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978-1-107-15012-6 — Samuel Richardson in Context
Edited by Peter Sabor , Betty A. Schellenberg
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CHAPTER 1

Portraying the Life

Thomas Keymer

Samuel Richardson did not come from the portrait-commissioning classes, and we have no likeness of him from the first fifty years of his life. In this respect he resembles Daniel Defoe – whose portrait was painted, but whose appearance we know most vividly from a newspaper description calling for his arrest – more closely than he resembles celebrity authors of the era like Alexander Pope or Laurence Sterne. For Pope in association with several artists, or Sterne with Joshua Reynolds in particular, portraiture was a way to shape or promote reputation in a process of strategic self-definition, one that could be further advanced by means of public exhibition or dissemination of engraved copies. Approached in this way, an authorial portrait did more than simply record physical appearance, display social standing and suggest personal character; it contributed to a larger project of creative self-fashioning or identity-projection of the kind also at work in the *Imitations of Horace* and Pope's emblematic Twickenham garden, or in *Tristram Shandy* and Sterne's role-playing as Parson Yorick. For the most theoretically self-conscious of Pope's portraitists, Jonathan Richardson (no relation), portraiture could even approach the condition of a narrative genre. 'A Portrait is a Sort of General History of the Life of the Person it represents', this artist wrote in a treatise of 1719. He developed the point six years later: 'upon the sight of a Portrait the Character, and Master-strokes of the History of the Person it represents are apt to flow in upon the Mind … So that to sit for one's Picture, is to have an Abstract of one's Life written, and published, and ourselves thus consign'd over to Honour, or Infamy.'[1]

Richardson was famous for no quality so much as personal diffidence, and seems to have disdained direct self-promotion (as opposed to promotion of his books), portraiture especially. 'I am not fond of being hanged up in Effigy', he wrote with macabre innuendo to Samuel Lobb, distancing himself from a mezzotint portrait by the young engraver James Macardell 'that was done by Command of a great Man; and which I have never permitted

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Figure 1.1 James Macardell, *Samuel Richardson* (1753), after Joseph Highmore, mezzotint, 353 × 252 mm (paper size), National Portrait Gallery, London, and elsewhere.

to be sold' (1 July 1754; Figure 1.1). As with Defoe, one effect of this attitude is to give special value to surviving pen-portraits from Richardson's lifetime: even the briefest, like the report of his 'large, blue, fiery, roguish, witty eyes' made to the poet Klopstock in 1756.[2] That said, it is clear that his reservations about portraiture went only so far. Between 1740 and 1754 – exactly the span of his career as a novelist – Richardson personally commissioned or otherwise sat for at least five formal portraits of himself. As for the mezzotint desired by the 'great Man' – probably the politician Arthur Onslow, long-serving Speaker of the House of Commons – it was Richardson who ordered and paid for the engraving, and he privately distributed copies on some scale, including to friends of friends. The oil portraits – by Francis Hayman (*c.* 1740–1), Joseph Highmore (1747, *c.* 1747–50, 1750), and Mason Chamberlin (*c.* 1754) – are all accomplished pieces in their own right, and in the first four cases are connected with illustrations discussed below by Lynn Shepherd (pp. 197–202). They project Richardson's authorial identity with intriguing differences of emphasis, and open up valuable insights not only into the shape of his personal and literary life but also into the meanings he sought to attach to it.

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Conspicuously absent from, or at best deeply buried within, these meanings is Richardson's profession as master printer, though it was from this profession that his career as novelist arose, and it makes him an important figure in book history independently of his standing as an author. He was born in middling-sort provincial obscurity in 1689, in a Derbyshire village to which the family had withdrawn after his father, a London master joiner, became entangled in some way in the conspiratorial Whig politics of the Exclusion Crisis, perhaps even in the Monmouth rising of 1685, in which the duke of Monmouth attempted to overthrow James II (a glamorous reminiscence on Richardson's part; there may have been more humdrum business reasons). By the mid-1690s the Williamite revolution had made it safe to return to London, and Richardson may have been educated at the Merchant Taylors' School there, but if so only to a certain level, and he always thought of himself as an autodidact. He never attained the classical learning flaunted in the work of his great rival Henry Fielding, and when creating the voice of Elias Brand, a pedantic cleric, for the third edition of *Clarissa*, he seems to have had to rely for help on an erudite book-trade colleague.[3]

