

## **Acknowledgements**

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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .....	i
Table of Contents .....	1
Chapter 1 - The Beginning .....	3
1.1. The Epistolary Novel.....	3
1.2. <i>Pamela</i> .....	10
1.3. Synopsis .....	16
Chapter 2 - Further Use .....	19
2.1. Henry James and the Epistolary Form .....	19
2.2. <i>Daddy-Long-Legs</i> .....	24
2.2.1. <i>Intimacy</i> .....	26
2.2.2. <i>Sincerity</i> .....	31
2.2.3. <i>Authenticity</i> .....	33
2.2.4. <i>Style and Character</i> .....	34
2.2.5. <i>The Male</i> .....	38
2.3. Synopsis .....	41
Chapter 3 - Recent Work.....	43
3.1. <i>S.</i> .....	43
3.1.1. <i>The Assumption of Intimacy</i> .....	46
3.1.2. <i>Sincerity</i> .....	49
3.1.3. <i>Authenticity</i> .....	55
3.1.4. <i>Characterization and Character</i> .....	60
3.1.5. <i>Men</i> .....	67
3.2. Synopsis .....	71
Conclusion.....	73
Works Cited.....	77



*”The letter-writer’s pen makes distance, presence: and brings back to sweet remembrance all the delights of presence; which makes even the presence but body, while absence becomes the soul”*

-Samuel Richardson

## **Chapter 1 - The Beginning**

### **1.1. The Epistolary Novel**

In his *The Epistolary Novel - its Origin, Development, Decline, and Residuary Influence* Godfrey Frank Singer claims that the letter writing impulse is among the oldest in human culture. (1) There are Egyptian letters dating back to the fifteenth century B.C., and they range in use from Homer’s Iliad to the New Testament. Letters were a popular and indispensable way of communicating across distances and reigned supreme until the invention of the telephone in the nineteenth century. (Singer 1) The letter has historically been divided into two groups; the purely informative or official letter of business, and the personal or private letter, usually consisting of a confessional style correspondence between family members, lovers or close friends. (O. B. Andersen 164) In the eighteenth century this personal letter found its use in a transformed way in the fictional correspondence of characters within a novel.<sup>1</sup> Novels that are composed in this way are called epistolary novels.<sup>2</sup>

The letter brought many new aspects to the novel.<sup>3</sup> First of all, the intimacy in familiar letters between friends came to include the reader of the epistolary novel who then gained the status of a confidential friend. (Singer 84) The reader comes to take on the role of the ideal or intended reader, a person the protagonist trusts and includes in her world.<sup>4</sup> Within the universe of the novel, the reader becomes a sympathetic character, a good person and trusted confidante of the protagonist, one who is invited into her circle of close friends. There is no other genre, it has been claimed, in which the reader plays so definitive a role in the creation of a text, and the text, even if written as a monologue, constantly revolves around a recipient.

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<sup>1</sup> Novel: Extended work of fiction written in prose. (Abrams 197)

<sup>2</sup> Epistolary novel: A novel where the narrative is conveyed entirely by an exchange of letters. (Abrams 199)

<sup>3</sup> Although according to Singer Richardson has been claimed to be the father of the novel, and he wrote epistolary novels. (60).

<sup>4</sup> Protagonist: The chief character in a plot, on whom our interest centres. If the plot is such that he or she is pitted against an important opponent, that character is called the antagonist. (Abrams 23)

(O. B, Andersen 171) This can be contrasted with the diary form, where we get the same level of intimacy, but where reading involves an intrusion into the writer's privacy. Since the letter is addressed to a named audience, the private thoughts concealed within are meant to be read by a second party, in which we are somewhat included. The intimacy the reader feels for the author of the letters is also a very effective way of making the characters memorable. As a result of this intimacy, the novel in letters can attain a great variety of themes and content. There is not much that cannot be discussed in a private letter to a dear friend or trustee, and thus the possibilities are nearly endless.

Sincerity is a key factor in familiar letters and, assuming the writer is composing from the heart, they reveal much about their character as "letters are the most direct material evidence for the inner life of their writers that exist". (Bray 8) According to John Mullan, letters in epistolary novels also tend to communicate things that for a variety of reasons cannot be spoken. (256) However, it can be argued that if one is embarrassed or scared to speak of something for fear of who might hear it, writing it down is not necessarily a safer option. Writing makes the thought permanent and a letter can be intercepted on the way to its recipient, be found and read before it is sent or discovered at the house of the recipient at a later date and become the source of scandal. The letter is potentially compromising evidence of a secret and unlike an overheard statement cannot be dismissed as mere rumour. Thus Mullan's claim is slightly problematic, although it seems to have been accepted as true for the epistolary novels and the use of correspondence in novels generally. In affairs of the heart however, the written word is seen as a good way to communicate the writer's true feelings to her or his heart's desire, as speaking the words to his or her face can be difficult. According to Singer "letters are the best medium for the revelation of the soul", and Ole Birklund Andersen adds that letters are "written in the language of the heart." (85; 162) However a letter can also be used as a part of an agenda and they must therefore also be treated with caution. The libertine tradition of the eighteenth century for example, involves the strategic use of the letter as a facade or mask to seduce young women because of its standing as a medium of the heart and soul. (O. B. Andersen 168)

The assumption of sincerity in letters lent an air of authenticity to the epistolary novel. According to Ole Andersen, in the eighteenth century the concept of fiction shifted from an emphasis on the purely imaginative to a more credible and grounded kind of fiction. (162) Due to an improved postal service as well as increased leisure time and literacy among

middle-class women in the eighteenth century, a 'cult' of letter writing emerged which was mostly feminine. (Watt 189) What Frits Andersen strikingly calls "the scandal of the ordinary" became a common attribute in letters of the time, dealing with the everyday life of women. (74) The emphasis on the ordinary in fictional letters made them believable and recognizable for a female audience. Letter writing was also a way for women to write about themselves. Indeed most of the epistolary novels were written by women and it became an extension of domestic activity.<sup>5</sup> The epistolary form's use of the domestic constituted a bridge between the previously separate spheres of the public and private in society. The personal thoughts of a writer of letters of fiction became public material bringing people with common norms and values together. This reinforced their sense of belonging to a particular group in society and solidified their identity. (O. B. Andersen 166) The language of the fictional letters was often natural in tone and aimed at an everyday speech which gave an air of authenticity to fictional correspondence: "the truly human can only be expressed through a natural, simple, unartistic style [...] The letter is first and foremost something natural, not art, not rhetoric." (O. B. Andersen 165) Sincerity and a promoted sense of the ordinary were very effective strategies for maintaining levels of realism in epistolary novels, and although some of the novels of the time included somewhat improbable events, the openness and the emphasis on ordinary details of language and life made them none the less believable.

With the close intimacy which the epistolary form affords came an increased representation of consciousness. Michael McKeon stated that "the letter becomes a passport not to the objectivity of sense impressions but to the subjectivity of mind." (Bray 7) This is important in two ways. Firstly, the letter is obviously not a neutral retelling of events, but rather a subjective and personal account. One can never take the contents of a letter as factual, for the events represented in the letter are always coloured by the individual's impressions. This is an important aspect of the letter, but not necessarily a flaw, as the second part of his statement indicates. The individual's impressions of the world around her show us her thoughts and feelings and it is these which become the object of interest for the reader - not only facts or moral lessons, but an inner life. Reading a letter therefore gives us a unique representation of consciousness, and as Ruth Perry states: "Because the letter-writer's imagination is involved in the translation of experience into language, a fiction told through letters becomes a story about events in consciousness, whatever else it may be about." (Bray 9) Singer argues that in

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<sup>5</sup> According to Frank Glees Black: between 2/3 and 3/4 of the total output was written by women between 1760 and 1790. (8)

a way the epistolary novel is narrated from an omniscient point of view used subjectively, meaning that we get unlimited access to one (or several) character's thoughts and impressions, and according to Joe Bray this type of representation of consciousness greatly influenced even the later use of third person narrative. (93; 2)<sup>6</sup>

The use of letters also brought a distinct sense of immediacy to the novel. Familiar letters were often written in the midst of action or right after an episode had taken place and while the memory was still fresh, especially if the correspondent had an ethical dilemma or urgent news to report. Immediacy is the trait which is the easiest to parody, as sometimes it was taken to absurd lengths, but it is an effective way of conveying the writer's immediate thoughts and reactions. According to Ole Birklund Andersen "the letter thematizes a limited experience, where the subject, in a state of emotional uproar, is confronted with dimensions of his spiritual world that are otherwise restrained by common sense." (169) Letters are often presumed to give an unmediated account of what the writer experienced and felt with very little editing, and it is because of this that letter writing was characterized as spontaneous and "to the moment." (Bray 54) It is possible to imagine the youth of the day sitting down to write a long passionate letter to a friend the second the action is over, much as the youth of today would call or text their friends or update their Facebook status for the same reason. It has been claimed that many authors of epistolary novels were strongly influenced by drama, and this is visible in the spontaneous feel and liveliness of the characters. (Singer 62) In addition, the letter makes the reader a part of the writer's universe in terms of time and space. Especially for modern readers, letters make history come alive in a way that a mere story cannot, because of the intimacy that may be felt towards the writer.

Letters implicitly have a moral undertone. It was not uncommon for a young writer of letters to seek advice on ethical dilemmas from a parent or friend. (Singer 85) This meant that epistolary novels could easily reach a deep level of content which made it possible to entertain the audience and at the same time educate them in the norms and values of society. This

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<sup>6</sup> Omniscient point of view: Point of view signifies how a story is told, and an omniscient point of view is the term used in works of fiction written in accord with the convention that the narrator knows everything there is to know about the agents, actions, and events, and has privileged access to the characters' thoughts, feelings and motives. Also, the narrator is free to move at will in time and place, to shift from character to character, and to report (or conceal) their speech, doing, and states of consciousness. (Abrams 240-1) "[E]pistolary novelists such as Richardson explore with great subtlety complex tensions within the divided minds of their characters. As a result, the way the epistolary novel represents consciousness has significant consequences for the history of the third-person narrative, beyond the date of its apparent demise." (Bray 2)



education was especially critical in the eighteenth century due to historical changes in the social position of women. With the new tendency towards individualism it became increasingly difficult for women to find a husband if they could not provide him with a dowry and many men chose to marry late for economic reasons. (Watt 142-3) Due to the industrial revolution it became even more important for women to marry, because the work the lower class women could previously do from home such as spinning, weaving and sewing was not needed any more and thus it was very difficult to gain economic independence. (Watt 145) For some authors of epistolary novels, this educational aspect was especially appealing. Samuel Richardson was one of those who chose to use his novels to educate the public in the importance of marriage and family, and he was strongly opposed to bachelorhood - as his fictional character Sir Charles Grandison comments when he says "I am for having everybody marry." (Watt 147)

An interesting attribute of the letter is the absence of closure. Until the correspondent dies, there is always the possibility of more letters. In a regular first or third person plot the story implicitly has an ending - often because the narrator speaks in the past tense, indicating that he or she is retelling events that have already passed. In epistolary novels the protagonist writes as the story is still in the process of unfolding, with one letter at a time right after an event has taken place. The writer lacks both the organizing perspective and temporal distance of a third and first person narrator. (MacArthur 2) This produces uncertainty for the reader as well as the protagonist and adds to the sense of immediacy associated with the genre. The reader of the letters knows as little about the future as the writer, and there is no guarantee that one will know the final outcome of the story.<sup>7</sup> In addition, this creates suspense about what the final outcome of the story will really be. In a real correspondence there is no end to the story, although certain issues are of course resolved along the way. Therefore, in an epistolary novel, the reader always anticipates that the story continues after the last page of the novel, or at least that it is not properly closed, unless the protagonist dies. And if the protagonist dies there is the problem of how to convey that information, unless there are more writers, in which case the story again continues. In one aspect, then, one could argue that the epistolary novel gains a higher level of authenticity and realism because, like real life, the story never really ends even if some dramatic tensions or problems are resolved. This resistance to closure was somewhat problematic in the nineteenth century because of the emphasis on conventional

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<sup>7</sup> Although in the case of *Pamela* one can say that initially the reader is more enlightened about the motives of Mr B.

endings to give shape and meaning to stories. (MacArthur 5) The ending was usually implied as the narrator spoke in the past tense, "telling a story whose outcome he knows already." (MacArthur 2) However, as the letter-writers in epistolary novels do not know the outcome of the story, unless the last letter is written a lot later than the rest, the events related lack a central narrative authority to guarantee that the final pages do indeed include an ending. Partly because of this, the epistolary novel has been criticized as faulty or limited, but it does achieve a higher level of realism, and as John Mullan states: "the most satisfying endings still leave us wanting to know more." (307)

An element of the epistolary novel which might be characterized as a flaw today is the often slow movement of the plot. In the eighteenth century however, middle class women especially had the leisure to read long novels. (Singer 91) In addition, a lack of haste in the development of the plot gave the characters time to reflect on life. If the letter is the medium of the heart, the emphasis has to be less on action and more on the inner lives of the characters. It has been argued that letters are not the right medium to convey action-filled plots, demonstrated by the decline in epistolary novels when gothic and horror novels came into fashion after 1785. (Singer 101-2) The steady pace of the genre does, nevertheless, convey a sense of authenticity, making it more plausible. And there is a practical reason for the lack of overwhelming action in epistolary novels. Letters are assumed to be written by the protagonists of the stories. Many have argued that the letters in epistolary novels are too long and too frequent for it to be believable that the characters could possibly be able both to write them and to experience what happens. (Black 8; Singer 86; Watt 191) Although fictional characters are not bound by the limits of reality, epistolary novels that include too many events would run the risk of seeming ridiculous.

