



## On Pamela's Consciousness of Equality

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### Abstract

*Pamela* is a well-known epistolary novel in the 18th century of England. It is written in the form of a series of letters, and has had a great influence to English novels and even the entire development of European literature. As the heroine, Pamela has strong equal consciousness and the spirit of revolting, and she takes her language as the tool to revolt. This thesis mainly analyzes Pamela's equal consciousness, including her idea of master and servant, her self-consciousness and her language and letters which conquer her master Mr. B, Richardson's view on Pamela's consciousness of equality. All this manifests Pamela's pursuit of equality. The whole thesis shows people a female image who is brave to pursue equality.

**Keywords:** Consciousness of equality, Pamela

### 1. Introduction

*Pamela* is well known as the first English modern novel with true significance and also a best seller of that time, written by Samuel Richardson who is the great master of the English epistolary novels. He enlarges the knowledge of human nature. His main achievement as a novelist lies in his technique to show characters as himself absent from the stage, refusing to intervene in the action. His influence could be traced in the works of such later novelists as Henry James, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. This novel tells a story about a beautiful female servant who treasures her fame and chastity, and does not yield to her master's intimidation. She does not consider herself as a servant, and she has strong equal consciousness. She longs for equality with her master Mr. B in social position and the relationship of sex. At last, she influences the dissolute son and marries him to become a rich wife. It is like a "Cinderella" story, but it emphasizes the woman's equal consciousness, which is a kind of positive and progressive consciousness in those days. In Pamela's time, her social status may be compared with a black maid of American south in the early 20th century. She is often considered as "another kind of people". In English society of that time, women in the middle and upper classes are men's prey, either for amusement or wealth, their chastity is very important before wedding to get a good marriage. But the male aristocrats or rich men have no moral restraint. They comply with "not only the dual moral criterion but also the double moral criterion". That is to say, it is unequal not only in sex but also in class. The women in lower class are the best objects to amuse. They can be trampled at will, and their chastity can destroy their reputation, but that would not bring shame to men. This is the world of that time. So as a rebel, Pamela's equal consciousness is the most charming aspect.

*Pamela* is a new thing in three ways: First, it discards the improbable and marvelous accomplishments of the former heroic romances, and pictures the life and love of ordinary people. Secondly, its intention is to afford not only entertainment but also moral instruction. Thirdly, it describes not only the sayings and doings of the characters but also their secret thoughts and feelings. It is, in fact, the first English psycho-analytical novel. This thesis will testify it through her idea of master and servant and her self-consciousness, her consciousness of equality manifested in her language and letters, and Richardson's view on Pamela's consciousness of equality.

### 2. Pamela's idea of master and servant and her self-consciousness

#### 2.1 Pamela's idea of master and servant

One of Pamela's charming lies in her idea of master and servant. In this novel, Pamela's revolting and the stewardess' obedience forms an obvious contrast. The stewardess says, "I am proud of my loyalty to my master." (Samuel Richardson 144) She believes that the servant should obey the master without any condition, and she need not think what morality is. "He is my master, if he orders me to do something; I think I should do as long as I can. Let the person

ordering me think if it is legal.”(Samuel Richardson 93) But in Pamela's opinion, everyone should take his responsibility for God firstly, that is also for conscience. This responsibility is more important than that for the master. If the master's order violates the moral conscience, she should not obey it. She never always does what her master tells her, because she knows clearly the contractual relationship with her master. She thinks she is not Mr. B servant any longer after she is taken off from the country. So she inquires the stewardess, “How can I become his wealth? What right does he have for me but for a thief's right for his stolen things?” (Samuel Richardson 108) This idea startles the stewardess. “Why? Who heard such words? This is rebellion, I tell you.”(Samuel Richardson 56) But Pamela still says to Mr. B, “If you were not rich and had no status, and I were not poor and modest, you would not insult me like this.” (Samuel Richardson 103) A hundred years after *Pamela* was published, Jane Eyre says to Rochester more clearly, “Do you think I have no sound or mind, only because I am poor and have no status and beautiful face? You are wrong! I have the same sound and mind with you.”(Charlotte Bronte 255) As a tutor, Jane Eyre's status is higher than Pamela, and she is more independent. But their thoughts show that they have the same self-esteem and pride. They both require defending their rights and dignity as a woman. However, Pamela requests more. She wants the upper-class people to respect her personality.

### 2.2 Pamela's self-consciousness

Although she is a servant, Pamela has a very strong self-consciousness. The two stewardesses tell her there is nobody like her any more, and the country gentlemen all consider her condition to be too ordinary, but to Pamela, the women's chastity is not only a simply physiological fact, but also a woman's right, which is the most basic right and symbolizes her dignity as a human being. She always longs for others' respect, and she once gets angry with young ladies who play a joke on her. In Mr.B's home, other servants treat her as if she is born to be a virtuous girl. Pamela is proud of this. Pamela always reports others' commendation to her in detail. For example, the old steward says he is willing to become a young man again for her, and she compares her doing housework to the bishop's execution. No wonder Mr. B discovers “vanity, conceit and pride”(Samuel Richardson 17-18) on Pamela. Mr. B has found on Pamela “such individuality you can't expect”. (Samuel Richardson 60) She is clear about her own willing. When she speaks, she always uses such words as “will” and “want to”. The writer sometimes emphasizes them with italic letters to highlight her tone. For example,

