Samuel Richardson (1689–1761)

Life and main works
Samuel Richardson was born in Derbyshire in 1689 of a Puritan commercial middle-class family. Ten years later his parents moved to London where he received what he called ‘common school learning’. By the age of 13, he had already shown a gift for story-telling and letter-writing. In 1706 he was apprenticed to a printer and he did so well in the job that, at the age of 32, he was able to set up his own printing shop. When he was 50, he was asked to write a volume of model letters to be used on various occasions by ‘country readers’, who were not educated enough to write by themselves. So Richardson told maid-servants how to negotiate a proposal for marriage, apprentices how to apply for a job, and even sons how to plead their father’s forgiveness. While working on this volume he had the idea of using the epistolary technique to tell a story he had heard about the real case of a serving maid whose virtue had been unsuccessfully attacked by an unscrupulous man. So he started writing *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740–1741), his first ‘epistolary novel’. It was a great success, like the two novels which followed, *Clarissa* (1747–1748) and *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753–1754).

His personal life was far from being so fortunate; he married his former master’s daughter, but she died ten years later, having given birth to six children, none of whom reached adulthood. Richardson’s second wife also gave birth to six children; only four daughters survived their father, who died in 1761.

| READ Richardson’s biography and collect data in the table below. |

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<tr>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Experiences</th>
<th>Masterpiece</th>
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The moralising aim
All his novels are set in a realistic domestic middle-class environment and are the dramatic representation of the ethics preached by “The Spectator”: common sense, good manners and modesty. In fact there is a heavy moralising tendency within Richardson’s novels, which reflect the Puritan middle-class scheme of reward for virtue and punishment for sins.

He avoided episodic plots by basing his novels on a single action, a courtship.

Characterisation
In Richardson’s work there is psychological analysis, missing from most of the previous fiction. The reader is taken inside the minds of the characters and is invited to share their innermost thoughts, feelings and moods. In contrast to Defoe’s novels, there is also a sense of individual development within the story: characters are far from being static and the reader is almost a witness of their gradual development. Richardson’s heroines have much in common with each other: youth and charm, considerable self-will and knowledge, together with Christian piety; they profess and venerate truth, defend virtue and perish when they find they are unequal to the conflicting demands of experience.

The epistolary novel
*Pamela*, *Clarissa* and *Sir Charles Grandison* are written in the form of letters exchanged between the main characters. This new type of literature, telling a fictitious story based on real life, was meant for a new reading public that had not been interested in books before. It was largely a reflection of the fashion for letterwriting of the period and was later to be taken up by other foreign writers, such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) in *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749–1832) in *Die Leiden des Jungen Werthers [The Sorrows of Young Werther]* (1774), and Ugo Foscolo (1778–1827) in *Le ultime lettere di Iacopo Ortis* (1818). The epistolary novel slowly fell out of use in the 19th century, especially when Jane Austen made the technique of the omniscient narrator popular.

Narrative technique
It is quite difficult to find a ‘story-telling’ device able to give a more perfect impression of actuality than the ‘epistolary way’ chosen by Richardson. This form, which uses the first person narrative technique through personal letters and journals, provides different individual points of view on the same event, which is fully explored; moreover it has much in
common with the dramatic technique, since the characters introduce one another, using letters instead of speech, and the action is made up by a series of 'scenes' with no general summaries. Another aspect of this literary form is its immediacy: the reader is implicitly invited to believe that the letters are as they read them as they were in the very act of composition.

_Pamela, or the Virtue Rewarded_ (1740–1741)

The story The title of this novel is significant in itself: not virtue for itself but for what it brings about, 'virtue rewarded'. _Pamela_ is a collection of letters written by a virtuous girl to her parents, who live in the country. Her letters record her various moods and feelings as she resists her late mistress’s son’s attempts at seducing her and gains from him, as a reward, a proposal of marriage which she accepts, becoming rich and obtaining the social position that, according to the puritan bourgeois ideal of the age, was the highest achievement in life.

The plot is very simple and it is probably the first time that a novel is not based on a long chain of events, but it is built around the interrelation between the two main characters, their belonging to different social classes, the difficult balance between sexual instincts and moral code.

In keeping with the plot, the setting varies little and the scenes generally take place indoors: Pamela is generally confined to a house and she goes outdoors only when her conflict with Mr B. comes to an end.

Characters Pamela, who is a ‘round character’, is practical, passionate, humble with all, but she is intolerant of injustice both to herself and to her fellow-servants. Mr B., the son of her mistress, is another ‘round’ character and reflects contemporary male superiority: he tries to seduce Pamela several times, but her resistance arouses his passion and gradually changes his behaviour which becomes more mature and responsible.

The story of Pamela is a modern variant of the old ‘Cinderella theme’. Both stories offer compensations for the monotonous work and limited perspective of ordinary life. By projecting themselves into the position of the heroine, the readers of _Pamela_ could change their impersonal, boring world into a gratifying pattern where each element gave excitement, admiration and love. These are the attractions of romance but here the fairy god-mother and the prince are replaced by morality, and the social importance marriage had in Richardson’s age, since it was the only way open to women to improve their social status.

Style and popularity The form which Richardson adopted for the telling of _Pamela_ is directly indicated on the title-page: it is ‘a series of familiar letters’. The writer places himself in the position of an editor, arranging and publishing, without comment, a series of thirty-two letters followed by a long journal which Pamela herself wrote while cut off from her friends at B-Hall: this journal also includes letters written both by Pamela and other characters.

