

Styles and themes of samuel richardson

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Styles and Themes of Samuel Richardson Samuel Richardson wrote his novels using the epistolary novel style, in which all the books are made up of letters. These letters are meant to be written during the time that the stories take place by the main character. They either described a scene or dialogue within the scene (Brophy 245). The stories used the themes of female dominance over the emotions of a man, and male dominance over the physicality of a woman. Also, many women in his stories are put under a great amount of distress, which takes up most of the plot of the novel (“Richardson Criticism”).

Little is known of Richardson's early years beyond the few things that Richardson was willing to share. Although he was not forthcoming with specific events and incidents, he did talk about the origins of his writing ability; Richardson would tell stories to his friends and spent his youth constantly writing letters. One such letter, written when Richardson was almost 11, was directed to a woman in her 50s who was in the habit of constantly criticizing others (Brissenden 2). "Assuming the style and address of a person in years", Richardson cautioned her about her actions.

However, his handwriting was used to determine that it was his work, and the woman complained to his mother (Harris 68). The result was, as he explains, that "my mother chides me for the freedom taken by such a boy with a woman of her years" but also "commended my principles, though she censured the liberty taken (Brophy 245). "Pamela was immediately and extremely popular with the reading public. Richardson initially also enjoyed critical acclaim and was considered one of the most important English novelists.

His contemporaries focused almost exclusively on his moral teachings, and most praised the author for his judgment and honesty. Richardson's stated purpose in his works was moral instruction and thus when his sincerity was eventually questioned, and his work attacked by Fielding in parodies including *Shamela*, Richardson defended himself with explanations and revisions, particularly in the third edition of *Pamela*. Fielding ridiculed *Pamela*'s obsession with chastity and her tendency to measure the rewards of virtue in material terms (Harris 87).

Fielding's interpretation of *Pamela* established the opposition between "Pamelist" and "anti-Pamelist" which has persisted to the present day (Brissenden 32). Richardson's popularity rapidly diminished in the nineteenth-century until he was generally neglected. However, critics would on occasion mention him as historically important for advancing the epistolary form. William Hazlitt perceptively wrote that his works combine the romance of fiction with the "literal minuteness of a common diary." Twentieth-century critics have emphasized Richardson's concept of self (Brissenden 12).

His character's extreme self-awareness can be read at different levels; according to both Richardson and critics, the characters are not as bound to the truth as they continually claim. Elements of Richardson's work have often been praised in spite of their author; critics suggested that the depths of his work were present unconsciously or even by accident (Brissenden 32).

Scholar A. D. McKillop argued convincingly to the contrary, that Richardson was a skilled, deliberate craftsman conscious of his work, its layers, and its meanings.

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Further rehabilitation to Richardson's reputation was gained from W. M. Sale's painstaking bibliographic study and Ian Watt's discussion of background and technique. Richardson is studied today as a psychological novelist and as a social historian for his descriptions and insight in regard to the relationships of the sexes in a patriarchal society, and to sexual themes in general (Brissenden 32).. While working for Wilde, he met a rich gentleman who took an interest in Richardson's writing abilities and the two began to correspond with each other.

When the gentleman died a few years later, Richardson lost a potential patron, which delayed his ability to pursue his own writing career. He decided to devote himself completely to his apprenticeship, and he worked his way up to a position as a compositor and a corrector of the shop's printing press. In 1713, Richardson left Wilde to become "Overseer and Corrector of a Printing-Office". This meant that Richardson ran his own shop, but the location of that shop is unknown. It is possible that the shop was located in Staining Lane or may have been jointly run with John Leake in Jewin Street (Brophy 245).

In 1719, Richardson was able to take his freedom from being an apprentice and was soon able to afford to set up his own printing shop, which he did after he moved near the Salisbury Court district close to Fleet Street. Although he claimed to business associates that he was working out of the well-known Salisbury Court, his printing shop was more accurately located on the corner of Blue Ball Court and Dorset Street in a house that later became Bell's Building (Brissenden 12). On 23 November 1721 Richardson married Martha Wilde, the daughter of his former employer.

