

Samuel Richardson (1689-1761)

Richardson: *Pamela, Clarissa*

# Samuel Richardson

- He was a Puritan printer and led an industrious life. He was apprenticed to a printer in London and married his employer's daughter.
- Discovered his ability as a novelist by chance.
- Wrote a book for young men apprenticed to a trade, *The Apprentice's Vade Mecum* (1733), and was commissioned a volume called *The Familiar Letters on Important Occasions*, a guide book meant to provide model letters that could be imitated by semi-literate readers. So he told maid-servants how to negotiate a proposal for marriage, apprentices how to apply for a job, and even sons how to plead their fathers' forgiveness.

# *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded (1740)*

- Pamela = made up of letters and journals, most of them written by Pamela herself. Epistolary novel. 6 correspondents.
- It tells the story of a 15-year-old maid-servant, Pamela, whose virtue has been unsuccessfully attacked by her master (Mr B.). Today we would call it: “Sexual harassment”. He wants her to become his mistress. But, after being rejected by Pamela, he marries her → virtue rewarded.

# The moralising aim

- Heavy moralising tendency throughout the novel, which reflects the Puritan middle-class scheme of reward for virtue and punishment for sins. Didactic aim.
- These are the same principles of hard work and conjugal love, accompanied by the condemnation of the debauchery of aristocracy previously promoted by Milton.
- Practical and secular application of the mercantile bourgeoisie's code of behaviour and outlook.

# Social mobility

- Richardson also promotes a revolutionary principle of the middle class: social mobility. He tells the story of a person of the lower middle class, who succeeds in joining the elevated ranks of the upper gentry.
- The middle class swept away the medieval principle whereby everyone should live and die in the same class in which s/he was born.

# Characterisation

- In Richardson's novel there is **psychological analysis**, missing from most of previous fiction. The reader is taken into the character's mind and is invited to share their innermost feelings and moods. In contrast to Defoe's novels there is a sense of **personal development** within the story. Characters are **not static** -→ his insights into man's mind influenced Jane Austen.

# Narrative Technique

- **First person narrative**, individual points of view on the same event, which is fully explored.
- It has much in common with the **dramatic technique**, because characters introduce one another using letters instead of speech, the action is made up by **a series of scenes**.
- **Immediacy**
- **Language of ordinary people** (but some parts could not have been written by a maid-servant. Richardson intervenes to correct some of the irregularities of common speech and makes it more formal). Yet, it is a revolution: the language of people entered the realm of literature.

# The Epistolary Novel

- *Pamela, Clarissa* and *Sir Charles Grandison* are written in the form of letters exchanged between the main characters.
- In this period vogue for letter writing :
- J.J. Rousseau, *Julie ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761)
- J. W. Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774)
- U. Foscolo, *Le ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis* (1818)



# Virtues and defects

- Richardson's **style** is **uneven**, his learning is narrow, his **pious morality** often seems **hypocritical** and the treatment of his themes is full of contradictions. However, he was very influential and innovative for his time. He developed a new genre (the **epistolary novel**) which provided new ways of revealing the **human character and dramatizing human relations**.

# Virtue or Hypocrisy?

- Richardson believed Pamela's behaviour is virtuous and should be rewarded. **Fielding** thought it was **hypocritical**.
- Pamela is “**unconsciously scheming**” said William Empson. **Or is she conscious of what is at stake?**
- Her **modernity** must be recognised: her **resistance**, her “impudence” are a modern response to **the arrogance or the principle of authority**, which the **aristocracy** and the upper classes had for centuries regarded as prerogatives.

# «Write to the moment»

- A new technique: Richardson's characters «write to the moment», they write about their experiences as they happen, have no time to reflect on them, put them down hot on the page.
- Real people who communicate their experience with **immediacy**. It is **up to us readers to reflect on them** and draw from them the necessary lessons.

## *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady (1747-49)*

- A gigantic epistolary novel in 8 volumes.
- Clarissa belongs to a rich middle-class family; she is not a maid like Pamela.
- Disappointed by her parents' choice of her future husband, she is drawn to a gentleman who is as dashing and fashionable as he is lacking in moral character: Lovelace
- Lovelace represents the aristocracy

## Richardson = fierce enemy of the aristocracy.

- She runs away with Lovelace to the apparent safety and anonymity of London.
- Clarissa resists the attacks of Lovelace, who wants to possess her (Lovelace, admirer and 'persecutor'). He finally drugs her and rapes her. Clarissa goes insane and, when she recovers, she has lost her will to live.

# Denunciation of the “old order”

- Clarissa dies but Lovelace is killed by Clarissa's cousin. The atmosphere is that of a gruesome Jacobean tragedy. Lovelace repents.
- His death sentence is a sentence passed on an entire social system, «the old order» (i.e. the aristocracy as ruling class), with its false values, insolence and arrogance, and treatment of women as commodities. A battle fought by the Protestant middle classes.

# A Subtle and Disturbing Relationship

## Clarissa-Lovelace

- Clarissa = symbol of the victims of male violence. Some critics depict her as a negative figure: self-obsessed, in love with virtue and victimhood.
- A masochist? How much does this masochism affect her relationship with her persecutor?
- She is attracted by his charm, but she wants to resist, because she distrusts his motives.
- When her refusal of him becomes absolute he becomes obsessed. This increases his violent instincts.