

Samuel Richardson's Views of Women in *Pamela*

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Abstract

Pamela is the first epistolary novel by Samuel Richardson, a masterpiece of sentimentalist literature. This paper mainly attempts to analyze Samuel Richardson's views of women based on the image of *Pamela*. The paper begins with introducing the life experience and literary career of Samuel Richardson, and the situation in which Richardson created *Pamela*. And then, it discusses traditional virtues, such as chastity, diligence and modesty embodied in *Pamela*. These virtues are the base of rewards of women in society. Then the present author focuses on self-pursuit of *Pamela* as a modern woman who does not depend on men and make livings on their own, and comes to the conclusion that, on the one hand, Richardson praises traditional virtues of women; on the other hand, he expects women to get independence from men, which is contradictory part of Richardson's views of women.

Key words: *Pamela*; virtues; self-pursuit; views of women

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1. INTRODUCTION

Pamela, first published in 1740 and known as one of the earliest novels in English, was written by British writer

Samuel Richardson. Samuel Richardson is one of the most famous English novelists in the 18th century, and his works has also impacted literary circles in Britain and even in Europe. In his life, he wrote three epistolary novels: *Pamela: Virtue Rewarded*, *Clarissa: the History of a Young Lady* and *The History of Sir Charles Grandison*. This paper will mainly discuss *Pamela*.

At present, scholars at home and abroad have made a lot of researches on Richardson and his epistolary novels, including his status and influence in literary history, artistic characteristics and value of epistolary novel, etc.

There are abundant studies on Richardson's *Pamela* abroad. Laura Fasick focused on the separation of the female body from consciousness and authority. Fasick studied the relationship between the body and authority in *Pamela*. Golden Morris believed that *Pamela*'s resistance is actually Richardson's own resistance in life. Tessie William saw *Pamela* as the embodiment of moral hypocrisy and dishonesty. William studied deeply about this in his *Richardson and his Pamela*, and pointed out that in *Pamela*, on the one hand, Richardson legalized women's fight for their own rights, on the other hand, he let the women compromise in the face of strict requirements and hierarchy.

In China, Richardson and his works are the focus of literary critics. In the 20th century, Chinese academic circles began to study Richardson's *Pamela*. Liu Yiqing believed that Richardson was the first person to complete the whole novel only in form of letter. Her "Samuel Richardson and epistle novel, the forerunner of modern novel" analyzed and discussed the reasons why Richardson caused fierce debate among critics, and she pointed out the significance of Samuel Richardson's epistle novel. Li Xiaolu's "Resistance of Speech: Interpretation of Sense of Equality in *Pamela*" elaborates on *Pamela*'s thought of equality and resistance embodied in her language, and reveals the influence and value of *Pamela* in the society at that time. Hou Yan's "A Study of The Cultural and Artistic

Value of *Pamela*” comprehensively examines the moral values, values and artistic characteristics reflected in the readership and *Pamela*. Liang Yingyu pointed out in *On Epistolary Novels* that Richardson’s epistolary writing influenced many European writers at that time, such as Rousseau and Goethe, who began to write epistolary novels under the influence of Richardson. Most of the researches on Richardson are focused on epistolary writing skills, narrative skills, psychological description, etc., while there are few analyses on the female images in Richardson’s works.

Compared with foreign systematic research, domestic research has not formed a system. Throughout the research results about Richardson and his novels, the domestic researches mainly focused on the art of *Pamela*, the study scope is rather small. Therefore, we need to introduce more foreign research results and research data, strengthen the research of academic history and use more critical methods and aesthetic theories for more in-depth research about Richardson. All these problems are the key points which Chinese Richardson researchers need to make great efforts on.

As a famous novelist in the 18th century, Richardson’s novels have been studied by later generations, but the popularity and research of Richardson in China are far less abundant than those abroad. Few scholars have studied feminism reflected in *Pamela*, which is the focus of this paper.

2. SAMUEL RICHARDSON AND HIS PAMELA

Samuel Richardson (1689-1761) is a famous British novelist in 18th century. He is considered as the ancestor of the epistolary novel and one of the pioneers of British realistic novel. He wrote *Pamela* in 18th century. At this time, England was deeply affected by patriarchy. Both the author’s experience and the situation of the society made *Pamela* a popular novel. In chapter 1, both the author and the history background of *Pamela* will be introduced in detail.

