

Pamela

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Samuel Richardson

Introduction by William Sale, Jr.



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INTRODUCTION BY WILLIAM M. SALE, JR.

In the autumn of 1739 Samuel Richardson, then fifty years old, began the writing of *Pamela*. He was no man of letters and had up to this point in his life written nothing by which he would have been remembered. He was a successful London tradesman, who by his own industry had become master of one of the three most prosperous London printing houses. He was printer to the House of Commons and a stockholder and officer in the London Company of Stationers, the trade guild of the printers and booksellers. Neither he — nor any of his countrymen, for that matter — had written anything that could, in the strict sense of the word, be called a novel. Yet in the perspective provided by time, *Pamela* has been generally accepted as the first example in English of this genre.

In part our interest in *Pamela* is an interest in how the dominant literary form of our day began. We would like to know how Richardson, with no literary training and with no tradition to depend on, came to write a novel. The full answer to this question can never be arrived at, but we do know something of the circumstances that led him to this experiment. Two of his friends among the London booksellers had asked him to prepare a letter-writer, a collection of letters that might serve as models for "country readers," as Richardson thought of them, readers "unable to indite for themselves." Volumes of model letters were no new commodity in 1739; they had proved popular since the reign of Elizabeth, when the rising middle class first provided a market for books of instruction. Among those whose culture is not commensurate with their new-found prosperity, education of one sort or another is always in demand, and letter-writers had continued for two hundred years to supply a felt need. Consequently Richardson had no difficulty in formulating

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a plan for the book he had been commissioned to produce. He found that many of the situations for which he wanted to supply model letters had been anticipated. But his volume did have certain distinctive features, and since it was in a sense the embryo from which the novel was to develop, these features are worth noting.

Richardson's letter-writer was to contain more letters than was customary, his models were generally longer, and, as Miss Katherine Hornbeak has pointed out, "his overwhelming emphasis . . . on the interests and concerns of women is symptomatic of Richardson's bent and very significant in view of his later work." Of the one hundred and seventy-three letters that he finally wrote, almost one hundred are concerned with the doings of women. Nearly half of them are occasioned by love, courtship, or marriage. Men and events — even the sights and diversions of London — are estimated from the point of view of women. His congeniality with the feminine point of view, first evident in the letter-writer, was to lead him to the creation of his most successful characters, Pamela Andrews, Clarissa Harlowe, and Harriet Byron. That the novel should have originated with a man of this temperament may not seem surprising to us now, for many modern novels have been written by men who have rendered experience as apprehended by women and who have made the problems of women central in their fiction. But the eighteenth century was a masculine century, and Richardson's successors in the novel — Fielding and Smollett — failed to create a successful female character.

In preparing the letter-writer Richardson found himself continuing a subject from one letter to another and on occasions providing both a letter and an answer to it. In this way he undoubtedly discovered the possibility of telling a story in a series of letters, a method which despite its disadvantages gave him confidence when he embarked on his novel. He also discovered that the letter could be a vehicle for edification. To the booksellers who had commissioned him, he wrote: "Will it be any harm . . . if we should instruct them how they should think and act in common cases, as well as indite?" When he wrote his title

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page, he made clear the dual function of the book. Readers were advised that they could learn not only the "requisite style and forms to be observed in familiar letters," but also "how to think and act justly and prudently in the common concerns of life." In providing such advice he inevitably thought of young girls who were obliged to go out to service and needed to be warned about "the snares that might be laid against their virtue." In fact, Letter No. 138 is one to be written by "a father to a daughter in service, on hearing of her master's attempting her virtue," and Letter No. 139 is a model for the daughter's answer.

Possibly it was at this point that he laid aside the manuscript of the letter-writer to begin *Pamela*. In any event he did lay it aside when he remembered a story he had heard some fifteen years earlier of an actual girl who had stood in need of just such a letter as No. 138. Her story, as Richardson wrote Aaron Hill, arose out of events of the year 1715 and had been told to him by a "gentleman." In broad outline, it is the story of Pamela Andrews, the story of a girl who, as Richardson told Hill, had been put out to service at twelve when her family had suffered financial losses, who had been the personal maid of her mistress, and who on her mistress's death three years later "engaged the attention of her lady's son, a young gentleman of free principles, who . . . attempted, by all manner of temptations and devices, to seduce her." She had "had recourse to . . . many innocent stratagems to escape the snares laid for her virtue," and once, in despair, was near drowning herself, but by "her noble resistance, watchfulness, and excellent qualities, subdued him," and finally became his wife. After her marriage she "behaved herself with so much dignity, sweetness, and humility, that she made herself beloved by every body," and "had the blessings of both rich and poor, and the love of her husband." The first half of *Pamela* follows this story up to the marriage; the second half is an expansion of the last sentence of Richardson's summary.