The epistolary novel had been preceded by a number of authors who published personal correspondence, but it was not until the eighteenth century that the true epistolary novel emerged from the capable mind of Samuel Richardson.<sup>8</sup> Richardson wrote his first epistolary novel *Pamela* (1740) while working on the letter manual *Familiar Letters on Important Occasions* (1741) for Charles Rivington and John Osborne. (Watt 55)<sup>9</sup> There is some

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<sup>8</sup> The first to do this consistently in English was Edmund Spenser in the sixteenth century. (Singer 14)

<sup>9</sup> Full title: *Pamela; or, virtue rewarded: In a Series of Familiar Letters from a Beautiful Young Damsel to Her Parents: Designed to Inculcate the Principles of Virtue and Religion in the Youth of Both Sexes (A narrative which has Its Foundation in Truth, and at the same time that it agreeably Entertains, by a Variety of Curious*

disagreement over whether he started writing *Pamela* as a result of this manual, if it was his lifelong fascination of letters which sparked the idea, or if it was simply something of an accident. (Singer 35; O. B. Andersen 167; Watt 55) The result, however, was the first true English novel, and its epistolary form inspired an abundance of epistolary novels in the eighteenth century. (Watt 173; Singer 61) Singer notes 361 titles between 1741 and 1800 with a decline in the epistolary novel output starting in 1785, and Frank Glees Black identifies a total of 333 novels composed exclusively of letters from 1780-1800 with a peak in 1788 followed by a steady decline. (99-101; 2) Epistolary novels thus amount to one fifth of the total fictional output from 1740 to 1800. (Singer 99) However, Black states that Richardson's ingenuity "left little for his followers beyond tame imitation", and concludes that especially the 1780s are characterized by an abundance of works rather than a few brilliant ones. (1; 12) Although not a direct result of Richardson, the genre was far reaching and epistolary novels appeared in America, France, Italy, Germany and Russia. (Singer 181) The only culture that seemingly avoided it was Spain, but the epistolary novel was nowhere bigger than in England. (Singer 214)

In England, the epistolary craze started out with continuations or parodies of Richardson's *Pamela*, including *Anti-Pamela, or Feign'd Innocence Detected* (1741), *Shamela* (1741) and *The True Anti-Pamela: or Memoirs of Mr James Parry, Late Organist of Ross in Herefordshire* (1742). Among the most famous non-*Pamela* epistolary novels of the period are *Fanny Hill* (1748), *Humphry Clinker* (1771), *The Man of Feeling* (1771) and *Evelina* (1778). As noted above there were an excess of epistolary novels during the eighteenth century, and although naming all of them here would be pointless, it is a testament to the genre's popularity that "every author of importance in the eighteenth century used this mode at one time or another." (Singer 155) Even the celebrated Jane Austen toyed with the use of the letter novel. Her *Lady Susan* (1871) is an epistolary novel and letters occupy a central role in several of her novels. According to Joe Bray "the struggles of subjectivity explored in earlier epistolary fiction can also be found in her third person narratives." (108) The way Austen makes use of correspondence in for example *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) is an example of epistolary fiction in blended form, i.e. an alternation of letter and narrative. By using a third person narrative with inserted letters an author can take advantage of the intimacy afforded by the letter, and at the same time have the artistic freedom of the more

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*and Affecting Incidents, is Entirely divested of All Those Images which, in Too Many Pieces Calculated for Amusement only, tend to inflame the Minds they should Instruct.*

common narrative technique. (Black 63) These blended forms show the importance of letters even in novels that were not primarily epistolary, and although the close of the eighteenth century brought with it a drastic decline in epistolary novels they still continue to be published and they are “resorted to by the occasional author, from time to time.” (Singer 156) Even one of the earliest historical novels *The Recess* (1785) is written as one long letter. Some more recent successful works of epistolary fiction are *Frankenstein* (1818) where the letter is used as a framing device, *Dracula* (1897) where the letter is used together with diary entries and newspaper excerpts, *Daddy-Long-Legs* (1912) has letters written by Jerusha Abbot to an unknown benefactor, the hilarious *Wake Up, Stupid* (1959), Stephen King’s first published novel *Carrie* (1974) was made up of newspaper extracts, magazine articles, letters and excerpts from books, *The Color Purple* (1982) about Celie’s difficulties being black and a woman in the first half of the twentieth century, and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2003), the letters of a 15 year old boy with severe behavioural difficulties and his interpretation of the world. This added to the books which include letters like *Hobomok* (1824), *Hope Leslie* (1827) and countless others show that epistolary novels have had a practically continuous, if not always robust, life since the eighteenth century.

## **1.2. Pamela**

*Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* by Richardson is as noted above seen by most critics to be the first true English novel, and it is constructed solely from the eponymous heroine’s letters to her parents, their scarce letters of response and a few letters from Mr B. and some minor characters.<sup>10</sup>

Pamela Andrews is 15 years old when the novel begins. She is a middle-class country girl raised in the modest house of her father John and mother Elizabeth. She is taken in by the Lady Bedfordshire as her handmaiden and after her Lady’s death continues as a maid in the service of her son, Mr B. In the beginning Pamela is not aware of Mr B.’s real intentions and writes to her parents that “God bless him! and pray with me, my dear father and mother, for a blessing upon him”, “indeed he is the best of gentlemen, I think!” (43; 45) After a troubled and concerned reply from her parents, she starts to suspect that Mr B. might have immoral intentions. (46) These suspicions are quickly confirmed as the devious Mr B. has already by letter X made advances and stolen one of her letters. Pamela is ordered to leave his house

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<sup>10</sup> “The credit of having written the first English novel of character, or ‘psychological novel,’ is almost unanimously given to Samuel Richardson for his *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded*” (Abrams 199)

after she declines his offers, and she is relieved to leave his Bedfordshire house behind, but she is kidnapped and taken to Mr B.'s Lincolnshire estate instead. Here she meets the 'wretch' Mrs Jewkes and the rest of her trials begin. It is also here that the plot is resolved and Pamela is introduced into high class society. Pamela's innocence and naiveté are elements of a new stereotype of the Victorian period which dictated that the ideal woman should be young, inexperienced, passive, both mentally and physically delicate and devoid of any sexual or amorous feelings before marriage. (Watt 161) These traits fit Pamela perfectly. She is 15 years old, inherently naive, loyal to her treacherous master when she is both his maid and his wife, and she does not admit her feelings for him until he has written to proclaim his love for her, and even then she tells her heart to guard itself. (287) Pamela's fainting fits are proof that she is also extremely delicate, and her fits "persist, not only through the entire length of this book, but even through the entire range of literature of sentiment of the day." (Singer 66) Her fainting fits show that she belongs to the upper class because she cannot bear psychological or physical stress, which according to Ian Watt is a case of sociosomatic snobbery. (162) It is her insistence on the worth of her virtue as being more important than life itself combined with her upper class traits and education that makes Pamela worthy of being Mr B.'s wife in the end.

Because the reader of *Pamela* has access only to Pamela's view of her experiences it is possible to speculate as to how innocent she really is. Some critics and novelists have claimed that Pamela is a calculating opportunist, using virtue to entrap Mr B.<sup>11</sup> Henry Fielding in his *Shamela* especially seemed to have thought this way, as he has his protagonist comment that "I thought once of making a little fortune by my person. I now intend to make a great one by my virtue." (Watt 171) It can be tempting to see Pamela thus, especially because of the ambiguous subtitle *Virtue Rewarded*, since this can mean exactly what Fielding insinuated. However, there is nothing in the text itself which points to guile. Throughout the book Pamela begs Mr B. to let her return to her father and her letters consistently indicate that she is truly shocked by the liberties he takes with her and Mrs Jewkes' attitude to her ordeal. The letters from Pamela's parents also strengthen the impression that her innocence is genuine. They show that Pamela has been raised in a poor but morally superior house to that of Mr B., shown in her countless statements of rejection like: "He has shewed himself in his true colours; and to me, nothing appear so black, and so frightful"; "[w]ell may I forget that I am

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<sup>11</sup> See examples on page 9.

your servant, when you forget what belongs to a master”; “all I can do with innocence shall be the study of my life to do”; “[g]ood God, protect me this one time, and send me but to my dear father’s cot in safety!”; “Angels and saints, and all the hosts of heaven, defend me! And may I never survive one moment that fatal one in which in which I shall forfeit my innocence!”; and, “[o] the difference between the minds of thy creatures, good God! How shall some be cast down in their innocence, while others can triumph in their guilt!” (54; 55; 115; 116; 63; 99). Because this novel is an epistolary, we are given unique insight into her state of mind but we are also heavily dependent on her point of view, which may be partial or flawed. We only have her word for it that these incidents happened as they are portrayed to us, and in writing to her parents she is unlikely to paint herself in a bad light. The letters from her parents strengthen the impression of her innocence, but her father makes a dramatic statement about the importance of Pamela keeping her innocence, saying that he would prefer her dead to ruined: “we had rather see you all covered with rags, and even follow you to the churchyard, than have it said, a child of ours preferred any worldly conveniences to her virtue.” (46) For a fifteen year old servant girl, this represents a strict moral code that she adheres to, and she does indeed think losing her virtue is a fate worse than death. Her parents’ extreme reaction might heighten her sense of sexual danger, so even though it is reasonable to conclude that Pamela is indeed as innocent as her letters indicate, she might very well be overly dramatic about the events that take place.<sup>12</sup> Pamela is the main letter-writer in this novel. Everything the reader knows about what happens is filtered through the perception of this fifteen year-old, whose experiences are coloured by her fear for her virtue and often conveyed with an enhanced air of immediacy which gives some scenes a more dramatic effect than might be realistic. At the same time as this gives the reader a thorough glimpse into the mind of the young maid, one must also remember that this is Pamela telling her story and her words are at all times coloured by her impressions. It is therefore possible to say that the events she retells are more dramatic to her sensitive mind than the actual events themselves. This would explain how Pamela could go from thinking of Mr B. as “Lucifer himself” to marrying him in the span of a few dozen pages. (248) Although she seems to be distressed by his advances the reader gets a glimpse of Pamela’s true feelings for him when she asks “[w]hy can’t I hate him?” (235) It is clear that although she writes from the heart to her parents, the strict system of values taught by her father and Mr B.’s actions will not let her admit her

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<sup>12</sup> Indicated by Pamela’s response to her parents’ letter that “I must needs say, my dear father, that your letter has filled me with trouble: for it has made my heart, which was overflowing with gratitude for my master’s goodness, suspicious and fearful”. (46)

feelings for him until she is on her way back to her parents and receives his declaration of love for her. Pamela falling in love with her would-be seducer is a very modern trait in this novel, and protecting her virtue in spite of this makes her “as wise as she is virtuous.” (Singer 69) Pamela ends up fulfilling both her moral and romantic wishes and is duly rewarded.

The one-sidedness of the correspondence makes the latter part of *Pamela* seem like a diary. The chapter headings change from “letter XXXII” to “Saturday” and Pamela writes entries like “Monday, Tuesday, the 25th and 26th Days of my heavy Restraint”, and considering her difficulty in sending the letters, the novel does indeed become a kind of diary. However, she writes with her parents in mind at all times until Mr B. becomes the intended reader and she does intend to post her ‘diary-entries’, so the epistolary form is upheld. According to Singer, Pamela’s letters are “natural, absorbing, and admirably fitted to the parts of the story they tell.” (87) The letters are indeed very well written for a girl of Pamela’s status, and they have an air of authentic presence. (O. B. Andersen 174) Her eloquence can be explained by the education she received from her “good Lady”, who gave her part of an upper-class education in having her learn to play the harpsichord, sing and sew; qualities useful for a future wife. Indeed, *Pamela* is written in a language which is plausibly fitted to the characters, including colloquialisms like “fat-face”, “no better than he should be” and “you might have beat me down with a feather.” (Watt 194) The language is an important element in making the reader believe Pamela’s story, and the frequent dialogues in her letters also work to this effect. Another important element is the break-offs from the story occasioned by interruptions from other characters or Pamela’s fear of being caught writing. The fear of being revealed as a letter-writer and thus the sense of writing under a constant threat puts emphasis on the writing situation itself and creates drama and suspense. (Andersen 169) The pond scene when Pamela contemplates suicide shows Richardson’s “amazing ability to sustain dramatic effort at a high pitch for a considerable length of time and to retain the original impulse over the space of many written pages.” (Singer 95) Although, according to Black the “reader of fiction does not wish to be reminded over frequently of a device which exists for the sole purpose of conveying the story”, the breaks and focus on the writing situation in *Pamela* make the letter become part of the story and is what drives the plot forward. (58) The letters become so integrated into the fabric of the narrative that they even have internal readers in addition to the intended ones, including Mr B., Lady Davers, and the members of the upper class who accept Pamela as one of their own. The letters become Mr B.’s justification for marrying Pamela to make up for his past misdeeds as they show her trials at his hands and how she has handled

her ordeal with virtue and grace. Thus the conflict between a rigid general principle of class distinction and an individual case is solved. (Needham 439) Indeed Pamela's moral values relate crucially to her gender. As a man, Mr B. is seen as being subject to sexual feelings and passion, and therefore it is natural that he gives way to his desires. According to the female code of the eighteenth century this is not the case for women, and a woman "debases herself by a mean marriage" if she puts a "sordid groom" as the head of the family. (Richardson, *Pamela* 441)