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The match was "prompted mainly by prudential considerations", although Richardson would claim later that there was a strong love-affair between him and Martha. He soon brought her to live with him in the printing shop that served also as his home (Brissenden 14). One of Richardson's first major printing contracts came in June of 1723 when he began to print the bi-weekly *The True Briton* for Philip Wharton, 1st Duke of Wharton. This was a Jacobite political paper which attacked the government and was soon censored for printing "common libel" (Brophy 245). However, Richardson's name was not on the publication, and he was able to escape any of the negative fallout, although it is possible that Richardson participated in the papers as far as actually authoring one himself. The only lasting effect from the paper would be the incorporation of Wharton's libertine characteristics in the character of Lovelace in Richardson's *Clarissa*, although Wharton would be only one of many models of libertine behavior that Richardson would find in his life.

In 1724, Richardson befriended Thomas Gent, Henry Woodfall, and Arthur Onslow, the latter of those would become the Speaker of the House of Commons (Kinkead-Weekes 667). In 1733, Richardson was granted a contract with the House of Commons, with help from Onslow, to print the *Journals of the House*. The twenty-six volumes of the work soon improved his business. Later in 1733, he wrote *The Apprentice's Vade Mecum*, urging young men like him to be diligent and self-denying (Brophy 245). The work was intended to "create the perfect apprentice. Written in response to the "epidemic Evils of the present Age", the text is best known for its condemnation of popular forms of entertainment including theatres, taverns and gambling. The manual targets the apprentice as the focal point for the

moral improvement of society, not because he is most susceptible to vice, but because, Richardson suggests, he is more responsive to moral improvement than his social betters. His total staff during the 1730s numbered 7, as his first three apprentices were free by 1728, and two of his apprentices, Verren and Smith, died soon into their apprenticeship (Brophy 245).

The loss of Verren was particularly devastating to Richardson because Verren was his nephew and his hope for a male heir that would take over the press (Kinkead-Weekes 67). Work continued to improve, and Richardson printed the Daily Journal between 1736 and 1737, and the Daily Gazetteer in 1738. During his time printing the Daily Journal, he was also printer to the "Society for the Encouragement of Learning", a group that tried to help authors become independent from publishers, but collapsed soon after.

In December 1738, Richardson's printing business was successful enough to allow him to lease a house in Fulham. This house, which would be Richardson's residence from 1739 to 1754, was later named "The Grange" in 1836. In 1739, Richardson was asked by his friends Charles Irvington and John Osborn to write "a little volume of Letters, in a common style, on such subjects as might be of use to those country readers, who were unable to invite for themselves." While writing this volume, Richardson was inspired to write his first novel (Brophy 245).

Richardson made the transition from master printer to novelist on 6 November 1740 with the publication of Pamela: or, Virtue Rewarded. Pamela was sometimes regarded as "the first English novel." Richardson explained

the origins of the work (Brophy 245). In the progress, writing two or three letters to instruct handsome girls, who were obliged to go out to service, as we phrase it, how to avoid the snares that might be laid against their virtue, and hence sprung Pamela...

Little did I think, at first, of making one, much less two volumes of it... I thought the story, if written in an easy and natural manner, suitably to the simplicity of it, might possibly introduce a new species of writing, that might possibly turn young people into a course of reading different from the pomp and parade of romance-writing, and dismissing the improbable and marvelous, with which novels generally abound, might tend to promote the cause of religion and virtue (Kinkead-Weekes 47).

After Richardson started the work on 10 November 1739, his wife and her friends became so interested in the story that he finished it on 10 January 1740. Pamela Andrews, the heroine of Pamela, represented "Richardson's insistence upon well-defined feminine roles" and was part of a common fear held during the 18th century that women were "too bold." In particular, her "zeal for housewifery" was included as a proper role of women in society.

Although Pamela and the title heroine were popular and gave a proper model for how women should act, they inspired "a storm of anti-Pamelas" (like Henry Fielding's Shamela and Joseph Andrews) because the character "perfectly played her part (Brophy 243)." Later that year, Richardson printed Rivington and Osborn's book which inspired Pamela under the title of Letters written to and for particular Friends, on the most important Occasions.

Directing not only the requisite Style and Forms to be observed in writing Familiar Letters; but how to think and act justly and prudently, in the common Concerns of Human Life. The book contained many anecdotes and lessons on how to live, but Richardson did not care for the work and it was never expanded even though it went into six editions during his life. He went so far as to tell a friend, " This volume of letters is not worthy of your perusal" because they were " intended for the lower classes of people. In September 1741, a sequel of Pamela called Pamela's Conduct in High Life was published by Ward and Chandler. Although the work lacks the literary merits of the original, Richardson was compelled to publish two more volumes in December 1741 to tell of further exploits of Pamela, the title heroine, while " in her Exalted Condition. " The public's interest in the characters was waning, and this was only furthered by Richardson's focusing on Pamela discussing morality, literature, and philosophy. After the failures of the Pamela sequels, Richardson began to compose a new novel.

