

# THE ENGLISH NOVEL: INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES

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Lecture: 08

The Novel After Theory: Gender

Hello learners,

Welcome to the second lecture in this NPTEL course titled “The English Novel Interdisciplinary Approaches.” The agenda for this lecture is to continue the discussion began in the previous lecture, which is to say we will continue examining Ian Watt's thesis about the newness of the novel as a genre. In this lecture, we will go a little bit deeper than we did in the previous lecture. In order to understand exactly how Ian Watt's thesis became persuasive and can actually help us understand the English novel, I will focus on one very, very famous novel by one of the novelists, Ian Watt chose to illustrate his thesis, that is *Pamela*, the novel by Samuel Richardson. Over the course of this discussion, I will describe how Ian Watt's thesis is remarkably influential but also has certain limitations. These limitations with Ian Watt's thesis concern the issues of gender and class and how these two issues came together in the English novel. So, the novel that I've chosen to focus on is titled *Pamela* or *Virtue Rewarded*. This novel was published in the year 1740.

The first edition appeared anonymously, although the author's name was eventually revealed as in subsequent editions. The author of this text was Samuel Richardson. The first thing to note about this novel is that both the author and the protagonist, i.e. Samuel Richardson and Pamela Andrews, are low. 'Low' in the sense that they were very different from the kinds of people about whom traditionally literature and most prose fiction before the 18th century in England was written. That is, these were individuals who did not belong to the aristocracy. Now, to begin with Samuel Richardson first, he was born to a working-class family, received a competent school education, but nothing too serious or formal. He began his career as an apprentice to a printer, and that is how he began to move up in life, i.e. building his business as a printer and a publisher. It was during the early part of his career as a printer and as someone who did a lot of work in the publishing industry, he was offered to produce, that is, write and publish a self-help book. The publisher Rivington and

Osborne asked Samuel Richardson to write a book of sample letters. This book was tentatively titled *Familiar Letters on Important Occasions*. In order to begin writing this book of letters, Samuel Richardson imagined a fictional scenario. He created a scenario in which a girl, a working-class girl, writes a letter to her parents describing some problems, she is facing at her place of employment. From this premise, the letters began to grow and this fictional idea became a novel which was later titled *Pamela*. In fact, this fictional idea, this scenario in which a young girl writes letters to her parents describing problems at her place of work became so much more interesting to Samuel Richardson than his original mandate that he put aside his offer and the contract to write this book of sample letters and put all of his energies into writing and completing this fictional prose text, which was *Pamela*. Now, in terms of sales, it's important to note that many people bought it and everyone, it seems, read it. Margaret Ann Dooley, the great scholar of 18th century prose in English, calls *Pamela* the first instance of a bestseller in the history of English fiction.

In terms of reception, it was very mixed. That is to say, the text was unable to shake a certain controversial idea, which was that it made people interested in the fate of a very low character. I've used this word 'low' two times now. Let me explain something about this word. Pamela Andrews, the protagonist of this novel *Pamela*, was a low character because she came from the working class. She didn't own property and was not as educated as some of the other protagonists, readers and writers of English fiction. In writing about such a protagonist, Richardson was inspired by much of the fiction that was published to great success in the early part of the 18th century.

Some unique features of this very popular fiction were that it was written by women and it was about women. It described a lot of female protagonists who were constrained by law, were repressed by convention. That is to say, they did not have a lot of freedom or agency given the kind of social structures and the kind of gender roles that were in place in 18th century England. However, despite being constrained by law, repressed by convention, these protagonists were empowered in a way the narratives were created about them by these female novelists. They were empowered because they were given a chance to speak in their voices. They were given a chance to resist. They were given a chance to defy. They were given a chance to express their disagreement with the forces and the moralities and the religions and everything that sought to suppress them. So, this was a unique feature and it seems that Samuel Richardson was greatly inspired by this body of work.

Now, before going further, I'll provide a very brief summary of what happens in this novel.

Pamela Andrews, a poor girl of 15, is employed in the home of wealthy and powerful landowner named Mr. B. After the death of Mr. B's mother, he begins to make several advances on Pamela. Instead of giving in to his advances, however, Pamela resists. Eventually, Mr. B makes a proposal of marriage to Pamela, and this is how the novel ends, like a conventional romance, with their union in matrimony. The virtue mentioned in the novel's title, which, to recall, is Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded. The 'virtue' in this title refers to Pamela's refusal to give in to Mr. B's advances.

Now, a quick note about the form:

This is an epistolary novel. By this, I mean that the novel consists entirely of letters. Most of them are by Pamela, but some of them are by other people as well, people who respond to Pamela. It is initiated by Pamela's own writing and therefore the primary narrator is Pamela. From this formal feature, two specific effects emerge. The first is that readers of this novel are always placed in the middle of the action. That is to say, readers lack the perspective of hindsight or foresight. Readers receive information about actions as these actions happen, with minimal or little and almost zero ability to organise that information in a narrative. The narrative or what of it the novel contains emerges from very close first-hand reports of these actions.