Since every action in the novel is related by Pamela, it is possible to doubt the depiction of Mr B. By the definition of his day he was indeed a double libertine, both an atheist and morally dissolute, but assuming Pamela is as innocent as she seems and so young, it is easy to imagine her being frightened by her parents' first letter to the extent that she interprets all of Mr B.'s advances as strategic and base. (O. B. Andersen 169) However, Gwendolyn B. Needham suggests otherwise, claiming that Mr B. is not evil incarnate but a proud, young man, used to getting what he wants and thus confused when a mere servant girl will not adhere to his wishes. Pamela's fear and insecurity colour her depiction of him, just as her love and admiration are projected onto him in the second half of the book. According to Needham:

The plot calls for a villain-hero who, to be plausible, must exhibit an involved motivation naturally produced by conflicting traits and impulses. The form requires the hero to be viewed through the eyes of Pamela, the character least able to see him objectively. Plot and form make sympathy for the heroine a paramount requisite; therefore, not only must the novel present the villain-hero indirectly, it must highlight in the first half his bad qualities, in the second half the his better, but at the same time in each half give enough mixed qualities, enough shading, so that the "villain" is gradually submerged in the hero. (439)

Rereading *Pamela* shows Needham's point. At first glance, Mr B. seems to be a ruthless and angry male acting like a spoiled child when he cannot get his toy. On closer inspection he is still all the above, but less ruthless and more frustrated. He has authority, good looks and status, and his previous experience has shown him that higher ranked women than Pamela were willing to give up their innocence. It is his encounter with Sally Godfrey which produced a child that in part made him a libertine, as a result of the marriage her mother was plotting behind his back. Because of this previous experience it is therefore difficult for him to take Pamela's rejections seriously. This is understandable given that it was a novelty for a



servant girl to have a choice when it came to the preservation of her virtue over her life and income, and Mr B.'s proud sentiment makes it difficult to let her go. (Watt 165-6) With his past in mind one can argue that Mr B. is a more credible and round character than he has previously been credited, and Richardson achieved his goal of making him a credible villain-hero. (Needham 436)<sup>13</sup>

*Pamela* can be seen as an expression of the general public view of the upper class as morally inferior to the purer middle class. Mr B.'s characterization identifies him as belonging to the literary tradition of the libertine which was indeed morally dubious. His sister Lady Davers is not perhaps morally impure, but she has a wild temper and is not very ladylike compared to the calm and passive Pamela. Pamela comes from a simple but pure family and she states that they are: "as *poor* and as *honest* too, and that is my pride", implying that poor and honest is better than rich and corrupt. (115) It is this conviction that enables her to become Mr B.'s wife; she brings purity and good values to the upper class, which is full of bad seeds. Indeed most of the middle-class servants are good, the exceptions being Robert, John Arnold and Mrs Jewkes. Robert is the coachman who kidnaps Pamela and brings her to Lincolnshire, but he seems unaware or does not have the luxury of realizing the gravity of what he was doing, shown by his regret when he realizes the truth. (146) John is the manservant who brought Pamela's letters to her parents when she was at the Bedfordshire estate. He fell into disgrace when Pamela discovered that he had shown her letters to Mr B. before bringing them further, but he is later forgiven because he was trying to do his duty to both her and Mr B. Mrs Jewkes is the real antagonist in this novel. She represents all that Pamela is not. She cannot understand why Pamela insists that losing her virtue is worse than murder. Instead she states that: "Are not the two sexes made for each other? And is it not natural for a man to love a pretty woman? And suppose he can obtain his desires, is that so bad as cutting her throat?" (148) She is Richardson's most corrupt character - an emblem of how some women are and what young girls should avoid becoming.

Throughout Richardson's novels are a strict sense of moral, and *Pamela* is no exception. Richardson "never made any attempt to mystify his readers" and as the title proclaims his intention was to make *Pamela* "Inculcate the Principles of Virtue and Religion in the Youth of Both Sexes". (O. B. Andersen 166) His goal was to make the public follow the lead of Pamela

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<sup>13</sup> For more and similar views on Mr B.'s character, see for example Parker or Roussel.

and inspire a sense of family values and self-worth. Pamela became a huge success and Richardson even had to write the sequel *Pamela's Conduct in High Life* (1741) due to popular demand, so it is safe to say he achieved his goal.

### 1.3. Synopsis

*Pamela* was a hugely influential and important novel in English literature. Not only is it considered the first novel and inspired a new feminine ideal which would last through the Victorian period, the genre Richardson 'created' even inspired the use of the third person narrative which is frequently used in both past and contemporary literature. Within the epistolary genre *Pamela* set the standard, and as mentioned previously it was both imitated and satirized, indicating its importance. Since *Pamela* was considered both the first novel and the first epistolary novel, it follows that numerous traits were brought forth from the novel into later works. In both realism and other genres sincerity is an important tool to make the reader sympathize with the characters, and although Pamela's sincerity and innocence has been questioned, it is still one of the epistolary genre's defining traits.<sup>14</sup> Sincerity is implied when writing letters to a friend or loved one, and it is a major contributing factor to make the reader sympathize with the protagonist. If the reader gets the impression that what they read is sincere, he or she is more likely to believe that the information given in the letter is unlimited and uncensored, and that he or she gets a clearer view into the characters' mind. The simple and colloquial language used in *Pamela* also often reappears in later epistolary, and other, novels. The use of simple language contributes towards the novel's authenticity and makes it seem less artful. A popular feature in epistolary novels which does not contribute to their authenticity however, is immediacy. Immediacy has been transferred to later works of the epistolary genre, and it is perhaps the attribute which has been the most ridiculed. However, immediacy is a way to add dramatic effect to the epistolary genre. It is not always believable, but it creates suspense and drama, and makes it possible to record the protagonist's thoughts directly as events pass while the thoughts are still fresh in the mind.

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<sup>14</sup> Literary realism: Applied both to identify a movement in the writing of novels during the nineteenth century, and to designate a recurrent mode, in various eras and literary forms, of representing human life and experience in literature. (Abrams 269) The Realistic novel can be described as the fictional attempt to give the effect of realism, by representing complex characters with mixed motives who are rooted in a social class, operate in a developed social structure, interact with many other characters, and undergo plausible, everyday modes of experience. It is often called a novel of manners. (Abrams 199-200)

As already mentioned, *Pamela* inspired a new feminine ideal, but it also started a trend in literature of placing young women in a vulnerable position. Like Pamela, many heroines in novels find themselves alone and separated from friends and family by a potentially dangerous protector. To get out of this situation the heroine either have to be saved or save herself by converting the gruesome rake by being so good and innocent that in the end he cannot but love her. This trait is not exclusive to the epistolary genre, nor employed by every epistolary novel, but it is an interesting attribute which reoccurs in later works of fiction. The male in later epistolary novels is, like Mr B., often a potentially dangerous authority figure who is also a suitor and wields some kind of power over the heroine. The male often also holds more information - especially about the heroine's inner thoughts - while he stays silent and distant.

Since Richardson's *Pamela* was the first novel of its kind, many traits was used in later works of fiction, including the attention to detail, the scarce direct dialogue and the subjective narration, but sincerity, immediacy, authenticity and the unbalanced relationship between the male and female are perhaps the most important ones.



*“A novel in its broadest definition is a personal impression of life”*

- Henry James

## Chapter 2 - Further Use

### 2.1. Henry James and the Epistolary Form

By the time Henry James wrote “A Bundle of Letters” (1878) and “The Point of View” (1882) the epistolary was a greatly devalued genre in prose fiction, never having fully recovered from Fielding’s double satire of Richardson and the letter writing form in *Shamela*. Both these works are short stories, signalling that although James valued the many advantages letters afforded, he did not find them suitable or entertaining enough to fill an entire novel.<sup>15</sup> Thus, he experimented with the genre while admitting or showcasing its shortcomings, making gentle fun at the expense of the genre. His use of the epistolary genre however does suggest a continued interest in the form’s unique possibility for intimacy, suspense and apparent sincerity. In “A Bundle of Letters”, for example, it is apparent that some characters behave differently towards other characters than they admit to their recipients, as when Evelyn Vane describes Louis Leverett as “one dreadful little man who is always sitting over the fire, and talking about the colour of the sky [...] Harold says he is mad”, while Louis thinks her sweet, lovely, and gracious. (23) Clearly, Evelyn has not expressed these feelings of disdain to Louis, or he would not have described her thus, and indeed the most striking feature of this short story is such differences in perspective. There are nine letters in total, four of which are composed by Miranda Hope, and the rest by Violet Ray, Louis Leverett, Evelyn Vane, Leon Verdier and Dr. Rudolf Staub. In total there are eight characters mentioned in these letters, two of whom do not write letters themselves.<sup>16</sup> Each letter reveal the author’s personality and true feelings about the others, and the descriptions they provide of the other characters both reflect the character described and their own motivation. The most obvious of these is the letter from Leon Verdier to Prosper Gobain, which exclusively describes Madame de Maisonrogue and the three young foreign girls in the house:

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<sup>15</sup> Short story: A brief work of prose fiction. (Abrams 295)

<sup>16</sup> Excluding the two daughters of Madame de Maisonrogue who are barely mentioned. Harold Vane and Madame de Maisonrogue do not write.

I live for nothing, and I straighten up the accent of the prettiest English lips. The English lips are not all pretty, heaven knows, but enough of them are so to make it a gaining bargain for me [...] The owner of one of them has private lessons [...] But I am well, very well, with the proprietors of the two other pairs. (37-8)

Firstly, Verdier writes exclusively about the female presence in the establishment and does not mention Louis Leverett, Harold Vane or Dr. Rudolf Staub. Secondly he chooses to describe them as the owners of pretty lips, clearly showing his erotic interests. From his perspective each girl is a potential lover, and in his letter he describes them accordingly. Miranda Hope “threw herself into my arms the very first day” through the private lessons, which was “a real stroke of genius on the part of Miss Miranda!” (39) Violet Ray appears not to understand his advances, “but her conduct, half an hour afterwards, reassures you completely - oh, completely!” (39) The “little Anglaise” is more of a challenge; “I am bound in honesty to confess that with her the situation is a little less advanced than with the others” - but this, according to him, is because “[t]he English are heavy, and the Anglaises move slowly, that’s all.” (38) When looking at the ladies’ comments on Leon in their letters, there appears not only a difference in perception, but also national differences. Miranda and Violet, both from America, are blissfully unaware of his intentions, as it was not unusual for men and women to keep company there prior to marriage, as reported by Mrs Church in “The Point of View”:

There is a peculiar custom in this country [...] it is called “being attentive”, and young girls are the object of the attention. [...] It is simply an invention by which young persons of the two sexes pass their time together. (14-5)

In “A Bundle of Letters” Miranda states that “every one has been as kind and attentive as if I were their own sister, especially Mr. Verdier”, and Violet describes him as “a very pleasant little Frenchman.” (46; 16-7) Evelyn from England, however, does not share their naive attitude towards strange men and describes him as “a nephew, or cousin, or something, of the person of the house, who is extremely nasty”, both showing that she is at once too far above him socially to notice his place in the household, and her realization and dislike of his practices. (35) This blend of nationalities and different perceptions are made possible by the fact that the characters are in transit. The English-speakers have travelled to Paris to experience the ‘old world’, and the journey becomes a device for having to write about new

places, people and experiences in a personal form. This makes the letter both a necessary and interesting tool, as letter writers write about other letter writers creating a diversity of perspectives and perceptions. Near the end of the short story, for instance, Miranda feels “as if I were leaving a circle of real friends”, while Dr. Staub in his letter describes how the Americans “look with the greatest mistrust and aversion upon each other [...] Add to this that there are two young Englanders in the house, who hate all the Americans in a lump.” (46; 45) Of these two very different perceptions of the chemistry between the residents in the establishment, the German doctor is the one closest to the truth. He is, according to himself, an observer, and he has managed to see through the surface pleasantries and into the individual nature of the visitors. (42) In contrast to Miranda’s impression that she has gained some real friends and that people understand why she travels alone, all the other characters judge her for it. Violet writes to Miss Agnes Rich that Miranda is “the most extraordinary specimen of artless Yankeeism that I ever encountered; she is really too horrible” (17) and the gentle Louis writes:

[T]his New England maiden is, in her way, a strange type: she is travelling all over Europe alone - “to see it,” she says, “for herself.” For herself! What can that stiff slim self of hers do with such sights, such visions! (22)

Evelyn calls her vulgar, and “Harold says she is mad”, while Leon sees her as an impertinent girl, “making the *tour du monde* entirely alone [...] for the purpose of seeing for herself *à quoi s’en tenir sur les hommes et les choses - on les hommes* particularly.” (35; 40) As these extracts exemplify, the short story can be used as an exercise between truth and perception, where several people share the same space but not the same perspective. Letters also allow James to explore his favourite theme of the tenuous link between appearance and reality, speech and consciousness.

If the epistolary genre allows James to investigate sincerity, it also affords him an opportunity for comedy. An obvious example is the letter from Louis Leverett to Harvard Tremont. Louis sees himself as a very artistic man, but the other characters think that he “looks pretty sick.”(27) From this description it is quite ironic that he focuses so much on living in his letter:

The great thing is to *live*, you know [...] Oh, to be able to say that one has lived - *qu'on a vécu*, as they say here [...] I sympathize with the artistic temperament; I remember you used sometimes to hint to me that you thought my own temperament too artistic. I don't think that in Boston there is any real sympathy with the artistic temperament; we tend to make everything a matter of right and wrong. And in Boston one can't *live* - *on ne peut pas vivre*, as they say here. (18-9)

Louis comes across as a sad but unintentionally funny character. He apparently has a liver disease and looks quite fragile, but he thinks very highly of himself and does not possess a sense of humour. His frequent use of French translations with the following “as they say here” is amusing: frequently, what he says is less a piece of wit or wisdom in French and more a very obvious and banal translation.<sup>17</sup> This comes across as quite humorous and pretentious, as it seems to be a way for Louis to foreground or display his self-appointed knowledge of the world. Louis also has a habit of namedropping, and among others mentions Théophile Gautier, Balzac and Matthew Arnold, which enhances his pompousness and self appointed importance and does not improve the reader's impression of him. He also comes across as a humorous character in the eyes of the innocent Miranda, who comments that when she speaks to him they unfortunately do not speak in French - possibly because Louis does not actually speak French, “but fortunately, he uses a great many French expressions.”(27) She adds that he “thinks everything of the French, too, and says we don't make nearly enough of *them*. I couldn't help telling him the other day that at any rate they make enough of themselves.” Louis's missive is one example of how a letter can easily reveal its writer's faults and limitations as well as virtues. This trait makes letters a source of huge comic potential and James playfully exploits the comic possibilities of people writing in confidence and revealing who they are - for better and worse.

