves and Kimpel 63), which are the standard texts of the medical discourse on sensibility, and from which Richardson possibly learned the medical theory on nervous illness. Richardson's novels, "especially Clarissa (1747-8), incorporated Cheyne's idea in depicting nervous female characteristics of excessive sensibility" (Brewer 114; about Cheyne's influence on Richardson's novels, also see Barker-Benfield [15-36], McMaster, Shuttleton, and Stephanson).

What kind of medical discourse did Richardson incorporate into his novels? The following is a passage from one of Cheyne's bestsellers which Richardson might have read. Cheyne wrote, as an important exercise: "Riding is certainly the most Manly, the most Healthy, and the least laborious, and expensive of Spirits, of any;
shaking the whole *Machine*, promoting an universal *Perspiration* and *Secretion* of all the *Fluids* ... and thereby, variously *twitching* the *Nervous Fibres*, to brace and contract them, as the *new Scene* amuse the *Mind*" (*Essay of Health and Long Life* 94–95). Richardson's chamber-horse probably prevented him from enjoying a benefit of the "*new Scene,*" yet, full of typically Cheynean vocabularies such as "*Machine,Fluids*" or "*Nervous Fibres,*" this passage leads us to a more comprehensive introduction of Cheyne's nervous theory. Among Cheyne's books, *The English Malady* (1733), discussing "*nervous Distempers, Spleen, Vapours, and Lowness of Spirits*" which are "*called the ENGLISH MALADY*" by the "*Neighbours on the Continent*" (i), shows how the medical discourse contributed to contemporary understanding of nervous disorders. His basic claim is that the human body is a sort of machine: "the Human Body is a Machin[e] of an infinite Number and Variety of different Channels and Pipes, filled with various and different Liquors and Fluids, perpetually running, gliding, or creeping forward, or returning backward, in a constant Circle" (3–4). The soul in this body as a machine is understood in material terms as follows: "the Intelligent Principle, or *Soul,* resides somewhere in the Brain, where all the Nerves, or Instruments of Sensation terminate, like a *Musician* in a finely fram'd and well-tun'd Organ-Case; that these Nerves are like Keys, which, being struck on or touch'd, convey the Sound and Harmony to this sentient Principle, or *Musician*" (4). This comparison of the human body to a musical instrument is one of Cheyne's favourite images, in which the body is a musician sitting in front of an organ. Using two meanings of the word "organ," a musical instrument and a part of the body, the body is figured as a machine connected with countless pipes. "Harmony" is thought to be a healthy state of the body, which, needless to say, contributes to the idea of the order of things. G. S. Rousseau states that, in the late seventeenth century, Thomas Willis's "paradigmatic leap" (131) to limit the soul to the brain leads to the cult of sensibility in the middle of the eighteenth century. If, as Rousseau says, "no novel of sensibility could appear until a revolution in knowledge concerning the brain, and consequently its slave, the nerves, had occurred" (134), Cheyne's theory apparently reflects the aftermath of this scientific "revolution." In this sense, Cheyne is also seen as a materialist in line with the "Newtonian group" (Yolton 163).

It is easy, then, to understand that one suffers from nervous disorder when this "Harmony" of the "Machine" gets out of order. According to Cheyne, the human body is not solid but an "elastic" soft machine. The fibres "are small, transparent, solid, and elastick, or springy Threads or Filaments" (42) and the nerves are "only some of these Fibres the most susceptible, by their Structure of communicating Action and Motion" (45). When this elasticity is spoiled, one is thought to fall into nervous disorder. But the cause of this elasticity, Cheyne says, has not been fully elucidated (50). In Cheyne's system, feeling, a bearer of sensibility, is defined as follows: "Feeling is nothing but the Impulse, Motion, or Action of Bodies, gently or violently impressing the Extremities or Sides of the Nerves, of the Skin, or other Parts of the Body, which by their Structure and *Mechanism,* convey this Motion to the sentient Principle in the Brain, or the *Musician*" (49). The "Musician" appears again and feeling is understood materialistically in the action-reaction relationship.