2.1 Introduction to Samuel Richardson

Richardson was a well-experienced man. He was born in 1689 in Mackworth. His father was a furniture manufacturer, and his grandfather was a merchant in London. For some accidental reason his family had moved from London to Derbyshire, but he moved back with them when he was ten years old. He received a good moral education from his family. His father was a Puritan, and he firmly believed that honesty, loyalty, diligence and frugality were the pillars of society. The novels that Richardson later wrote praised all of these virtues.

He had only received a secondary education, but he enjoys reading. When he was 13, all the girls in London thought he was a good storyteller and he was willing to

write love letters to them and letters for the poor people in the neighborhood. At 16, he was apprenticed to John Wilder, a printer in London, and spent several years as a typesetter and proofreader. After his apprenticeship, he connected with the family of Rick, the printer, and eventually took over their printing house, operating it on its own in 1721. Later, he married Martha, the daughter of his former boss, Wilder.

As a result of his hard work, he achieved great success in the printing industry. In the 1730s, his printing house was one of the three best in London. During this period, he became acquainted with the English lexicographer and writer Dr. Samuel Johnson, the painter Hogarth, the actors Colley Cibber and David Garrick, the poet Edward Young and the speaker of the house of Commons Arthur Onslow. Under Mr. Onslow’s influence, he took on the lucrative business of printing government documents and later the periodical.

Richardson created a literary structure integrating narrative style, plot, characters and moral subjects, which had a great influence on British literature and even European literature. As a printer and publisher, Richardson printed nearly 500 different works, periodicals and magazines in his lifetime. As a famous epistolary novelist, he has written three famous epistolary novels: *Pamela: Virtue Rewarded*, *Clarissa*, or *The History of a Young Lady*, and *Sir Charles Grandison*.

Richardson began writing in the 1730s. At the beginning, he only compiled some manuscripts and pamphlets. In September 1733, he published *the apprentice’s handbook*, a summary of Richardson’s life as a young apprentice, and his own success added credibility to the book. In the book, Richardson warned young people that they should work diligently and discipline themselves according to moral standards. We can say that this book has obvious moral education purpose.

In November 1739, at the age of 50, Richardson began writing his *Pamela: Virtue Rewards*. As soon as the novel was published, it was a success and Richardson won a great reputation. However, the emergence of “Pamela fever” has been accompanied by the emergence of “opponents of Pamela”, and what the opponents criticized is Pamela’s hypocritical morality. The representative of the opposition is the famous realistic novelist Henry Fielding. He mocked Pamela for her obsession with her virginity and for constantly valuing it. He even wrote *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews* to attack *Pamela*.

Fielding’s criticism made Richard think more deeply, so he created *Clarissa*, which finally established his position in the history of literature. *Clarissa* depicts the responsibilities and emotional conflicts in family life, which can be said to be *Pamela*’s further exploration of emotional morality. Richardson developed his epistolary writing method in *Clarissa*. When writing *Clarissa*, he used many characters to narrate besides *Clarissa*. *Clarissa* still has a strong didactic element, but unlike the comedy

ending of *Pamela*, the heroine of *Clarissa* chooses to die and finally presents the readers with a tragedy. *Clarissa* was such a success that even Mr. Fielding, a longtime critic of *Pamela*, praised it.

By this time, Richardson had become a household name and was playing an important role in the literary world. However, readers are not content to read *Pamela* and *Clarissa*. Many of his female readers criticized his male images as negative and hoped that he could create a model of male morality, and his creation of *Sir Grandisson* met the needs of readers. Grandisson was a perfect man. He had almost all the virtues of a man. He was also a devout Christian. However, this novel did not enjoy the same popularity as the previous two novels. Readers said that the plot of the novel was too flat and there were no sharp conflicts. There were also some readers who thought Richardson's portrayal of Sir Grandisson was too perfect to be true. In a word, this novel was not comparable with the achievements of the first two novels. Richardson's novels have been greatly welcomed. Although some readers criticized his novels for being too long and full of sentimental color, his depiction of characters' psychology in his works and his exploration of the writing mode of epistolary novels have achieved great success, and he has become an important writer in the history of English literature. In 1761, Richardson died at the age of 72.