It was not until early 1744 that the content of the plot was known, and this happened when he sent Aaron Hill two chapters to read. In particular, Richardson asked Hill if he could help shorten the chapters because Richardson was worried about the length of the novel. Hill refused, saying, You have formed a style, as much your property as our respect for what you write is, where verbosity becomes a virtue; because, in pictures which you draw with such a skillful negligence, redundancy but conveys resemblance; and to contract the strokes, would be to spoil the likeness (Kunitz 60).

In July, Richardson sent Hill a complete " design" of the story, and asked Hill to try again, but Hill responded, " It is impossible, after the wonders you

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have shown in Pamela, to question your infallible success in this new, natural, attempt" and that " you must give me leave to be astonished, when you tell me that you have finished it already. " However, the novel wasn't complete to Richardson's satisfaction until October 1746. Between 1744 and 1746, Richardson tried to find readers who could help him shorten the work, but his readers wanted to keep the work in its entirety (Kunitz 60).

A frustrated Richardson wrote to Edward Young in November 1747: What contentions, what disputes have I involved myself in with my poor Clarissa through my own diffidence, and for want of a will! I wish I had never consulted anybody but Dr. Young, who so kindly vouchsafed me his ear, and sometimes his opinion (Brissenden 32). Richardson did not devote all of his time just to working on his new novel, but was busy printing various works for other authors that he knew. In 1742, he printed the third edition of Daniel's Tour through Great Britain.

He filled his new few years with smaller works for his friends until 1748, when Richardson started helping Sarah Fielding and her friend Jane Collier to write novels. By 1748, Richardson was so impressed with Collier that he accepted her as the governess to his daughters (Brophy 243). In 1753, she wrote *An Essay on the Art of Ingeniously Tormenting* with the help of Sarah Fielding and possibly James Harris or Richardson, and it was Richardson who printed the work (Kunitz 60). But Collier was not the only author to be helped by Richardson, as he printed an edition of Young's *Night Thoughts* in 1749.

By 1748 his novel *Clarissa* was published in full: two volumes appeared in November 1747, two in April 1748 and three in December 1748. Unlike the

novel, the author was not faring well at this time. By August 1748, Richardson was in poor health. He had a sparse diet that consisted mostly of vegetables and drinking vast amount of water, and was not robust enough to prevent the effects of being bled upon the advice of various doctors throughout his life. He was known for "vague 'startings' and 'paroxysms'", along with experiencing tremors.

Richardson once wrote to a friend that "my nervous disorders will permit me to write with more impunity than to read" and that writing allowed him a "freedom he could find nowhere else (Brissenden 32). " However, his condition did not stop him from continuing to release the final volumes *Clarissa* after November 1748 (Brophy 243). To Hill he wrote: "The Whole will make Seven; that is, one more to attend these two. Eight crowded into Seven, by a smaller Type. Ashamed as I am of the Prolixity, I thought I owed the Public Eight Vols. n Quantity for the Price of Seven" Richardson later made it up to the public with "deferred Restorations" of the fourth edition of the novel being printed in larger print with eight volumes and a preface that reads: "It is proper to observe with regard to the present Edition that it has been thought fit to restore many Passages, and several Letters which were omitted in the former merely for shortening-sake (Brophy 243). " The response to the novel was positive, and the public began to describe the title heroine as "divine *Clarissa*. It was soon considered Richardson's "masterpiece," his greatest work, and was rapidly translated into French in part or in full, for instance by the Antoine Francois Prevost, as well as into German. In England there was particular emphasis on Richardson's "natural creativity" and his ability to incorporate daily life experience into the novel

(Brissenden 32).. However, the final three volumes were delayed, and many of the readers began to "anticipate" the concluding story and some demanded that Richardson write a happy ending.

One such advocate of the happy ending was Henry Fielding, who had previously written *Joseph Andrews* to mock Richardson's *Pamela*. Although Fielding was originally opposed to Richardson, Fielding supported the original volumes of *Clarissa* and thought a happy ending would be "poetical justice" (Brissenden 34). Others wanted Lovelace to be reformed and for him and *Clarissa* to marry, but Richardson would not allow a "reformed rake" to be her husband, and was unwilling to change the ending.