To us today the novel may seem tedious and unconvincingly moralising. Yet it was immensely popular and it was a remarkable breakthrough, a breach into a rigid and discriminating class system. The novel also comments on the sexual and social inequality in the position of women.

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2 **TAKE** notes about Samuel Richardson’s work under the following headings

1 what kind of novel he created;
2 the aim of his novels;
3 his characters;
4 the narrative technique he employed;
5 the protagonists of _Pamela_ and its setting in place.
**LETTER VII**

**DEAR FATHER,**

Since my last, my master gave me more fine things. He called me up to my late lady’s closet\(^1\), and pulling out her drawers\(^2\), he gave me two suits of fine Flanders laced head-clothes\(^3\); three pair of fine silk shoes, two hardly the worse, and just fit for me (for my lady had a very little foot), and the other with wrought silver buckles\(^4\) in them, and several ribbands\(^5\) and top-knots\(^6\) of all colours; four pair of white cotton stockings, three pair of fine silk ones, and two pair of rich stays\(^7\). I was quite astonished, and unable to speak for a while; but yet I was inwardly ashamed to take the stockings, for Mrs Jervis\(^8\) was not there: if she had, it would have been nothing. I believe I received them very awkwardly\(^9\); for he smiled at my awkwardness, and said, ‘Don’t blush, Pamela; dost\(^10\) think I don’t know pretty maids should wear shoes and stockings?’.

I was so confounded at these words, you might have beat me down with a feather. For you must think there was no answer to be made to this: so, like a fool, I was ready to cry, and went away curtseying\(^11\) and blushing, I am sure, up to the ears; for, though there was no harm in what he said, yet I did not know how to take it. But I went and told all to Mrs Jervis, who said, God put it into his heart to be good to me; and I must double my diligence. It looked to her, she said, as if he would fit me in dress for a waiting-maid’s place on Lady Daver’s own person. But still your kind fatherly cautions came into my head, and made all these gifts nothing near to me what they would have been. But yet, I hope, there is no reason; for what good could it do to him to harm\(^12\) such a simple maiden as me? Besides, to be sure no lady would look upon him, if he should so disgrace himself. So I will make myself easy; and, indeed, I should never have been otherwise, if you had not put it into my head, for my good, I know very well. But may be, without these uneasinesses to mingle with these benefits, I might be too much puffed up\(^13\): so I conclude all that happens is for our good; and God bless you, my dear father and mother: I know you constantly pray for a blessing upon me, who am, and shall always be, your dutiful daughter.

**LETTER VIII**

**DEAR PAMELA,**

I cannot but renew my cautions on your master’s kindness, and his free expressions about the stockings. Yet there may not be, and I hope there is not, any thing in it. But when I reflect, that there possibly may, and that if there should, no less depends upon it than my child’s everlasting happiness in this world and the next, it is enough to make one fearful for you. Arm yourself, my dear child, for the worst, and resolve to lose your life sooner than your virtue. Though the doubts I filled you with lessen\(^14\) the pleasure you would have had in your master’s kindness; yet what signify the delights that arise from a few fine clothes, in comparison with a good conscience?
These are very great favours he heaps upon you, but so much the more to be suspected; and when you say he looked so amiable and like an angel, how afraid I am that they should make too great an impression upon you! For, though you are blessed with sense and prudence above your years, yet I tremble to think what a sad hazard a poor maiden of little more than fifteen years of age stands against the temptations of this world, and a designing gentleman, if he should prove so, who has so much power to oblige, and has a kind of authority to command as your master.

I charge you, my dear child, on both our blessings, poor as we are, to be on your guard; there can be no harm in that. And since Mrs. Jervis is so good a gentlewoman, and so kind to you, I am easier a great deal, and so is your mother; and we hope you will hide nothing from her, and take her counsel in every thing. So, with our blessings and assured prayers for you, more than for ourselves, we remain your loving father and mother.

Be sure you don’t let people’s telling you, you are pretty, puff you up; for you did not make yourself, and so can have no praise due to you for it. It is virtue and goodness only that make the true beauty. Remember that, Pamela.

COMPREHENSION

1. AFTER READING the first letter, answer the following questions.
   1. What did Pamela’s master give her?
   2. How did she react?
   3. What did the young master recommend the girl to do?
   4. How did Pamela feel after listening to her master’s words and what did she decide to do?
   5. What social conflict emerges in this letter?

2. READ Pamela’s father’s reply and find out:
   1. what he suggests Pamela should do;
   2. what he fears.

ANALYSIS

3. EXPLAIN. From whose point of view are the events narrated?

4. WHAT effect/s does the epistolary form create?

5. CONCENTRATE on Pamela.
   1. What aspects of Pamela’s personality are underlined here?
   2. Have you noticed any contradictory aspects in her nature?

6. FOCUS on Pamela’s father.
   1. Which psychological features of his are revealed in his letter?
   2. Underline the sentences that most reveal his attitude to Pamela.

7. WHAT is the theme developed in the first letter? What is taken up in the second? How are these themes developed?

8. CONSIDER the language used in these letters.
   1. Underline some examples of formal and informal language.
   2. State the dominant tone and explain its function.
YOUR TURN

9 **STATE** the reason of the great success *Pamela* had and the moral values embodied by this novel.

10 **DISCUSS.** Do you like writing letters? Do you think that letter-writing is still a good way of communicating personal feelings and thoughts? Why / Why not?