2.2 Introduction to *Pamela*

In November 1739, at the age of 50, Richardson began writing his *Pamela: Virtue Rewards*. As soon as the novel was published, it was a success and Richardson won a great reputation. However, the emergence of "Pamela fever" has been accompanied by the emergence of "opponents of Pamela", and what the opponents criticized is Pamela's hypocritical morality. The representative of the opposition is the famous realistic novelist Henry Fielding. He mocked Pamela for her obsession with her virginity and for constantly valuing it. He even wrote *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews* to attack *Pamela*.

The novel tells the story of the fifteen-year-old, pious and mannered maid Pamela firmly resisting the temptation of her master Mr. B to defend her chastity. As a result, Mr. B finally returns to the fold and ask Pamela to marry him. The novel caused a sensation when it came out, with repeated reprints and a steady stream of admirers and naysayers.

By May 1741, four editions of the novel had been published and adapted by Indian and English writers. *Pamela* is considered to be the most popular novel in Britain in the 18th century. It was popular with aristocratic ladies, the middle and lower classes, and even the clergy read it when they preached. *Pamela*'s important contribution is that it combines the description of social environment with the analysis of the characters' psychological activities, so that readers can get moral education through interesting stories. While inheriting

the realistic tradition of Defoe, Richardson paid special attention to the description of characters' emotions, thus giving rise to a new literary type of modern novels—sentimental literature, and *Pamela* is a masterpiece of sentimental literature.

3. RICHARDSON'S VIEWS ON WOMEN'S VIRTUES

In this chapter, three main virtues of women will be discussed, which are chastity, diligence and modesty. Richardson's description to Pamela is also his expectation to all women.

3.1 Chastity

In Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, the author organically combined the social status, class consciousness and moral norms of women, advocated the "chastity first" female moral concept, and believed that the most important virtue of women is chastity. As a male writer, Samuel Richardson was deeply influenced by the patriarchal system. Therefore, when Richardson discussed about women's morality, especially for women's view of chastity, he tended to follow traditional concepts.

As can be seen from *Pamela*, the virtue of "chastity" was sexist at that time, mainly because chastity was only restricted to women. The man before marriage could have a fling, and the female must maintain chastity before marriage, if the female had lost chastity before marriage, she would be considered debauched and degenerate. In *Pamela*, it can be concluded from Pamela's life that there are three double standards for men and women: at that time, men in the lower class were required not to be too promiscuous, but men of all classes took a more casual attitude towards this, and young women in the middle and upper class were explicitly required to maintain chastity. However, for the girls in the lower class, their low status made them the object of men's enjoyment.

It can be seen from the novel that female's consciousness of resistance first reflected in Pamela's defense of her chastity. In her letters to her parents, Pamela writes about Mr. B's concern for her and his love for her beauty. However, in the end, Mr. B finally reveals his conspiracy. He uses various methods to make Pamela his lover, but in Pamela's ideology, chastity is above everything, and she cannot yield to money and threats. In fact, Pamela's resistance was not accepted at that time, because it should be a good thing for the maids to feel happy and grateful that the noble men took a fancy to the maids. The maids could take advantage of the noble men's love for them to lift them out of poverty. But Pamela does not think so. She would rather lead a poor life than lose her virginity. In Pamela's mind, virginity is above everything else. When Mr. B is disloyal to her, she vows to fight against him and even considered Mr.

B's behavior as vulgar and shameless regardless of her status as a maid. From this, it can be seen that the author Richardson endowed Pamela with the spirit of resistance that traditional women do not have. Pamela has always presented herself as a "chaste" lady. Mr. B is able to marry the maid Pamela mainly because he has been moved by her chastity. But as for her, he does not take into account the sneers and comments of the world and married her. Pamela reminds herself to maintain a dignified and humble attitude after her marriage. Pamela's upbringing earns her more respect and praise and is recognized by Mr. B's noble family. In the conflict of the genders and classes, Pamela uses her persistent virtues as a model for the British moral reform movement.