In a postscript to *Clarissa*, Richardson wrote: If the temporary sufferings of the Virtuous and the Good can be accounted for and justified on Pagan principles, many more and infinitely stronger reasons will occur to a Christian Reader in behalf of what are called unhappy Catastrophes, from a consideration of the doctrine of future rewards; which is everywhere strongly enforced in the *History of Clarissa* (Brissenden 36). Although few were bothered by the epistolary style, Richardson feels obligated to continue his postscript with a defense of the form based on the success of it in *Pamela*.

However, some did question the propriety of having Lovelace, the villain of the novel, act in such an immoral fashion. The novel avoids glorifying Lovelace, as Carol Flynn puts it, But Richardson still felt the need to respond by writing a pamphlet called *Answer to the Letter of a Very Reverend and Worthy Gentleman* (Peden 236). In the pamphlet, he defends his characterizations and explains that he took great pains to avoid any

glorification of scandalous behavior, unlike the authors of many other novels that rely on characters of such low quality (Brissenden 32)..

In 1749, Richardson's female friends started asking him to create a male figure as virtuous as his heroines " Pamela" and " Clarissa" in order to " give the world his idea of a good man and fine gentleman combined. " Although he did not at first agree, he eventually complied, starting work on a book in this vein in June 1750. Near the end of 1751, Richardson sent a draft of the novel The History of Sir Charles Grandison to Mrs. Dunnellon, and the novel was being finalized in the middle of 1752. When the novel was being printed in 1753, Richardson discovered that Irish printers were trying to pirate the work (Brissenden 32)..

He immediately fired those he suspected of giving the printers advanced copies of Grandison and relied on multiple London printing firms to help him produce an authentic edition before the pirated version was sold. In Grandison, Richardson was unwilling to risk having a negative response to any " rakish" characteristics that Lovelace embodied and denigrated the immoral characters " to show those mischievous young admirers of Lovelace once and for all that the rake should be avoided (Brissenden 32). " At the same time as he was associating with important figures of the day, Richardson's career as a novelist drew to a close.

Grandison was his final novel, and he stopped writing fiction afterwards. However, he was continually prompted by various friends and admirers to continue to write along with suggested topics. Richardson did not like any of the topics, and chose to spend all of his time composing letters to his friends

and associates (Peden 236). The only major work that Richardson would write would be *A Collection of the Moral and Instruction Sentiments, Maxims, Cautions, and Reflexions*, contained in the *Histories of Pamela, Clarissa, and Sir Charles Grandison*.

Although it is possible that this work was inspired by Johnson asking for “index rerum” for Richardson’s novels, the Collection contains more of a focus on “moral and instructive” lessons than the index that Johnson sought.

Richardson was a skilled letter writer and his talent traces back to his childhood. Throughout his whole life, he would constantly write to his various associates (Peden 236). Richardson had a “faith” in the act of letter writing, and believed that letters could be used to accurately portray character traits.

He quickly adopted the epistolary novel form, which granted him “the tools, the space, and the freedom to develop distinctly different characters speaking directly to the reader.” The characters of *Pamela*, *Clarissa*, and *Grandison* are revealed in a personal way, with the first two using the epistolary form for “dramatic” purposes, and the last for “celebratory” purposes (Peden 236). In his first novel, *Pamela*, he explored the various complexities of the title character's life, and the letters allow the reader to witness her develop and progress over time.

The novel was an experiment, but it allowed Richardson to create a complex heroine through a series of her letters. When Richardson wrote *Clarissa*, he had more experience in the form and expanded the letter writing to four different correspondents, which created a complex system of characters

encouraging each other to grow and develop over time (Kunitz 60). However, the villain of the story, Lovelace, is also involved in the letter writing, and this leads to tragedy (Brissenden 32).

Leo Braudy described the benefits of the epistolary form of *Clarissa* as, "Language can work: letters can be ways to communicate and justify." By the time Richardson writes *Grandison*, he transforms the letter writing from telling of personal insights and explaining feelings into a means for people to communicate their thoughts on the actions of others and for the public to celebrate virtue. The letters are no longer written for a few people, but are passed along in order for all to see (Brophy 243). Works Cited Brissenden, R.

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