

Samuel Richardson's two Pamelas: Or virtue rewarded by textual compassion

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La escritura de Pamela comienza como una simple correspondencia, pero termina cobrando una notable complejidad que la convierte en un ejercicio terapéutico y, al mismo tiempo, en su arma más efectiva (a veces empleada consciente y otras inconscientemente) para hacer frente a Mr. B y a los demás personajes aristocráticos del libro. Prestando atención a los diferentes niveles de narración de la novela, uno se da cuenta de que no hay una Pamela, sino dos: Pamela-escritora y Pamela-personaje. Esta distinción es paralela a la que se establece entre lo físico y lo discursivo, lo “real” y lo textual, respectivamente. A través de Pamela-personaje Pamela-escritora despertará compasión y simpatía, primero en Mr. B, luego en Lady Davers y por último en el lector, a quien se le permite ver ejemplos de arrepentimiento y reforma dentro de la novela. Con este proceso de textualización el concepto de “mujer” se convierte en objeto de investigación y empieza a ser redefinido, ya que las emociones, la simpatía y la sensibilidad sustituyen al cuerpo, al dinero y a la posición social.

An epistolary novel is “a story written in the form of letters, or letters with journals, and usually presented by an anonymous author masquerading as ‘editor’” (Drabble 1985: 322). Richardson’s *Pamela: Or Virtue Rewarded* fits perfectly within this description, but it must be noticed that there is a real letter correspondence only during the first twenty-eight pages—letters I–XVII—, where Pamela and her parents write to each other. After this, Pamela’s correspondence with them turns unidirectional—for she is the only one who writes—and it finally takes the form of a journal, once she is secluded in Lincolnshire. The most simple explanation for this change is that Mr. B’s constant harassment on and his restrictive vigilance of Pamela make this letter exchange more and more difficult and eventually impossible. However, there is a more important reason. Her writing activi-

ty begins as mere correspondence, but, after some time, it displays a sensible complication and she does not need any excuse to take her pen. She realizes that she has to resort to her papers more and more frequently, since writing will work as a therapy for her and in the end it will turn into her most effective weapon—sometimes used consciously, others unconsciously—against Mr. B and the other aristocratic characters in the book.

Considering this, I will argue that one can observe the way in which Pamela finally asserts her position as Mrs. B and earns all the other characters' respect by analysing her writing activity and the different levels of narration that are created in the novel. Throughout the book there are two Pamelas that I will refer to as Pamela-writer and Pamela-character. This distinction will be linked to that of physical versus discursive, for there is a "real" Pamela within the novel who writes about her own experience and, in this way, creates a textual Pamela, who will be a character about whom other characters read.¹ Through Pamela-character, she will arise compassion and sympathy, first in Mr. B—who will end up as a reformed libertine—and then in Lady Davers, his sister—who stands for a conservative social and sexual contract. In a final stage, this compassion also reaches the actual reader, who is allowed to see instances of repentance and reformation within the novel.

In the first part of the novel, Mr. B's repeated attempts of sexual harassment, together with some ladies' visit and Pamela's anxiety for coming back to her parents affect the heroine's way of writing clearly. Her letters are written in more detail, since her problems with Mr. B have reached a stage in which her uneasiness obliges her to write more and more. This implies an increase in the length of the letters, and a shorter period of time between one and another—letters XXV and XXVI, for instance, are written in consecutive days. She explicitly says: "I shall write on, as long as I stay, though I should have nothing but sillinesses to write" (87), and "I must write on, though I shall come too soon; for now I have hardly any thing else to do" (108). Even if she knows—or thinks—that she is coming back to her parents, she keeps on writing to provide her troubled thoughts with a physical body, namely her writings. In this way, as she explains, "[I can] vent my griefs, and keep my heart from bursting" (93). With this last assertion she states clearly the fact that writing works as a therapy that relieves her from her tension. By stating on paper the thoughts that are crowding in on her mind she provides them with a physical dimension that

allows her to see them as something separated from her. With this externalization she is able to set her mind in order by making her thoughts tangible, turning them into a piece of thought alien to her body and that she can manipulate as a text. At the same time, this process of alienation implies a split of Pamela into two different selves, Pamela-writer and Pamela-character—an idea that will be developed later.