With no tradition on which to depend, Richardson undoubtedly felt that if he was to secure the credulity of his

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readers, he must depend on a true story for his narrative. That he did follow so slavishly the outlines of this story of an unknown girl is, therefore, not surprising, nor is it surprising that he did not appear on the title page as the author of *Pamela* but only as the editor of her letters and journal. He did not want to think of his book as a fiction, for fiction to him was the marvelous, the improbable, the romances, calculated, as he said on his title page for *Pamela*, "for amusement only" and tending to inflame the minds they should instruct. Nevertheless, his novel, as we shall see later, might have escaped some of the censure it received from his contemporaries and from his later critics had he had the insight to see that, though a story from real life might ensure a kind of verisimilitude, this verisimilitude would be secured at the expense of the full development of his theme. At the time when he began writing *Pamela*, however, he probably had only the dimmest idea of what his theme was to be.

The letter-writer, then, suggested a method and a point of view, and the story that he remembered from real life provided a kind of structure. With no more to depend on than this, he began to absent himself from his family each evening after his plant was closed to try his hand with *Pamela*. These withdrawals became the subject of speculation on the part of his wife and a young lady who was making her home with the Richardsons, a young lady who there is some reason to believe sat for the portrait of his heroine. Elizabeth Richardson and her guest surprised Richardson at his work, and, having discovered his secret, insisted on hearing each installment as it was written. They heard a note of alarm sounded in the very first sentence of Pamela's story, and before the first letter had come to an end, they learned that Pamela's mistress had died, that her mistress's son, Mr. B, planned to keep Pamela in his service, and that his intentions in so doing were not to prove as disinterested as they had been made to seem. Richardson was under way with a rush, but in a style which, as we can see, is marked by none of the feverish agitation that we might expect. The constant clausal modification suggests the sobriety of rational discourse,

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and the parts of the sentences are soberly linked with the hooks and eyes of such discourse. A generally commonplace diction lends a matter-of-factness to the incidents and to much of the dialogue.

By his style Richardson suggests that he is not outraged by the facts of his central situation. He does not feel that it is incumbent upon him to account for the action that Mr. B is planning. We feel that masters may well have been planning to seduce their servants in half the houses in England. Of course Richardson does not approve of such goings-on, but he lets us see, without his becoming agitated, that Mr. B treats Pamela as part of his goods and chattels and exercises over her a conventional prerogative. Consequently, Mr. B seems to us, and must also have seemed to Richardson's contemporaries, a bit "old-fashioned." We know, as they must have known, pretty much how to take him. He has strayed into this story from the romances and is only slightly changed to fit his new environment. We might have expected that Richardson would have taken some trouble to account for Mr. B's abduction of Pamela, for in this act he is really setting at naught the laws of the England of 1740. But Richardson feels little responsibility for taking such trouble. This violation may seem to us a highhanded violation of human rights, but we must remember that, critical as Richardson's contemporaries were of many aspects of his novel, they were not really disturbed about the improbability of this portion of it. In the early portions of the novel the characterization of Mr. B. does not call forth Richardson's special effort. Only when it becomes clear that his hero has fallen in love with the girl he should have traditionally seduced does Richardson feel the need to account more carefully for his actions.

