**UNIT III - PAMELA**

**Brief Biography of Samuel Richardson**

Samuel Richardson was most likely born in 1689 in Mackworth, Derbyshire, England. Richardson kept some aspects of his life, including his birth, private, possibly to disguise the fact that he grew up in poverty. One of nine children, Richardson became the apprentice to a printer, in part because his father couldn’t afford to pay for Richardson’s education as a clergyman. Richardson showed a talent for telling stories at an early age and he sometimes helped others write letters, including helping girls he knew write responses to love letters. Despite this, however, Richardson didn’t publish his first novel, *Pamela; or Virtue Rewarded*, until he was 51 years old, after many years of running a successful print shop in London. The novel sold very well and was also a critical success—today, it’s considered one of the first modern novels in English, if not the first. *Pamela* spawned several parodies and sequels from other authors, but Richardson’s own sequel (*Pamela in her Exalted Condition*) was much less successful than the original. A few years later, however, Richardson wrote *Clarissa; or, the History of a Young Lady*, which revisited and expanded on many of the ideas of *Pamela*, earning even greater praise. He died of a stroke at age 71.

**Historical Context of *Pamela***

Richardson wrote *Pamela* during the Enlightenment, a period lasting from around the late 17th century to about the end of the 18th century characterized by new developments in science, philosophy, and culture. The central idea of *Pamela*—that an impoverished servant girl could prove herself worthy of living among the gentry—bears some similarity to the Enlightenment political concept of egalitarianism, the idea that all humans are of equal value and so should be equal under the law. On the other hand, the Christian morality of *Pamela* conflicted with the increasingly secular beliefs of many (although not all) Enlightenment thinkers, including Denis Diderot (*Encyclopédie*) and Voltaire.When Richardson wrote Pamela in 1739, the concept of the United Kingdom (then consisting of just England and Scotland, not Ireland) was relatively new, having only formed in 1707. This also means that *Pamela* takes place during the relatively early days of British Empire, meaning that despite the book’s relatively isolated setting, the wealthy characters would have been connected to the rest of the world through Britain’s extensive network of global trade routes. One of Britain’s many colonies at the time, Jamaica, appears briefly in a subplot involving the character Sally Godfrey, illustrating the global reach of the new empire.

**SUMMARY**

Fifteen-year-old [**Pamela**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pamela/characters/pamela) Andrews is a virtuous but poor maid working for the wealthy [**Lady B**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pamela/characters/lady-b) at her Bedfordshire home. On her deathbed, Lady B recommends that Pamela should work for her son, [**Mr. B**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pamela/characters/mr-b). Pamela excels in her new role, and so Mr. B gives her four guineas and some silver from his mother’s pocket. Pamela sends the four guineas home to her [**father**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pamela/characters/father) and [**mother**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pamela/characters/mother) to help with their many debts, describing her new situation in a letter, and she continues to write letters to her parents throughout the novel.

At first Pamela is overjoyed to accept her new position with Mr. B. She takes a liking to the other servants in the house, particularly [**Mrs. Jervis**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pamela/characters/mrs-jervis), who watches over Pamela and gives her advice. But as Pamela spends more and more time at the house, Mr. B makes increasingly aggressive advances toward Pamela. He kisses her many times without her permission, and at one point, he hides in the closet of her room to spy on her. And although Mr. B keeps promising Pamela a new role working for his sister [**Lady Davers**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pamela/characters/lady-davers) at her estate, Pamela’s departure date never seems to come.

Eventually, Pamela decides she must go back to see her parents to get away from the aggressive Mr. B and preserve her “virtue” (virginity). Mr. B claims to want to marry Pamela off to his chaplain, [**Mr. Williams**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pamela/characters/mr-williams), and so he finally allows Pamela to take a coach back to her parents so she can ask for their permission to marry Mr. Williams. But what Pamela doesn’t know is that [**John**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pamela/characters/john), the man who carries her letters to her parents, has been following Mr. B’s orders, secretly showing him some of Pamela’s letters and leaving a few of them undelivered. Also, Mr. B has no intention of sending Pamela home. When Pamela gets in the coach to go home, it takes her instead to Mr. B’s Lincolnshire estate in the country, trapping her there as Mr. B’s prisoner.

At Lincolnshire, Pamela must endure the cruel [**Mrs. Jewkes**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pamela/characters/mrs-jewkes), who always watches Pamela, even forcing her to sleep in the same bed and locking the door at night. Pamela wants to escape and see her parents, but she can’t even send letters to them, so she begins keeping a journal instead.

While at Lincolnshire, Pamela meets the chaplain Mr. Williams, who, despite depending on Mr. B to make a living, is nevertheless willing to do what he can to help Pamela escape. They exchange letters in secret using a hiding place in the garden that Mrs. Jewkes doesn’t know about.

Eventually, Mr. B gets jealous about Mr. Williams’s close relationship with Pamela, so he arranges to have Mr. Williams robbed on the road and later jailed. With the cooperation of Mrs. Jewkes, Mr. B secretly comes back to his Lincolnshire house and impersonates a maid named [**Nan**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pamela/characters/nan) who normally sleeps in bed with Pamela. He then assaults Pamela one night, causing her to faint.

Mr. B leaves later that night, but he continues to spy on Pamela. At one point he discovers some of Pamela’s writing and then demands to see all of it. To Pamela’s surprise, Mr. B doesn’t seem too angry about the journal pages, many of which are very critical of him—in fact, they may even move him. Eventually, he relents and allows Pamela to leave his Lincolnshire estate to go back to see her parents.

Pamela takes a coach that begins taking her back to her parents. Along the way, she receives a letter from a seemingly repentant Mr. B who says that he’s feeling physically sick with love for her. Surprisingly, Pamela realizes that she doesn’t hate Mr. B and might even find him handsome, so she goes back to see him.

When Pamela gets back, she finds that Mr. B is much kinder to her and even seems earnest about marrying her. Still, Pamela fears that Mr. B might only be trying to trick her into a sham-marriage. Mr. B does several things to try to prove himself to Pamela, including bailing Mr. Williams out of prison and hosting Pamela’s father at the estate. Eventually, the two of them agree to marry, with Pamela suggesting that Mr. B clean out his family’s cluttered [**chapel**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pamela/symbols/chapel) so that they can use it for the wedding.

Pamela and Mr. B have a small wedding that they keep secret for a while. Mr. B treats Pamela better than he did before, but some of the other local gentry, particularly Lady Davers, have a hard time accepting that Mr. B has truly married the lower-class Pamela. Despite some initial reluctance, however, Pamela eventually uses her virtue and beauty to win over the gentry—even Lady Davers—and become a respected member of society.

After marrying Mr. B, Pamela obtains a lot of money and uses most of it for charity, paying back the servants who helped her, giving some to the local poor, and arranging for her parents to get an annual income. Her happy marriage faces a challenge when she learns that Mr. B previously had a child ([**Miss Goodwin**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pamela/characters/miss-goodwin)) with a woman named [**Sally Godfrey**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pamela/characters/sally-godfrey), but Pamela accepts this new development and even proposes adopting the child as their own (since Sally now lives a new married life in Jamaica). In an epilogue, [**the Editor**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pamela/characters/the-editor) summarizes some of the moral lessons of the book and says that Pamela is a role model for all to follow.