

‘The happy effect of my writing’: Richardson’s Plotting and Epistolary theory

Daniel ESSIG GARCÍA

Universidad Autónoma de Madrid
daniel.essig@uam.es

Recibido: 10/05/2011
Aceptado: 04/06/2012

ABSTRACT

The article explores an alternative genealogy for Richardson’s novel of sensibility, and looks at the practice of reading in sentimental novels. Richardson cannot be properly understood if one does not take into account the political culture of his time, including misrepresentation and manipulation of the public. The centre of the article is a discussion of the volte-face scene in *Pamela* (published in 1740), managed masterfully by Samuel Richardson as plotter. In that scene, the two protagonist bodies are brought to accord and harmony by a reciprocal activity of reading: the interaction of those bodies, in the theatre of reading, leads to an effusion of sentiment and sensibility, which is the decisive factor in moralizing the masculine character, redeemed from rake to model husband, and become the mouthpiece of a new ethos for the 18th century British gentry.

Keywords: Samuel Richardson, novel, sensibility, reading, sexual harassment in literature, tears in literature.

“Efecto afortunado de mi escritura”: construcción argumental y teoría epistolar en Richardson

RESUMEN

En el artículo se delinea una genealogía alternativa para la novela de la sensibilidad tal como la practicó Samuel Richardson, y se examina la práctica de la lectura en las novelas sentimentales. No puede entenderse correctamente a Richardson si no se tiene en cuenta la cultura política de su época, incluidas la tergiversación y la manipulación en la esfera pública. El centro del artículo es un comentario de la escena que supone el punto de inflexión en la acción de *Pamela* (publicada en 1740), en la que se pone de manifiesto la extraordinaria habilidad con que Richardson construye líneas argumentales. En dicha escena, los dos cuerpos de los protagonistas alcanzan el acuerdo y la armonía por su actividad conjunta como lectores: la interacción de esos cuerpos, en el teatro de la lectura, desemboca en una efusión de sentimiento y sensibilidad: ésta representa el factor decisiva para la moralización del personaje masculino, que queda redimido al convertirse de libertino en esposo ejemplar, y convertido en portavoz de un *ethos* nuevo para la nobleza media en la Gran Bretaña del dieciocho.

Palabras clave: Samuel Richardson, novela, sensibilidad, lectura, acoso sexual en la literatura, lágrimas en la literatura.

SUMMARY: 1. Introduction. 2. The pond scenes in *Pamela*. 3. Proper theatre. 4. Improper theatre: effect at a distance. 5. Tears and the good passions. 6. Conclusion.

1. INTRODUCTION

There is no shortage of ponds, or pools, in the store of Classical imagery and thematic inherited and reinterpreted by Protestant culture: from the pool of Narcissus to Bunyan's "slough of despond", but also Eve's "lake" in Book IV of *Paradise Lost*—and Satan's in Book I—or the "pond or pool", of Milton's Book IX, where humans might be "swallow'd up and lost". Ponds are variously associated with death, and rebirth, with forgetfulness or oblivion. Here I will be concerned with a pond in Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*. Looking at the use of the pond in Richardson's plot will suggest a way of getting on to answering an important question in literary history: how is the transition from Protestant allegory and melodrama to the culture of tears and sensibility managed? With Richardson we move from the likes of Joseph Hall and Jeremy Taylor¹ to Denis Diderot as lachrymose reader of novels: by what routes?

This article will pay attention to changes in reading practices as they are presented in *Pamela*, and their consequences in the early history of the English novel: reading is often seen as an activity of individuals, practiced in privacy, and contributing to the definition of the self; things, though, are more complicated; I will argue that "scenes of reading" ought to be conceived and described to account for the new reading of novels, and the sometimes odd behaviour of (historical) readers of sentimental novels. The second section of the article will briefly present some details about the plot of *Pamela*; and define and circumscribe the "pond scenes". In the third section I will attempt a close reading of an interview between the protagonists of *Pamela*; we are concerned there with direct, "face-to-face" interrelation. With the fourth section, the centre of the article, we come up directly with the question of reading, in a scene where one of the characters is described offering the other a text to read. Finally, some conclusions will be drawn about the connections between reading and the politics of the central decades of the 18th century, in the case of the novelist Samuel Richardson.

Early Modern reading is all about privacy, or at any rate supposed to be so: it is Michel de Montaigne and his *cabinet de lecture* interpreted by Philippe Ariès and Roger Chartier² (the latter, though, considerably refined his position³). This theme—or *narrative*—is an easy target for historians wary of "Whig interpretations": it is certainly true that reading aloud, that typically gregarious activity, lasted much longer than it "ought to" have lasted, and not only among the less educated and semi-

¹ Keymer 2005.

² On reading and privacy, see Chartier 1989.

³ See for example, Chartier 1999. More generally, Chartier 1992.

illiterate groups. More suggestively, “passionate” or “prophetic” reading in the mid-17th century was certainly not solitary—although it was of course introspective —; likewise its antithetical continuation, both social and socially conflictive, the reading of irony and satire in the first three decades of the 18th century.