Cheyne owed his reputation not so much to his medical doctrine as to his ethical stance, which worked well especially in a polite and civilised society as seen in the mid-eighteenth century English middle class. His book is not only a straightforward genuine scientific book, but also a work of ethical social criticism. Regarding nervous disorder as a deviation from "Harmony," Cheyne's theory belongs to a line of classical attacks on luxury. According to John Sekora, luxury, archetypally defined as "*anything unneeded*" (23), is thought to be disobedience to the legislator of the law, who decides what is necessary and brings hierarchical order to his people and their states. It is Yahweh for the Hebrews and a kind of rationality, the natural law, for the Greeks and the Romans. Cheyne inherited the idea of the Greeks' luxury, that is, as Sekora puts it, "a retreat from order, a violation of harmony, and the introduction of chaos into the cosmos, preventing the individual and the community from realizing their natural ends" (29). In fact, Cheyne's attacks on luxury cite examples from the classic era. He thought that the ancient Greeks, who "sunk into Effeminacy, Luxury, and Diseases," began "Physick" to cure the "Evil" which "Luxury" and "Laziness" brought (*English Malady* 39). Since the classic rational harmony is above all for the order of the political community or the "state" (Sekora 30), the attacks on luxury lead to the attacks on urbanity. In this respect, Cheyne's nervous disorder must be called the "*English*" malady, not "Scottish" for instance, because it is especially a disease of its capital city: "London (where nervous Distempers are most frequent, outrageous, and unnatural) is, for ought I know, the greatest,
most capacious, close, and populous City of the Globe... which, in Time, must alter, weaken, and destroy the healthiest Constitutions of Animals of all Kinds; and accordingly it is in such like Cities, that these Distempers are to be found in their highest and most astonishing Symptoms" (English Malady 38).

This critical stance of Cheyne's attacks is comparable with Cicero's. Sekora asserts that Cicero, idealising the "rustic, virtuous simplicity," represents "one of the Roman contributions to the history of luxury, the impulse to purge the disorder... from every phase of Roman life, a practical approach that preoccupied most European nations until the middle of the eighteenth century" (36). It is noteworthy that Cicero's "simplicity" is "not a life of frugal fare and rigorous toil," but "a life of comfortable leisure, free from labor," for the people he presupposes are "not farmers, but masters or managers or gentleman farmers" (36). Just like Cicero, a series of discrimination underlies Cheyne's attacks on luxury. That is, the English malady is a disease not for the labouring poor, but for the wealthy middle class, as Cheyne wrote: "Nervous Disorders are the diseases of the Wealthy, the Voluptuous, and the Lazy... and are mostly produc'd, and always aggravated and increased, by Luxury and Intemperance" (English Malady 110). This class bias gets combined with the degree of intelligence: "Fools, weak or stupid Persons, heavy and dull Souls, are seldom much troubled with Vapours or Lowness of Spirits" (36). Even his favorite "Musician" must be "philosophical" in order to "understand Proportions and Harmony" (37). When he wrote that his "Diet is only proper for the thinking, speculative, and sedentary Part of Mankind, and not for the active, labourious, and mechanical" (246), both Cheyne himself and his presumed readers are included in the former "Part of Mankind." Thus he extracts a discrimination from his own nervous theory, and his value judgement is obviously class-conscious and in favour of his readers/patients/customers from the decent social ranks.

Besides these general statements, the culmination of The English Malady is in its last part, Part 3, which consists of case studies. It is not surprising if most of Cheyne's patients are from the middle-class "ladies" and "gentlemen," since there is an obvious class bias of the fashionable nervous disorder as seen above. Among these case studies, Cheyne puts his own case in the end of the book as it was the most successful one. As a kind of a confession, a self-analysis, or a medical autobiography, his case occupies the largest part of the book. Moreover, written "in a plain narrative Stile" (250), it is the most interesting to read and, as Cheyne puts it, "this Manner and Stile might be most instructive and beneficial to common valetudinary Readers" (250). To summarise his "confession," Cheyne's life is a constant battle with obesity, neglect of health, and nervous disorder. He was born "of healthy Parents" but "dispos'd to Corpulence, by the whole Race of one Side" of his family (222). He passed his youth "in great Temperance and a sedentary Life" (222). But, after his coming to London, his "whole Manner of Living" completely changed; he found the "Bottle-Companions, the younger Gentry, and Free-Livers" only to "Eat lustily, and swallow down much Liquor" (222-23). As a result, he confessed: "my Health was in a few Years brought into great Distress, by so sudden and violent a Change. I grew excessively fat, short-breath'd, Listless and Listless" (223). Before long, serious nervous disorder attacked him.