Richardson once apologised to Aaron Hill that he 'seldom read but as a Printer, having so much of that' (2 April 1743), a comment sometimes used to support a view of him as, like Ben Jonson's Shakespeare, a 'natural' genius. Potentially, however, reading as a printer meant reading on a prodigious scale across multiple fields. In the mid-twentieth century, the bio-bibliographical researches of William Sale made clear that Richardson's printing business was among the most important of the day, but we now know that its output was up to five times larger than Sale recognised, on a scale comparable to the great printing-houses of the Bowyer family or William Strahan. By 1734 Richardson was employing twenty compositors and pressmen as well as four apprentices bound to him and doubtless other hands (warehousemen, devils, a corrector of the press); in 1753 he had forty workmen on the payroll, and in 1759 he was still expanding capacity, to a total of nine presses.[4] In this context, it hardly needs saying that we must not think of Richardson as personally reading the huge and diverse range of material he printed. On the other hand, delegation was not his forte, and we know that he won commissions from booksellers precisely because of his ability, unusual in a printer, to give qualitative advice about copy and supply paratextual additions from his own pen.[5] Some booksellers (in effect, publishers) 'thought fit to seek me, rather than I them, because of the Readiness I shewed, to oblige them, with writing Indexes, Prefaces, and … Dedication[s]; abstracting, abridging, compiling, and giving my Opinion

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of Pieces offered them', he recalled in the best single source we have for his early career: an autobiographical letter of 2 June 1753 to Johannes Stinstra, his Dutch translator.

After apprenticeship and years of fairly menial employment (as compositor, corrector, and eventually overseer of his former master's printing-house), Richardson set up in business for himself on the corner of Salisbury Court, off Fleet Street, in late 1720. He was to live and work in this neighbourhood for the rest of his life, though from 1738 he also maintained semi-rural retreats (at North End, Hammersmith, then Parson's Green, Fulham) where much of his writing was done. He took over a going concern (from the Leake family, with whom he maintained close lifelong ties), but even so, getting securely established cannot have been easy. Richardson's biographers T. C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel use this fact to explain the dissident cast of his early output as a printer, or at least of a conspicuous part of it. 'There is no evidence that Richardson was ever opposed to the House of Hanover', they maintain, and where his printing activities indicate otherwise, they suggest that he was glad of whatever work he could get, that he may not have fully understood what he was printing, or that he was simply helping out a book-trade colleague.[6] Yet it is hard to think of Richardson as stupid or rash, and his creative output gives no grounds at all for thinking him deaf to nuance or subtextual meaning. He ran obvious risks by printing dissident material, and persisted in these risks through a politically fraught decade. Prominent among the authors whose works he handled in the 1720s were Bishop Francis Atterbury, recently banished for his role in the abortive Jacobite plot of 1722; George Kelly, a participant in the Jacobite rebellions of both 1715 and 1745, whose defence speech in the 1723 treason trials was printed by Richardson in five editions; and Philip, duke of Wharton, whose cover as an 'Old Whig' critic of ministerial encroachment on the 1688 settlement was blown when he later defected to the Jacobite court in exile. None of this work escaped official attention. In 1722 Richardson appeared on a blacklist of 'disaffected printers' (specifically those 'Said to be High Flyers', i.e. Tory ultras, sympathetic to the Jacobite cause) supplied to the ministry by a book-trade insider; in 1723 he escaped prosecution for seditious libel only when the publisher of the *True Briton* (Wharton's journal, printed by Richardson) falsely confessed to doing the printing himself; in 1728 he was implicated in the production of another crypto-Jacobite organ, *Mist's Weekly Journal*.[7] Like his father in the 1680s, though from another position, Richardson was keeping dangerous political company – the

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common element in both cases being a doomed, charismatic nobleman (Monmouth, Wharton) whose type he was to anatomise in *Clarissa*.

It was only after 1730 that Richardson was able to transform his political reputation into that of a trusted insider to the Hanover Whig establishment, and quite how he managed to do it is still unclear. In 1733 he became the first official printer to the House of Commons, responsible for printing sessional papers for the use of MPs only, and in 1742 he expanded this role further by winning an enormous contract, extended in 1756, to print the Commons *Journals* all the way back to 1547 and forward in the ongoing present. No longer the printer of opposition polemic, Richardson became, for the rest of his life, as much a presence in the seat of government as any minister or official. The costs were high: 'Half a Day every Day obliged to be thrown away on a personal outdoors Attendance at Westminster', he wrote with frustration while trying to revise *Clarissa* (to Aaron Hill, 10 May 1749). But the rewards were immense. Parliamentary printing is clearly the activity that Richardson had in mind when he told Stinstra of developing a branch of business that made him 'more independent of Booksellers (tho' I did much Business for them) than any other Printer' (2 June 1753). This activity, moreover, reaches back to the very start of his career. Perhaps building on relationships established by the Leakes, Richardson carried out extensive work over four decades as a printer of private parliamentary bills concerning estates, trusts, wills, marriages, and the like; there were also local bills (roads, canals). This printing was commissioned not by booksellers but by lawyers and lobbyists acting on behalf of real-world Harlowes and Solmeses who wished, as Keith Maslen drily puts it, 'to alter the condition of their lives by securing an act of Parliament in their favour'.[8] No doubt Richardson's dominant position in the private bills market helped him to secure the official Commons contract in 1733, but that may not be the whole story. William Bowyer, who competed unsuccessfully for the contract, sourly attributed Richardson's victory to 'his superior knowledge of mankind': an innuendo not hard to unpack in the Walpole era.[9]