Louis Leverett also appears in James' “The Point of View”: returning to America by boat, the humorous, pompous character has given way to a depressed and unhappy man. He does not like what he has come back to, and he misses “the dear old people de Paris”: (31)

[T]here are a thousand people in this huge and hideous structure; they feed together in a big white-walled room. It is lighted by a thousand gas-jets, and heated by cast-iron screens, which vomit forth torrents of scorching air. The temperature is terrible; the atmosphere is more so;

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<sup>17</sup> He does it seven times in his letter.



the furious light and heat seem to intensify the dreadful definiteness. When things are so ugly, they should not be so definite; and they are terribly ugly here. [...] We are dying of iced water, of hot air, of gas. I sit in my room thinking of these things - this room of mine which is a chamber of pain. (32)

This is a bleak scene, and although it is beautifully written, all trace of the playful humour generated by Louis in “A Bundle of Letters” has disappeared. This short-story is about homecoming Americans’ impressions of America after a long journey abroad, as well as the responses of an Englishman and a Frenchman.<sup>18</sup> There are eight letters in total. The reactions are very different, and if “A Bundle of Letters” recorded how different people perceived each other, “The Point of View” can be said to record different perceptions of America. There are several differences between the two short-stories, one of which is that “The Point of View” employs dialogue much more frequently than in “A Bundle of Letters”, where it only appears in the theatre before Miranda found Madame de Maisonrouge’s establishment. There are parallels between *Pamela* and “The Point of View” in the use of dialogue, which is very frequent, while in “A Bundle of Letters” and *Daddy-Long-Legs* (1912) which will be mentioned later, dialogue is virtually non-existent. In “The Point of View” the genre-typical immediacy of epistolary novels is also comically visible:

I am scribbling along, as you see, to occupy me till we get news of the islands. Here comes Mr. Cockerel to bring it. Yes, they are in sight; he tells me that they are lovelier than ever, and that I must come right up right away. (10)

And:

I have just called to Mr. Leverett to remind him of the islands. “The islands - the islands? Ah my dear young lady, I have seen Capri, I have seen Ischia!” Well so have I, but that doesn’t prevent ... (A little later) - I have seen the islands; they are rather queer. (10)

Both these extracts are examples of the convention of immediacy being put to humorous use in this short-story. In the first example Aurora writes as if Mr Cockerell is giving her the news while she is in the act of writing.<sup>19</sup> In the second extract there is dialogue and a temporal break, as Aurora Church writes, calls to Louis, starts to formulate a response to his dismissal,

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<sup>18</sup> It is Aurora Church’s first time in America.

<sup>19</sup> James may be poking gentle fun at literary-historical examples of simultaneity here.

is broken off in mid sentence by Mr Cockerell to go out on deck and view the islands, and then, instead of continuing her original train of thought drops it, as if it were a spoken sentence which could not be retracted or continued after she had seen the islands. This type of writing is very oral and playful: it takes the idea of immediacy to absurdly comic levels.

James's experiments with the epistolary genre perform several functions. At one level, they are tiny acts of homage or debt, as James inserts himself into a tradition of its usage in fictional prose. At another level, they are typical of his preoccupation with centres of consciousness, with the gap between people's public and social interaction, and their perception of such interaction. By setting his characters on a boat and on a journey, James explores the international theme - one of his favourites, and an extension of his interest in consciousness and customs, in how we see and are seen. Finally, while his setting makes the production of letters plausible, James can be argued to use certain conventions of the epistolary novel in a knowing, amusing way.

## ***2.2. Daddy-Long-Legs***

*Daddy-Long-Legs* by Jean Webster is another example of how in the literature of the United States the epistolary novel survives beyond the eighteenth century. It tells the story of and is told by Jerusha or 'Judy' Abbott. 'Jerusha Abbott' is the name given to the character by Mrs Lippett, the governess of the orphanage where she was raised, and was constructed by combining a name she found in a phonebook and one she saw on a tombstone. (20) In essence this is what the author does with the genre; making the past relevant in the present and combining old and new. 'Judy' is Jerusha's selected nickname.<sup>20</sup> Judy is an orphan from the John Grier Home who is plucked from her existence almost as a working maid and placed into a women's college by an anonymous trustee to become an author who after reading her essay 'Blue Wednesday' has great ambitions for her. (7)<sup>21</sup> Letters can be considered to be a workshop for the craft of fiction, and the anonymous trustee employs this theory by making Judy write letters to him as 'Mr Smith', telling him of her progress at school while getting useful writing experience. Apart from the opening chapter where Jerusha learns her fate and the trustee's conditions for sponsoring her, the novel is entirely made up of Judy's monthly

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<sup>20</sup> "I've changed my name. I'm still 'Jerusha' in the catalogue, but I'm 'Judy' everywhere else. [...] I've always hated [Jerusha]; but I rather like Judy. It's such a silly name. It belongs to the kind of girl I'm not - a sweet little blue-eyed thing, petted and spoiled by all the family, who romps her way through life without any cares. [...] In the future please always address me as Judy". (19-20)

<sup>21</sup> For an in-depth look on education of women in children's literature, see Lehnert.

letters to her benefactor Mr John Smith (otherwise known as Daddy-Long-Legs or Jervis Pendleton) and relates Judy's experiences in and around college.<sup>22</sup> The choice of the epistolary genre is interesting giving that this is a novel about education and coming into artistic maturity, traditionally the remit of the *bildungsroman*, which is the novel of education, or the *künstlerroman* about the emergence of the artist.<sup>23</sup> One possible reason for this could be that both the *bildungsroman* and *künstlerroman* are traditionally about young men, and *Daddy-Long-Legs* is both written by and about a woman. It is possible that Webster felt that genres about men coming into personal and creative maturity would not be unproblematic for the story of a young woman finding her place in the world, especially as it entailed breaking class distinctions and to some extent defying patriarchal society. The epistolary genre can be seen as more useful since, although not exclusively written by women, it has traditionally put women at the narrative centre as protagonists and as narrators. The letters also allow Judy to share her true feelings, and this creates interplay between her and her benefactor unique to this genre.

The novel's title is inspired by Judy's nickname for her benefactor, a result of her glimpsing a man's long shadow on the wall of the John Grier Home, and her unwillingness to write to a John Smith: "Why couldn't you have picked out a name with a little personality? I might as well write letters to Dear Hitching-Post or Dear Clothes-Pole". (13) The little Judy knows about her benefactor is that he (supposedly) hates girls, is rich, and is tall, so she chooses to call him Mr Daddy-Long-Legs Smith or Daddy for short. The name she gives him is a source of ambiguity, as Daddy implies someone paternal and protective and also slightly authoritarian, while also slightly frightening as it is connected with the insect. As the name suggests he becomes like a father figure to her, giving her, through the letters, a medium in which to share her new experiences at the college while also providing continuity with the past. Daddy-Long-Legs is Judy's chosen name for "Smith" because of the shadow he cast on the wall, which resembled a Daddy-Long-Legs insect. Like many insects the Daddy-Long-Legs can instil a sense of fear, but in fact they are harmless. There is also a Daddy-Long-Legs

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<sup>22</sup> 'Jervis Pendleton' is the real name of the trustee, 'John Smith' is the name he has chosen for himself to keep his identity hidden, and 'Daddy-Long-Legs' is Judy's nickname for him.

<sup>23</sup> Bildungsroman: "Novel of formation" or "novel of education" about the development of the protagonist's mind and character, in the passage from childhood through varied experiences into maturity, usually involving their realization of their own identity. (Abrams 200-1)

Künstlerroman: A subtype of the Bildungsroman about a novelist or artist's growth from childhood into the stage of maturity that signalizes the recognition of the protagonist's artistic destiny and mastery of an artistic craft. (Abrams 201)

spider however, which is poisonous but cannot bite humans. (Daddy Long Legs Myth) Therefore the name Daddy-Long-Legs can suggest a benevolent creature, or a potentially dangerous one, spinning webs to entrap Judy. It can also suggest both, a potentially dangerous character that is domesticated by Judy. Her act of naming him, of assigning a nickname that is funny, might imply an ability to disarm him, to shape him according to her own needs and wishes. Right from the beginning, the issue of the benefactor's anonymity becomes a site of conflicting meanings of whether he is unknown because he is selfless, charitable and disinterested, or because it gives him a certain power over her. Daddy-Long-Legs' role will be discussed further later, but in either case, Judy's pet name for him represents an attempt at asserting some degree of control on her part, at the same time as he represents someone who cares about her, saves her from the John Grier Home and can fill the role of a fictive parent.

### **2.2.1. Intimacy**

*Daddy-Long-Legs* is an epistolary novel and therefore displays the advantages and disadvantages of the genre discussed in Chapter 1. The first trait of the genre is the high level of intimacy afforded to the readers, and this is a characteristic of this novel. Judy shares her inner thoughts and insecurities with Daddy-Long-Legs: "The trouble with college is that you are expected to know such a lot of things you've never learned," she admits to him; "[i]t's very embarrassing at times." (17) She also shares with him her feelings about the sense of not belonging at the college: "Half the time I don't know what the girls are talking about; their jokes seem to relate to a past that everyone but me has shared. I'm a foreigner in the world and I don't understand the language. It's a miserable feeling." (22) Daddy-Long-Legs is also told about her wishes and dreams: "What do you think Daddy? The English instructor said my last paper shows an unusual amount of originality. She did, truly. Those were her words." (20) Lastly Judy writes about the people she meets: "Julia is bored at everything. She never makes the slightest effort to be amiable. She believes that if you are a Pendleton, that fact alone admits you to heaven without any further examination. Julia and I were born to be enemies." (18) However, despite the openness there is a filter: since 'Mr Smith' is her guardian she is told by Mrs Lippett that the letters must be "respectful in tone", and although she does not always obey she tries to be deferential, she wants to please Daddy-Long-Legs and do as he wishes, to some extent. (9) The letters she writes are confidential, but are initially not to a dear and trusted friend. She does not know this man in any way, and despite, or perhaps because of this, he becomes a screen onto which she projects her need for a fictional family:

I am *very* much obliged for my seven presents. I'm pretending to myself that they came in a box from my family in California. The watch is from father, the lap rug from mother, the hot water bottle from grandmother - who is always worrying for fear I shall catch cold in this climate - and the yellow paper from my little brother Harry. My sister Isobel gave me the silk stockings, and Aunt Susan the Matthew Arnold poems; Uncle Harry (little Harry is named for him) gave me the dictionary. He wanted to send chocolates, but I insisted on synonyms. You don't object, do you, to playing the part of a composite family? (32)

She continues throughout the novel to use him as a screen for extended family members and a surrogate family, mostly older individuals: "Should you mind, just for a little while, pretending you are my grandmother? [...] I saw the sweetest cap of Cluny lace trimmed with lavender ribbon. I am going to make you a present of it on your eighty-third birthday"; "[d]o you mind pretending you're my uncle? I believe they're superior to grandmothers"; "[d]id you ever have a sweet baby girl who was stolen from the cradle in infancy? Maybe I am she! If we were in a novel, that would be the denouement, wouldn't it?", and "[a]re you old enough, Daddy, to remember sixty years ago?" (39-40; 53; 77; 93) The roles she assigns him are often older ones, signalling the distance she feels between them in age and that her feelings for him resemble the ones of a daughter for a father or grandparent. After having met Mr Pendleton for the first time she even comments that he "reminded me a little of you, Daddy, as you were twenty years ago." (53) This statement is also interesting considering she did not know him twenty years ago, no more than she knows him now. She makes up a story for him like she imagines his roles as her surrogate family. There is a balance present between courteous appreciation and a need to share her feelings and feel like she belongs somewhere.

Because Judy writes her letters to a man she does not know, the reader might feel even less like a voyeur than was the case in *Pamela*. For a start, what Judy can share with a stranger cannot be so private that it is improper for us to read it. The first chapter before the letters start provides the reader with her background, and we immediately become her confidants. As readers we are invited to sympathize with her feelings of not fitting in and the need for a family she can call her own. If as readers our role is not an intrusive one, we are nevertheless placed in a similar position to Daddy-Long-Legs: we have access to intimate materials without having the responsibilities of responding to them. This is very different from *Pamela* where the reader is uncomfortably aware that he or she is looking at Pamela's letters without permission as it were, making us in some ways no better than Mr B. Although Daddy-Long-

Legs is not necessarily as dramatically suspect as Mr B., we are nevertheless reading letters not addressed to us. However, the overriding impression is that we are witnesses to the growth of a young woman's mind and not uninvited guests. We do not assume the role of a family member or become identified with someone who illicitly intercepts letters to a loved one.