- 1). “I don't want to stay, Mr. B” “You don't want? Do you know who you are talking to?”(Samuel Richardson 12)
- 2). “I will tell you, even you are a king, and I will not obey your insulting words.” (Samuel Richardson 56)
- 3). “I am not willing to take a walk with you, Mr. B, never again.” “Do you know who you are talking to and where you are?” (Samuel Richardson 184)

Pamela is never obedient like others. On the contrary, she has her own views. Mr. B has told her not to tell others the happenings in the garden. But she tells it all to the stewardess and her parents in letters. In the opposite, if she does not want to do something, she can also find many excuses. For instance, she can't go back home. Because she is very hesitate--whether she should take off so many things given by Mr. B and how she should take away. Moreover, the dress is so exquisite that she may come across some troubles on the way home. And perhaps someone would say her master drives her out for her steal. In addition, she hasn't embroidered Mr. B's coat. In a word, she can't go. If we remind of Sophia, a heroine in *Tom Johns*, a real rich young lady, she leaves her father so firmly.

Pamela's most obvious characteristic is the difference between other servants: She is not like a female servant but surpasses a female servant. Many people think Pamela's behavior is like Zi Juan, who mistakes herself for Sister Lin, who are both the characters in the famous novel *The Red Chamber*. The stewardess also outlines Pamela's image in a few words. “You are a thorough beauty, eating nothing, taking no rest, but groaning with no reason.”(Samuel Richardson 8) Pamela does not do the heavy work, even washing dishes. She is much fairer than common female servants. When she hears Mr. B's tease, she is always very shy, murmuring, “You will overthrow me with a single feather.”(Samuel Richardson 6) The look of male servants also makes her feel ill at ease, she says, “I can not stand such expression in their eyes”. (Samuel Richardson 34) Usually she does not communicate with the common servants. From this, we can see that Pamela is like a noble girl but born in a poor family, and she is not like a servant. Although in some way, Pamela displays to be a little delicate, her delicacy mirrors her revolting difficulty, her suffering's cruelty and her will's toughness.

### 3. Pamela's consciousness of equality manifested in her language and letters

Pamela's language and her letters constitute the main body of this novel. Pamela knows she cannot match with Mr. B in the motion, but she always can gain the victory in the language. Usually she makes Mr. B dumb in their dispute. This is her proud result. She thinks she can make fool of such a person like Mr. B who has not expected and know how to deal with such things. That is her proud scold to him; she is very proud of her will and courage. Mr. B becomes a character in her writing and is controlled by Pamela in her description. It subverts sex role and social role in traditional meaning. Pamela grasps the narrative initiative. For instance, when she describes their conversation between them, Pamela uses “I

say” and “he says” such words as the marks of her initiative. Sometimes she adds some psychological descriptions, as if she adds “the editor’ notes” to Mr. B’s words. For instance,

I say, “You can call this a joke or a game, or anything you like. But sir, such a joke does not suit master-and-servant status.” “Did you hear it, Mrs. Gaverse?” Mr. B says.

He also says, “As far as I know, she writes to her parents and others, and she describes herself as a bright angel in letters but her master as a devil’s incarnation. (I think, sometimes people give themselves just right names.) (Samuel Richardson 67-68)

Since the struggle between Pamela and Mr. B is a language struggle, Mr. B attempts to frustrate Pamela by controlling her language. At the beginning of the novel, when Pamela writes the first letter to her parents, she is interrupted by Mr. B. He warns her to be careful when she tells his family’s situation to others. But as soon as she writes, she gains power and courage. She is not a servant ordered by others, but a creator and a referee, who judge the people’s words and deeds around her all by her own moral standard. In her writing, her master has lost his privilege to give orders, and becomes a common person or a common person with a certain status. His modesty does not depend on his wealth and status, but on if his words and deeds makes him like a monarch. Mr. B’s words are always empty and hypocritical. He ever tells Pamela twice to believe his fame and his sincere attempt to her, as if his status is his fame’s guarantee. But in fact he does not take his oral words as a matter. When the stewardess reminds him to pay attention to his fame, Mr. B interrupts her to say, “Don’t say these chinchies again.” (Samuel Richardson 98) Pamela makes an obvious contrast with him. Just like the final conclusion, the author writes in the end, “Pamela always tells truth in any hard situation, even if her answer will do harm to her.” (Samuel Richardson 462) She knows clearly that she is well matched with Mr. B in language and intelligence, and she has to stand his force, just because of their status. Mr. B’s oppression to her is same as the master to the servant, the rich to the poor and men to women.