Finally, in letter XXXI—the last of them which can be properly called a letter—, some loose ends regarding Mr. B's molestations are tied up, since he openly offers money to Pamela for her to remain with him.² She, of course, rejects it exclaiming: "O sir, take back your guineas; I will not touch one, nor will my father, I am sure, till he knows what is to be done for them; and particularly what is to become of *me*" (118). This refusal shows that Pamela definitely realizes that Mr. B is trying to establish an illicit sexual contract with all the attempts he has made since his mother's death. The exchange he proposes is an economic one—money for sex—, which Pamela finally rejects by means of writing a letter to him (120).

It is this rejection, and the ones that will appear later on, that made *Pamela* so particular for the readers of Richardson's time. It implies a drastic change in the master-servant relationship of that time, a relationship that, in Judith Laurence-Anderson's words, kept "stressing the parent-child nature of domestic service, with the parental employer viewed as responsible for the spiritual lives of his or her employees. Servants, in turn, were continually urged to pay childlike obedience to their employers." Within this "childish obedience" sexual favours were also included, since "[a]s is well known, the female servant was the primary . . . [and] the most readily available sexual object in English society" (1981: 448, 449). So, the fact that Pamela, who is a servant, does not submit to Mr. B's requirements—breaking a preestablished and assumed rule in this way—is a challenge to these social conventions that makes this novel uncommonly interesting, most of all for a female reader, and different from previous ones. Yet, the most remarkable aspect of her negation is the way in which she presents it, namely with the help of her pen.

Once the novel has reached this stage, it is obvious that Pamela has undergone a psychological development, which is perceptible most of all in the complication of her writing activity. She has developed a knack of writing that almost obliges her to use her pen constantly, and which ends

up turning it into her main weapon to deal with Mr. B and with the hostile circumstances that oppress her. The reason why she uses a letter—instead of oral words—to deny Mr. B's proposition is that her capacity for writing leads her closer to her master, allowing her to address him more openly. This closeness is explicitly conveyed when she repeats this process on pp. 227-31, answering Mr. B's proposals with another letter, which—in quite a significant manner—appears side by side with his.

All this implies that, although there is a material and social distance between them (servant/master), this distance disappears when Pamela is personalized in her writing, and her physical body gives place to her mind—which represents her virtue (understood in a broader sense than simply chastity). The consequence of this “shift [of] Pamela's values from a physical to a discursive register” (Sussman 1990: 93) is that Pamela's writing capacity denies and eventually removes the conservative aristocratic pattern of relationships that governs the beginning of the novel, and replaces it with a progressive one. Thus, the arbitrariness of Mr. B's superior social position is displayed when she places herself level to him with the help of her written words, which remove the materiality of her body—together with its social implications—and assert the strength and value of her ideas.

The power and influence of Pamela's writings are best noticed in the sixth week of her confinement at Lincolnshire, when Mr. B, disguised as the maid Nan, tries to rape her. This is his last violent attempt to impose his kind of contract, because he has had access to Pamela's journal and this makes it no longer private. From now on, Pamela's writing is displayed as her weapon in a more obvious way than ever before. As Nancy Armstrong puts it, “‘Words’ are indeed all Pamela has to exert against the coercion of rank and a large fortune” (1987: 119), and even though she did not intend her journal to be read by her master, he finally finds part of it. At the beginning, when he takes the first parcel of her papers—which he calls “reasonable papers” (265)—he is very angry with her and thinks that his having access to her writings is an advantage he has on her, for this first violation of her privacy is the previous step towards having access to her body. Nonetheless, when he reads the second parcel—where the account of Pamela's attempt to escape and her consideration of suicide by the pond appear—he is moved by compassion, and her writing turns into the instrument that will make him accept her terms. From this moment on,

Pamela's main attraction turns from her body to her writing, as there is a "transfer of erotic desire from Pamela's body to her words The pleasure she now offers is the pleasure of the text rather than those forms of pleasure that derive from mastering her body" (Armstrong 1987: 6).

