

GIVING THE LANDLORD A NOTICE: ON MANAGEMENT OF THE HOUSE OF FICTION IN SAMUEL RICHARDSON'S *PAMELA*

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ABSTRACT

While at work on *Pamela*, Samuel Richardson allegedly remarked that he had to labor hard to rein his invention. Epistolary form lets the work grow into its own natural shape without much control but from within the text itself. This paper is to trace the heroine's growing freedom from the ideological enslavement imposed by the author and Richardson's attempts to assume authority over his creation.

RESUMO

Enquanto trabalhava em *Pamela*, Samuel Richardson observou, alegadamente, que tinha de se esforçar para refrear a sua imaginação. O estilo epistolar permite ao trabalho desenvolver-se e assumir a sua forma natural sem grande controlo, a não ser a partir do interior do texto. Este artigo tem por objectivo traçar a crescente libertação da heroína da escravatura ideológica imposta pelo autor, e as tentativas de Richardson para assumir o controlo sobre a sua criação.

Samuel Richardson (1689-1761), a successful printer, was once asked to prepare a small book of sample letters to be of use to country readers who knew little about conventions of writing. Two of those letters were based on a real life incident Richardson's friend claimed to have heard about, entitled "A Father To a Daughter in Service, on hearing of her Master's attempting her Virtue" and "The Daughter's Answer" (Dobson, 27: 2003). Richardson put aside the letter writing to begin a novel on the given subject. He managed to complete his project within less than three months, prompted by his wife and her friend who grew interested in the book and insisted on being informed of its progress on a daily basis (Dobson, 28: 2003).

Pamela (1841) was conceived as an epistolary conduct book to instruct handsome girls who were obliged to go out to service, how to avoid the snares that might be laid against their virtue. Its nominal narrator and protagonist was thus supposed to serve as a doctrinal mouthpiece; a model of virtue oppressed and tried by depravity.

To summarize Richardson's effort: *Pamela*, the intriguing heroine of his novelistic debut, is put to test many times, at one point even finding herself incarcerated in a country residence by the dissolute Mr. B. However, she manages to assume unheard-of authority through her writing - by arresting his gaze that has kept straying so far she succeeds in maneuvering Mr. B. out of control over her destiny. The postmodern readers may be even ready to believe she also challenges the textual control of her Maker – Samuel Richardson himself.

As it is quite obvious, the text was drafted in white heat and strange frenzy and, what is more, it proved an unruly being as it was taking shape. Samuel Richardson's remark, recorded in one of his letters, "I labored hard to rein my invention," (Gwilliam, 1994: 45) is a rather desperate discovery of someone who, despite numerous attempts to patch up his perplexing novel, still had to watch the disobedient text slip out of control. Naturally, any scholar may remark, Richardson embedded the seeds of narrative rebellion within the fabric of the text itself since epistolary form typically "decenters" the author and hinges on ambivalence of viewpoints. By belittling his role to become a mere "editor" and thus granting *Pamela*, the narrator-protagonist, a voice of her own and, and a potential reader a direct access to her.

I am convinced *Pamela*'s victorious statement halfway through the book on getting an offer of marriage from Mr. B., "O! My prison is become my palace!" (Richardson, 293: 1641) has much broader ramifications than just referring to becoming Mistress B. who has had kept her virtue intact and received a household of her own, a new dominion. Let us suspend disbelief and read it also as a comment on her growing freedom from the ideological enslavement imposed by the author.

There are various reasons why Richardson, *Pamela*'s literary landlord, finds himself in the precarious position of someone engaged in a battle over authority in his own fictional house, the novel entitled *Pamela*.

Let me take you back to the beginning and draw your attention to a section in the text that follows Mr. B's first attempted rape. Having

determined that losing her life is preferable to losing her honesty, Pamela decides on leaving Mr. B's service and returning home though this would mean tumbling down the social ladder since the girl would now fully depend on her poor parents for subsistence. Pamela summons courage to do what is necessary and as a symbol of her new status exchanges clothes given to her by her late mistress for those she made, a home-spun garment befitting a girl of her low social standing.

This seems one in a series of turning points in the narrative. Pamela regards herself in the mirror and she likes what she beholds. And so does Samuel Richardson, who seems to be abdicating responsibilities of a landlord and mastermind behind the text. In a way, he falls for his own literary character the way Pygmalion fell for his own creation, Galatea.

An unparalleled transformation of a heroine into a conscious self is to take place. The fact she regains identity and a presence in the narrative which can be easily proven; as a positive quality negatively defined. Pamela possesses something which exists because it can be withdrawn from Mr. B. by her own decision, because the notion of herself belonging to someone else but herself can be called into question and negated: "And pray, how came I to be his property? What right has he in me, but such as a thief may plead to stolen good? Was ever the like heard? This is downright rebellion, I protest!" (Richardson, 116: 1741)

Richardson gave his heroine an unparalleled opportunity to defend her value as a person in a truly revolutionary and disconcerting claim. Women in the eighteenth-century culture were not thought of possessing any authority or autonomy at all since authority traditionally revolved around masculine center (Richetti, 102: 1996).