At that time, it was for granted if men violated women, and people even mistakenly believed that the attraction of aristocratic men to lower-class women was something to be proud of. But female chastity is a woman's right to her own body and a symbol of her dignity as a human being. As for the author, Richardson wanted to criticize the social background of male superiority and female inferiority with the help of Pamela, so that women could dare to pursue their own freedom and resist the repressed destiny. Richardson deliberately portrayed Pamela as a chaste, self-reliant woman who ultimately gained other's respect. Richardson wanted to warn young girls through a typical moral example that they should constantly improve their moral standards. Pamela's rebellious spirit and Richardson's own successful experience have more to do with Puritan thought. Richardson lived in a time when Britain was too much in the class society of female morality, so the author regarded "chastity" as the invaluable treasure of women in the book.

3.2 Diligence

As a female servant, Pamela is required to be diligent, and she can make a living by herself. Her kind lady tells her to make diligence as a working rule. She never complains about her humble origin and hard-working conditions, but in the letter to her parents praises the work and cherishes the income. When she is doing needlework for Mr. B in Bedfordshire, she tells her parents that labor is "the dearest thing of her [me] to be a good child" (Richardson 1740: 81). After being kidnapped to Lincolnshire, she becomes a writer and believes that writing is "a genuine employment" (ibid: 188), and it is as important as her sewing. She praises writing as the most "agreeable" way for her to "receive improvement as well as amusement" (ibid: 150). Labor gives Pamela the sense of equality and independence, encourages her to resist sexual harassment and material temptation of her master, and finally makes her a new independent woman.

Pamela may be "the first important heroine in an English novel that skips all the work that might first be needed to earn a living for living and can earn a living by the work of her hands" (Doody 1776: 4). As a maid, she

is diligent. Her kind madam asks her to make diligence a rule and trains her to be a versatile housework worker. Mrs. Jervis, the housekeeper, instructs her to work hard in return for her master's kindness. Mr. B even says to her, "if she [I] is faithful and diligent, he will be her [my] friend" (Richardson 1740: 192). Pamela appreciates her master for providing her with the job, so she writes down their requirement and works very hard.

Pamela works hard when working, appreciates labor in writing, and cherishes the reward in work. The compliment makes her a modern independent woman. In the novel, Pamela's diligence helps her gain Mr. B's respect and marriage, as well as the appreciation and admiration of others. In the real world, this kind of female diligence made inferior women respect their status as a maid and inspired the creation of female novelists.

3.3 Modesty

Although Pamela is a humble maid, she is lucky enough to be made a lady by her kind madam. She is modest and pays attention to her manners and dress. In her writing, she always asks herself to reflect herself on her own behaviors and translates the results of self-reflection into the code of conduct in daily life. When others praise her, she never feels proud of herself, but communicates with herself to see if she deserves such praise. Despite being misunderstood and oppressed by words, she never argues in front of others, but expresses her opinions through careful words. In addition, in the face of the temptation of fine clothes provided by Mr. B, she insists on wearing clothes that match her social status. Therefore, with her undoubted modesty, Pamela succeeds in changing from a humble maid to a real lady of high society, and this is her accomplishments as a modest lady.

At the beginning of the novel, Pamela is asked to be modest by her elders. Both Mrs. Duvers and the sister of her master order her to "be careful to keep her distance from her companions" (ibid: 47). Mrs. Gervais asks her to be discreet and modest. In addition, her father also teaches her to be modest when others make great comments on her appearance "for she [you] did not make it herself [yourself], and so no praise can be due to her [you] for it" (ibid: 52). So Pamela keeps a careful record of their requirements and constantly communicates with herself to see if she meets them.

As is often the case, when the humble one wants something from the rich and powerful one, he should be more active. However, Pamela is very passive and doesn't mean to claim ties of kinship with someone of a higher social position. What Pamela writes is a letter, not a declaration. When speaking of the compliment she received, she is not complacent. That's Pamela's attitude. Her attitude has, of course, something to do with the position of a servant: it was only her virtues that gave her the appearance of being what she was.