Secure in these lucrative official contracts, Richardson become one of the most prosperous printers of his day, and rose to be elected, in 1754, as Master of the Stationers' Company, the ancient book-trade livery guild. This is the Richardson depicted in the three-quarter-length portrait now hanging in Stationers' Hall, originally with a companion portrait of Richardson's second wife, Elizabeth Leake, destroyed in the Blitz (Figure 1.2); it may always have been intended for that destination, though it stayed in family hands until 1811. The paradox is that

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Figure 1.2 Joseph Highmore, *Samuel Richardson* (1747), oil on canvas, 1245 × 996 mm, Stationers' Hall, London.

this representation, by Richardson's friend and favourite portraitist Joseph Highmore, largely erases his professional identity. Even the bookselling magnate Jacob Tonson, who liked to pose as landed gentry, holds one of his own publications – *Paradise Lost*, gilt title displayed to the viewer – when sitting for Sir Godfrey Kneller in 1717. Richardson too is shown holding a book, but not in a posture of display, and with no indication of the contents. The volume points to his contemplative character, not his frenetic day job, and is closed around his index finger as though to show him pausing as he reads and strolls at leisure – a condition he rarely if ever knew – in a landscaped garden with statuary and mature trees. The landscape is clearly a studio backdrop, not a *plein-air* setting, but it serves important functions nonetheless. At one level it bespeaks a naturalness intensified by its unkempt, 'wilderness' state and its chipped, overgrown stonework, while Richardson is shown with matching gestures of warts-and-all authenticity. He is jowly, thick-browed, with a prominent mole on the cheek facing the spectator. Like Sir Peter Lely's celebrated Cromwell portrait, the painting gives out a message of frankness and honesty above all, and this was the meaning picked up by the novelist Mme de Genlis on seeing it in 1785: a 'portrait de grandeur naturelle' that expressed Richardson's truest self, 'sa physionomie et ses yeux … remplis de douceur'.[10] Yet at the same time the landscape also makes an implicit claim about social standing, placing Richardson in an elite milieu to

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Figure 1.3 Francis Hayman (1708–76), *Samuel Richardson, the Novelist (1684–1761), Seated, Surrounded by His Second Family* (*c.* 1740–1), oil on canvas, 995 × 1252 mm, Tate Britain, London.

which he certainly aspired, but to which he had yet to secure full access. In this respect, nothing here is natural at all. With his rich, plum-coloured coat, laced cuffs, and (Lynn Shepherd notes) 'the fashionable "hand-in-waistcoat" pose recommended in François Nivelon's *Rudiments of Genteel Behavior* (1737) … which became the staple pose of much mid-century society portraiture', he is depicted not as the tradesman he was but as the gentleman he aspired to be.[11]

Richardson holds the same pose in two slightly later Highmore portraits, which makes it possible that he sat only once, leaving Highmore to fulfil further commissions by reworking the first composition. He appears somewhat differently, however, in the earliest portrait we have, done in the popular 'conversation piece' idiom of the era by Francis Hayman, who made his name in the theatre as a scene painter but was developing a new line in portraiture by 1740–1, the date usually assumed for this canvas (Figure 1.3). It is a characteristic Hayman piece, marked by his sensitivity to domestic relationships, though also by a

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style 'easily distinguishable', Horace Walpole noted, 'by the large noses and shambling legs'.[12] Richardson comes across as a benign, burgherly patriarch, surrounded by his family in the extended eighteenth-century sense: not only his second wife Elizabeth Leake and four young daughters but also – stealing the show in a bravura rendering of blue silk – Elizabeth Midwinter, an orphan who lived with the Richardsons until her marriage of 1742 to Francis Gosling, Richardson's banker. In its decorous way, it is a joyful image, transcending the pain that Richardson still felt from the loss of his first wife, Martha Wilde (daughter of the printer whose apprentice he had been), who died in 1731, as did six children from this first marriage and two from the second, all in infancy. Some lived long enough 'to be delightful Pratlers' (Richardson to Lady Bradshaigh, 15 December 1748); four, with dreadful poignancy, were named Samuel.