Needless to say, whatever was taken for granted seems contested in this particular claim. Pamela the narrator-protagonist obviously enjoys a privileged position of moral authority in the book and therefore someone who wields power over Mr. B. whom she finally "converts" to her vision of the world and her role in it.

The narrative of *Pamela*, seemingly a traditional tale of seduction, a stereotypical struggle between master and his maid for possession of the female body, changes focus quite dramatically. Mr. B is now fully aware that if he tries to force the woman, he would merely grasp at a void; just another anonymous body in a petticoat. But Pamela the person, the utmost object of his desire, is no longer presented as a Nobody. She has gained the power of self-representation; Galatea has been presented with a soul to contend with and a female self. She

exists outside anyone else's control and is conscious of her value. This value is not to be traded for a diamond necklace or pin money (among other things masters have a tendency to offer maids in exchange for physical pleasure) but the fact that Mr. B even makes such an attempt, testifies to the existence of such value.

Pamela voices a protest not only against Mr. B. but the patriarchal, feudal world that leaves no niche for the likes of her. Richardson let something slip much against his will, forced by the logic of circumstances which let the work grow into its own natural shape without much control from the outside. He found himself outmanoeuvred by his own narration despite the fact his own attitude to the proper role and place of women in the world of men was reactionary.

Indeed, "Pygmalion" found, much to his own surprise, that "Galatea" slipped out of his control, claiming, very rightly, that her soul is valuable and is ready to act accordingly - as someone who is aware of her immense value. Suddenly it is his own creation hurtling abuse into his face, and what is more, abuse grounded in the very logic of the narrative.

And yet, with the notable exception of fairy-tales, when did a woman, a lowly servant even, assume a right to be treated as a partner, a chance to preserve control over her self, an opportunity to shape her destiny?

However, in the eighteenth-century context "once upon a time" of tales must give way to "nevertheless" of reality. Overthrowing of centuries - old notions of relationships was certainly not a part of Richardson's agenda.

At this point, it becomes necessary to consider the way a personal identity is constructed. In the realm of fiction, personality exists as a narrative (Currie, 25: 1998). Needless to say, self-narrating from the outside for the purposes of self-representation (in other words, being consummately outside as well as inside a narrative) creates quite a conundrum - as Pamela presents the action as well as comments on it (rape moments, regarding herself in the mirror) which is supposed to combine innocence and a degree of omniscience at the same time. Self-narration in an epistolary novel may be considered an act of schizophrenia and therefore is likely trigger polar reactions. *Pamela* presents Pamela as a (secular) martyr, quotes Hamlet, recalls the tale of Lucretia, represents a teenage scholar, a dutiful daughter, a model employee. But first and foremost, Pamela embodies a woman of principles, innate wisdom and independent, critical mind.

This would be impossible to achieve through a subjective point of view – unless we imagine this narrative in terms of equivalent of brain death when a disembodied spirit roams the room commenting on the body it has momentarily slipped out of. This paradox signifies that whatever has whipped Pamela's identity into existence, is also intent on its destruction.

We have been often reminded that personal identity does not reside within a body but it is structured around a system of differences through which individuality is constructed. Therein lies the point and a stumbling block at the same time; the text was imbued with characteristics that (if given an opportunity to develop) would shake the foundations of the novel and undermine its own presupposition. Richardson therefore hurried to control the damage done and restore the balance in the world of his creation, the novel entitled *Pamela*. Pamela was allowed to have her revolt for the time being but now it is time for the originator of the narrative to resume control and cave in all the possible escape routes in his house of fiction by an ultimate action – having the heroine marry. The moment of Pamela's marriage marks her triumph over adversity but is also instrumental in the destruction of her independent identity and the text's logic and coherence; Pamela is thus goaded into becoming an accomplice; her identity, on the point of being celebrated, must be subsumed in the identity of what proves not-that-much reformed Mr. B. (Kreismann, 45: 1960) whose vice, not virtue is rewarded.

This act of marriage both assures and undermines Richardson's original moral purpose, and what is more, exposes hypocrisy he was participating in. Marriage seems to be the only option since this is the only way of silencing Pamela's voice that has become far too outspoken for both, Mr. B. and Richardson alike. Pamela gets corrupted by the prospect of being elevated to the position of Mistress B. and saved from the indignity of her circumstances. From that moment onward, both Richardson and B. use her as a shield for both real and textual depravity, as "someone to draw a kind veil over [their] faults" (Richardson, 470: 1741) which is one of the requests Mr.B. presents to his wife as a condition sine qua non.

Pamela is indeed a text about a social revolution that has left everything in its place.

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