It was not Mr. B but Pamela — and particularly the Pamela of the first half of the novel — that surprised Richardson's readers. It was the consideration that Richardson gave to Pamela's problem that made this work the most popular of Richardson's novels and the most popular novel of the century. On Pamela was showered the praise; against Pamela was directed the censure. Rich-

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ardson's ability to communicate at many points in his novel the heightened and immediate response of Pamela to experience and his delineation of the peculiar reasons for her distress sounded a new note for English readers in 1740. Whether they were pleased or displeased, they responded to that note. The praise was extravagantly effusive and prolific, but in the main the favorable comment failed to make very clear what had called it forth. In part the novel pleased its readers because it allowed them to contemplate virtuous sentiments, and the eighteenth-century reader was much more disposed to be edified in this fashion than we are. But his thirst for edification must have been more than assuaged by the moral essayists and the didactic versifiers. We must, therefore, incautiously assume that the eighteenth-century reader was interested and moved by what we still find interesting and moving. But before speculating on this matter, we can look for a moment at the comments of two representative critics who did not approve of *Pamela*. Those who did not like the novel made clear the grounds of their disapproval. They anticipated all the later unfavorable comment on *Pamela* and indeed included charges which it has not occurred to later critics to make.

So novel was this novel that Henry Fielding, for example, could not resist parodying Pamela's story in a work called *Shamela*. He chose as the major point of his attack what he took to be the facile opportunism of Richardson's heroine. Since he could not accept Richardson's blend of the artless and the artful in the character of Pamela, Fielding exposes Shamela's artlessness as bold calculation. With Shamela thus presented, Fielding is forced to make his Mr. B a young fool, for only a fool could be taken in by a palpable schemer. Each reader must assay for himself the justice of Fielding's parody; its point has certainly been appropriated again and again.

From quite a different quarter comes a second attack. Charles Povey appended to his *Virgin in Eden* a blast at what he took to be Richardson's inflammatory novel. "Good God!" he wrote, "what can youths and virgins learn from *Pamela's* letters, more than lessons to tempt

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their chastity." As Povey saw it, when Pamela exposed herself a second time to Mr. B's immodest advances, she demonstrated a lack of the very modesty for which Richardson had praised his heroine. Fielding is the amused skeptic; Povey is the outraged moralist. In one or another of these camps were most of his adverse critics. They were clearly unwilling to admit that there was a third attitude that could be taken toward *Pamela*. The failure to read the novel more sympathetically was in part due to the amount and kind of edification that it incidentally provided. But I suspect it was also due to the new direction in which Richardson was moving, to the particular feminine point of view he was exploiting, and to the inadequacy of his pioneering technique. Above all, it was due to what Richardson at this time apparently failed to recognize, that in deciding to follow the outlines of a story from real life, with the heroine's happy marriage to her master, he would seem to his critics to have fitted his embryonic "new woman" somewhat too easily into an older social structure.

For if we look at the novel in the light of what we know about the eighteenth century, we can see that the series of dilemmas that confronted Pamela were due to the slow change in human values, the slow shifting in the alignment of social classes that came as the seventeenth century gave way to the eighteenth. As a social being Pamela must play two conflicting roles: all the social forces of her age that were directed toward upholding the older structure of society impel her to recognize the duties of the master-servant relation, while all the forces that were to lead to the dominance of the middle class urge Pamela to an independence of spirit, to a just estimate of the "rights of man." She is, in a sense, the "new woman," emerging but not fully emerged, as is always the case with the "new woman"; as is the case, for example, with the more carefully realized heroines of George Meredith — Clara Middleton or Diana Merion. But Pamela's problem is even more complex than this indicates, for she is not merely a social being; she is also a sadly perplexed young girl of fifteen. Richardson seems to recognize this complexity

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and he proceeds, within the limits of his technical resources, to endow her with sufficient perception of her plight. As a young girl, she represents Richardson's concern with the divided mind, a concern which Brian Downs finds characteristic of all of Richardson's fiction and which for him is best exemplified in Richardson's second heroine, Clarissa Harlowe. The forces that find a battleground in Clarissa are more numerous than those with which Pamela must contend, and the complexity of Clarissa's nature is more completely set forth, more consistently realized. Her resources are greater even as the dilemmas she faces are less capable of being resolved. But the subject of Richardson's second novel is not radically different from that of his first one, and if Pamela had not been bound to the man she loves as his servant and had not Richardson committed himself in advance to "reward" her with marriage, he might have saved Pamela, as he did Clarissa, from many of the sharp attacks that have been made on her.