Other elements of the painting look forward to Highmore: a fanciful rural setting with distant mountains (though the nearest thing to a mountain that Richardson ever saw was a rocky outcrop in Kent);[13] the dignified hand-in-waistcoat pose (but no sign of the mole); again the finger marking the page of a book, as though looking up from reading (despite the proximity of four children aged under eight – but perhaps he has been reading to them). Janet Aikins conjectures that the unlabelled book, at the geometric centre of the canvas, is a volume of *Pamela*, published to overnight success in November 1740 and still intensely in vogue when Richardson brought out his handsome octavo edition (May 1742) with illustrations by Hayman and a collaborator. In this view, the painting not only catches the glow of the moment but also registers the stages of ideal femininity promoted in the novel and its sequel, while also alluding to the domestic circumstances of composition, when Richardson read passages to his wife and Miss Midwinter as he drafted them.[14] More pragmatically, the painting may have been designed to enhance Miss Midwinter's prospects in the marriage market (a big nose, but gorgeous silks), in which, if so, it succeeded.

Shepherd notes the relative privacy of the conversation-piece genre, and if this painting was intended to represent a domestic ideal, to celebrate *Pamela*'s success, or to link these things, it did so within a restricted audience of family and visiting friends.[15] Richardson's growing fame as *Pamela*'s author (the mask of anonymity lasted only so long, and he craved recognition) is better reflected by a second Highmore of *c.* 1747–50, again in three-quarter profile but this time at bust length, to which a gold inscription was

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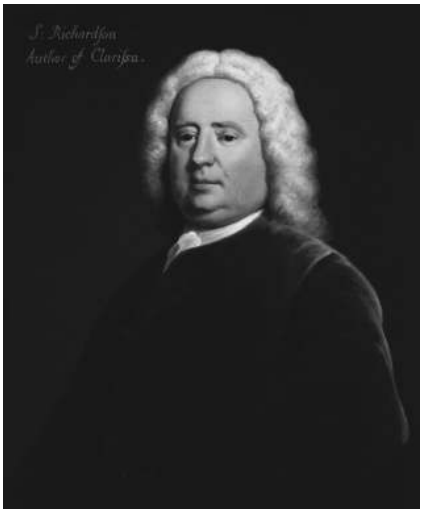

Figure 1.4 Joseph Highmore, *Samuel Richardson* (*c.* 1747–50), oil on canvas, 764 × 635 mm, National Portrait Gallery, London.

at some point added reading '*S. Richardson/Author of Clarissa*' (Figure 1.4). Within the standard rectangular canvas, painted spandrels indicate the frame-within-a-frame format known as the 'feigned oval', a descendant of the Roman *imago clipeata* tradition: a heroic, emphatically public style of portraiture originating in the use of sculpted or painted shields to frame bust-length images of victorious generals. The form thus implied a claim to public standing, and became the eighteenth-century norm for authorial frontispiece portraits. 'The typical sitter in an *imago* portrait was not the aristocrat, who owed his public position primarily to his lineage, but the private man brought into public view by his works, his talents, and his moral qualities', Shepherd writes; this example may even have been intended for a private collector's gallery of worthies, possibly with a companion piece showing Pope.[16]

Publication of *Clarissa* in 1747–8 took Richardson's reputation to fresh heights, not only in the literary world and with the broader public, but also in elite circles whose way of life he was able to represent with new confidence in *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753–4). For its literary consequences, his most important social conquest was Lady Bradshaigh of Haigh Hall, Lancashire, who engineered a lengthy, playful correspondence with Richardson before finally meeting him in 1750, by which

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Figure 1.5 Joseph Highmore, *Samuel Richardson* (1750), oil on canvas, 527 × 368 mm, National Portrait Gallery, London.

time she had already seen his portrait exhibited in Highmore's studio. Eventually, Richardson thought the letters between them 'the best Commentary that could be written on the History of Clarissa' (to Lady Bradshaigh, 19 November 1757), and these exchanges were consolidated at an early stage by a remarkable exchange of portraits. The resulting painting of Richardson, again by Highmore and now in the National Portrait Gallery (Figure 1.5), is a conscious exercise in relationship-building. Richardson is shown at full length and, as Lady Bradshaigh requested, 'in your study, a table or desk by you, with pen, ink, and paper; one letter just sealed, which I shall fancy is to me' (3 June 1750). Behind him hangs his portrait of Sir Roger and Lady Bradshaigh at Haigh Hall (copied from the original in their London house), and it was at Haigh, *mise-en-abyme* style, that she kept the portrait. The intimacy thereby expressed was very real, and the air of genial reciprocity was noted by Lady Echlin, Lady Bradshaigh's sister, who thought Richardson's image 'looks pleased with notice from a friendly eye, and seems to return a sensible obliging smile' (13 December 1759). But this was no less a matter of social display, enshrining a connection that gave different kinds of cachet to

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