Then he "retir'd... to the Country, into a fine Air" (225). In this "melancholy Retirement" (227), he constructed his basic reflections from the "great and fundamental Principles of all Virtues and Morality" (226) and continued to "examine carefully such Spiritual and Dogmatic Authors" (228). He took a step forward to his regimen: "I... changed the Bath for Bristol Waters, retrenched my Diet, and increased my daily Riding and Exercise, and continued sometimes gentle Vomits" (229). He adopted one Dr Taylor's "total Milk Diet" (229). Thus he shaped his regimen from trial-and-error. The methods of Cheyne's regimen can be reduced into three points: physical exercise, a kind of fat-free diet, and vomiting. As for the exercise, it is needless to say that "riding on Horse-back is the best of all" (125). As we have seen, such exercise is required for "Circulation" and "Secretions" in the "more Northern and colder Climate" where "the Perspiration is small, or scarce any at all, especially in Nervous or chronical Distempers" (120). As a diet, Cheyne recommends "a total Milk or a Vegetable Diet" (115). But this is not original to Cheyne; he admitted that he learned from forerunners such as "Dr. Taylor," "Dr. Sydenham," "Dr. Pitcairn," and others (229-30). As for vomiting, "gentle Vomits suited to the Strength and Constitution of the Patient" to "promote the Circulation and Perspiration" induced by "Tea of Carduus, Chamomile Flowers, Horse Radish, Ipecacuanha" (142).

Armed with this regimen, he came back to London, but fell out of condition again. He ate and drank too
much as before, absorbed like a "Sponge," and "suddenly grew plump, fat, and hale to a Wonder" (235). He exceeded 32 stone at that time. He returned to a regimen of diet and evacuation. But, this time, he succeeded in recovering his fitness owing to his own regimen: "in my Nerves and Scorbutical Disorder, I had continued my Milk, Seed, and Vegetable Diet, with proper Evacuations, for above two Years, before I obtain'd a compleat Recovery" (242). This recovering was also the declaration of the success of diets to reduce weight: "all the former Habit . . . was wasted, wore away, and discharged by Evacuations, Diet and Exercise; for I had wasted and lost of my former Size and Bulk, in this last illness, almost one third in Weight and Measure; and had pass'd through a State of entire bodily Purification" (243-44). Thus medical ideas of regimen encounter a religious solution in the concept of "Purification":

I imagine . . . there must be required a particular Make and Frame, both of Mind and Body, to determine any one to receive heartily and pursue steadily this (as it were) material Metaphysics of a Regimen. There seems to be necessary, previous to a Conviction of the Benefit and Necessity of such a State of Purification . . . to make Men comprehend, embrace, and prosecute this Self-denying Doctrine, for the sake of such insensible Trifles, as Health, clear Faculties, Cheerfulness, Activity, and Length of Days, when they are in Danger. (253)

According to Anita Guerrini's account of vegetarianism in eighteenth-century England, Cheyne belongs to such religious dieters who thought "meat was not eaten" before the Fall, but he was "quite unlike his fellow physicians" (36) in using his own life as an example. His autobiographical confession is mainly an "argument within a context of sin and redemption" (38). While Guerrini concludes that eighteenth-century vegetarianism reached an "argument against cruelty" of eating animal food (40), it is more apt to regard Cheyne's regimen as belonging to the argument against luxury as well. As his diet is based on an idea that Adam and Eve were vegetarian before the Fall, the luxury of animal food can be defined as "anything unneeded." For example, when Cheyne denounces the cruelty of "taking away the Life of a Fellow-Creature," it is because this cruelty has been done "out of Wantonness, Luxury and Riot, and not from Necessity and Self-defence" (Essay on Regimen 64). He criticises the luxury of animal food for the sake of "Necessity" of the natural order. So he attacks the "unnatural" dishes: "Made Dishes, rich Soup [sic], high Sauces, Baking, Smoaking, Salting, and Pickling, are the Invention of Luxury, to force an unnatural Appetite" (Essay of Health and Long Life 28-29).