Daddy-Long-Legs is in a position of power, as he reads her letters without being expected to reply other than an occasional note and gifts for Christmas.<sup>24</sup> This is perhaps good for her, because she can imagine him in exactly the way she wants. If he had replied to her letters she would perhaps not have dared to be so free with what she wrote: an actual response might have shattered him as an imaginative outlet for her. She treats her letters to him as a kind of diary, but at the same time the letters fulfil a triple role. First, the other girls at the college see her sending letters to her 'family' and this creates the illusion that she has the same sense of belonging as her fellow students. Being an orphan was a socially demeaning position, as it signalled that her parents could not care for her for either moral or natural causes. As an orphan Judy is vulnerable and subject to sympathy and pity, but contemporaneous readers would have been alert to her potentially suspect moral inheritance. Although we never learn of her parents' fate, she gains a degree of social respectability and normalcy by hiding her past as an orphan from her schoolmates. This places the reader in a unique position as her confidant, because he or she knows of her past and the girls at her school do not. Secondly, the letters work on a personal level to provide Judy with a creative outlet and a personal sense of belonging for herself. When she writes to Daddy-Long-Legs she writes to someone who knows her past and has in a sense taken her in. She has been told to write to him as if she was writing to her parents, and by doing so she manages to create a space for herself where she is loved and feels like she belongs.<sup>25</sup> The third function Judy's letters perform is the one assigned to them by Daddy-Long-Legs himself. Although he claims that her letters to him provide writing practice and a means of reporting her academic progress at school, he also exploits them to get to know her, who she sees and where she will be at a certain time.<sup>26</sup> He is therefore able to increase his power over her and to manipulate her.

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<sup>24</sup> Judy received pink rosebuds and a hand written card with a polite message when she was in the infirmary for grippe and tonsillitis. (43) Judy only receives one note and one letter from Daddy-Long-Legs, the rest are from his secretary Elmer Griggs. She usually hears a voice of authority through the male servant, so she gets mad at him instead of 'Daddy', even though he is the one giving the orders.

<sup>25</sup> Mrs Lippett tells Judy to write "[j]ust such a letter as you would write to your parents if they were living". (8)

<sup>26</sup> "His reason in requiring the letters is that he thinks nothing so fosters facility in literary expression as letter writing [...] also, he wishes to keep track of your progress". (8)

The fact that Judy does not know her benefactor is a major shift from other epistolary novels. One of the advantages of the genre is for the reader to become acquainted with the protagonist's innermost thoughts and true feelings in what appears to be a natural way. Although novels are fictional, they create the illusion of a character whose letters are transparent, representing thoughts which are not artful. In *Pamela* the heroine is an 'accidental' author, forced by distance and circumstances to report to, and seek guidance from, her parents: her letters are therefore meant to be open and honest. Admitting that Judy wants to be an author makes the distance between artifice and truth less obvious. Her letters are her way of practicing literature, and the reader becomes less concerned about their artifice. Writing to a friend, family member or lover is, as I pointed out in Chapter 1, one of the devices for enabling these 'true' feelings. Writing to an unknown recipient might appear to prevent this, but by making Daddy-Long-Legs a trustee of the John Grier Home, the novel positions him as a character who is sympathetic to Judy's past as an orphan and thus allows her to explore her feelings more fully. They have the orphanage as a common but also unique point of reference, and he becomes the only one in her present environment that she can confide in. Because of her childlike desire to please him and the bond they share of the past, he becomes a facilitating device for her writing.

Because of this past and Judy's wish to find out more about Daddy-Long-Legs, the novel does revolve around the recipient, but perhaps less so than in *Pamela* due to Daddy-Long-Legs' unknown identity and the letters' monologic feel.<sup>27</sup> Judy is largely the only one who writes, and hers are the only letters we have access to. Because of this *Daddy-Long-Legs* is even more monologic than other epistolary novels where we might encounter several letter-writers, such as is the case in James' short stories, *Pamela*, *The Color Purple* and others. The single letter-writer can be seen as a potential shortcoming as the novel generally is a dialogic form, and this might pose the question of whether a single speaker addressing a correspondent who never replies hinders the novel's dialogic potential.<sup>28</sup> The epistolary novel might be said to compensate for this by having the missing voice lie with the reader: he or she is inserted into the text as an implied or ideal reader who cannot write back and is not invited in any direct way to do so, but still has a real set of imagined responses or positions to the letters. Being the

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<sup>27</sup> Monologic novels: Writers of monologic novels undertake to subordinate the voices of all the characters to the authoritative discourse and controlling purposes of the author. Dialogic novels let the characters speak "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses." (Abrams 63) In this assignment I refer to the monologic element of the narrative, that there are not many voices in the novels and often one single writer.

<sup>28</sup> This is interesting, as she is at college to receive education helpful to becoming a novelist which is mainly dialogic.

third voice in the text gives the reader an important role, and without being formally actualized he or she has an important presence in the novel. In traditional novels the thoughts are already there, in epistolary novels the reader brings them and in a way becomes another correspondent.

However, there is a small dialogic element in this novel as Judy asks Daddy-Long-Legs questions that - although never directly answered - brings him to the centre of her letters, such as in the following extract:

Dear Daddy-Long-Legs,

You never answered my question and it was very important.

ARE YOU BALD?

I have it planned exactly what you look like – very satisfactory – until I reach the top of your head, and then I *am* stuck. I can't decide whether you have white hair or black hair or sort of sprinkle gray hair or maybe none at all.

Here is your portrait: [Illustration]

But the problem is, shall I add some hair?

Would you like to know what color your eyes are? They're gray and your eyebrows stick out like a porch roof. (27)

And:

Mr D. L. L. Smith,

Sir: You never answer any questions; you never show the slightest interest in anything I do.

[...] I don't know a single thing about you. I don't even know your name. It is very uninspiring writing to a thing. (41)

From these extracts it is apparent that in *Daddy-Long-Legs* the recipient is not actualized so his voice is missing, but he is very much present in her imagination and she brings him into the center of the story. As mentioned above there are also many epistolary novels which include dialogue, but even in the ones who do not the reader as an internal presence is still present.



### 2.2.2. *Sincerity*

The intimacy that seems to be afforded by the novel can also be related to its air of sincerity. *Daddy-Long-Legs* is a novel in which Judy writes about her everyday experiences, hopes and fears, filtered through respect and appreciation for her benefactor. Although the other girls at the college believe she is writing to her family, she does not hide much from the reader of her letters and she mostly speaks from the heart. We gather this from her way of writing, which seems chaotic and disorganised: she seems to transcribe impulsive impressions, rather than reflective responses. In the following extracts this impulsive quality is exaggerated even as she reports that she has decided to limit it:

Sir: Having completed the study of argumentation and the science of dividing a thesis into heads, I have decided to adopt the following form of letter writing. It contains all necessary facts, but no unnecessary verbiage.

I. We had written examinations this week in:

A. Chemistry

B. History. (96)

But in the very next letter she is back to her old ways;

Dear Daddy-Long-Legs,

You will never guess the nice thing that happened. (97)

She also sometimes seems to realize that her letters are not as respectful as they should be:

Am I too familiar, Daddy? Ought I to treat you with more dignity and aloofness? – Yes, I'm sure I ought. I'll begin again.

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My dear Mr Smith,

You will be pleased to hear that I passed successfully my midyear examinations, and am now commencing work in the new semester. [...] Trusting, my dear Mr Smith, that this will find you in your usual good health, I remain, Most cordially yours, Jerusha Abbott. (134-136)

But then again in the very next letter her free style is back:

Dear Daddy,

Spring has come again! (136)

It is these responses to advice about restricting or controlling openness that suggest that she has not been regulating her writing this far, reinforcing the sense of sincerity and openness in Judy's letters. We are invited to believe that what she writes to Daddy-Long-Legs is what she truly goes through at school, and it is only occasionally that we are given reason to doubt her frankness.

If Judy is associated with sincerity, then by definition the historical structure of the epistolary genre makes Daddy-Long-Legs a source of deception and the ambiguity surrounding the addressee's name is reflected in his role as the sole reader of her letters. The possible deception afforded by letters plays a major role in this novel, albeit in a different way than discussed in Chapter 1. Daddy-Long-Legs does not reply to Judy's letters, but unknown to her he appears in her life as a character called Jervis Pendleton. He does not use the correspondence directly in his deceit, but indirectly he uses letters as a mechanism for seduction. Judy is unaware that Jervis is Daddy-Long-Legs, and this makes it possible for him to use her letters to his advantage in courting, controlling and manipulating her. For example, Daddy-Long-Legs refuses to let Judy accompany her friend Sallie McBride to Camp McBride for the summer so that Jervis can casually drop in on her when she is at the Lock Willow farm instead.<sup>29</sup> We have then the curious situation of an open hearted character addressing a man who she believes she has never met and telling him stories about a character he plays in real life. As mentioned in the previous chapter McKeon claims that the letter is a subjective representation of an individual consciousness, and this is enhanced in *Daddy-Long-Legs* because for the duration of many letters Judy describes to Daddy-Long-Legs her personal impressions of time spent with Jervis Pendleton. This discrepancy means for example that Judy can write to her anonymous benefactor about books she has enjoyed reading, books that Jervis then can claim to have read himself, thus suggesting a natural compatibility which is in fact manufactured. Jervis learns from her letters that she is adventurous, and tempts her with trips to Europe where "[they] would run away from the chaperon occasionally and have dinner together." (144) He also drives in the countryside alone with her, keeping a love-struck servant couple from using the horse which made it "all the better because it wasn't proper for *them* to go driving without a chaperon." (115; my italics) This double standard makes the

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<sup>29</sup> "Your secretary man has just written to me saying that Mr Smith prefers that I should not accept Mrs McBride's invitation, but should return to Lock Willow the same as last summer." (98)

reader distrustful. Through her letters Jervis gets to know her while he withholds information about himself. In this way he both increases his power over her and gets to know her without having to declare his own interest or suffer the indignity of rejection. The uncertainty about Jervis' intentions and motives is a complication kind of plot not limited to this text. This imbalance between the open feminine writer and the more circumspect male recipient reflects an unequal distribution of power that is also typical of the epistolary novel generally.<sup>30</sup>

### 2.2.3. *Authenticity*

As discussed in Chapter 1, epistolary novels create the illusion of authenticity, making the story believable precisely because it is not meant to be a story. *Daddy-Long-Legs* creates the same sense of plausibility by being grounded in everyday life, but in many ways it is even more of a Cinderella-story than *Pamela*. Judy is a young woman with no family or friends, taken from a life that is close to slavery at the orphanage into the world of education and ease by a benevolent older trustee who allows her a certain amount of limited experience until she is ready for marriage.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, Judy's everyday life at college is packed full of events, and the fact that Judy only writes to Daddy-Long-Legs once a month (albeit sometimes more often) means that the novel can filter out the daily trivia that takes up much of *Pamela*. Thus the letter writing in *Daddy-Long-Legs* is more entertaining and believable; any young woman of the age could easily have written a few letters a month relating events to their families or friends. Another contributor to the novel's authenticity is the focus on the physical act of sending the letters:

Your letter didn't come in time (I am pleased to say). If you wish your instructions to be obeyed, you must have your secretary transmit them in less than two weeks. As you observe, I am here, and have been for five days. (147-8)

This was also a device which Henry James employed in "A Bundle of Letters"; "although my letter will not have reached you yet, I will begin another before my news accumulates too much." (5) This technique enhances the impression the reader has of the letters being real entities and is an effective way of making the novel seem realistic. The doodles Judy draws are also an important contributing factor. She sketches herself doing different everyday things such as playing basketball, cooking and working on the farm, or picturing Daddy-Long-Legs

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<sup>30</sup> *Pamela, The Coquette* (1797), *The Color Purple* to mention a few.

<sup>31</sup> This is a topos (or traditional theme) of the 18<sup>th</sup> century - a young woman's entrance into the world supervised by a wealthy older male, like in the novel *Evelina*.

in addition to other people, scenery, animals and several important events in her life. The doodles are mostly comical and simple; representing Daddy-Long-Legs as a tall bald figure in order to reinforce her point that she does not know anything about him, an image of herself after a fall captioned “Judy learns to skate”, and a drawing of a cat titled “[t]his is Prexy’s kitten. You can see from the picture how Angora he is.” (27; 38; 138) Collectively, Judy’s doodles give an impression of authenticity by appearing to be hand drawn with hand written text inserted into otherwise typed letters. The real life exchanges between them also feature in the letters: “Here’s a four-leaf clover from Camp McBride to bring you good luck for the new year”; and “I’m sending a slight token, too.” (155; 129) However, the often awkward immediacy that characterizes the genre is still preserved, as in the following episode:

Ow!!!!!!

That was a shriek which brought Sallie and Julia and (for a disgusted moment) the senior from across the hall. It was caused by a centipede like this: [illustration].

Only worse. Just as I had finished the last sentence and was thinking what to say next - plump! - it fell off the ceiling and landed at my side. I tipped two cups off the tea table in trying to get away. Sallie whacked it with the back of my hairbrush - which I shall never be able to use again - and killed the front end, but the rear fifty feet ran under the bureau and escaped. (45-6)

There are also other passages in this novel which are very close in time to what she writes about, an example being her natural interjections at the sudden realization that she has lost track of time and is late: “Oh, dear! There’s the chapel bell”; “!!!!!!!!!!!!!! That’s the clock in the chapel tower striking twelve. I believe I am sleepy after all”; and “[t]here’s Jimmie calling for me to come canoeing.” (78; 40; 148) This immediacy requires a leap of the imagination to be considered entirely real. It is easy to parody and it is one of the weaknesses of the genre that Fielding criticized in *Shamela*.

