

# 1650-1850: Ideas, Aesthetics, and Inquiries in the Early Modern Era

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## AFTERWORD

Janet E. Aikins

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# AFTERWORD

Janet E. Aikins



he strands of separate authorship remain virtually undetectable in *Samuel Richardson* [:] *A Biography*, so the question persists: who, indeed, were T. C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel, and how can we understand what each man individually brought to the project? Anecdotal evidence abounds. In addition to Murray Brown's cryptic tale of grave robbery, Paula Backscheider recalls another hint of the biographers' obsessive nature in a story verified by Kimpel's wife, Juliet. Every day she would bake a large chocolate layer cake which, together with an enormous urn of coffee, the two men would entirely consume in the course of their evening's work. Less amusing but perhaps more helpful information about their authorial identities lies within the ten large boxes of unprocessed material from Eaves and Kimpel's files that Juliet Eaves gave to the University of Arkansas Library after her husband's death.<sup>1</sup>

While Catherine Parke has posited *Clarissa* as the "source of the biographers' fascination" with their subject, one particular item in the unprocessed collection hints at a guiding assumption behind their methodology. A bright green spiral notebook marked with the words "Fayetteville Bulldogs" (and emblazoned with a caricature of a bulldog)

<sup>1</sup> I wish to acknowledge the Special Collections Division of the University of Arkansas Libraries for graciously providing access to the unprocessed Kimpel-Eaves Research Materials and for allowing me to quote from them for the purposes of this anniversary tribute to *Samuel Richardson: A Biography*.

contains a draft of the book's Preface, hastily scrawled in Ben Kimpel's handwriting. The notebook itself does not reveal whether Kimpel composed the Preface alone or whether this was an early or a late draft, since it is not dated or signed. More likely, of course, is that the draft resulted from extensive conversation between the two men which Kimpel simply wrote down, since T. C. Duncan Eaves was the specialist in the eighteenth century and the initiator of the project. Be that as it may, on one penciled page Kimpel had written,

In addition, we wished to give a picture of Richardson as a person, using in so far as possible the method he himself used in his novels, quoting his own words & [the phrase 'relating any' crossed out] reporting any details, however minute, which might reveal his personality.<sup>2</sup>

In the Preface as printed, the phrase, "the method he himself used in his novels, quoting,"<sup>3</sup> simply does not appear. Its presence in Kimpel's draft suggests that the authors conceived their story as a form of epistolary narrative, in which words from Richardson's own letters speak to us directly, embedded as they are within this double-voiced biography.

A fascination with personal letters clearly informed Duncan Eaves' literary imagination, for before he embarked on the Richardson project he had edited the letters of the novelist William Gilmore Simms in five volumes, published between 1952 and 1956. Immediately thereafter Eaves went to England on a Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Award (1957-58) to perform "some of the preliminary research"(xi) for the biography that he and Ben Kimpel were to write together. In fact, his interest in Richardson's letters may have been what prompted Eaves to embark on the biography, for in a letter dated 1 June 1960, to the British Museum, he mentions his intention to edit Richardson's correspondence,<sup>4</sup> a goal that remained unrealized although boxes C and

<sup>2</sup> Kimpel-Eaves Research Materials. Unprocessed. MC 1166, Box J, Fayetteville "Bulldogs" notebook, handwritten pages 105-106. Special Collections Division, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville.

<sup>3</sup> Also, in the printed text an additional phrase, "and those of his friends," appears after "his own words."

<sup>4</sup> Kimpel-Eaves Research Materials. Unprocessed. MC 1166, Box E.

D of the Eaves and Kimpel papers contain microfilm and photostatic copies of a large bulk of the Richardson correspondence gathered from sources worldwide.

The life stories of these two scholars also shed light on how they viewed their shared project. Thomas Cary Duncan Eaves (1918–1986) was born in Union, South Carolina, the only child of Donald Matheson and Louisa Duncan Eaves. As a boy he studied art and in his teens become skilled enough to mount a one-man show, which explains the double focus of his dissertation, dealing as it does with both visual art and the eighteenth-century novel. In 1935 he entered the Citadel, but in 1936 transferred to the University of North Carolina, where he was to meet Ben Kimpel who arrived there in 1939 to pursue a doctorate in American Literature. After a master's degree at the University of Cincinnati (1940) Eaves went to Harvard where he earned both an M.A. (1943) and Ph.D. (1944). Barred from the military because of poor eyesight, and after a brief career in teaching, in 1947 he left the academy to take an advertising job in New York City from which he was forced to resign because of a long illness. It was during his recovery at home, in Union, South Carolina, that he was invited by Mary C. Simms Oliphant, the granddaughter of the novelist William Gilmore Simms, to edit her grandfather's letters for the University of South Carolina Press, eventually resulting in the five volumes published between 1952 and 1956, with a sixth volume coming out in 1982. Eaves accepted an assistant professorship at the University of Arkansas in 1949, was promoted to the rank of associate professor in 1952, professor in 1957, and University Professor in 1984. It was through his influence that his longtime friend, Ben Kimpel, accepted a position in the Department of English at Arkansas in the fall of 1952 after a remarkable career in the military and the State Department.