In the novels written since *Pamela* we have witnessed time and again the distress that attends the interpenetration of classes and the affronts to the dignity of the individual when his aspirations to rise in the social scale are checked by someone who is bent on keeping him in his place. Richardson was surely right in claiming for his novel that the distresses of Pamela, great or small, were raised by "natural causes." Her resources are limited, her social inexperience patent, but it is not to stock situations that she reacts. She was never really sure whether she wanted most to keep her virtue or to marry her master, but she is only the first of many heroines who wanted to make the best of two worlds, and neither of her worlds seems contemptible. We need not assume, as many of her adverse critics have assumed, that she could not have been honestly interested in both goals, or that she was pretending an interest in one in order to achieve the other. She wanted both the moon and the sixpence and was pretty inadequately equipped to play for such stakes. Furthermore, her strong sensual nature did not make her problem any easier, as we can see when she is struggling with the

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temptation to become her master's mistress lest in refusing she would have to abandon forever the hope of becoming his wife. Shall she throw herself away, as she puts it, because her fear of Mr. B leads her to think that ruin is inevitable, when that sense of inevitability may only be the consequence of her own "short-sighted apprehension"? That she resorts to deceiving others when she is hard pressed is clearly evident. That she is also self-deceived is not always so evident, nor can we be sure that her self-deception was always consciously recognized by her creator. " 'O credulous, fluttering, throbbing mischief!' she cries, 'that art so ready to believe what thou wishest; I charge thee to keep better guard than thou hast lately done, and lead me not to follow too implicitly thy flattering and desireable impulses.' Thus foolishly dialogue I with my heart; and yet, all the time, this heart is Pamela."

In estimating the importance of the subject of this novel and of Richardson's degree of success in exposing this subject, we must bear in mind what many critics seem to have ignored: the marriage of Mr. B and Pamela takes place in almost the exact center of the novel and not at the end. The second half of the novel is the story of the maid who has become the mistress. Pamela's problems continue and are even more painstakingly delineated, but they are less acute. The horns of her dilemma in this half of the novel are blunter, and to us, removed from the action by two centuries, her niceness of discrimination as the wife of Mr. B often seems mere punctilio. Nevertheless, the situations in the latter half of the novel are those with which fiction has continued to concern itself, and before we press the charge of finickiness too sharply, we should remember that H. G. Wells thought that Henry James often seemed like a leviathan retrieving a pea and that Mrs. Henry Adams felt that James often chewed more than he bit off. Even in a generous view, however, the second half of *Pamela* seems anticlimactic. Perhaps Richardson did feel uneasy in seeming to have fitted Pamela into an established social order at the sound of the wedding bells. And perhaps he felt that in carrying on the

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story beyond the wedding, he could mitigate the charge of facile optimism to which the first half of the novel is exposed. Had the novel come to a close with the marriage, we might have felt even more surely that a share of the action antecedent to the marriage was much ado about nothing. But whatever may have been Richardson's reasons, he planned it this way and we must take his plan into account. We do know that in handling a comparable subject in his second novel, he resisted all the pleas of his friends to bring about a marriage between his hero and heroine.

In *Pamela*, however, the marriage did take place, and Richardson was left, as it were, to demonstrate the truth of the platitude that a reformed rake makes the best husband. The compromise with human values implied by this platitude was not really congenial to Richardson, however congenial it may have been to many of his countrymen in a century in which accommodation was thoroughly characteristic. On the other hand, Richardson's heroines always sought to make some kind of common cause with the kind of aristocrats Richardson created for them, even though they may have found this difficult or even impossible. Richardson himself was apparently living at ease in the Zion of his middle-class prosperity, but neither he nor his heroines were limited in their view to a life of middle-class values. His "new women" were not looking for "new men." Unfortunately, however, he had set up a conflict in his first novel that could not really be resolved by marriage; it could only be stopped. Richardson, like Pamela, had allowed himself to try to make the best of two worlds. Nowhere is this clearer than when Pamela at the altar accepts the ring from Mr. B with a curtsy and a "Thank you, sir."