#### **2.2.4. Style and Character**

The type of language used in epistolary novels makes an important contribution to their illusion of transparency, and the passages from *Daddy-Long-Legs* quoted here emphasise a natural and unaffected form of expression. The language of Judy’s letters is that of a spirited young girl. The drawings are also very much in accordance with Judy’s personality and age. She is free, imaginative and funny; for example - in addition to her chosen name for her benefactor, she teases him by asking if he “still hate[s] girls.” (44) There are numerous

instances of verbal humour: “It’s raining cats and dogs tonight” she observes, before adding: “Two puppies and a kitten have just landed on the windowsill.” (132) But there is also evidence of political responsibility behind the play, too:

[Julia’s mother] can’t imagine where [Jervis] picked up his queer ideas; the family have been Church of England for generations. He throws away his money on every sort of crazy reform, instead of spending it on such sensible things as yachts and automobiles and polo ponies. (130-1)

And:

Haven’t you any sense? Don’t you *know* that you mustn’t give one girl seventeen Christmas presents? I’m a socialist, please remember; do you wish to turn me into a plutocrat? (154)

The second of these quotations shows a certain skill on her part, too, in responding to an overwhelming amount of presents, the giving of which can be seen as part of a strategy of seduction, with grace and humour. The playful drawings and language go towards creating a credible character, and one who is kind and affectionate. Like most teenagers, her moods vary, and every now and then a letter is cold, angry or depressed. She is mostly anxious that she might not amount to anything, complaining that she “may end by marrying an undertaker and being an inspiration to him in his work”, but later she states that “I believe absolutely in my own free will and my own power to accomplish.” (146; 153) Her frustration is mostly directed at Daddy-Long-Legs’ refusal to answer her letters or caused by the orders that arrive as notes from his secretary Mr Griggs, but she also gripes about her life at school and being lonely. She begins one letter by saying: “I don’t know why I am in such a reminiscent mood except that spring and the reappearance of toads always awakens the old acquisitive instinct”, but then follows the last thought with a witty piece of insight: “The only thing that keeps me from starting a collection is the fact that no rule exists against it.” (45) However, each of her emotionally charged letters is followed by an often striking apology: “Anyway, I am going to be a sport. You will never hear me complain again, Daddy dear, because Julia wears silk stockings and centipedes drop off the wall.” (49)

There are times when she combines an attitude of respect with childlike honesty, as in the following letter:

Daddy-Long-Legs, Esq.

Dear Sir: I am in receipt of a letter from Mrs Lippett. [...] Since I probably have no place to go this summer, she will let me come back to the asylum and work for my board until college opens.

I HATE THE JOHN GRIER HOME.

I'd rather die than go back. (49)

The combination of a business-like address and adolescent exaggerations suggests a young woman who tries out many different voices because she is not quite sure yet of her own; though it also reflects verbal skill, an ability to mimic or impersonate a variety of discourses, which is a useful technique for an author.<sup>32</sup> Sometimes she attempts to be solemn and serious, as in the letter composed after a speech by President Cuyler about “the modern generation being flippant and superficial”:

My dear Mr Smith,

You will be pleased to hear that I passed successfully my midyear examinations, and am now commencing work in the new semester. (134)

This tone, like her moods, does not last for long and her next letter, although written a month later, shows that distance in writing does not come naturally to her, as she returns to a free, spirited style that is closer to her true character:

Dear Daddy,

Spring has come again! [...] And where do you think we were going? To Princeton, to attend a dance and a ball game, if you please! I didn't ask you if I might go, because I had a feeling your secretary would say no. (136)

This passage is also an example of her independence: she did not ask permission because she knew he would not let her go, but she quickly assures him that they were chaperoned and that “it was entirely regular.” (136) This, however, is somewhat contradicted by her next sentence: “I shall have to omit details; they are too many and complicated.” If it was an entirely

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<sup>32</sup> “Esq.” or “esquire” is used in official correspondence, as is “sir”. This is followed by an emotional outburst in capitals and an extreme statement of reluctance in “I'd rather die” which has a personal style. This shows Judy using two very different styles of writing in the same letter.

uneventful and proper experience, how can there be complicated details? In this passage Judy's naiveté is apparent. Princeton is an Ivy League university which was not accessible for people from deprived backgrounds such as herself. The ball was clearly confusing for her, and her choice not to relate details in one way suggests that she is a little overwhelmed. She has too many impressions from the ball to be able to communicate them immediately to Daddy-Long-Legs. Here the novel employs negative strategies of omission and withholding in order to impart a sense of sincerity that runs counter to the convention of transparency in the epistolary novel. Full disclosure is meant to represent innocence in the protagonist, so this refusal to reveal complicates Judy's guilelessness. But, in fact it might be used here to show Judy's innocence. Another possibility might be that she excludes this information to shield her benefactor, to prevent him from worrying on her behalf. Either way, it shows the author and the character creating a private space free from intrusion and suppression. Judy is trying out the limits of her privacy. She learned early that Daddy-Long-Legs does not like her being with Sallie's brother Jimmie, when he refused her permission to go their camp for the summer in her second year. (98) The attentive reader might suspect his motives, as, although seemingly oblivious to it herself, her letters reveal that Jimmie is romantically interested in her.<sup>33</sup> The first time Judy meets Jimmie she is visiting the McBrides for Christmas, and suspends her correspondence with Daddy-Long-Legs until her return. She describes him then as Sallie's "big, good-looking brother Jimmie, who is a junior at Princeton" and goes on to report what a lovely time she had dancing with him at the Christmas ball the McBrides held for her. (73) In the very next letter Judy writes that "Julia's desirable uncle called" with a five-pound box of chocolates, "waited over a train in order to take tea in the study" and talked with her about their mutual acquaintances at Lock Willow farm. (75) In addition to him showing up unexpectedly right after Daddy-Long-Legs has heard about Jimmie, their mutual acquaintances are hardly a coincidence, considering that it was Daddy-Long-Legs who sent her to Lock Willow. This shows how innocent and naive Judy is, although she does question how Daddy-Long-Legs' secretary came to know of the place after she found out that Jervis Pendleton used to own it. She receives presents from both Jimmie and Jervis, but does not seem to realize the intentions behind them. It is not until near the end of the novel that she admits to herself that she is capable of attracting men: "Do you want me to tell you a secret that I've lately discovered? [...] I'm pretty. I am, really. I'd be an awful idiot not to know it

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<sup>33</sup> He gives Judy a Princeton banner as a gift, sends roses for her graduation, and they dance together at the McBride ball and the founder's dance at her college, and was even "sulky because he had only three dances with [her]." (79; 166; 74; 126)

with three looking glasses in the room.” (128) It is after this realization that she goes to Princeton without Daddy-Long-Legs’ permission, showing now that she knows that she is pretty and Jimmie might also find her so she wants to meet him. She is no longer quite as unknowing, and although Daddy-Long-Legs urges her to remain so, Jervis appeals to her rebellious nature by inviting her to break the rules by being alone with him. This is probably why Daddy-Long-Legs is so anxious for her not to meet Jimmie, because Jervis has tempted her into going out alone with him on walks and for carriage rides and therefore uncovered a side of her that makes him anxious: if she does this with Jervis she might also with Jimmie. He is testing her, and when she acquiesces, he grows anxious.

### *2.2.5. The Male*

As seen in the last paragraphs Jervis occupies a dual role in the narrative. On the one hand he is a suitor, an exciting and rich socialist who sweeps Judy off her feet with gifts and adventures. On the other he is a father, the absent but caring, concerned and trusted family member Judy has always wanted, in the form of a trustee of the John Grier home. Judy resents aspects of both personae but learns to look past them, neatly summed up in her comment to Daddy-Long-Legs that “I don’t consider [Jervis] a true Pendleton [...], any more than I consider you a true Trustee.” (91) This dual role poses several problems. First, it confuses the roles of father and lover. In her letters Judy tends to call her benefactor Daddy, and it is a little grotesque to think that Jervis knowingly lets her call him Daddy while trying to seduce her. However, Daddy is less formal than ‘father’, and the nomenclature reflects middle-class ideals of the husband as alternative father-figure and locus of authority. But it seems morally ambiguous to think that this young girl ends up with the man she has called ‘Daddy’ - someone she treats as her father and extended family throughout the novel. Though there is an element of charity involved in his willingness to act as a relative when she had none, there is undeniable deceit and trickery too. As Jervis and Daddy-Long-Legs this man accesses her immediate feelings when she is with him and her inner thoughts as she writes to him, at the same time that he gets to know her interests and ways without having to give anything in return. This enables him to prepare for their meetings, to drop casually by at the place Judy is staying, and to learn of potential rivals. He uses his financial and ‘parental’ power to prohibit her from seeing her other potential suitors on several occasions, and he is clearly afraid to lose this power over her. When Judy is offered a scholarship he forbids her in his personae of Daddy-Long-Legs from accepting, and Judy does not understand why:



Will you kindly convey to me a comprehensible reason why I should not accept that scholarship? I don't understand your objection in the least [...] Are you still harping on that scholarship? [...] You prefer that I should not be accepting favours from strangers. Strangers! And what are you, pray? (120-2)

These problems are never solved, and one might argue that Judy under reacts rather when she learns that Daddy-Long-Legs is 'Master Jervie'.<sup>34</sup> As readers, we are invited to understand this as a joyful reaction which blinds her to the realization that Daddy-Long-Legs has been using her letters to get close to her. Even though her nickname for Mr Smith was due to the huge shadow with long limbs she saw at the John Grier home, it quickly abbreviates to Daddy, with comments like "poor Daddy, you must be tired!"; "[w]ill you be awfully disappointed, Daddy, if I don't turn out to be a great author?" and so on. (35; 45)<sup>35</sup> Knowing that he has abused his position as her guardian and manipulated information given in her letters, makes Judy's casual and happy acceptance of Jervis as Daddy-Long-Legs one of the less believable events in the novel.<sup>36</sup> Women's power is usually associated with virtue and innocence. Although Daddy-Long-Legs' moral status is never really villainous, he both is and represents the older, wealthy educator who wields power over her both in knowledge, wealth and status. It is clear that he does not want her to be independent, as he disapproves of her trips alone with Sallie, or her summer job as a tutor, or when she has the chance of gaining economic independence from him by receiving a scholarship. (98; 141-5; 119-23) It is important for Jervis to maintain his authority and power over her so as to ensure her loyalty to him and her continued gratitude. She keeps saying that her wish is to pay her benefactor back for his help, and Jervis might think she could pay him back by becoming his wife. Although he claims to be a socialist, and therefore pays lip-service to equality, Jervis demands loyalty and obedience, is furious when Judy disobeys him, and does not seem to appreciate her independence except when she is with him. Her male friends constitute a threat to his chances of gaining her affection, while her female friends at the college might lessen his exclusiveness, so it is important for him to keep her close.

There is another way of looking at these matters. If Jervis, as his mother says, is a hopeless socialist it is possible that he saw potential in little Jerusha Abbott after reading her essay on

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<sup>34</sup> 'Master Jervie' is Judy's nickname for Jervis.

<sup>35</sup> She decides to call him Daddy-Long-Legs on page 14, and on page 18 she calls him "Daddy dear" for the first time.

<sup>36</sup> See Rosenberg for a similar view.

“Blue Wednesday”. He has previously sent two orphanage boys to college, so his motives for sending her there might be similarly philanthropic. (5) That he did not do so previously is, according to Mrs Lippett that “[h]e does not [...] care for girls.” (6) This suggests that Judy was a special case prompted by Judy’s English teacher reading her essay aloud and making a speech in her favour: according to Mrs Lippett too, Jervis has “an immoderate sense of humour” and was amused by the essay, perhaps seeing a bright future for her as a writer. (7) The letters Judy has to write each month might have started as a way to “foster [her] facility in literary expression”, with him as the recipient for practical reasons since she has no family and needs someone to report to. (8) The deal Jervis made with Mrs Lippett clearly stated that he would not respond to her letters and that Judy was to address him as Mr John Smith. When Judy nicknamed him Daddy, it was her initiative that changed the connection to a personal one. As he had no mandate to answer her letters, he had no reason or motive for rejecting that move.<sup>37</sup> This is one way to explain his motives, but it does not explain why he chooses to keep his identity hidden. Since the reader is given little or no information about his feelings during the period of her education, this makes us identify more strongly with Judy, and precisely because his intentions are unclear we worry on her behalf. Either he is a very manipulative, detached person, or one who was taken in by Judy’s letters to a point where he fell for her personality and started to use the letters to get close to her. Either way this novel is filled with his deceit, misuse of power and a conflict of interests between trustee and suitor. Yet, curiously, we learn very little about his true motives. They appear complicated and even dubious, but nothing much is revealed. At one level, this creates suspense and drama: as readers, we are aware of him as peripheral but powerful, distant but dangerous. But in another way he represents a gap, a missing piece in the novel - a character that is never fully there. Perhaps this is the drama of courtship for young women in 1912. The orphan becomes a symbol of a young woman who must leave the father in search of an alternative protector, one she knows only in public settings, and not privately or intimately. Perhaps it is about the separation of the genders too: The woman deals with her emotional life, the man with business. What we do know is that Jervis wants to control her after he has fallen for her, and he becomes increasingly protective of his assets in one or another way. In some ways Daddy-Long-Legs is reminiscent of Mr B. in *Pamela*, both men being proud and of a good family

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<sup>37</sup> One might speculate about his own feelings - after having received her correspondence for several months and learning more about her personality he might have started developing feelings for her. It might well have been a coincidence that Judy ended up being roommates with his niece Julia, and it might be that the manipulation and dictation began when Judy began writing about Jimmie.

more or less unwillingly falling in love with women of lower birth through reading the letters they write and finding them worthy of becoming part of their worlds.<sup>38</sup>

There are several similarities between *Pamela* and *Daddy-Long-Legs*. Before marriage women were seen as the property of their father, and “the theme of ‘parental regard’ often becomes a matter of obedience, and the protagonists are inclined to be submissive towards their guardians.” (Davidson 194; Brandtzæg 112) In both these novels it is the men who are the tyrants, not the parents; Pamela wants to be obedient to Mr B., but must obey her parents’ wish to keep her virtue.<sup>39</sup> Judy obeys Daddy-Long-Legs at first, but rebels; she threatens to reject his allowance, goes where she wants and does not follow his orders. But when Judy disobeys Daddy-Long-Legs she disobeys Jervis and puts their relationship at risk. They both play a game, but Jervis cheats.