The reading of Pamela's journal makes Mr. B change his mind so drastically that he allows her to go to her parents at once. Nevertheless, compassion works both ways, and when she is on her way home, she learns that he has become ill, which makes her return to the place that was her prison for some weeks. After this, they get married properly and one would expect that all her uneasiness would come to an end, as J. A. Dussinger argues when he explains that "[t]he whole action during her captivity amounts to an initiation ritual, Pamela's 'coming out' . . . with marriage putting an end finally to her adolescent doubts about her identity" (1974: 59). However, the marriage is just part of the climax of the novel, but not *the* climax, for the climactic moment is delayed until she is able to make Lady Davers accept her as Mrs. B.³ Therefore, Pamela's "doubts about her identity"—using Dussinger's words again—are not fully answered after the ceremony. Now she is appropriately married to Mr. B, but Lady Davers obliges her to define her position in her domestic sphere. At this stage, Lady Davers' role is clearly displayed, for, as Armstrong puts it, she "speaks for an archaic contract that . . . constitutes an economic and political alliance rather than a bond of affection. [And s]he feels that the family name has been tarnished by Pamela" (1987: 130), who, after all, had been only a servant.

In the present circumstances, Pamela has to show her sister-in-law her new position in her household and the lawful steps she has followed to deserve it. The way through which she eventually gets to do this is—as it happened with Mr. B—by means of letting the lady read her journal, after which the last one admits: "I was greatly moved with some part of your story: and you have really made a noble stand, and deserve the praises of all our sex" (471). In addition to this, Mr. B also contributes to his sister's change of attitude making her realize that Pamela has to be accepted and even admired, although not because of her "person"—which would stand for materiality—, but because of her "mind" (427)—which could be equated with femininity and sensibility. In the end, Pamela's words, together with Mr. B's support, make Lady Davers accept a sexual—

now turned into social—contract based on “a bond of affection,” instead of the one she intended to keep on imposing, based on “an economic and political alliance.” She has eventually learnt that a woman’s “value reside[s] chiefly in her femaleness, rather than in traditional signs of status” (Armstrong 1987: 20).

With all this, the concept of “woman” is being redefined. There is something nebulous, especial, indefinable, another value different from the body, money and status that is going to substitute the old notion. *Pamela* is a process of definition of this new value that constitutes the “*Virtue Rewarded*” of its subtitle, a value in which the emotions carry out an essential role. Pamela’s writings are full of descriptions of her tears and faints, of her victimization and her hysteria, something that arouses the sympathy and compassion of those characters that read about them and which makes them accept and even admire her.

In this manner, with her papers Pamela has been able to change the Humean concept of sympathy, which was characterized by “relatively little interest in sympathy manifested in pity or compassion, and a great deal of interest in sympathy as a mechanism of pride in or respect for power, riches, family status” (Kay 1983: 80-1), for a more modern one. She has made the aristocratic fictional readers of her writings—and eventually the actual ones—feel sympathy for a servant-girl⁴ not because she has been enjoying a good situation with which they would like to identify themselves, but because she has been always suffering unpleasant circumstances that finally arise their “pity or compassion.”

After the ninth week of her journal, her writing has lost the immediacy of previous stages, which, on the one hand, makes this last part less attractive, but, on the other, emphasizes the importance of her previous papers. All this is realized not only by the actual reader of *Pamela*, but also by the fictional readers, those characters who read Pamela’s journal within the book. Following Susan R. Suleiman’s proposal of the different levels of narration in an epistolary novel (1981: 90), *Pamela* has four different ones:

1. actual author ——(addressed to)——> actual reader
(Richardson)

2. editor of the letters —————> implied reader
3. Pamela-writer —————> her parents
(then Mr. B and Lady Davers,
1st unintended, then intended)
4. Pamela-character —————> her parents.

The two last levels are the most relevant for this discussion. For a large portion of the novel the narrative process seems to stop at the third level, where Pamela appears as the author of the letters that she addresses to her parents. Nevertheless, at this stage the fourth level already exists—although in such a natural way that makes it almost covert—, since whenever Pamela-writer writes, the Pamela of her papers turns into a character, about which Goodman Andrews and his wife read at the beginning and are expected to read later on. In spite of this, it is not until Mr. B appears as the—first unintended and then intended—narratee of Pamela's papers that the fourth level clearly appears, becoming the most significant one, since its consideration provides the major turning point in the work, namely the change of attitude of the aristocratic characters towards Pamela.