If Cheyne's regimen is one type of attack on luxury, then, his "redemption" is from the sin, not of cruelty, but of luxury, of disobedience to the natural order. In Cheyne's confession, religious motif is taken as the Fall into the sin of luxury and gluttony, the following punishment of fatness and nervous disorder, and the final redemption or recovery. Examining the relationship between criminal and religious confessions in Western culture, both of which have been institutionalised by police and church, Hepworth and Turner point out that a typical confessional mode "presupposes a constellation of notions about the private self tormented by guilt and the private conscience exposed to self criticism" (8). Cheyne's confession is in the same mode. Although he was not a criminal deviant like those whom Hepworth and Turner deal with, Cheyne's feeling of guilt about the sin of luxury and gluttony is apparent in his confession. Moreover, if not criminal, luxury can be seen as "deviance" from "Harmony." Hepworth and Turner also point out that, "while the art of [confession] itself may be private (within the confessional box of the church) or secluded (within a police station), it must have some public consequences" (7); in short, being published, confession becomes "a public restatement of social order" (7). This presupposes the existence of authority and the institutionalisation which make the private turn out into the public. An institutionalisation can be found in Cheyne's case. For his confession resembles a typical success story of the kind found in diet books. It is a sort of quasi-religious discourse in which one overcomes all the difficulties and reaches success as a result of "evacuation" or "purification" of "fat" or "evil" from the human body. In this point, Cheyne's confession is institutionalised into the typical discourse of dieting as well as conventional religious confession and becomes a published restatement of social order free from the sin of luxury.

This religious disguise is one of the characteristics in the discourse of diets. Hillel Schwartz, tracing the history of diets back to the sixteenth century, proposed two "fundamental modes": romance and ritual. The
dieting romance, extracted from a prototype dieter, Luigi Cornaro, is spiritual impatience working from the inside of the body: “As in the typical 16th-century romance, the hero changes himself and so changes the world. Personal renovation has cosmic consequences. It may reverse time, restore justice, establish order” (Schwartz 11). On the other hand, the dieting ritual is examined from another prototype, Santorio Santorio, who had observed the weight of his own body for thirty years with an enormous steelyard scale. Although “weighing of the body as a metaphor for the weighing of the soul is an ancient figure,” what is new in Santorio is scientific scrutiny of the body: “Like his Italian [seventeenth-century] contemporaries studying air pressure and specific gravity, Santorio directed his thirty-year experiment toward the discovery of law about the changes in natural bodies” (11). Thus the dieting ritual is supported by patience in scientific experiments working from the outside of the body. From previous centuries, Cheyne inherited these two modes of dieting. Schwartz finds a delicate relationship between ritual and romance in Cheyne's affection: “The ‘English Malady’ which Cheyne himself so named had to do with the weight of the body and the weight of the soul bearing directly upon one another. Cheyne had been caught between them just as he had been caught between the ritual and romance of dieting” (13). In other words, in Cheyne, medical theories on nervous disorder represent the ritual of examining the weight of the body, while religious or ethical statements on regimen represent the romance of examining the weight of the soul. So, when he concluded the end of his regimen with: “Milk and Honey was the Complexion of the Land of Promise, and Vegetables the Diet of the Paradisiacal State” (English Malady 254), Cheyne had a place in the more traditional or classical disguise of his predecessors rather than the more materialistic or scientific one of the later age.

Cheyne's autobiographical confession sets up a critical link between himself and Richardson in terms of fatness. Cheyne thought that a fat man has weak nerves: “A fat, corpulent, and phlegmatick Constitution is always attended with loose, shabby, and relax’d Fibres” (70). His method was obviously oriented to fat men: “perhaps it may not be quite useless to some low, desponding, valetudinary, over-grown Person, whose Case may have some Resemblance to mine” (250). Richardson no doubt was the “Resemblance” he had in mind. Both of them were “valetudinary” and “over-grown.” Here their “Resemblance” turns to positive implication for their sensibility prone to nervous disorder. In other words, their “shared ‘sensibility’ renders them liable to the ‘distemper’ of which Richardson complains, but also allows them to communicate their ‘feeling’ to each other. Such communication is only possible between those who are properly sensitized” (Mullan 207).

