



## Cultivating Principles of Virtue in the Youth: Samuel Richardson's Pamela

### KEYWORDS

Formal Realism ,virtue , Pamela , 18th century novel

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**ABSTRACT** *The eighteenth century is also called the 'Age of Reason' as the thinkers and writers of this period thought and expressed their views rationally. The writers aimed at reforming the society and therefore, through long fictional narratives exposed excesses and moral corruption. With the emergence of the middle class, the readership had shifted from elite to middle class. The writers made use of wit and satire in their stories to make them appealing to the common man who was self-made and self-reliant. For this purpose, the writers of this period adapted a collection of techniques known "formal realism," to represent a more particular and circumstantial view of life. In this paper an attempt is made to study Samuel Richardson's Pamela, from three perspectives .a) the transition from the novel of adventure to the novel of character. b) struggle between two opposed conceptions of sex and marriage and c) masculine and feminine gender roles .*

### Introduction

Around 16th and 17th centuries , England had to face two very difficult challenges. First there was twenty years of civil war in 1660 and second, in 1700, it was stuck by a devastating plague and a fire that left more than two thirds of Londoners homeless. But, by the middle of the eighteenth century, England had almost come to normalcy at least among the upper classes. Though the people from the lower strata were still struggling and many of them had to start from scratch , the middle class grew. The catastrophe faced by England had a great impact upon this age and throughout this long period the British men and women produced many brilliant works of philosophy, art, and literature. Influenced by the existing problems of the society, the thinkers and the writers shifted from old romances to experiences of life. The writers of the eighteenth century strongly felt it was imperative to integrate literature as education and literature as entertainment. Therefore, all the major novelists of the eighteenth century adopted the 'Bildungsroman novel.'(A German word for "novel of education" or "novel of formation", a novel which traces the spiritual, moral, psychological, or social development and growth of the main character from (usually) childhood to maturity).

The novelists of the 18th century also opined that a modern work of fiction must not only have a good story, but should also be a study or observation of humanity, not of superhuman heroes but of men and women who work or play or worship in close relationship to their fellows. This shift from fantasy to reality gave birth to a concept called 'Formal Realism'. "Formal realism...is...the premise or primary convention that the novel is a full an authentic report of human experience, and is therefore under an obligation to satisfy its reader with such details of the story as the individuality of the actors concerned, the particulars of the times and places of their actions, details which are presented through a more largely referential use of language than is common in other literary forms" (Ian Watt,p32)

Richardson incorporated aspects of the different literary predecessors into his work: the educational, the entertaining, and the utilitarian. His makes the "love" letters addressed not to a lover, but to Pamela's parents. The letter in Pamela is not a part of private communication but is an expression of exemplary ethical and emotional feeling.

Richardson was an outstanding novelist who dealt with the inferior social issue of women in a sympathetic manner and entered into detailed psychological study of female characters. Through his novel 'Pamela' he not only showed the conflict between the helpless woman and the social evils existing

in the society , but also laid bare the moral hypocrisy of the aristocratic-bourgeois society of his day. He projected the heroine of Pamela as a paragon of virtue, a servant girl who resisted her master's advancement to "cultivate the Principles of Virtue and Religion in the Minds of the Youth of both the genders ."

"my dear father and mother,

be assured, that, by God's grace, I never will do any thing that shall bring your grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. I will die a thousand deaths, rather than be dishonest any way. Of that be assured and set your hearts at rest; for although I have lived above myself for some time past, yet I can be content with rags and poverty, and bread and water, and will embrace them, rather than forfeit my good name.( letter 1p5)

The second half of the novel is about Pamela's positive qualities of generosity and benevolence. In fact, because of these qualities, Mr. B. gets impressed and proposes for marriage. When he reads her journal he comes to know that she was happy when he had an escape from death by drowning. He therefore, considered her to be kindhearted and concerned about his well being. As a result, her goodness and defense of her virginity were rewarded in the form of happy marriage.

On the contrary, Henry Fielding's Shamela , a parody of Pamela, equates morality with expediency. Unlike Pamela, she is calculative and conniving woman. She tempts Booby ,but pretends to be innocent and disinterested, thus retaining her virtuous image. Shamela tries to leaves no stone unturned to lure Booby into marriage and elevate herself socially.

By choosing a character representing the lower strata of the society, Richardson showed the struggle of the individuals to balance incompatible demands on their integrity. Pamela, for instance, either had to compromise her values or offend her Master. "And pray, said I, walking on, how came I to be his Property? What right has he in me, but such as a Thief may plead to stolen Goods?---Why, was ever the like heard, says she!---This is downright Rebellion, I protest!"(p126).From the above lines it is evident that individual's right to self-determination was one of the primary objectives of the novelists. However, some critics condemned Pamela as a representation of the undignified and the low, seeing in the story of a servant girl "climbing the ladder" of social class, a pernicious 'leveling' tendency.