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LETTER I

DEAR FATHER AND MOTHER,

I have great trouble, and some comfort, to acquaint you with. The trouble is, that my good lady died of the illness I mentioned to you, and left us all much grieved for the loss of her; for she was a dear good lady, and kind to all us her servants. Much I feared, that as I was taken by her ladyship to wait upon her person, I should be quite destitute again, and forced to return to you and my poor mother, who have enough to do to maintain yourselves; and, as my lady's goodness had put me to write and cast accounts, and made me a little expert at my needle, and otherwise qualified above my degree, it was not every family that could have found a place that your poor Pamela was fit for: but God, whose graciousness to us we have so often experienced at a pinch, put it into my good lady's heart, on her death-bed, just an hour before she expired, to recommend to my young master all her servants, one by one; and when it came to my turn to be recommended, (for I was sobbing and crying at her pillow,) she could only say, My dear son!—and so broke off a little; and then recovering—Remember my poor Pamela—And these were some of her last words! O how my eyes run—Don't wonder to see the paper so blotted.

Well, but God's will must be done!—And so comes the comfort, that I shall not be obliged to return back to be a clog upon my dear parents! For my master said, I will take care of you all, my good maidens; and for you, Pamela, (and took me by the hand; yes, he took my hand before

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them all,) for my dear mother's sake, I will be a friend to you, and you shall take care of my linen. God bless him! and pray with me, my dear father and mother, for a blessing upon him, for he has given mourning and a year's wages to all my lady's servants; and I having no wages as yet, my lady having said she should do for me as I deserved, ordered the housekeeper to give me mourning with the rest; and gave me with his own hand four golden guineas, and some silver, which were in my old lady's pocket when she died; and said, if I was a good girl, and faithful and diligent, he would be a friend to me, for his mother's sake. And so I send you these four guineas for your comfort; for Providence will not let me want: And so you may pay some old debt with part, and keep the other part to comfort you both. If I get more, I am sure it is my duty, and it shall be my care, to love and cherish you both; for you have loved and cherished me, when I could do nothing for myself. I send them by John, our footman, who goes your way: but he does not know what he carries; because I seal them up in one of the little pill-boxes, which my lady had, wrapt close in paper, that they mayn't chink; and be sure don't open it before him.

I know, dear father and mother, I must give you both grief and pleasure; and so I will only say, Pray for your Pamela; who will ever be

Your most dutiful DAUGHTER.

I have been scared out of my senses; for just now, as I was folding up this letter in my late lady's dressing-room, in comes my young master! Good sirs! how was I frightened! I went to hide the letter in my bosom; and he, seeing me tremble, said, smiling, To whom have you been writing, Pamela?—I said, in my confusion, Pray your honour forgive me!—Only to my father and mother. He said, Well then, let me see how you are come on in your writing! O how ashamed I was!—He took it, without saying more, and read it quite through, and then gave it me again;—and I said, Pray your honour forgive me!—Yet I know not for what: for he was always dutiful to *his* parents; and why should he be angry that I was so to *mine*? And indeed he was not angry;

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for he took me by the hand, and said, You are a good girl, Pamela, to be kind to your aged father and mother. I am not angry with you for writing such innocent matters as these: though you ought to be wary what tales you send out of a family.—Be faithful and diligent; and do as you should do, and I like you the better for this. And then he said, Why, Pamela, you write a very pretty hand, and spell tolerably too. I see my good mother's care in your learning has not been thrown away upon you. She used to say you loved reading; you may look into any of her books, to improve yourself, so you take care of them. To be sure I did nothing but courtesy and cry, and was all in confusion, at his goodness. Indeed he is the best of gentlemen, I think! But I am making another long letter: So will only add to it, that I shall ever be

Your dutiful daughter,

PAMELA ANDREWS.

LETTER II

[In answer to the preceding.]

DEAR PAMELA,

Your letter was indeed a great trouble, and some comfort, to me and your poor mother. We are troubled, to be sure, for your good lady's death, who took such care of you, and gave you learning, and, for three or four years past, has always been giving you clothes and linen, and every thing that a gentlewoman need not be ashamed to appear in. But our chief trouble is, and indeed a very great one, for fear you should be brought to anything dishonest or wicked, by being set so above yourself. Every body talks how you have come on, and what a genteel girl you are; and some say you are very pretty; and, indeed, six months since, when I saw you last, I should have thought so myself, if you was not our child. But what avails all this, if you are to be ruined and undone!—Indeed, my dear Pamela, we begin to be in great fear for you; for what signify all the riches in the world, with a bad conscience, and to be dishonest! We are, 'tis true, very poor, and find it hard enough to live; though once, as