Because of this shared “sensibility,” Cheyne’s claims on regimen mentioned above are essentially reiterated in the correspondence with Richardson. Yet what is significant is that, by contrast to Cheyne’s autobiographical success story and in spite of Cheyne’s advice, diets had few effects on Richardson. Even in the first recorded letter, Cheyne pointed out Richardson’s obesity: “I wish the attentive Correction of the Book may influence to take Care of your own Health, which I am told is disposed to Rotundity and Liquor. Fatness is but another Word for a Dropsy of Flesh which a little Time will melt into Snow-water” (31). Richardson, who was, in Cheyne’s words, “short, round, and plump” (70), could not lose weight, could not cure his disorder, and Cheyne’s consultation could not reach a successful resolution.

The key to understanding this failure is in the traits of Richardson’s disease. Cheyne diagnosed Richardson’s nervous disorder as hypochondria: “I hope your Case is more Hypochondraical than Apoplectic” (38). It seemed easy to treat for him: “Your Noise in your Ears is a common Symptom of nervous Hyp and of no possible Consequence” (50), so “your Purification must be lighter than mine has been because you have never been so luxurious nor hurt your Constitution so deeply” (83). He tried to encourage his patient: “Mine was a Complication of Gout, Scurvy, and Hypo, yours a simple Hypo. Be of good Courage. All will do well in Time” (105). He repeated his claim to the worrier: “I most sacredly assure you again and again, yours is Nothing but a genuine Hypo for all your Symptoms etc, etc. Believe me and rest assured” (106). The cause was the same in Richardson’s case: “the Nerves have been wasted and relaxed by your sedentary Life and thinking attentively” (104). And the method of cure is stamped with the acclaimed Cheyne brand: “Not only a temperate but an abstemious Diet, Exercise and gentle Evacuation must relieve you most effectually” (42). Sometimes it sounds rather funny: “Your short Neck is rather an Argument for a Vomit now and then than against it, for no long necked Animal can vomit, and Vomits are the best Preservative from Apoplexies after little Phlebotomies” (58). By the end of the correspondence period, Cheyne’s tone becomes more religious. At
the beginning of 1742, he wrote: “It is true you are not a Physician, but you are I hope a Christian” (81). At the same time, Cheyne tried to put Richardson’s case into his quasi-religious framework of dieting narrative: “you must go through your State of Purification, in Body as well as Soul, before you can enter on the Land of Promise” (88). This framework takes a form of more traditional confession even in Richardson’s case: “In a Word next to eternal Happiness and a great Step in an honest Heart towards it, is bodily Health, and the best worth giving up every Thing for it, and in Truth all true Religion consists in Self-denial and Resignation” (96). So the Bible was evoked: “I have often thought Low-living and its Attendants to mend a bad or weakened Constitution of Body, has a great Analogy and Resemblance to the Meanest Purification and Regeneration preserved in holy Writ” (101). Even evacuation and “Cold Bathing” were spiritualized: “[Thumb Vomits] are indeed the most painful, disagreeable, and irksome of any Operation in Physic, but they are by far the most beneficial. They are like Self-denial in Religion, without which Our Lord tells us none can be his Disciples. . . . Cold Bathing is our Corporal Baptism and outward Cleansing which gives us present Strength to work out our Cure in the Duties of the Vocation whereunto we are called” (101). Reading through all these letters, it is quite easy to imagine that Cheyne found it an uphill battle to cure Richardson’s disorder. Cheyne had been engaged by this patient for 16 months of the last days of his life (Eaves and Kimpel 64). Yet unfortunately it was without any remarkable success.

When Cheyne called Richardson’s distemper “a simple Hyp” or “a genuine Hypo,” “he implies,” as John Mullan puts it, “a compliment to Richardson’s faculties of imagination and sensibility, as well as to his own powers of diagnosis” (215). But, what is worse for those who want to cure it or recover from it, hypochondria cannot be either “simple” or “genuine,” since it has countless symptoms. Cheyne wrote to Richardson:

You have quite a wrong Notion about the Hyp, as in Truth all but sensible Physicians have. We call the Hyp every Distemper attended with Lowness of Spirits, whether it be Flatulence from Indigestion, Wind Cholic, Head-Pains, or an universal relaxed State of Nerves, with Numbness, Weakness, Startings, Tremblings, etc., so that the Hyp is only a Short Expression for any Kind of nervous Disorder with whatever Symptoms (which are various nay infinite) or from whatever Cause. (108)