### 2.3. Synopsis

Women of the period were seen as property and had to show obedience to some extent to both father and husband. However, according to Brandtzæg, the obedience was willingly granted because the father has his daughter’s best interests at heart. What is interesting about *Daddy-Long-Legs* is that Judy has no parents, and that the man who acts in loco parentis also becomes her suitor. Such novels also dramatize the period between young adolescence and marriage as a time of anxiety for society because women can make the wrong choices, give up their virtue or choose the wrong husband. In *Daddy-Long-Legs* that time is perhaps redefined, as a space in which the woman can try out different roles and identities in her path towards self-definition. Husbands are seen as combining positions of authority: they are money-makers and decision-takers, insinuating that the only period in a woman’s life where she can decide for herself and have a higher degree of freedom is during the time of the suiting, combined with the insight that all women have is the right to refuse a marriage. The man in epistolary novels is often distant, mysterious, powerful and has a respectable rank in society. He does not have to persuade the reader. This is definitely the case in *Daddy-Long-Legs*, considering Jervis does not write more than one single letter and one note.<sup>40</sup> Judy is the one contributing all the emotions and the traditional feminine virtues of honesty, modesty, wit,

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<sup>38</sup> There are also several echoes to *Jane Eyre* (1847). Both Judy and Jane are orphans becoming dependant on an older, distant male patron which does not quite reveal himself. They both lack economic autonomy and legal independence.

<sup>39</sup> Although Judy’s ‘parent’ is Jervis.

<sup>40</sup> On page 176 Judy has received a letter from Daddy-Long-Legs asking her to come to New York to meet him. The letter is not in the novel.

artistic abilities and beauty, continuing the trend of the period. However, *Daddy-Long-Legs* also questions this belief through Judy, showing women who are deferential to some extent but capable of exercising choices without waiting to overthrow patriarchy.<sup>41</sup> In a way, the author uses Judy's education at college, where women had largely been denied access until recently, to argue that they are just as capable of acting responsibly in the sphere of politics. Considering the novel was written in 1912, a mere eight years before women in America got the vote, the novel draws on the shifting dynamics of gender relations; women's enfranchisement is not a threat to society or to the family, although Judy does jokingly comment that: "you should see what politicians we are! Oh, I tell you, Daddy, when we women get our rights, you men will have to look alive in order to keep yours." (68) An interesting distinction in this novel is that it invokes the conventional ending but at the same time refuses or fails to provide it: The novel does not end by Judy marrying Jervis. It is highly likely that they will marry, but the reader half expects one more letter because of the absence of the conventional ending and Jervis still being ill. It is a very clever ending, because it does not deny marriage, it just fails to supply it within the space of the novel itself. According to Brandtzæg "the romance ending is believed to confine and 'chain' the heroine in marriage", so by leaving the marriage out the book has a doubly happy ending: Judy ends up with Jervis but is still an independent woman. (144)

As for the traits used in this novel, they are all important conventional characteristics of the epistolary genre: From the intimacy which inspires the reader to sympathize with the protagonist, the awkward but action-promoting immediacy, to the simple language and drawings enhancing the letters' authenticity. As in *Pamela* the protagonist is a young girl, trying to make her way alone in the world, who through open, honest and innocent letters captures the heart of a wealthy upper-class man, thus securing her future while staying true to herself.

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<sup>41</sup> Exemplified in Judy's thoughtful comment: "The only way I can ever repay you is to turn out a Very Useful Citizen (Are women citizens? I don't suppose they are). Anyway, a Very Useful Person." (145)

“When fiction works, it has the charm of presenting life in something like its true colors, its true, bright colors. If we could strip away habit and dullness from our days, what we would be left with would look like fiction.”

- John Updike.

## Chapter 3 - Recent Work

### 3.1. S.

As discussed in the previous chapters, the epistolary novel survived beyond its heyday in the eighteenth century because despite its defects as a genre, it was still convenient as a way of showing the inner lives of characters. And it attracted the attention of some notable writers - Henry James, obviously, as well as Alice Walker in *The Color Purple*, Saul Bellow in *Herzog* (1964) and John Barth in *LETTERS* (1979). A great deal has been written on all three of these works, but an epistolary novel which has attracted less attention is John Updike's *S.* (1988), which tells the story of Sarah P. Worth as she leaves her husband Charles on a quest to find herself in an ashram in the Arizona desert.<sup>42</sup> The novel is composed mostly from her letters to her mother, her daughter, her husband Charles, as well as letters written for the Arhat to the outside world, and recorded tapes to her friend Midge; all containing her journey towards self-definition over a period of eight months in 1986.<sup>43</sup> There are fifty-five letters and six tapes in the novel.<sup>44</sup> There is recorded dialogue between Sarah and other characters of the ashram in the tapes, but apart from this the reader is only given access to Sarah's voice as hers are the only letters included in the book. We are only given her part of the correspondence with other characters - including two enclosed tapes of the Arhat speaking about Kundalini, and women and meditation - and one in which she has recorded a conversation with the Arhat which she

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<sup>42</sup> Most of the critical responses to Updike's novel trace its connections to, and appropriation of, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850). For additional information, see Royal or Sengupta. For more information about Updike's novels and Hawthorne in general, see Greiner or Calinescu.

<sup>43</sup> Arhat means 'the deserving one', or a Buddhist monk who has reached a high level of enlightenment. An ashram is a place of religious retreat.

<sup>44</sup> Fifty-five letters; four to Charles, four to Pearl, four to Dr. Podhoretz the dentist, two to Shirlee the hairdresser, four to her mother, two to Epstein the psychologist, in total nine letters to three different banking facilities, one letter to Irving her yoga instructor, one to Vikshipta her former lover, two to Alinga her lesbian lover, three to Martin the eldest son of Shirlee, two postcards to Shirlee's youngest son Eldridge, two to her brother Jerry, one to Gilman Charles' attorney, one to her own attorney Ducky, one to Myron Stern her old flame, and one to the Arhat. Altogether eleven letters from the ashram, three tapes to Midge, two tapes from the Arhat, and one recorded conversation.

will later use to blackmail him.<sup>45</sup> We see that one of the problematic aspects of the epistolary novel - its partiality or one-sidedness - becomes, in a twentieth century preoccupied with the role of the unreliable narrator, a point of interest. Having to guess from Sarah's letters about other perspectives, and about her own limitations, is one of the fascinating aspects of Updike's work.

The novel can be seen as both an act of homage to and an appropriation of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850). This is indicated partly by the long extract from *The Scarlet Letter* which is placed before the first pages of *S.*, as well as indirect textual references: Sarah is very preoccupied with the letter A which is all important in *The Scarlet Letter*; she writes about vitamin A, A-frames and an A-line dress for Pearl, and she writes a love letter to Alinga titled "Dearest, dearest A." (207; 99) Sarah has named her daughter Pearl and calls her an "elf-child" which is an exact copy of the name and description of Hester's daughter. (18) She stayed at a motel in Hawthorne and misses the hawthorns in her old garden, tells Pearl to "[t]hink of these letters as what I do now instead of embroidery", and is scared to end up "a sad old story buried amid the rubbish in the custom-house attic", *The Custom House* (1850) being a prefatory to *The Scarlet Letter*. (56; 31; 158; 206) In addition to this we have the preoccupation with religion, a statement from Sarah herself on the very last page claiming that her "[m]other's mother's mother's people [are] the Prynnes", and Updike's outright statement that this novel is a contemporary retelling of *The Scarlet Letter* from Hester's perspective. (264; Royal 1)<sup>46</sup>

The novel's title is interesting, considering that Sarah signs her letters Sarah, Sarah P. Worth, Sare, K., Kundalini and even Shri Arhat Mindadali M.A., Ph.D. Supreme Mediator, Ashram Arhat when she writes letters for the Arhat. Only four letters are signed S., which considering the amount of letters in the novel is a tiny proportion.<sup>47</sup> These four letters are all to her soon to be ex-husband, cleverly indicating that although she writes to over twenty individuals about different events, the core of the novel is about Sarah's journey away from Charles and her old

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<sup>45</sup> Kundalini is Sarah's ashram name, as well as the serpent of female energy dormant at the base of the spinal column.

<sup>46</sup> Royal and Sengupta also conclude that Hester's 'A' has been replaced by the tape recorder Sarah hides between her breasts. Apart from its position on her body I disagree with this claim on the grounds that the recorder is hidden and is not a visible symbol of Sarah's previous rebellion enforced on her by society. The recorder is not the visible source of her isolation, but rather a tool she uses to communicate with her old friend and with which she exposes the Arhat in the end.

<sup>47</sup> Love, S. (14), Fondly, S. (65), Love, S. (173), Ever, S. (264)

life as a homemaker, which is partly anchored by his position as a significant emotional focal point.

That Updike chose the epistolary genre for this novel is interesting. At one level, he does something which Hawthorne did not - narrating from the first-person a woman's break from society and her journey towards apparent autonomy. Hawthorne hints at what Hester Prynne was thinking from time to time, but mostly stays outside her consciousness. That Updike chooses to represent Sarah in an apparently unmediated way gives a greater amount of intimacy, but does not necessarily make us closer to the protagonist; in fact, it reveals her shortcomings as much as her strengths. The advantage of the epistolary genre is that no other genre supposedly more accurately and immediately mirrors the inner workings of a character in their own voice. The reader gets Sarah's impressions on the new world as they occur to her as and when she discovers it - as well as her reactions to responses her actions and thoughts provoke in her family and friends. By writing to a range of different people about her experiences and feelings the reader gets to see the different nuances to her personality. It is significant that Updike chooses to write from a woman's perspective, and the novel is narrated mostly by Sarah and an anonymous persona who has transcribed and commented on her tapes, and who rearranged the order of the last three letters. The epistolary novel is often associated with female characters, and there is certain appropriateness then to Updike using the genre to dramatize Sarah's progress as an independent woman, gradually liberating herself from the patriarchal society she grew up in. And given that Richardson's *Pamela* was ostensibly an attempt at educating women, *S.* is in keeping with the tradition of the epistolary genre as a genre about and for women. But although Updike's female impersonation is a largely convincing one, there is also a sense of distance that is also a feature of Hawthorne's original - a sense that he understands Sarah's fight but does not necessarily approve of everything that she does and says. The epistolary novel is useful in this respect too, because it is precisely its assumption of openness and sincerity (in letters people can express themselves as they truly are, because they are physically remote from the recipient) that leaves room for dramatic irony, and revelations that are unflattering. Updike also introduces a change to the original model: whereas Pamela wrote mainly to a single set of recipients, Sarah writes to several, and that gives us an opportunity to see discrepancies and inconsistencies.

### ***3.1.1. The Assumption of Intimacy***

Generally speaking, an epistolary novel gives the impression of a high level of intimacy, so that the reader feels a certain connection to the protagonist and sympathizes with her. However, in *S.* this is not as uncomplicated as it might appear. In most of her letters Sarah seems to be writing openly about what happens to her and how she feels, but after a few letters one realizes that this is not at all always the case. This is a book about a 42 year old woman who is in the process of alienating herself from her friends and family, and who is described as having “fallen” from the good society she was born into. (91) She tries to keep in touch through the media of letters and tapes, but does not always manage to be consistent, since even at the beginning of the novel she gives people different stories as to why she left and where she went. She tells her hairdresser Shirlee that she is on a vacation with her husband; to her daughter she says it was nobody’s fault; she tells Charles she has left him for another man; and in a letter to her mother we learn that she left because Charles did not care about her anymore, but that there is no other man, at least “not the way you think”. (21; 15; 12; 23) Sarah, like Judy in *Daddy-Long-Legs*, filters her letters, but instead of correcting herself as Judy does to ‘Mr Smith’ she tells different parts of the truth to different people. However, as the reader learns more about Charles’ adultery, a daughter in England and a lifetime of subordination we do feel sympathetic towards her, and realize that the reason she does not tell the whole truth in all of her letters is the result of exactly this previous life she is trying to escape. As she becomes more liberated from this past, her letters seem to develop into more truthful accounts of her adventure, until the point where she writes, to her dentist, that she lives at “an agricultural community” and, to her psychologist, about Hindu and Buddhist psychological thought. (102; 104)

The bond of confidentiality that the reader comes to feel towards Sarah is grounded mainly in our early introduction into her previous life through her memories of days past in her first letter to Charles. We see her pain, confusion and fear of leaving, and we feel that we do get access to her innermost thoughts and feelings, although it takes more work as we have to read between the lines to get there. *S.* can be compared to *Daddy-Long-Legs*, because in the same way that Judy constructs ‘Mr Smith’ as her fictional family, Sarah projects her wishes and dreams for the future onto the Arhat. To her he is a kind of God, and even after she finds out he is really an American fraud she finds that her “love for [him] is slowly being restored to the love it was before reality intervened”, showing, much like in Judy’s case, how it is difficult for reality to derail fantasy. (252) In *Daddy-Long-Legs* Judy decides to hide her past,



while Pamela is proud of hers. We learn from Sarah's letters that she has regrets and wishes to escape her personal history, but comes to accept it as part of her, and as with the other novels we learn of these regrets and hopes from her letters. She continues to contact people from her past however, so she might not try as hard as she thinks to get away from it. She has run away, but left a trail of clues like the "giant clue of dust in the air" from her car on her first trip to the ashram. (36) This attachment to the past is also apparent in the way she talks about her house and garden. She tells different stories and uses different language in her letters, but as privileged third party readers of all of the letters (rather than as discrete readers of a single correspondence) we are able to look through her stories and see pain and despair. Because of this we can easily see her flaws as well, and what we discover is a naive, inconsistent, spiteful and emotionally controlled woman. We also see a scorned woman, and although we do not identify with her as a trusted friend, we do end up pitying her.