It has often been pointed out that new forms of entertainment appeared in the last decades of the 17th century in Europe: foremost among them was the reading of novels⁴. Those new forms, which did not altogether supersede more traditional forms of entertainment and leisure, were private, individual, silent, “abstract” (in other words, interior and imaginary; physically interior and introspective). This “new leisure” created considerable anxiety: that reading may imperil spiritual integrity and even, occasionally, the social and political order. That anxiety was strongly gendered, and the imaginary figure of the female reader is central in countless works about morals, and in didactic art (including portraiture). Such attitudes to the female reader were ambiguous: stemming from some readings of Castiglione's *The Courtier*, fascination for the spiritual and moral potential inherent in the reading of women often coalesces with such anxiety; those, after all, were the decades, notably in the years of Anne's reign in England, of the waning of the old, Medieval-Renaissance, misogyny, and its replacement by the modern system of gender⁵.

“Did not altogether supersede them”: reading rather led to a re-evaluation of those earlier forms of gregarious and cross-sectional entertainment. The changed course of the theatre is a case in point: the novel and the theatre ought to be taken, more helpfully, as accomplices rather than rivals, and there is a constant dialogue between them, in their practice and in their theory (when, for instance, devices typical in comedy plotting crop up on the fertile ground of the novel in letters; or, as will be suggested in this essay, when scenes in novels are constructed according to a theatrical model). “High” intellectual life, of course, is rarely isolated from leisure entertainment, and often impregnated by it. The prestige of the stage after 1660 installed the paradigm of the theatre and acting at the centre of 18th century culture, from Addison and Mandeville to Adam Smith, Rousseau and the histrionics of French Jacobinism. The dialectics of actor and spectator became vital in morals, psychology, aesthetics, and even economic theory: what are the effects of actors and acting on spectators? how do actors achieve effects?

The generic history of narrative fiction was closely influenced by the theatre and theatricality. Michael McKeon, in 1989, remarked in an endnote to *Origins of the English Novel* that theatre in narrative is the epistolary novel⁶. I will later address the

⁴ The most thorough approach to the issue from that angle is Warner 1998.

⁵ See Thomas Laqueur's thought-provoking study of 1990. Also, Anthony Fletcher 1995.

⁶ McKeon 1989: “The formal similarities between letters and printed dialogues, as well as Samuel Richardson's ruminations on his own narrative method [...] have stimulated the related view that drama is the chief source for the eighteenth-century epistolary novel. McKeon 1989: 456, n. 82). See also *ibid.*, p. 414.

often remarked sophistication of epistolary writing in its connections with theatricality, which makes it receptive to the complications of comedy plotting (even from Ovid epistolary narrative has systematically resorted to *quid pro quo*, misunderstanding, cross-dressing and disguise). From the standpoint of literary history, after 1700, Restoration comedy, duly purged of its "immorality", had become a prime influence on genres which also showed receptivity to French models. The mid-18th century sentimental novel did not appear out of the blue; fiction published between 1710 and 1740, often by women (William Warner's "novel of amorous intrigue"⁷), belongs firmly to the genealogy of the Richardsonian novel in letters.

Before going on to focus more narrowly on the theatricality of reading, one question must be tackled: why are scene and writing, reader and writer as actors, such a favourite concern of, precisely, novels in letters? Epistolary narrative—or the theory of telepathy in literature—, appeared long before the 18th century, and two features have always been central to it: the presentation of unintended effects of language, and the management of distance and its paradoxes (the complex relation of distance and presence; "the greater the distance, the more intimacy", which tends to cause the fusion of writer and reader). Epistolary theory in literature—as opposed to communication by correspondence in "normal" social life—is interested in deviation, in "irregular" effect: not just the study of the perlocutionary dimension of epistolary discourse (the effect of letters), but more specifically the exploitation of accident, of contexts which are unforeseen, not inherent in everyday exchanges of correspondence. This often involves, for example, parasitical positions of both written object and reader: the substitution of addressees; dual or multiple intentionality; "purloined" letters, discovered letters, the interception of correspondence; multiplicity of readers, including the situation where the original writer of the letters reads them again, maybe differently. Those two elements are often brought together: when diverted letters throw doubt on the sincerity of the lovers, and thus threaten to distance them even further.

Reading seen from the perspective of the theatre is pictured and experienced as a scene. After the breathtaking changes in culture in the period 1660 to 1710, theatre came to impinge on everyday behaviour—reading practices, for instance—because of the importance of representation and identification: further incendiary implications of the experience of distance. Distance belongs to the essence of theatricality: as in the paradox taken from Lucretius, and often noted in 18th century theories of theatre, that watching a shipwreck from the safety of the shore elicits pleasurable sensations, including compassion to the people involved in the shipwreck. Just as theatricality plays on the intense but partial identification of spectator with actor, the literature of love, and very specifically love novels in letters, deals with the collapse—not achieved—of distance between reader and writer. The reader *tends to* identify with the

⁷ Warner 1998: 47-8, 93-4, *et passim*.

writer, but because writing, and the letter, are material (*distance* is material), and “penetration” (two bodies sharing the same space) is impossible, reader and writer are endlessly frustrated. Those two human agents, writer and reader, are become actor and spectator: the intimacy of reading is become truly a scene (like the representation of intimate reading, often of women, in 18th century portraiture⁸). Through the illusion of the collapse of the positions of reader and writer, epistolary theory and practice presents intimacy as both theme (*i. e.* aspiration) and illusion; it underlines writing—and reading—as theatrical or scenical (intimacy observed). Reading, thus, supposed to be an act of intimacy, however paradoxical, by metonymy becomes privacy and intimacy observed. Substituting proximity and its paradoxes for metaphysical presence puts *distance*, its logistics and management, at the centre of the “space of literature” in the novel in letters of the 18th century; it is not simply “effect of letters”, but effect at a controlled distance.