In reality, Pamela is in the inferiority, but in letters, her powerful sound subverts the opposite’s superiority. Although Mr. B is angry with Pamela, by the can not change her. Pamela has grasped the initiative to express, and Mr. B displays fear in fact, because he has lost the ability to control the situation. He often lets the cart drive intercept Pamela’s letters, which is the only thing he can do. Because he cannot stop Pamela from writing and control her letters. Each time he checks or confiscates Pamela’s letters, he is always like a conqueror who conquers a place and clear its history and memory away. But his ability is always passive and limited. For example, he writes to Pamela’s parents to tell them their daughter is intimate with someone secretly, so it is good for her to deliver her elsewhere. However, in fact, he abducts Pamela. But before this, Pamela has written twenty-nine letters to her parents to describe Mr. B. So Pamela’s parents do not believe Mr. B. His language makes no effect.

In Richardson’s novel, it is a violent behavior to limit people’s freedom of opportunity to write. In fact, its aim is to attempt to suppress her sound and mind. It is Pamela’s first misery not to write letters freely. She is forbidden to write letters, so she can only write diaries secretly. Mr. B makes her language lost power. There are many commons with Robinson in writing diaries on the deserted island. This forms Pamela’s another misery—nobody can see or understand her letters. That is to say, there is no person to communicate. This also symbolizes Pamela’s spiritual level. Her moral view has reached a lonely level, which others can reach. So there are only her letters and diaries left. Moreover, the only person who would read her letters is Mr. B. Because except for his cynicism for women, he is almost a good landlord, a good master, a generous friend and a magnanimous brother. And he has felt her language’s power after reading her diaries, as he has pointed out for many times, “What captures his heart is her letters and diaries.” (Samuel Richardson 109) At first, he only falls in love her beauty, but when he has read her notes of books, he discovers her smooth thoughts and language, and he begins to admire her. He thinks “she is not only a beautiful puppet, but also a person to be his love”. (Samuel Richardson 110) The world of language is different from the world of common customs. In this world, wealth and status are insignificant, and the only power is language. “As long as Pamela can think and write, Mr. B is not her master. And he is just absorbed by her language power that he has not found in reality.” (Margaret A Doody 15)

In this novel, Pamela puts an unprecedented new end to the old-versioned story by her language power. Mr. B deepens his understanding to her by Pamela’s language. Only this rich sir begins to praise Pamela honestly, he presented himself as a handsome, magnanimous, fair and modest gentleman. His behavior of marrying Pamela indicates his agreement with Pamela’s intelligence and sentiment, and this is also the victory of Pamela’s language. At last, Pamela gets all things that everyone wants: love, wealth, status, society’s admittance and repentance. This is only a bright tail added to the gloomy reality artificially, but the optimism and idealism filled in this novel still give people hope. It tells us that novels record not only the heroes’ graceful behavior. One person who does something difficult in his hard situation is also great. Pamela’s behavior is filled with heroism. Her status is low but she is reluctant to live insipidly. In order to preserve her personality’s independency and dignity, Pamela is reluctant to get material profit easily. In that society which is full of money and interest, it is a worshipful moral choice.

#### 4. Pamela's consciousness of equality from Richardson's point of view

Richardson pays attention to the problem of women's status. In 18<sup>th</sup> century, women are humble. If they have no rich and generous marriage, they hardly have a good marriage, and they are also excluded from men's career and entertainment. So, as a girl from a poor family, Pamela cannot have equality with Mr. B at all. In this novel, Richardson searches for equal and honest marriage. Pamela has no right in born, but Richardson gives her the ability to write, by which Pamela expresses her pursuit to equality. This novel is a story about a female servant, and it is also an ideal world in which Richardson expresses his own thoughts. Because he is sensitive to the inferiority of his own class and the snobbish attitude of the aristocrats. This makes Richardson engender confirmation and agreement to delicate and helpless Pamela, and shout out his own inner thoughts through her mouth: "All the people who work honestly are not humble." (Richardson P82) "Although my status is as low as a slave, my soul is as important as the princess." (Richardson P188) "How the wealth look down upon the poor! But we are equal completely in the early time." (Richardson P304) So Pamela is Richardson's self-mold and expression, and she is also his shouting from his heart, shouting equality and the social confirmation and agreement to personal capability.

Meanwhile, it is also subversion to the traditional literature. It means that not only prince or princess can be the main role in literal works, and the servant only play the comic foil. As one literal style, novels always portray some common persons in deed, but they are always the objects to be satirized and teased. Only Pamela is really a common person with significance. The uniqueness of *Pamela* lies in that it respects "I" as a common person, expresses the bourgeois's equal and free view, and praises the weak and poor people's revolting to the strong power. It believes that kindness can defeat devil. This positive and progressive mind is just the foundation of its thoughts.

#### 5. Conclusion

In a word, Pamela is a brave woman to pursue equality with men in her time when women have no social position. Although she is a servant, she is never obedient, and she has a high and strong moral standard, especially in chastity. She makes herself to be a model for women to study. In her time, this equal consciousness has been positive and progressive, so is today. To a large extent, this kind of pursuit to equality connects material reward with morality tightly, and manifests religious thought of common customs. But this arouses readers' respect, yearning and pursuit to virtue. Maybe it is a reason why the novel is welcome popularly, especially among women. It is equal consciousness in this novel expresses most women's inner thoughts, arouses them to pursue quality, including in sex and class. It produces a profound influence; even today it is worth studying for modern women.

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