4. RICHARDSON'S VIEWS ON WOMEN'S SELF-PURSUIT

Although Pamela follows the virtues of middle-class, her thought has penetrated into the consciousness of upper-class society. She blends the two heterogeneous ideas together. Therefore, her words of resistance are mixed with her compromise to the authority of the upper class. Richardson reflected the general female pursuit in the social background at that time through the self-pursuit of Pamela.

4.1 Entering Society

Before the 18th century, Britain was a patriarchal society in which women were in a subordinate position. At that time, many writers and philosophers were clearly aware of the unequal status of women, and the author described these negative emotions in detail. In the past, no matter in the historical development process of eastern civilization or western civilization, men occupied the dominant position in the society, while women only existed as the appendages of men. Moreover, patriarchal ideology dominated the society at that time, and male spirit controlled the development of the society. Men represented power, authority and dignity in the society at that time, while women only existed as an object.

In the eighteenth century, with the decay of the domestic industry in England, more and more lower-class women no longer took care of their fathers or husbands in their family; instead, they had to enter into female servant market to make a living. Under the social background at that time, many women tended to marry to reflect their own value. But Pamela has a strong personality. As far as her beauty is concerned, she can marry a man with good conditions and lead a stable life. The fate of maids at that time was often tragic. Their situation "was similar to that of a black maid in the southern United States in the early 20th century," and "was often treated as a different kind of person in Mr. B's world." At that time, marriage was regarded as an important means to change destiny, especially for girls without rich dowries, who could make their own or even the whole family situation better by marrying rich people. Although Pamela was a maid, she does not want to be oppressed by the upper class. So, she chose to entering society to have her own job and devote to her career.

Pamela is a very hard-working maid, who can earn a living by herself. She never complains of her humble birth and living environment but complements labor in her letters to her parents and treasures her working income. Pamela is "the first important heroine in English fiction who works for living and can earn a living by the work of her hands" (Doody, Introduction 13). She believes that if there is no labor and her labor income, she, a humble female servant, will not "be respected by everyone" (ibid. 47), thus she cherishes her working opportunity and labor income. What's more, she behaves kind to other people.

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As a maid, Pamela has a restless heart. Pamela's most distinctive characteristic is that she is different from other servants: unlike a maid, but more than a maid. In her first letter, she told her parents that the old lady died and Mr. B took over the property. The master of the house now is a man. What about the maids who served the old lady? She was the old lady's most intimate, favorite maid, so she is especially anxious. Then Mr. B gathers the maids and tells them to stay on. Then, under the eyes of the public, he takes Pamela's hands, lets her in charge of his underclothes and bedding, and gives her the four gold pieces that the old madam carried with her when she died. Independent and different is the impression that Pamela leaves the readers with from the beginning of the story.

When the old madam dies, Pamela is only 15 years old. She can only get rid of the maid's fate through marriage after becoming an adult. Her marriage to Mr. B means giving up everything in her class and entering the upper class, which is risky for a young girl. After the death of the old madam, Pamela is seduced by Mr. B. She does not feel lucky about it. Instead, she resists until Mr. B made a commitment to her marriage. Was Pamela's fierce resistance to Mr. B because he is ugly and annoying? The answer is no. Not only is he well-educated, but Pamela also thinks he is tall, handsome and elegant. Such a gentleman with both talent and appearance is of course quite popular with young girls. From the novel, we can see that Pamela has a good impression on Mr. B. Otherwise, when Mr. B promised to give up his evil idea and marry her, she would not agree without hesitation. In fact, in the first volume of the novel, what Pamela refuses is not Mr. B, but the insult and contempt of the upper class he represents to the lower class. Mr. B's sister, Mrs. Divers, advises Pamela to keep her distance from the valets, and Mr. B warns her that if she has an affair with one of the valets, she will be ruined and sink into poverty and misery. As Ian Watt says, Pamela's struggle with Mr. B easily reflects the larger conflict between the two classes and their way of life at the time.

4.2 Self-Reliance

In the process of trade expansion and commercial production, the diligence of a woman was regarded as "the working ability similar to men but inferior" (ibid. 15). Feminine diligence was required as a necessary quality for a good job.