The middle decades of the 18th century also witnessed the coalescence of changes in acting theory and new medical models, notably in the field of neurology. Popular theories of sympathy, and the origin of sensibility, had also a medical dimension: George S. Rousseau, in a very influential article published more than thirty years ago, pointed out that literature and medical theory shared common ground within the zeitgeist of nerve theory well before the 1750s⁹. Beyond that, reflections and practices of novelists filtered into the writing of physicians and practitioners of medicine: the interchange between Richardson and his doctor, George Cheyne (the author of a famous treatise on melancholy), may well have functioned both ways¹⁰. Acting theory, aesthetics and models of physiology thus converge. Nerve theory went back to Isaac Newton, John Locke, and Thomas Willis, before the close of the 17th century: a shift from systems of passions and mechanics to themes like energy, acoustic theory and vibration: themes that were germane to the budding literary and aesthetic theories of sensibility¹¹. This denotes a quality which varies according to individuals, but that can be developed, as part of education (hence its moral nature); it depends on distance and complicates it. In summary, the novel in letters, telepathy itself, literally, and notably

⁸ See Fried 1980.

⁹ Rousseau 1976.

¹⁰ Graham Barker-Benfield puts it thus, “That the nerve paradigm was so widely popularized, [...] must be seen in large part as the result of literacy and the novel, above all, the novel of “sensibility.” (Barker-Benfield 1992: 16). See also *ibid.* pp. 9, 15, and 18.

¹¹ “If indeed each actor’s flesh has an innate capacity for responsiveness, if his soul is simply a function of his physical organization, then the way a particular player embodies emotion would have to vary greatly from that suggested by the dualistic models proposed by adherents of the Cartesian system. To develop new explanations that could account for such responsiveness, theatrical theorists adopted the body of scientific and philosophical ideas now known as the doctrine of sensibility. Models based on hydraulic automata with their tubes and spirits gave way to models drawn from investigations into the behaviour of electricity and acoustical vibrations”. Roach 1983: 94-5.

the novel of love in letters, complete with its largely female readership, fed into the discourse of neurology.

This article will focus on the deployment of conventions of epistolary form in Samuel Richardson's first novel, *Pamela*. Too scant attention has been paid to the sophistication of the writing of *Pamela*, to its complex and meticulously crafted structure, in which resort is made to theories of letter writing, to reflections on body and reading, on the essence of letters and their "illusions of presence". A survey of reading in *Pamela* requires selection: mine here will be on one scene of reading and on stage effects and dialogue in two "pond scenes".

Perhaps most unexpectedly, reading in the sentimental novel is also about politics. The interest in reform through reading—the "reformation of male manners"¹²—points in that direction. But more generally, we should not ignore that texts which deal with people mistaking themselves, with the reliability of people who write aiming at effects, and the reliability of readers, with the uses that texts can be put to, are political in a strict sense: as many historians of political discourse, and of later Stuart political culture, have pointed out, readers and reading are the crucial question in politics¹³. The culture of political reading was also part of the inheritance of the readers of the fledgling sentimental novel. This links, moreover, Samuel Richardson with the writing of Daniel Defoe, a connection which is sometimes underplayed in literary history.

2. THE POND SCENES IN *PAMELA*

For modern readers, it would seem that the dénouement of Richardson's story of a servant who defends her virtue against her master's advances, only to be married to him in the end, comes half way through the novel: in her master's volte face from sexual harassment and aggression, to willingness to ask Pamela in marriage.

Thus "cut" in almost equal halves by the master's "reform", the novel is further divided into sections which reproduce sequences of letters, and on the other hand the young girl's diary. When Mr. B. in effect kidnaps Pamela and takes her to a family estate in Lincolnshire, the narrative form shifts to diary (since Pamela no longer can send letters). Her diary, its written, material, form, is fragmented into "parcels" of text—from her need to keep it concealed by various means (stitching the parcels to her undergarments, hiding them, etc). Some of those parcels she buries, one she manages to send to her parents. Therefore the diary, just as letters in sequences, is *discrete* as a

¹² The phrase provides the title for the third chapter of Barker-Benfield's book on sensibility (1992). Barker-Benfield proposes a thorough picture of "reform" and "civility", "politeness", etc. in the Enlightenment. For another study which shows the connection of this line of thinking with courtly culture, see Bryson 1998.

¹³ Including the dogged issues of representation and misrepresentation. See Knights 2005.

text, a crucial fact to which I shall come back below. Richardson exploits masterfully the resulting interruptions in the text. The shift from letters to diaries naturally provokes B.'s frustration: he is no longer able to get hold of her writing, as he did when he read her letters; paradoxically, presence is now distance; he has her, but he cannot read her (until he manages to locate one of the parcels).

As expected, she keeps her mind occupied with devising ways of escaping. On one of the occasions she almost succeeds: but not quite, and her failure leads her, for the only time in the novel, to utter despair. Pamela is haunted by suicidal thoughts (Richardson 1980: 211-14); she happens to have reached the pond in the park, and she is tempted to throw herself in.

Some days later, as they are taking a stroll through the park, servant and master come beside the pond (Richardson 1980: 250). Rapidly, an emotionally charged scene builds up between them, and Pamela, reacting to a new kindness in B., all but confesses her love for her master, an unexpected declaration to which he is comically deaf and blind. The passage has little else but dialogue: quid pro quos, misunderstanding, "misfiring," are pervasive in a scene which is highly theatrical in its comic intensity. I will call this the first pond scene (Richardson 1980: 250-57; of course, the earlier reference to the pond is not so much a "scene" as a fantasy).

The next pages of *Pamela* are busy with action and intrigue. On Saturday B. manages to get his hands on a "parcel" of Pamela's diary (Richardson 1980: 262-3). The parcel in question includes the diary just up to Pamela's frustrated escape: in the printed novel (Richardson 1980: 208) it is separated only by a few paragraphs from her anguished, introspective description of her suicidal thoughts (Richardson 1980: 211-14). Unlike the readers of *Pamela*, however, B., after his "seizure" of the parcel, cannot read that yet: he can read no further than Pamela's description of her escape plan, which, crucially, includes her ploy to throw some clothes of hers into the pond, so as to make her pursuers think she has drowned. Impatient to read the rest, he coaxes Pamela into submitting the next "parcel", which opens with the suicidal reflections. She persuades him to allow her a night before submitting the diary. On the Sunday morning, she finally hands it to him. Accompanied by Pamela, he goes on to the pond, and, under Pamela's attentive gaze, proceeds to read. He soon comes to the passage where Pamela describes her thoughts on suicide. Deeply impressed, the master gives way to tears (Richardson 1980: 276). This is the second pond scene.

At the closing of the second pond scene, Pamela is held back by suspiciousness about B.'s intentions. To win time, she requests to be sent to her parents. B., under the impression that he has lowered his defences too far, and in vain, becomes furious, and has Pamela sent away from his house (Richardson 1980: 278). An anonymous letter Pamela has received—the "gypsy letter", denouncing B.'s intentions—has thus managed to open a physical chasm between the two characters. Conversely, the distance between them now justifies again the resort to epistolary communication, rekindling the effect of shared reading. Paradoxically, distance brings them together again: B reads and re-reads

Pamela's diary, and sends her two letters which she, in her turn, reads and reads again (Richardson 1980: 282-86). As a result, she decides to go back to B.

3. PROPER THEATRE

Such a paramount example of the effect of letters, and written texts, is thrown into relief by contrast with the first pond scene, a scene without readers or reading, a masterful case-study of the potential for failure in direct communication, which reveals Richardson's flair for the misunderstandings and hazards incurred in face-to-face intercourse. We are presented with a conversation between Pamela and her master, made crucial by the risks that Pamela allows herself to run: she all but confesses her love for B., master and sexual harasser. It is a comic scene where the supposedly sophisticated B. is shown to be deaf to those very signs in and from Pamela which he has been teaching himself to detect. The latitude for misunderstanding—more generally, the non-effectiveness of ostensible acting and dialogue—includes bodily signs: body behaviour frequently belies verbal communication, but here body language is also misunderstood before actual communicational misfiring occurs.

At the very moment when Pamela is placing herself in such a dangerous position by her frankness—revealing her tender feelings for the man who has mistreated her—she is cornered by B.'s ineptness into equivocating about her feelings. The dialogue shuttles between lies and truth, or half-truths: when the master entreats her to answer whether she can love B. “preferably to any other man” and whether “[any] one in the world has had any share in [her] affections” (Richardson 1980: 253), she declares that she has not “yet [seen] the man to whom [she] wished to be married” (Richardson 1980: 254). It is a kind of untruthfulness which comes closer to equivocation than to actual lying, as the subtlety of this exchange makes clear:

“Well then,” said he, “I may promise myself, that neither regard for the parson, nor for any other man, is any the least secret motive of your steadfast refusal of my offers?” “Indeed, sir, you may [*this, if one sticks to words, is sincere and true, because “regard for B.” could naturally not be the motive for refusing his offers!*]; and, as you was pleased to ask, I answer, that I have not the least shadow of a wish, or thought, in favour of any man living [*this, generously, is equivocal, but more realistically is a lie*]. (Richardson 1980: 254)

All this verbal parrying is exactly what B., supposedly well seasoned in the dialogues of Restoration comedy, will be able to unmask on a second reading of the scene. But here, when bodies speak, in gestures and words, he is deaf.

The precision and importance of time and place—the pond, where she was tempted to commit suicide, only a few days after an attempt at rape—suggest a dramatic dimension to this section of *Pamela*. A comic scene is built which points at two developments with tragic potential (the character of Lucrece, bringing together suicide and rape, comes up in an earlier conversation between B. and Pamela). It is appropriate to refer to the conversation as a scene in the strictest sense of the word: theatrical effect and dramatized text are all important here; before the “theatre of reading” takes over in the second, and last, “pond scene”, we witness here the display of comic misunderstanding, which contributes to defuse the menace, displacing the tone of the action from its tragic potential to the typical resources of comedy.

Ostensibly it is B. who takes the initiative: not so much by relinquishing his sexual aggressiveness and menace as by tempering his proud, overbearing manner. This allows him to make his point, explain himself in more articulate language than he has used so far (it is also more flexible in that his snobbishness is under greater control). His diction, however, verges on the ridicule:

“Well, Pamela,” he was pleased to say, “I am glad you wanted not intreaty, or a new command, to come to me. I love to be obliged. Give me your hand”. I did so; and he looked at me very steadily, and pressing my hand all the time, at last said, “I will now talk to you in a serious manner”. (Richardson 1980: 250)

Pamela and B. speak at cross-purposes, yet they understand each other well enough. The danger for Pamela is that if her love for B. is brought into the open before he asks her in marriage, the defence she has so tenaciously put up is breached; if on the other hand, by doggedly refusing to consider B.'s genuinely new terms, and kinder mood, she fails to release herself—or rather, them—from the impasse, then she loses B. and her life is blighted. Her defences, in effect, break down: she concedes a central point without securing anything firm in return, and certainly the idiotic B. cannot be expected to lend her a hand:

“[B.:] But tell me, still more explicitly, what you would advise me to in the case”.

“O, sir,” said I, “take not advantage of my credulity, and of my free and open heart: but were I the first lady in the land, instead of the poor abject Pamela Andrews, I would, I *could* tell you. But I can say no more”. [...]

O my dear father and mother! now I know you will indeed be concerned for me, since now I am concerned for myself: for now I begin to be afraid, I know too well the reason why all his hard trials of me, and my black apprehensions, would not let me hate him. (Richardson 1980: 252)

It is all this uncertainty, this failure of communication, which makes Pamela be faced with a *aporia* familiar in the literature of love: she says that she cannot speak,

she is forced to speak, to speak and say nothing, or say not; her speech is shot through with modality (not only modal verbs, but sheer conditionality, qualifications which undo, unsay, what she has just said). One full quotation will do, but the examples are plenty (“it is not that I cannot most readily answer your question”, “I find, sir, I know not myself”, “If, sir, you will again generously spare my confusion, I need not speak it: but this I will say”, “If ever, sir, I have given you cause to think me sincere”, “I will tell you, perhaps, the unnecessary and imprudent, but yet, the whole truth”):

“Ah! Sir, what can I say? I have already said too much, if—But do not bid me say how well”. And then, my face glowing as the fire, I, all abashed, leaned upon his shoulder, to hide my confusion.

He clasped me to him with ardour, and said, “Hide your dear face in my bosom, my beloved Pamela; your innocent freedoms charm me! But then say—How well—what?”

“If you will be good,” said I, “to your poor servant, and spare her, she cannot say too much! But if not, she is doubly undone!—Undone indeed!” (Richardson 1980: 256)

He doesn't react, he hasn't heard? B. is so self-infatuated, so vain, so selfish (and he is mortally jealous), that he can only think of himself here, and he is letting the greatest opportunity slip by him unnoticed. Of course, it all ends ridiculously: “But, my dear girl, what must we do about the world, and the world's censure? Indeed, I cannot marry”. Seldom has a seducer been laughed at so mercilessly in the history of the novel.

What is needed, as counterpoint to this scene, is a context where the two characters are able to sound each other's emotions, and their own, and to persuade themselves that they enjoy a privileged perspective on the other's feelings, a paradoxical combination of reverie and observation, of privacy or intimacy, a mirror system of reading positions.

4. IMPROPER THEATRE: EFFECT AT A DISTANCE

In the second of the “pond scenes”, Richardson's narrative manner is opposite: pristine simplicity, practically no verbal parrying (some by B., none by Pamela), little dialogue, and no humour.

The parcel that B. is able to seize, and then read—on his own—on Saturday, ends with Pamela's description of a plot attendant to her escape attempt:

So I will slip off my upper petticoat, and throw it into the pond, with my handkerchief; for it is likely, when they miss me, and cannot find me elsewhere, they will go to the pond, supposing that I may have drowned myself [...] I shall not, perhaps, be missed

till the morning, and this will give me opportunity to get a great way off. (Richardson 1980: 208)

The second pond scene describes how Pamela's master reads the section after that, which opens with Pamela's retrospective description of her despair at the failure of her escape plan, and her subsequent suicidal reflections. The outcome of that scene of reading is stark in its simplicity, possibly misleadingly so: Pamela once more expresses her doubts, implores once more to be allowed to go back to her parents, to which B. for once, unexpectedly, consents, willing, in a fit of fury, to renounce to Pamela. Half way to the safety of home and family the servant, though, after reading two letters from her master sent after her departure, decides to go back to Lincolnshire and B. It is that spectacular volte face which has often been portrayed as grossly implausible psychologically: this section will argue that it is not so, and that the scene(s) of reading are far more intense, tight, and emotion-laden than the conversation in which Pamela recklessly reveals her feelings for B.

The second pond scene is about B. as reader: that quality which mainly defines him, but which we extradiegetic readers witness here for the first time in the open. B., of course, has been the interceptor of Pamela's correspondence for a long while. And he twice claims that those letters precisely, and the reading thereof, have made him fall in love with Pamela.

The elements of the scene of reading comprise setting—an abstract entity—, characters and objects: “being beside the pond”, B. and Pamela, and the “parcel” of the diary, the bundle of sheets that is exchanged between B. and Pamela. It is a “scene” in a “theatre of reading”: Pamela, reluctant actress, tries to stick to her position as spectator (“I will just look upon that part of your relation here”. “Sir,” said I, “let me then walk about at a little distance; for I cannot bear the thought of it,” Richardson 1980: 275).

Describing reading as theatre requires some reflection. Instead, reading is one of the paradigms of privacy and the privileged site of the subject of modernity. There are several ways, however, in which reading as portrayed in the novels of sensibility is a scene.

Scene of reading (I): “being there beside the pond”, “haunting” the pond. It is the setting of Pamela's suicidal temptation: one can therefore readily imagine an alternative course of action, where, after her suicide, Pamela's ghost would appear to B. (“then, thought I [Pamela], will he, perhaps, shed a few tears over the poor corpse of his persecuted servant”, Richardson 1980: 212). The experience of reading might usefully be considered along the lines of a phenomenology of ghosts and haunting: being there where it should not be, where there should not be, the here and somewhere else: the absent B. in the night scene of Pamela's attempt, Pamela miserable by the pond, and Pamela later in the relative security of her parlour, where she is writing—and therefore reading herself—about her innermost feelings.

Scene of reading (II): all reading, with its paradoxes of presence, proximity, and unspecified distance, makes the reader a ghost (not only, though most conspicuously, the reading of sensibility). But every human agent, in relation to another human agent, is a reader, defined so in relation to another reader. B. is here a reader of Pamela, and of Pamela's diary. Pamela is a reader not only potentially—the text exchanged here might well not have had another reader but herself—but also because she is, in this scene, reading B. reading: those lines in her diary, which she has read and re-read—the last time, a few hours before this scene—she recognizes, as she scans the “lines” of B.'s face, the emotion, or rather emotions, printed there.

Thus, reading is always a scene, and always specular (we all are shown as readers not only of the text and therefore the writer, but always as readers of the reader, recursively). Readers and/of readers; let us go one by one.

B. identifies with Pamela; he first read her letters to others, he now is reading her diary: he imagines himself, he feels, in Pamela's place, he is where she is. This is a familiar trick in epistolary literature, and not only erotic. Here moreover, that emotional identification is active and dynamic, it literally follows etymology in putting B. in motion, he reads as he walks, like Diderot and countless others (“When he came, as I suppose, to the place where I mentioned the bricks falling upon me, he got up, and walked to the door, and looked upon the broken part of the wall; for it had not been mended,” Richardson 1980: 275)

Pamela identifies with B.: just like he now is reading her, she read herself before. Pamela puts herself in B.'s position: the writer of in epistolary theory is also a reader, and a reader in intimacy. Critics have described Pamela as a writer: more profoundly, she is first and foremost, a reader. The writer of letters and diary, she is also the arch-reader—the arch reader)¹⁴.

but B. is a reader observed, so Pamela is also observer or spectator, just as B. is an imaginary spectator of the ghostly scene of Pamela's failed escape and suicide (“Whither now?” said he. “I was going in, sir, that you might read them (since you *will* read them) without interruption” (Richardson 1980: 275).

yet another reader, the implied reader, is here defined negatively, or by absence: reader as anti-B. The implied reader—we—is reader of Pamela, reader of B., but not like B. If B. is a victim, ironically, of his own scoffing (“This being the scene of part of your project, and where you so artfully threw in some of your clothes”, “Romantic girl! I know what you'd say”, Richardson 1980: 275, 276), the implied reader—not quite in B.'s shoes—enjoys the irony at B.'s expense, just as Pamela, biting her lip, must be enjoying the prospect of the chastening of her would-be rakish master. Like B., the implied reader

¹⁴ Another Pamela-as-reader: potential editor of her journal on the night from Saturday to Sunday (she finally decides not to edit, which means that B. will have the opportunity of re-reading the second scene; that only happens after Pamela's departure on Sunday night).

lovingly identifies with the apparent victim, Pamela. Unlike B., we are "in the know": because we are in love with Pamela, we rejoice at B.'s discomfiture. We know what B. does not know: that just as he is scoffing at Pamela's plot of throwing her neckerchief to the pond, he is only minutes away from reading about Pamela's genuine suicidal temptation; the more cynical he is, the more he plays the rake, the more motive for remorse and compunction he will have, only minutes from here and now.

He was going to speak; but I said, to drive him from thinking of any more, than that parcel, "And I must beg of you, sir, to read them with favour, in such places as I may have treated you with freedom; and allow for the occasions: but if you will be pleased to return them, without breaking the seal, it will be very generous: and I will take it for a great favour, and a good omen.

He took the parcel and broke the seal instantly. "So much for your *omen!*" replied he. "I am sorry for it," said I, very seriously; and was walking away. (Richardson 1980: 274-275)

Richardson's masterful use of plot and the theory of epistolarity manages to open a cleavage between the positions of the implied reader, and of B. as reader of Pamela's diary. In other words, we also become readers of B., like Pamela (and that is one more reason for us to identify with the virtuous servant). But how is that split achieved?

The answer lies, exactly, in the materiality of the letter (here, the diary as text). The letter is material in that it occupies some place: it is here exchanged between Pamela and the master. The diary is a physical volume that can be parcelled. Interruptions might appear for some readers and not for others. When we read Pamela's diary, we do not come up with a material interruption between the paragraphs describing the "plot" of throwing her clothes into the pond, and the paragraphs reporting the failed escape attempt. There is no reason why for us the inflow of narrative information should be interrupted, as it must be for B. Indeed, if we have followed the plot carefully, we know in advance what B. is about to read; readers of B. like Pamela, we feel the correspondence between the lines in the diary and the lines of B.'s face.

Richardson underlines this by a careful use of intertextuality. Intertext also "happens" within one same text, by the multiple occurrence of words and passages—"anchoring", or cross-referencing, by use of words, images, or themes which provide internal coherence.

On Saturday, B. reads this in Pamela's diary:

O my dear parents! don't be frightened when you come to read this! But all will be over before you can see it; and so God direct me for the best! My writings, for fear I should not escape, I will bury in the garden; for, to be sure, I shall be searched and used dreadfully if I can't get off. And so I will close here, for the present, to prepare for my

plot. [...] [I pray God that] I may escape the crafty devices and snares that have begun to entangle me; and from which, but by this one *trial*, I see no way of escaping! (Richardson 1980: 208; emphasis added)

In the interview that precedes the second pond scene, again on Saturday, B. refers to that passage. Pamela in the Saturday entry of her diary reports his words:

About nine o'clock he sent for me into the parlour. I went a little fearfully; and he held the papers in his hand, and said, "Now, Pamela, you come upon your trial". "I hope, sir," said I, "that I have a *just* judge". (Richardson 1980: 266-7)

Now, the "trial" that B. refers to is the opportunity to escape (which he knows was frustrated). B.'s meaning is lost on Pamela, who does not remember her use of the word: B. is now a more careful reader than Pamela herself.

The same thing happens with a word which is even more important for *Pamela*—and, indeed, for late 17th and 18th century English culture: "plot". In the passage above, it is used for describing the preparations of the escape. On the Sunday B. comes back, with relish, to a word which captures a long tradition of misogyny, but here enriched with the budding storyline of the origins of the novel:

"And you will greatly oblige me, to shew me voluntarily what you have written. I long to see the particulars of your plot, and your disappointment where these papers leave off. As I have furnished you with the subject, I think I have a title to see how you manage it. Besides, there is such a pretty air of romance, as you tell your story, in *your* plots, and *my* plots, that I shall be better directed how to wind up the catastrophe of the pretty novel". (Richardson 1980: 268)

5. TEARS AND THE GOOD PASSIONS

In summary, B. reacts to writing as he did not to presence, gesture plus words in the first scene:

He was very serious at my reflections, on what God enabled me to escape. And when he came to my reasonings about throwing myself into the water, he said, "Walk gently before"; and seemed so moved, that he turned away his face from me; and I blessed this good sign, and began not so much to repent his seeing this mournful part of my story¹⁵ (Richardson 1980: 276).

¹⁵ Apt to misread the body (inapt witness and actor), proficient at reading texts (but only because he learns to read like a woman; the gender issue, and the traditional condemnation of the reading of romances and novels by women, here thus adroitly turned round). In other words, rather surprisingly, reading in *Pamela* offers insight into B., not into Pamela.

B.'s tears make another utterance resonate ironically. "I should have sought to melt her by love" (Richardson 1980: 246): this is B. after a prior scene of harassment. Those are words which Pamela, in her terror, misunderstands when she overhears them. Yet they provide an accurate description of the effect of the diary on B. (including the well-known and obvious association of the verb "melt" with tears and crying).

Tears have long had a mysterious relation to reading. They are physical but do not quite belong to the body; they do not so much obstruct vision as blur it. The effect is one of multiplication and proliferation: perspective lines, and dividing lines, are confused and "dislimned". Tears as veils on the eyes of the reader are to be compared to the tears so often shed on the paper in epistolary tradition (see Ovid's *Heroides*, or the *Letters of the Portuguese Nun*). Again, ghostly film, blurred lines, here and far. Tears are an invitation to "inner reading", the reading most likely to produce, in its turn, tears in the reader's eye.

Conversely, bodies in these crucial scenes of *Pamela* function as screens, as is evident by comparing the first and the second scenes. Pamela's body, when it is in B.'s field of view, will always block clear vision (thence the comical misunderstandings on Wednesday). Distance is therefore imposed: the second scene, when B. finally reads Pamela's diary, is not enough; the diary must be re-read, with Pamela not so much absent as distant, remote (far, further: "let me then walk about a little distance" "don't go far"). They are distanced, but with distance comes the possibility, for both of them, of introspective reading, and that finally brings them together again.

The precursor of the "culture of sensibility"—and the sentimental theories of reading—is the Early Modern concern about passions and the social life. The passions were not so much individual as referred to the social, or "mass", entity (as evidenced in the currency of physiological metaphors). Again, in Hobbes, Henry More, or Clarendon, reading is feared as a dangerous stimulant for the passions (in more general and cross-national terms, such prejudice underlies the history of the languages of republicanism in Renaissance Europe). Favourable reappraisals of the passions in the closing decades of the 17th century gained ground together with ideas of the *individual*. Moving from passions to *interests* opened new inroads for the study of sensation, and the problem of epistemology. Thinking the passions and communication together was familiar to the Early Modern mind: theories of the passions, and the threat they could pose; the connection between inordinate passions and reading (*via* a theory of the imagination, and its negative counterpart sensorial delusion); a language of enthusiasm and inspiration; the model of epistolarity; interest in theatrical or dramatic passions (namely, the theory of *catharsis* and purgation of the harmful passions); the gendering of reading, and the fear of the "woman reader". What was new was unifying and grounding it all on a description of the integral function of the nervous system ("neurology" or nerve physiology). As a result of the prevalence of a model of neural centralization, in the context of "individuation",

issues such as *perspective* and *distance* became crucial (likewise anxiety about misreading and misrepresentation).

6. CONCLUSION

A fundamental insight of recent histories of political discourse is that representation ought to be defined partly by, or as, misreading¹⁶. *Pamela* does not seem, *prima facie*, to be about misreading: is it not reading which allows B. and Pamela to recognize each other? However, the anonymous letter, that mysterious, ugly, piece of writing, should give us pause: beyond that, more generally, the letters from Pamela show that *Pamela*, in actual fact, finds its very origin in the possibility and multiplicity of misreading (does Pamela know that her letters are intercepted? Is she, in writing to her parents, sending signals to her master?) Readers brought to the reading of sentimental novels their expertise about representation and misreading in politics. Those are things supposed to have gone away with the accession of the Hanover dynasty but reality is more complex¹⁷. Witness the context of the South Sea Bubble (the very nature of a financial bubble is, by definition, misrepresentation). And one might legitimately ask whether Walpole's ascendancy is not the arch-type of misrepresentation.

This is a larger question of habits of reading. The "new public sphere", which is normatively rational, in fact forefronts irrationality: this is a point that historians indebted to Habermas' model—or critical of it—have made once and again. The notion has always been familiar in criticism of Daniel Defoe's work—not only "The Shortest Way with Dissenters"—but much less so in studies of the sentimental novel. Samuel Richardson was very probably less tame than generations of critics and literary historians have made him. He was also a far more sophisticated writer.

¹⁶ Mark Knights puts it this way: "Preceding chapters have suggested the prevalence of a national political culture that was perceived to be full of passionate rage, irrationality, intemperate language, sophistry, debased rhetoric, lies, name-calling, dissimulation, conspiracy, and hypocrisy. It was a political culture in which forms of representation and misrepresentation seemed entwined. All this meant that the first age of party politics raised fundamental and perhaps worryingly unanswerable questions about the relationship between the public, information, and the nature of representation. [...] Hostility to the excess or even the existence of party was in part based on much older notion of civility, unity through uniformity, and the common good. Yet the repeated castigation of the behaviour of partisans redirected these older concepts of languages along lines far more familiar to students of the eighteenth century. These included the culture and language of politeness, rationality, public interest and happiness, sociability, a mature print market, and lessons in reading texts critically and how to see through manipulative discourse". (Knights 2005: 335-6.)

¹⁷ See Knights 2005: 6-7, 46, 52, 379.

REFERENCES

- Ariès, Philippe and George Duby (general editors) (1989). *A History of Private Life. Vol.3. Passions of the Renaissance*. Ed. Roger Chartier. Trans. Arthur Goldhammer. London: Belknap.
- Barker-benfield, Graham John (1992). *The Culture of Sensibility. Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bryson, Anna (1998). *From Courtesy to Civility. Changing Modes of Conduct in Early Modern England*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Chartier, Roger (1992). Laborers to Voyagers: From the Text to the Reader. Trans. J. A. González. *Diacritics*, 22, 2, 49-61.
- Chartier, Roger (1999). Richardson, Diderot et la lectrice impatiente. *MLN*, 114, 4, 647-666.
- Fletcher, Anthony (1995). *Gender, Sex & Subordination in England 1500-1800*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Fried, Michael (1980). *Absorption and Theatricality. Painting and Beholder in the age of Diderot*. Berkeley: California University Press.
- Keymer, Thomas (2005). Sentimental Fiction ethics, social critique and philanthropy. In *The Cambridge History of English Literature 1660-1780*, ed. John Richetti, 583-84. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Knights, Mark (2005). *Representation and Misrepresentation in Later Stuart Britain. Partisanship and Political Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Laqueur, Thomas (1990). *Making Sex. Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*. Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press.
- Mckee, Michael (1989). *The Origins of the English Novel 1600-1740*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Richardson, Samuel (1740; 1980). *Pamela*. Ed. by Peter Sabor and Margaret Anne Doody. Penguin: Harmondsworth.
- Roach, Joseph (1983). *The Player's Passion. Studies in the Science of Acting*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Rousseau, George Sebastian (1976). Nerves, Spirits, and Fibres: Towards Defining the Origins of Sensibility. *Blue Guitar* 2: 125-133.
- Warner, William B. (1998). *Licensing Entertainment. The Elevation of Novel Reading in Britain, 1684-1750*. Berkeley: University of California Press.