Richardson was the first novelist to write on class differences and class tensions. He wanted to end the discrimination

between the rich and the poor because just like the family of his protagonist Pamela, Richardson was a member of the lower middle class, working as a printer. Nevertheless, Pamela's class status is ambiguous at the start of the novel. She is on good terms with the other Bedfordshire servants, and the pleasure she takes in their respect for her shows that she does not consider herself above them. "Indeed I am Pamela, her own self!" (p 56). in the early part of the novel, Pamela emphasizes that Mr. B., in harassing her, violates his duty to protect the social inferiors under his care. Richardson, in his novel Pamela stressed on the the reciprocal obligations that characterize the harmonious social order. After many exchanges in which Mr. B. has reminded Pamela of her lowly place in the social hierarchy, he finally marries her and addresses her as an equal. "[L]et us talk of nothing henceforth but Equality." (p350). On the contrary, Fielding's novels are more based on values and cultural norms of the upper classes and differ from Richardson's concept of equality.

Richardson was influenced to a great extent by popular women fiction writers of his time. To mention a few: Elizabeth Rowe, Mary Davys, Jane Barker, Eliza Haywood etc. Their works dealt with experiences of women in the trials of love. These writers showed their heroines to endure restriction and passivity, and prove that they had the capability to think and defend themselves. The heroines defied the world of masculine authority around them by being the protagonists of the stories. Richardson through his protagonist Pamela commented on the hoary theme of the sexual double standard: "those Things don't disgrace Men, that ruin poor Women, as the World goes." (letter VII).

As far as the concept of marriage was concerned, the passing of 1753 Marriage Bill gave much greater freedom to women in order to emancipate them. Women of the 18th century were considered to be on par with men in modern society and therefore, could have a civil contract with the desired life partners, rather than be bound by traditional "paterfamilias".

Richardson's novel Pamela is considered as "sentimental," to be precise, as presenting a "much wider range of feelings than those to which sentimentalists. Sympathetic tears... he made... flow as no one else and as never before." (Ian Watt, p174). Richardson's novel Pamela is was made up of alleged letters from a girl to her parents, a sentimental girl who opened her heart freely, explaining its hopes, fears, grieves, temptations, and especially its moral sensibilities.

"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." (letter 1.)

[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, 'tis true, very poor, and find it hard enough to live; though once as you know, it was better with us. But we would sooner live upon the water, and, if possible, the clay of the ditches I contentedly dig, than live better at the price of our child's ruin." (Letter 1)

While Richardson focused on the characters, their feelings and emotions, Fielding's works are much more focused on the plot of a story. Since he knew the taste of women for domestic details, he made extensive use of details. For instance, the dress worn by Pamela, laying of the table for dinner etc. This is one of the things that caused Fielding to describe Richardson's work as vulgar—too concerned with the minutiae of daily and private.

"DEAR FATHER AND MOTHER,

My master has been very kind since my last; for he has given me a suit of my late lady's clothes, and half a dozen of her shifts, and six fine handkerchiefs, and three of her cambric aprons, and four holland ones.

The clothes are fine silk, and too rich and too good for me, to be sure. I wish it was no affront to him to make money of them, and send it to you: it would do me more good." (LETTER VI)

Fielding took special care to parody even the smallest details of Richardson's work, and the form of Shamela closely followed that of Pamela.

Richardson's sympathy for the feminine view of things emerged in his presentation of certain contrasts between the feminine and masculine psyches. Pamela's psychological subtlety countered Mr. B.'s simplicity, her emotional refinement countered his crudity, and her perceptiveness defeated his callousness, with the result that Mr. B. must give up his masculine, aggressive persona and embrace instead the civilizing feminine values of his new wife. "[H]er Person made me her Lover; but her Mind made her my Wife." (p474)

#### Conclusion

With the rise of the realism and of the moralistic-didactic intentions, Richardson's novel was considered as an eminent literary work as his novel not only entertained, but also instructed, and improved the minds of the youth. As the novel's subtitle suggests, eventually, Pamela's behavior and character are appreciated and acknowledged and thus, virtue is rewarded. Richardson's novel Pamela also served as a replica for countless later images of women characters who in spite of suffering at the hands of intolerable husbands faced the unpleasant situations with patience thus, projecting their good deeds. Such women became a stock kind of Victorian narrative, particularly in novels by women. Richardson was considered as a feminist writer due to his sympathetic interest in the hopes and concerns of women. Pamela's individuality set a pattern of behavior that was unknown to several generations of women.

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