Pamela only feels grateful to the reward from her hard-working rather than other's award. Her choice of the "three parcels" shows her individual economic value. After she recognized Mr. B.'s wicked intention, she determines to go back to her parents and puts her clothes into three parcels. The "fine clothes and linen gave by" (Richardson 110) was from her kind lady, and she makes then in the first parcel, "presents" from Mr. B. in the second parcel and her own homespun clothes bought with her own income in the third parcel.

The "three parcels" are of very significance to Pamela. Her choice of them is as important as her belief of morality and value. The first parcel indicates her lady's kindness, and it represents Pamela's honest and ambiguous status once in her master's house. Taking the first parcel away reveals her desire for wealth and status. The second parcel reveals Mr. B.'s intention. She suggests that "they were to be the price of my shame, and if I make use of them, I should think I should never prosper with them" (ibid. 111). Taking it away means that there is no continuous oppression by her master. The third parcel represents Pamela's moral pursuit. She determines to rely on her labor to be an honest person instead of her good-looking to be a dependent mistress.

She shows her deep appreciation to Mrs. Jervis. Because of her, she can "live upon in bread and water" instead of depending on other's award. From Pamela's perspective, writing is as important as needling works. Since she works at Bedfordshire as a needlewoman, her job has deeply been connected with her writing. Although sometimes, Mr. B. complains that she has minded "her pen more than her [your] needle", she insists that "I have not been idle; but had writ, from time to time" (Richardson 76). Therefore, in her writing, she encourages acquiring the equality and independent consciousness through labor. Through her words, it can be seen that she is a dutiful daughter as well as a new independent woman.

In addition, Pamela is at the very bottom of the society, but with her own experience, she developed the ability that she can resist to be submitted to the ordained fate for maid by social instruction. She adepts in using both the written and the spoken word – in the use of her own explanation of patriarchal ideology – greatly leads to her ultimate triumph over Mr. B.. Through what she has experienced and what she has written, she becomes a new independent woman who is not at all inferior to Mr. B.

Most of the female readers are maids. They are eager to change their status quo and to acquire their discourse power from their diligent work. Encouraged by Pamela, a lot of women novelists' desire for "a room of their own". The women novelists, including Behn, Manley, Haywood and Davys began to make a living through their writing. Richardson shapes Pamela as an ideal woman writer, and this "ideal" is what Richardson thinks almost perfect.

5. CONCLUSION

The subtitle of the novel is "Virtue Rewarded", and it can be seen from the title that clearly reflects the author's intention that Pamela is the embodiment of social morality, especially female virtue. In the end, the novel has a comedy ending, which caters to the public reader's psychology of "virtue is rewarded", fully shows the positive effect of the moral improvement movement in the real society and achieves the author's original goal of enlightenment. As for the author, Richardson wanted to criticize the social background of male superiority and female inferiority with the help of Pamela, so that women could dare to pursue their own freedom and resist the repressed destiny. Richardson deliberately portrayed Pamela as a chaste, self-reliant woman who ultimately gained other's respect. Richardson wanted to warn young girls through a typical moral example that they should constantly improve their moral standards.

As a maid, Pamela has a restless heart. Pamela's most distinctive characteristic is that she is different from other servants: unlike a maid, but more than a maid. Through writing letters, the heroine teaches unmarried women how to protect themselves and resist temptation in the society which is getting worse day by day through her own experience, setting up a moral model for young women. This was very similar to the conduct books, which were very popular for girls at the time.

Pamela's story is an English dream: as long as you live honestly and persist in doing the right thing, you will be richly rewarded if you get through the struggle. Its thinking logic reflects the belief of the protestant petty bourgeoisie. Material is closely linked with spiritual morality, which reflects secular religious thoughts. Perhaps because it is so hard to achieve in reality, it is tempting to combine virtue and wealth, and that chastity can be a means to get wealth for a woman. This will undoubtedly arouse readers' respect, desire and pursuit of virtue, which may be one of the reasons why the novel is so popular.

In *Pamela*, Richardson told people that people should not only live honestly and insist on doing the right thing, but also be able to withstand the material temptation and reality test if they expect to be richly rewarded. He combined the traditional epistolary novel with moral advice, virtue with material rewards, so that people can learn that virtue can not only help them win respect, but also get wealth.

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