

Bonnie Latimer, *Making Gender, Culture, and the Self in the Fiction of Samuel Richardson*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2013. Pp. 215. £54. ISBN 9781409446323.

Popular in its day, and with many admirers thereafter (most famously, Jane Austen), Samuel Richardson's final novel, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1753-4), is no longer widely read outside specialist circles, though it is beginning to appear on teaching syllabuses. Bonnie Latimer begins her engaging and perceptive monograph with an exploration of the 'immediate cultural impact' (2) of the novel in which she emphasises *Grandison*'s prominent place in Richardson's works. Her central premise is that it 'represents the most sophisticated, subtle and intellectually compelling' of Richardson's three novels, which taken together were 'instrumental in a cultural shift according to which women became imaginable as individuals', by which she means 'stable, autonomous, contained and rational selves' (3).

The book is divided into five chapters, each of which explores a dimension of Richardson's fictional innovation in 'gendered individuality' (3). The first chapter on 'The Modern Individual' explores how Richardson's heroines parody the irrational and intemperate women of Augustan satire and early amatory fiction. Chapter 2 ('The Manhood of the Mind') describes how Richardson endows 'his heroines with the masculine qualities of reason and understanding' (47) and contains an excellent discussion of how his heroines control 'unwanted sexual meaning by understanding and disarming it' (59). The next chapter, on 'The Moral Economy', includes a thought-provoking analysis of free will and choice in terms of female virtue, which confronts the troubling nature of 'the competitive self-construction of Richardson's heroines' (71). Chapter 4 ('The Practice of Piety') reads Richardson's novels alongside Latitudinarian devotional writing in order to show how his female characters use their 'doctrines of exemplary goodness' to question 'masculinist authority' (145); as Latimer comments about Clarissa's deceptions: 'Canny contrivance is not the same as immoral falsehood' (138). This chapter ends with a brief discussion of masculine benevolence in Sarah Scott's *George Ellison* (1766). The last chapter argues against recent 'feminised' readings of Richardson's last novel, sensitively showing how his novels explore the cost of marriage for women as they move falteringly from 'singleness of identity [...] into mutuality and communality' (155).

Latimer is an astute critic of Richardson's writing who makes careful distinctions, noting 'the distance between the moral vision of Sir Charles Grandison and that of his novel' (6). One of the book's many strengths is its ability to integrate readings of the novels' major and minor characters. Another is the careful attention Latimer plays, not just to Richardson's epistolary form in a general sense, but specifically to how rhetorical artifice is inextricably linked to moral rectitude. She elucidates the way in which Richardson's central characters make themselves in the creative act of writing a letter and mimicking other voices: 'Harriet is able to judge precisely because, as she demonstrates throughout her letters, she *can* "be that very other in imagination"' (94). An intriguing discussion of Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* as an important heir to *Grandison*, as well as a reading of the heroine, Harriet Byron, alongside Milton's Eve, both deserve expansion. Especially as the latter example demonstrates Richardson's thoughtful engagement with *Paradise Lost*; yet more evidence of his conscious, and still often overlooked, artistry.

Some of the book's broader premises and conclusions are debatable: the arguments about *Grandison*'s afterlife don't sufficiently differentiate between reception and influence. Not all readers will easily agree with Latimer's emphasis on '*Grandison*'s primacy as the author's final word' (7). Richardson was an inveterate reviser: the many changes he made to his novels over his lifetime, particularly noticeable in the differences between the first edition

of *Clarissa* (1747-8) and the famous third edition (1751), with its numerous added footnotes and commentary, create an authorial indeterminacy that raises tricky editorial problems. For all of its interest, few readers now prefer the cluttered, latter edition to the first version. In 1761, the year of Richardson's death, he borrowed copies of *Pamela* and *Clarissa* to make further revisions: therefore proclaiming Richardson's 'final word' on anything is a perilous task.

Latimer's book is an erudite, original, and provocative contribution to Richardson studies and to scholarship on the novel more generally. Indeed, the quibbles noted above testify to the success of a book whose aim is to extend and open up discussion around Richardson's final novel. Upon coming to the end of a volume of *Grandison* in 1753, the writer Catherine Talbot commented to a friend (in a letter now in the Bodleian Library): 'What will become of us all when we have concluded the whole Six Volumes? Will any common book of Amusement appear tolerable after this? [...] And are you not as much in love with Sir Charles as poor Harriet herself can be?' Not all of its readers will find *Grandison* Richardson's most compelling achievement, nevertheless Latimer's book makes a convincing and sophisticated argument for its central place in the development of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century prose fiction.

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