The second feature is that because Pamela is the primary reporter of these actions, it is her limited knowledge and the state of distress she finds herself in which creates the narrator. That is, instead of a narrator or an author deciding to create a narrative of events, it is the protagonist whose experiences, whose reactions, whose very stressful state of being is what creates the novel. As you might recall from the previous lecture, these two effects have very directly illustrated how the novel is about an individual's experience of reality. The form of the novel, the epistolary novel, will have a very long afterlife in the English novel and one that will be discussed later in this course as well. Very briefly, the novel *Jane Eyre*, which we will be discussing later in this course, has often been seen by many scholars as an inspiration and a kind of rewriting of Pamela. That is not the case. It is a much more complex and a unique novel in its own right. But we will have occasion to compare Pamela with Jane Eyre later in this course.

The other very important aspect of the English novel that *Pamela* inaugurates is the fact that it is the protagonist's narration which creates the novel. The narrator is involved in the actions she is describing and has very little foresight or hindsight, as an omniscient narrator, has to arrange these observations in a coherent narrative. So, you can see how the influence

of John Locke, the philosopher, can be felt very clearly. According to John Locke, as I mentioned in the previous lecture, Identity and Consciousness are created in two steps. First, the mind receives information through stimuli from the external world. Subsequently, the mind organises these stimuli, retains them and remembers them through the act of memory and thereby creates a sense of its own reality. In a way, this is exactly how the novel Pamela is created. The reality of the novel Pamela is created by the organization of actions and their memory in Pamela's consciousness. I want to explain how all this works by reading from the first letter i.e. the opening pages of the novel.

The novel opens with the letter by Pamela and this letter sets the tone of the novel and also inaugurates the two great themes of the English novel, about which I will have a lot of comments to make subsequently. These two themes are Gender and Class. This is how Pamela begins the novel:

My 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 of 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 had enough to do to maintain yourselves; and, as my lady's goodness has 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, put it into my good lady's heart, on her deathbed, 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! Oh, how my eyes overflow! 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 burden to 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 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 would do for me as I deserved ordered the housekeeper to give me mourning with the rest and gave me with his own hand four guineas and some silver which were in my lady's pocket when she died; And she 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." "I formerly sent you such little matters as arose from my lady's bounty, loth was always to take anything from me: But Providence will not let me want; and I have made, in case of sudden occasions, a little reserve (besides the silver now given me) that I may not be obliged to borrow, and look little in the eyes of my fellow-servants: 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, wrapped clothes in paper, that they may not chink; and be sure don't open it before him.

I know, my 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; but just now, as I was folding up this letter, in my late lady's dressing-room, in comes my young master! Good sirs! how I was 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, 'prav vour honour. forgive me! Only to my father and mother.'" "Well then, let me see what hand you write.' He took it without saying more, and read it quite thoroughly, and then gave it me again and i said pray your honour forgive me! 'Yet i know not for what: For he was not undutiful to his parents; and why should he be angry that i was dutiful to mine! And indeed, he was not angry; for he took me by the hand and said, 'you are a good girl 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 pretty hand, and spell pretty well too. You may look into any of my mother's books to improve yourself so you take care of them'" "To be sure I did nothing but curt'sy and cry, and was all in confusion, at his goodness. Indeed, he was once thought to be wildish; but he is now 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.

I will discuss many of the takeaways from this long letter in the next lecture. But for now, I want to just highlight a few things. The first thing is how much detail Pamela provides of her circumstances, of the material and the social aspects of her existence, how much detail she provides of her precarious employment. That is to say, it begins by describing how her former employer has passed away, and for a moment, she had no prospects. That is to say, she was looking at a very dreadful scenario in which she would be forced to return home and live off her parents. That would be a nightmarish scenario. But fortunately, she has been spared that fate because on her deathbed, her former employer, that is Mrs. B, extracted a promise out of her son, Mr. B, that he would take care of all her servants and Pamela being the property of her employer, just like a slave, was now transferred to a new master, her current employer, Mr. B. This was a very fortunate turn of events because it meant that Pamela could continue living and working and earning and support her parents in whatever small way, she could find it practical and feasible to do.

We hear a lot of these employment related details. The other thing we hear about are how important and how valuable the financial remuneration that she receives is. The detail with which Pamela describes how she received these coins, four coins, four guineas, and the detail with which she has packed these so that the person carrying these coins will not know what they are. and the instructions she provides to her parents to open them up and to unpack them so that the carrier of these gifts will not get a hint of what's in them.

These two things are very important and we will have occasion to return and examine these in greater detail in the subsequent lecture.

Thank You!