

Session 12/1

Samuel Richardson
Pamela

Richardson (1689-1761)

- born near Derby, but lived as a Londoner
- apprenticed as printer and set up his own business
- his work as a writer:
 - *Pamela* (1740)
 - *Clarissa* (1747/48)
 - *Sir Charles Grandison* (1754)
- all his novels are epistolary novels = written in form of a series of letters

The novel *Pamela*

- Richardson declared *Pamela* “a new species of writing” (Roulston 1)
- epistolary novels became very popular in the 18th century
- *Pamela* is about the struggle of the sexes and the “class conflict between the rising middle and the ruling upper classes” (Chung 21)
- > virtue as the moral theme

Critics on *Pamela*

- As a woman, Pamela is ambiguous:
“Is Pamela’s secreting of her letter in her bosom an authentic act of feminine modesty, or is it an act of seduction?” (Roulston xi)
- > parodies: *Shamela* by Fielding
- Ian Watt called Pamela “a striptease in form of a sermon“ > it’s full of overstated moral and curiosity in sexual matters (“prurient inquisitiveness”) (Wagner 62)

Pamela (plot)

- Pamela Andrews is 15 years old.
- servant maid
- Her Lady died and she is left with her Lady's son and her new Master, Mr. B.
- Mr. B tries to seduce pretty Pamela and even wants to rape her,
- but Pamela rejects him continually and can keep her virtue, her innocence.
- Pamela is in love with Mr. B in spite of his disorderly behaviour.

The act of writing

- “the importance of the act of writing is foregrounded from the opening letter” (Roulston 20)
- Mr. B is ambiguous regarding Pamela’s writing:
he blames Pamela for her writing:
“my master [told me] that I minded my pen more than my needle” (Richardson 48)

Society in the 18th century

- Age of Reason and Revolution
 - “growing influence of the middle class and the decline of aristocratic power” (Wagner 41/42)
- Gender roles:
 - Partly depending on class background: upper-class women had more rights and more education than those from the middle and lower classes;
 - but even upper-class women had less legal rights than men (see marital laws, divorce laws etc.).
 - men: power over women, have all rights, make all decisions
 - women: not equal to men, no right to vote, not well educated, no own opinions allowed, responsible for the household, children

class ideologies

- lower middle class (Pamela):
 - responsibility in marriage, religion, moral
- aristocratic class (Mr. B):
 - libertine lifestyle
 - no marriage with lower classes
 - no responsibility and morals

class system (“Marxism”)

- landowners vs. servants, working class
 - money (and aristocratic titles) means power and defines your status
 - Mr. B can be seen as an employer with total power over Pamela, who depends on him entirely.
- Mr. B offers her money and offers to “buy” her.

clothes as a symbol

- “The eighteenth-century fear that clothes were ceasing to function as a reliable guide to status, and especially to status and virtue in women, is here confronted through a reversal” (Gwilliam 33)
- Mr. B gives his mother’s clothes to Pamela
- > but Pamela rejects them / gives them away

Pamela as a “terrorist” (fighting for a new social order)

- She constantly rejects Mr. B and fights for her innocence.
- Giving away the clothes as a symbol of a better status can be seen as rebellion.
- “she ‘converts’ the entire household (in which she is a servant) into a substitute protective family; she ‘dictates’ from the Bible; she ‘domesticates’ Mr. B’s libertine lifestyle” (Chung 32)

Pamela's success

- “that chastity defines the female self in its social and moral relation to the world, and that its preservation constitutes the affirmation of an inviolate personal identity” (Rivero 39)
- Pamela fights for her virtue and her identity.
- she is “a fantasy that re-enacts the classic battle of the sexes, won by the woman because she stands for what is right and good” (Rivero 39).

Bibliography

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