Born in Arkansas, Ben Drew Kimpel (1915–1983) was, like Duncan Eaves, an only child, the son of a lawyer. Following his father's death in 1918, he was educated by his mother and stepfather, attending public schools, traveling in Europe, eventually studying at Phillips Exeter Academy and at Harvard University where he graduated in 1937 and took an M.A. in English in 1939. In 1942 Kimpel received his doctorate in American Literature from the University of North Carolina, and in the fall of the same year he entered the army where he received intensive training in foreign languages. After D-Day Kimpel

was posted to a civil affairs unit in France and was subsequently assigned to the de-Nazification program at Erlangen, Germany. He left the army in 1946, joined the State Department, and was sent to Vienna as the First Secretary and Political Affairs Officer. While in Vienna he learned Russian, one of the dozen languages in which he was fluent or proficient by the end of his life.

Because of his enormous size, weighing nearly three hundred pounds, people fondly referred to Ben Kimpel as "gentle Ben," after the television program about a gentle grizzly bear. His passions included worldwide travel, haute cuisine, and dancing. Leighton Rudolph, a colleague at the University of Arkansas, recalled that "he enjoyed attending and giving parties, and everyone was amused by his violent demonstrations of the Charleston, the blackbottom, the jitterbug, and more formal dances or his loud and enthusiastic off-key renderings of Gilbert and Sullivan."<sup>5</sup>

As a scholar of American literature, Ben Kimpel might seem an odd choice as co-author for a Richardson biography; however, the logic behind Eaves's invitation to join him in the project becomes clear with a look at Kimpel's dissertation. Its title was *Herman Melville's Thought After 1851*, and it took the form of a biography of Melville dating from the year of *Moby Dick's* publication to the author's death. In methodology this work clearly anticipated *Samuel Richardson*, since both biographies reflect the conviction that to understand the novels is to fathom the characters of the men who created them. Kimpel chose to focus centrally on Melville's "thought," while Eaves and Kimpel used chapters 21 and 22, at the end of the book, to explore what they call Richardson's "Personality" and his "General Ideas." Kimpel's decision to gain access to Melville's thought through a study of his reading may also suggest why Eaves and Kimpel pointedly devote chapter 23 to "Richardson's Reading and Criticism." The table of contents in *Herman Melville's Thought* certainly anticipates the handling of chronology within *Samuel Richardson*, and both works focus on the latter half of the life in question. Kimpel opened his dissertation with a single chapter outlining the first forty-two years in Melville's life ("Melville before 1852"). The remainder of the dissertation consists of

<sup>5</sup>Leighton Rudolph, *Some Illustrious Educators of Old Main* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, n.d.), 45.

a chapter on "Melville's Later Years" followed by six more that treat aspects of Melville's "thought" as revealed by his reading and writing from 1852 to the time of his death in 1891. *Samuel Richardson* follows a roughly comparable outline. Its first eighty-six pages cover the first forty-one years of Richardson's life in a highly condensed form. Nineteen more chapters then follow, covering periods as short as two years but no longer than nine, interspersed with chapters of critical analysis of the novels and discussion of their composition and reception, ending with chapters on Richardson's personality, his ideas, his reading, and his achievement.

These details offer a suggestive glimpse into the goals, methodology, and intellectual marriage of Duncan Eaves and Ben Kimpel as co-authors. The passage of most fascination to all four contributors represented here comes from the biography's Preface, where Eaves and Kimpel write, "We do not know the 'secret' of Richardson's character." The manuscripts retained within the Kimpel-Eaves Research Materials reveal an important fact about this very sentence: it was not originally written for the Preface but as the opening paragraph of chapter 21 on Richardson's "Personality" whose typescript draft begins with the following words, crossed out in pencil:

We regret to say that, unlike some other biographers, we do not know the "secret" of Richardson's character. We suspect that real people are likely to have a good many secrets, but a biography is certainly more suitable for summarization, perhaps also more readable, if it can discover one of them which it at least purports to explain all of the important actions of its subject. The ruling passion is no longer in vogue, but the public can still read about historical figures who seem to have stepped out of a Jonsonian comedy of humors. More common, of course, are figures entirely motivated by one sexual quirk or by the effects of one traumatic experience or by one element in their economic or social environments. Richardson's character does not seem to

us to have been remarkably complex, but it was too complex for us to pinpoint in a phrase.<sup>6</sup>

As the "regretful" tone reveals and as Professors Epstein, Flynn, Brown, and Parke each intuit, Eaves and Kimpel had indeed been on a quest to find "the 'secret,'" to identify Richardson's "ruling passion" or a key to his "thought," but they felt they had failed. They refused to admit defeat in print, however, and the first sentence of chapter 21, "Personality," actually reads, "We hope that Richardson's personality has already appeared from his words and actions, like that of a character in one of his novels" (518). The closest Eaves and Kimpel could come to depicting the man was to employ an epistolary method, "quoting his own words" and thereby leaving us with the inscrutable thought that *Pamela*, *Clarissa*, and *Sir Charles Grandison* somehow contain the fullest inscription of Samuel Richardson's life.

<sup>6</sup> Kimpel-Eaves Research Materials. Unprocessed. MC 1166, Box A, typed manuscript page with handwritten identification as Chapter "XXI." Special Collections Division, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville.