

EPISTOLARY NOVEL

An epistolary novel is a novel in the form of the letters to and from the various characters involved. The use of letters as a narrative device occasionally proves awkward, but it can, nevertheless, be valuable as a means of characterization. This form of novel is said to have begun with Richardson's "Pamela". When Richardson was working on a collection of letters in 1739, it occurred to him that he might work up a complete novel out of a series of letters written by a virtuous servant girl to her parents in the intervals of dodging her master's attempt at rape. His desire took a concrete shape when he produced "Pamela".

Richardson's class was committed to the view that worth depended on individual effort rather than on status, yet they were fascinated. This gives an ironic ambivalence to

the whole moral pattern of the novel. This is presented in the form of letters from Pamela to her parents. Squire B., whose mother had employed Pamela as her maid, is bent first on seduction and then on rape. He does everything, he can, to get Pamela into his physical power. Yet, after Mr. B. has relented and sent Pamela home, she returns voluntarily when he sends for her, loving and admiring them all the time, though disapproving of his attempts to dishonour her. When he finally convinces her that her continued successful resistance has led him to offer marriage, she is all humble love and passionate gratitude. The development of episodes, exploration of theme and delineation of characters are done through the exchange of letters here.

"Clarissa", Richardson's masterpiece, too, is in the epistolary form. It is a