If hypochondria is thought to be a distemper never reduced to any specific rules or order, then it is a literal dis-order, like “a real Proteus” (107; see Stephanson 273): “The Symptoms, the Course, the Obstinacy of this Distemper is as various as the Faces, Complexions, and original Frame of each individual are. It is called a true Proteus and is never to be reduced into particular Rules” (104). It is such “Proteus” also because it is a symptom of luxury. Sekora, in discussing John Brown’s Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Time (1757), which is “a catalogue raisonné of the evils of luxury” for the commercial classes, points out that “Cowardice, hypochondria, and suicide are but various symptoms of the same national disease of luxury” (93). This comment on Brown can be applied to Cheyne as well. Hypochondria, just like luxury, is a complex disease, “kaleidoscopically fluid and demonstrably complicated, one aspect sometimes seeming to negate or contradict another” (29) in its symptoms.

Yet the most disturbing thing in the Cheyne-Richardson correspondence is that there are no letters from Richardson’s side. What is available now is Cheyne’s writing which Richardson recorded and wanted to possess. Cheyne asked Richardson to destroy his letters after reading them: “Besure [sic] you destroy all my Letters when perused, for though I value little what the present or future World of this State, thinks of me, yet for my Family’s Sake I would not be counted a mere Trifler, as these long Nothing-Letters, merely to amuse you, would show me” (96). Cheyne kept his promise. He threw away letters from his patient which were probably flooded with his grumbles about his health. On the other hand, Richardson broke this promise. Their correspondence consists only of the elder physician’s voice speaking to Richardson, sometimes kindly and sometimes admonishing, coaxing, even scolding. On the cover of the notebook is the following injunction by “S. Richardson” dated 11 August 1744: “This Book, and the Letters in it, on no Terms, or Consideration, whatever, to be put, (or lent) into such hands, as that it may be printed, or published” (Mullett’s Introduction to Cheyne, Letters 19). In contrast to Cheyne’s autobiographical confession, which became public discourse when it was published, Richardson would keep the letters private.
We can only guess the details of the distemper Richardson complained about. But there are a few letters referring to his health (Eaves and Kimpel 84). One is addressed to Lady Bradshaigh under the name of “Mrs. Belfour”:

Thus have I lost six Sons (all my Sons!) and two Daughters with every one of which ... I parted with great Regret. ... My Nerves were so affected with these repeated Blows, that I have been for seven Years past forced, after repeated labouring thro the whole Medical Process by Direction of eminent Physicians, to go into a Regimen, not a Cure to be expected, but merely as a Palliative; and for Seven Years past, have forborn Wine, Flesh, and Fish . . . . (Richardson to Lady Bradshaigh, 15 Dec. 1748, Selected Letters 110; Correspondence 4: 227-28)

Apparently Cheyne is one of the “eminent Physicians.” “Seven years past” covers the period of their correspondence. Richardson continued Cheyne’s regimen after his death. But Richardson admitted that the regimen was not for “Cure,” but for “Palliative.” Answering the biographical inquiry, Richardson wrote to another correspondent, a Dutch translator of his novels: “I am in an advanced Age; & have by too intense Application, fallen into Nervous Maladies: In short, am almost worn out, as to my Health; tho’ I bless God, my Mind, at times when not too much oppressed by bodily Disorders, is not very sensible of Decay” (Richardson to Johannes Stinstra, 2 June 1753, Selected Letters 234). As a result of “too intense Application,” the ethic of the middle-class tradesman, his nervous disorder had not been cured 10 years after Cheyne’s death.

In short, the diets had no effect. He continued to suffer from “distempers.”