At this point, Pamela is overtly split into two inseparable sides of a same coin: Pamela-writer and Pamela-character. On the one side, she is the physical representation of the Pamela that appears in the papers the other characters read, but, on the other, this physical personification and what it now denotes would be devoid of meaning if Pamela-character did not exist. In this way, at the end of the book two stories of Pamela are taking place at the same time, one embedded within the other: she appears closing the account of her journal, but within this narrative the whole story of Pamela's life is implicitly happening again, inasmuch as the other characters are reading it.

In the end, the characters who read Pamela's journal accept Pamela-character as a true character. They find it completely believable, and, in fact, their assumption of its being real is what makes them change their minds towards Pamela-writer. They see Pamela-character as a case for study and examination; she has been confined and has written her own experience, becoming in this way an object of empirical observation through which useful moral conclusions can be attained. For these characters, the

exposition and subsequent analysis of suffering have been didactic and moralizing. Ascending to the second and first narrative frames (editor of the letters → implied reader, actual author → actual reader), compassion is also aroused in the actual readers of *Pamela*, who have also had access to Pamela's papers. From their advantaged external position they have been able to observe different examples of reformation or changes of attitude within the text, so that they already know the reaction that is expected from them. Something similar happens in D. Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, where Moll's governess repents from her past deeds when she sees that the heroine ends up in Newgate and is sentenced to death. This functions as an internal example of repentance for the external reader, too.⁵

Nonetheless, there is an important difference between both cases. In *Moll Flanders* the exposition of the idea of womanhood is merely physical, and her governess analyses the eponymous character's actions as she has seen or known about them. In the case of *Pamela*, as explained above, the most important consideration of the idea of femininity is carried out by means of the examination that some characters make of some texts, of a woman's writings about herself. At this stage, one can perceive the growing power of the textualization of women's experience. The interest placed in them develops from physical to textual, that is, from body to mind. *Pamela* is written by a male author, but women writers—as Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth, Charlotte Lennox, etc.—begin to proliferate in this same century because they find in this rising genre called novel a perfect vehicle to convey their experiences and to reivindicate a ground that had been denied to them until that moment. Their novels present particular features that associate gender and sentimentality, making the last one the province of women. In the eighteenth century, sentimentality will be women's glory and triumph, since it will draw towards them the attention they deserved from men and some social collectives. However, they will also realize that it may become their undoing if it is not dominated, something that Mary Wollstoncraft will remark in the following century.

NOTES

1. It is obvious that Pamela-writer is also a character about whom we read, but, in that case, the Pamela of her writings would be a character doubly, as she is the one about whom Goodman Andrews and her wife—and also some other characters within the book—read.

2. He had already offered money to her in the scene at the summer-house (56), but it was for her not to tell anybody what had happened. Now it is for her to be with him as his mistress.

3. Somewhere else (Aguilar-Osuna 1997: 15-47) I support this opinion with a study of the development of the psychology of the eponymous character by examining Richardson's use of duration —“the relationship between the time the events are supposed to have taken to occur and the amount of text devoted to their narration” (Rimmon-Kennan 1983: 46)—in the letters and the journal.

4. The fact that she is a servant also shows the way in which eighteenth-century readers—real and fictional ones—begin to display an interest in everyday people, people who present problems similar to those they experience or know about. Now they can read about something that concerns the world in which they live, and not about marvelous and unreal worlds as those previously presented in romances. Even Pamela herself rejects the idea of being the heroine of a romance, for when she is telling about her consideration of suicide by the pond at Lincolnshire and thinking about the way in which “the young men and maidens in [her] father's neighbourhood” would react, she explains: “But yet I hope I shall not be the subject of their ballads and their elegies” (212). She wants to be only an average woman, and not an idealized and unreal one.

5. Defoe supports his didactic intentions with the presentation of this real penitent within the novel itself. After the old woman sees the closeness of Moll's death once she is caught and taken to Newgate, the heroine says: “[m]y poor afflicted Governess was now as much concern'd as I, and a great deal more truly Penitent; tho' she had no prospect of being brought to Tryal and Sentence” (1722: 360). Although the old woman

has not been caught, Moll's example is enough to make her correct her behaviour and leave her trade. The fact that Defoe presents this clear instance of revision, repentance and rectification makes his readers realize that this is what is expected from them.

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