Obviously Cheyne was consumed by this incurable patient. Richardson represents an unattainable goal of diets. In general, the discourse of diets appeared as an instrument in consumer society. According to Richard Klein’s paradoxical “post-modern diet book” (4), EAT FAT, statistics show that most of the people on a diet put on more weight after dieting, that is, after the failure of dieting. One (re-)starts diet because of its unattainability. Klein states that, in the eighteenth century, still the age of “fat,” extreme obesity like Louis XVI’s was an “emblem of aristocratic class,” though the food became more delicate, the taste more subtle, and the refinement of taste replaced overeating. Then, through the “sublime” aesthetic of Romanticism preferring “un-fat” to the “frivolous excess” and the “ornamental abundance of Rococo,” the modern age of diet obsession comes (Klein 139-42). For Klein, “fat” is the “emblem of Capitalism, a metaphor and index of our society’s relation to consumerism” (144). Citing Schwartz, Klein isolates two aspects: (a) Hunger: a “drive, a biological need motivated from within by body’s lack of what it needs”; and (b) Appetite: a “desire, stimulated by the attraction or seduction of things outside the self that provoke an interest or inclination to eat.” The logic of late capitalism expresses itself in new forms of dieting. Seemingly, dieting is the antithesis of consuming. But, in the paradoxical logic of the capitalism, “diets don’t work. Never have; never will,” because: “More diet means more appetite, and more appetite means more consuming” (Klein 144-45; also see Schwartz 328).

In Richardson’s case, however, this hunger/appetite model is best understood in the light of the paradoxical logic of sensibility. In the middle of the eighteenth-century “consumer revolution” (Mackendrick et al 1), hypochondria became a fashion. Roy Porter calls it “quintessentially bourgeois anxiety” (41) or “a symptom of a fearsome syndrome” (42) of bourgeois society. Since the body of a bourgeois man is “the source of labour and thereby value,” the “efficient running of the animal machine . . . assumed critical importance, requiring attentive psychosomatic maintenance” (42). But “the culture required that the anxious self expressed itself, by conversion, in the idiom of physical malaise, and this, in turn, was to be assuaged not (as was traditional) through religion or philosophy, but therapeutically, via the consolations of medicine” (42). Behind the “medical moralists” such as Cheyne, “Georgian England was becoming a medicated society, drunk on self-drugging” (43). Richardson, who was, to Cheyne, “one of the most staunch Epicures” (Cheyne, Letters 85), had continued to deal with the “Doctors” and “Apothecaries” who, Cheyne thought, used unnatural methods. Cheyne wrote to Richardson: “As to your old Apothecary’s Soot-Drops, I have often mentioned to you, and if his be very good, keep them by you to take as a Dram on Occasion, or on any sudden plunge or Lowness, but as an Alterative to be taken. By a Continuance, they are of no Use, but on the Contrary, and
are just a Dram or an Opiate to gain Time and Quiet; and universally I conjure you to take Nothing from an Apothecary so easy as you can do tolerably without" (109). Although there is no evidence that Richardson's "old Apothecary" had any connection with Porter's quacks, Porter's critical point to illustrate a "vicious circle" (43) of hypochondria, quackery, and addiction can be applied to Richardson's case. For, printers in Georgian England were very close to medicines, as Porter says: "Printers acted as distributors of medicines, typically selling them from their offices or bookshops (where they also sold the medical books advertised in their papers), and even delivering them, through their agents and newsboys, with the newspapers themselves" (116). Printers were in the front-line of the consumer society, since "the growth of the market in printed materials is the first aspect of the commercialization of leisure" (Mackendrick et al 267). Richardson, the master printer, who wrote, printed and sold books, was in the heart of the consumer society, so his nervous disorder could not be cured despite Cheyne's advice. In fact, the relationship between Cheyne and Richardson began in business. Richardson printed Cheyne's works. In their correspondence, Cheyne appreciated Richardson: "I truly think myself much obliged to your Civility and Friendship. I have a sincere Regard for you and am convinced you are a Man of Probit and Worth beyond what I have met with among Tradesmen" (Cheyne, Letters 36). Cheyne regarded Richardson as a tradesman in the first place, since, at this time of correspondence, Richardson was not a novelist. And he was also a "Head of Family" who supported his family by the printing business, as Cheyne wrote: "think it you Nothing that now you are under a Physical Certainty, that, as long as you continue your Regimen, you shall live as long and continue at the Head of your Family and Affairs, all the Time the Author of Nature first made you to last?" (89).

Since he constructed his public image in such a consumer society, we could suspect that Richardson needed no recovery at all. It is not ironical to think that he might be at a loss if he completely recovered from his nervous disorder. He would never recover as long as he had virtuous sensibility. Mrs Donnellan wrote to Richardson on 25 Sept. 1750: "Misfortune is, those who are fit to write delicately, must think so; those who can form a distress must be able to feel it; and as the mind and body are so united as to influence one another, the delicacy is communicated, and one to often finds softness and tenderness of mind in a body equally remarkable for those qualities" (Richardson, Correspondence 4: 30; cited in Rousseau 133). This passage from a familiar letter tells Richardson's public image, as G. S. Rousseau says: "Richardson represented to contemporaries like Mrs Donnellan the man par excellence of exquisite and truly delicate sensibility, and other women as well knew why he was able to write so delicately, even if we do not today" (13) and Mrs Donnellan is "obliged to give no elaborate reasoning, because her unstated assumptions are precisely those of the age" (14). Richardson's "Misfortune" comes from virtue, one of the most important received ideas for the contemporaries. It is because the society he was in "self-consciously engaged in the transformation of virtue from political capacity to provincial politeness," and "had produced for its own delectation a fantasy of virtue as private susceptibility" (Mullan 119). J. G. A. Pocock points out that this redefinition of virtue "as the practice and refinement of manners," or the shift from "political" virtue to "social" manners, happened in the process of commercialisation of society where "relationships were social and not political in character" (49-50). Richardson as a master printer no doubt practiced in favour of this process. Then, as a representation of a "fantasy" of his "private susceptibility," Richardson's nervous disorder accompanied with corpulence formulates the author's version of the virtue-in-distress story: that is, uneasy virtue in the consumer society. Yet, at the same time, hypochondria represent the sin of luxury. Here his public and private images collide with each other and fall into a moral dilemma. It could exposed his virtue of "private susceptibility" as a mere "fantasy." Hypochondria, a "real Proteus," becomes a complex idea in which "moral, religious, economic, and political attitudes were mixed into a vague and sometimes contradictory amalgam" (Sekora 48).

Such complex and uneasy anxiety lies behind Richardson's reticence in the correspondence with Cheyne. It is anxiety of virtuous industry as a master printer in the consumer society as well. His anxiety would never stop. In contrast to Cheyne who published his autobiographical confession, Richardson's anxiety remained private. Yet, while Cheyne's quasi-religious discourse found out his redemption in confessional mode, Richardson got another mode of public utterance around the time when he kept in touch with the physician, that is, to write and publish a novel. In his novels, Richardson freely adapted Cheyne's theory to explain the mechanism of sensibility, which, more or less, distributed Cheyne's nerve theory to the general reader. For
example, the following passage from *The English Malady* is on the “degrees” of sensibility (see Barker-Benfield 9):

It is true indeed, there are as many and as different Degrees of Sensibility or of Feeling as there are Degrees of Intelligence and Perception in human Creatures; and the Principle of both may be perhaps one and the same. One shall suffer more from the Prick of a Pin, or Needle, from their extreme Sensibility, than others from being run thro’ the Body. . . . none can choose his own Degree of Sensibility. That is given him by the Author of his Nature, and is already determined. (253)

Robert Lovelace in *Clarissa* quotes a slightly altered version of this passage with no quotation marks. Thus Cheyne’s medical discourse is infused into Richardson’s novelistic discourse: “Some people are as sensible of a scratch from a Pin’s point as others from the push of a Sword: And who can say any-thing for the sensibility of such fellows?” (7: 180). He wrote this passage as a matter of fact. At the same time, it drags the reader into the paradox of sensibility: that is, a paradox that the more refinement brings the more suffering. In other words, this paradox is an authority for the eighteenth-century heroines’ refined sensibility which causes fits. According to Cheyne, the passion could kill sensible people: “It is well known to Physicians what wonderful Effects, the Passions, excited by lucky or unlucky Accidents, (which are justly reckon’d Intellectual or Spiritual Operations) have on the Pulse, Circulation, Perspiration, and Secretions, and the other Animal Functions, in Nervous Cases especially, even to the restoring from Death, and destroying Life, as innumerable Instances demonstrate” (*English Malady* 47). The same logic kills Clarissa Harlowe: “virtue’s triumph in the body’s defeat” (Mullan 207). Richardson’s corpulent body is still reticent in his private image, but it is not so inapt to imagine Richardson, riding on his chamber-horse, contemplating on his heroine’s death and transforming his anxiety into the affirmative paradox of sensibility.

[I am grateful to Tim Parnell, Goldsmiths College, University of London, for his comments on the earlier version of this paper. Y. K.]

**Works Cited**


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(Received August 21, 2000)