One of the highlights in *S.* is the technical achievement whereby a single character's consciousness is represented to us in an intimate but credible way. The novel differs from both *Pamela* and *Daddy-Long-Legs* in that the reader only has access to Sarah's letters and tapes, and in that Sarah corresponds with several people. This novel also differs from James' linked short stories, as here we only have access to the thoughts of a single letter-writer communicating to several people, the end result being diversity as well as a depth of representation, as different correspondents bring out different nuances to Sarah's personality and story. The reader gets to experience Sarah writing and speaking intimately to Midge and her family, while encountering her public self through her letters to 'Gentlemen' and doctors, and through the letters she writes on behalf of the Arhat. It is interesting to note that while the previously mentioned epistolary novels have tended to be about young women who simultaneously seek advice while conveying their story, in this novel it is the other way around: the protagonist dispenses advice rather than seeking it. In nearly every letter to her mother she offers guidance about money, vitamins, and how to take care of herself and her belongings; she cannot stop lecturing Charles about how to take care of the house and the garden; she naturally gives plenty of advice to her daughter; and she even gives instructions to her yoga instructor and dentist.

On the other hand, we do not read the replies that Sarah receives. We have to reconstruct these through her comments in subsequent letters. We are exclusively reading her side of the story, and that makes us fully reliant on her perspective. Incoming letters are less important

and interesting than her responses to them. In a way, this gives us the impression of a very narrow subjectivity, a consciousness that from time to time seems very self-concerned. It also promotes a very un-novelistic sense of *S.* as a monologic text: although there are many other characters in the work, they are all filtered through Sarah's thoughts and words. At least in theory, the epistolary novel complicates Bakhtin's assertion that the novel in general is necessarily dialogic, because it inevitably imports voices and vocabularies that are not exclusive to one character or world view. (289) At first glance, *S.* appears to be exclusively monologic, since we do not get to read any responses to Sarah's letters (though a possible explanation for this might be that Sarah has disappeared, taking the letters sent to her with her, so that the anonymous persona who collates her voice at the end did not get access to these documents.) However, compared to *Daddy-Long-Legs* or *Pamela* the dialogic element is actually quite strong in *S.* There are elements of dialogue in the tapes, and in some letters she speaks for, and to all intents and purposes as, the Arhat or Durga.<sup>48</sup> Although we cannot see it directly, we know Sarah receives correspondence, and what she writes can therefore be seen as an inclusion of other voices and perspectives. Nevertheless, the novel does not so much revolve around a recipient as Sarah, and we learn more about her layers of being than we do in the other novels.

Another clear difference between *S.* and the other epistolary novels previously under discussion is the degree of intimacy which exists privately between the characters within the novel. *Pamela* was mainly about preserving innocence and virtue, and there were no hints of sexual desire from Judy in *Daddy-Long-Legs*. In *S.* however, sex is central, and especially so in the sanctity of the ashram, where 'maithuna' (or coitus) plays a major role. Sarah speaks to Midge about divine orgies taking place, the participants are naked during the dynamic-meditation session where Vajna allegedly tries to rape her, and there are ritualistic aspects to her first sexual encounter with the Arhat. (51; 43; 180-6)<sup>49</sup> For Sarah personally sex seems liberating, and after the first time she sleeps with Vikshipta (also known as Fritz) she feels awoken. (46) Later she initiates a lesbian affair with Alinga which gives her joy and a sense of well-being, which she later breaks off because Sarah cannot love only her. (166) Sex is an important part of this novel, which represents a fairly major shift of direction from earlier epistolary works, where the emphasis was on chastity and on socially approved forms of

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<sup>48</sup> Durga is the Arhat's Irish right hand woman. Her ashram name means 'difficult of approach', and is the name of Shakti in her aspect as the goddess of war and destruction.

<sup>49</sup> Vajna is a young boy in the ashram. His name is not explained.

courtship. It is especially distant to the epistolary novel under Richardson's stewardship, where young women were educated about the importance of abstinence before marriage. Part of this is historical, of course, and part of it relates to character: Sarah is a grown, already married woman with previous sexual experience, and the novel was written at a time long after the sixties, when, as Sarah herself comments, there has been a revolution and "all the old barriers [are] down". (16) Nevertheless, *S.* derives some of its charge from being more explicit than previous examples of the genre (and in differing from *The Scarlet Letter*, which is narrated only *after* an act of adultery but otherwise almost entirely devoid of sexual content). But there is an argument for saying that *S.* also continues the work of previous epistolary novels, dealing with contradictions or sexual double standards within patriarchal views of women.

The voyeuristic element that was especially present at the beginning of *Pamela* (where the reader views letters without permission) is not as present in this novel. It is very important to Sarah that Charles does not know where she is or reads the letters which are not intended for him. She writes several times "you *mustn't* tell Charles", "*don't give the address to your father*" or "*don't show him my letters*", but her repeated emphasis is less about the unrestricted access we have to private materials than about the character's need to control more aspects of her experience. (47; 20; 90) As readers of the novel we have no way of sharing her secrets with Charles or anybody else in her world, and thus it is less egregious for us to read them. But privacy and its relation to personal authority, to control the circumstances of one's existence, is a concern in the novel. It gradually becomes apparent that one of her most trusted correspondents, Midge, shares information with Charles, and her betrayal also helps lessen our transgression and even places us as more sympathetic and loyal confidantes. In addition to these claims, the fact that the correspondences have been collected, edited and transcribed by an unknown third person makes our reading of them even less voyeuristic. Because we are so far removed from both Sarah and the events taking place in her narrative, the internal presence of the reader is not such a factor as it is in both *Pamela* and *Daddy-Long-Legs*, although we are drawn in to her story and react to what she writes.

### **3.1.2. Sincerity**

The assumption of sincerity is an important element of the epistolary genre, and it is no less so in *S.* Throughout the novel the reader gets the impression that Sarah is speaking the truth, or at least her version of it. This impression is strengthened as the novel progresses, as she

sheds her old inhibitions as a part of her religious education in the ashram. In many of her letters we get the impression that there are fewer and fewer filters, as she even writes to her daughter about her ovaries, her womanhood, and her own limited sexual experience. (18; 85) Updike takes the concept of apparent sincerity one step further by having Sarah record things directly onto tape, where she does not have the chance to edit out parts of what is said or done. She refuses to delete any part of the tapes where the Arhat is speaking, for example, because since she sees him as an idol or God it would be blasphemous to alter, interfere with or block his words. (135) The technology of the tape recorder increases the impression of unmediated language even more so than in the letters because everything said or done when the tape is rolling is not subject to revision, or to a pre-existent script: it is immediate and transparent, a true representation, to be saved and sent to Midge. Immediacy is of course another important characteristic of the epistolary novel, where writers sometimes give the sense of events and experiences being told even as they unfold, with no gap between narrated and real time.<sup>50</sup> The presence of the tapes allow for immediacy to be present in the text in a much more natural way than how it has previously been used in the epistolary genre.

In the novel Sarah is perceived as a very naive character. She believes the best about the people she chooses to like and is for a time blind to both Charles' and the Arhat's deceptions. Because of this naiveté it is easy to assume that when she is not openly concealing the truth the feelings she shares must be genuine. Though she sometimes filters what she writes depending on who she writes to, her tapes to Midge especially disclose some less than flattering information about the ashram which gives the impression of sincerity. Since she chose to go there and presumably has a positive disposition towards the place, it stands to reason that a statement such as "they work you like dogs here [and] there aren't enough blankets for these cold clear nights" is fairly accurate and unbiased. (31) Nevertheless, her naiveté and admiration of the Arhat mean that she is easily manipulated. When she first arrives at the ashram she comments to Midge that "people *steal* here", but after having been there for only two months she "[nipped] into a room that the Mexican maid had left open and [stole] from the desk", justifying this on the grounds that "[p]roperty is not only theft, it's nonsense." (40; 104) So even if she is being sincere, the sincerity allows us to see defects in her character, exposing a gap between normative standards of behaviour and her convictions. Sarah is unafraid to express her opinions, but we see that some of her views are suspect and

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<sup>50</sup> With 'narrated time' I refer to the timeframe within the novel, where events may slow down, pause or speed up as the narrative is told. With 'real time' I mean the actual realistic movement of time in the real world.

self-serving - they reveal sides to her that she herself is unaware of. This is a change from the Sarah we meet before the ashram: although she took half of the stock and money in the accounts she owned jointly with Charles, she then at least justified it. As the novel progresses we see her losing critical distance and acting on impulses that are in fact a form of programming, sometimes even justifying continuous and petty acts of larceny such as taking the stationary on the grounds that “it amuses me so much”. (99) Later in the novel she even starts skimming money from the oxymoronic Treasury of Enlightenment, acquiring almost 300 000 dollars, and even provocatively admitting this in her final letter to the Arhat while also threatening to publicize the tape she has of them talking about his past should he try to tell anyone.<sup>51</sup>

If Nitya Kalpana is now recovered enough to resume supervision of the Treasury of Enlightenment, kindly explain to her that any apparent discrepancies she notices in the books must be blamed upon the irregular methods of accounting which I, having never attended business school, had to improvise, and if *that* does not explain everything, blame the diabolic machinations of the perfidious Durga. In return for this courtesy, rest assured that our personal relations and whatever revelations they brought are sealed in my vasanas [subconscious], to remain there as speechless vidya [wisdom] forever. If not, not - if you take my meaning. (249)

Of the stealing she confesses, only the paper from the motel is entirely unjustified by her. She finds ways to acquire what she feels belongs to her. The money she took from Charles was technically hers in her eyes, as he got the house and she had helped him advance his career by remaining at home:

Did I not labor for you twenty-two years without wages, serving as concubine, party doll, housekeeper, cook, bedwarmer, masseuse, sympathetic adviser, and walking advertisement - in my clothes and accessories and demeanor and accent and even in my body type and muscle tone - of your status and property? (62)

There is a personal dimension to Sarah’s complaints, but also a political one: the roles she plays are the ones assigned to married women by a patriarchal society. Women, the excerpt says, are seen by men as sexual objects, objects of display, unpaid manual labourers, and helpmates. The question is, however, how much this situation improves when Sarah moves to

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<sup>51</sup> The Treasury of Enlightenment is the ashram’s accounts, where followers of the Arhat deposits money for the daily operations of the ashram and for rings and limousines for the Arhat.

the ashram. She seems unaware for a long time that she has swapped one scene of exploitation and oppression for another. Thus she repeats her mistakes, but then justifies taking money from the ashram because the Arhat deceived her, just as Charles did. To be a wife and a female member of a commune amount to the same thing - a kind of unpaid labour. So when Sarah steals, she excuses the theft on the grounds that she is reclaiming wages that were never paid to her. However criminal her actions might be, there is an element of justice or satisfaction in the thought that the Arhat did not get to keep all the money, and one might feel that Charles had it coming - especially when we learn that he is to marry Sarah's best friend Midge. The world has not been easy on Sarah, so she takes what she feels she deserves from the people who have hurt her, and the epistolary genre allows her to be refreshingly open about her reasons.

Despite this, Sarah also lies from time to time in her letters, so the reader cannot be completely sure about how truthful she really is. As already mentioned she lies to her hairdresser and Charles, and does not tell the whole truth in her early correspondence as she seems insecure about how her journey will turn out and how people in her life will react and possibly judge her. But this means less that she is an unreliable narrator, and more that as a character she is concerned about her reputation, about preserving outward appearances: as readers, we get to the truth pretty easily.<sup>52</sup> Several times she writes things like "I have nothing but my love of the Arhat", and "[Charles] has all the worldly possessions we once shared" - both of which are plain lies. (63-4; 92) She also chooses to tell different things to different people so as not to compromise her reputation - sharing information with Midge which she does not intend for anyone else, for example, while scared that Charles or others might find out: "I guess I can tell *you*. You, Midge, but not Irving or anybody else". She especially wants to keep secrets from Charles: "For God's sake don't tell any of this to Charles or even to Irving" and "[i]t *mustn't* get back to Charles." (34; 52; 187) Sarah also keeps secrets from Durga. Durga is paranoid about secrets being leaked from the ashram, is rumoured to have spies, and reads through outgoing and ingoing mail. Although Sarah knows this and is aware that Durga does not approve of what she tells Midge, she still does it. She does not think she is doing anything wrong, and so she hides it so Durga will not find out. Again she takes justice into her own hands.

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<sup>52</sup> Unreliable narrator: One whose perception, interpretation and evaluations of the matters he or she narrates do not coincide with the opinions and norms implied by the author, which the author expects the alert reader to share. (Abrams 244)

There is an unusual amount of deception and lying in this book, which is remarkable for an epistolary novel. In addition to the stealing and deception already mentioned are the letters Sarah writes on behalf of Durga, the Arhat and herself to county officials and neighbouring farmers. Without her full knowledge she is a part of their deceit against the government, and she puts her name to letters dictated by the Arhat as a naive and almost brainwashed disciple, such as in the following letter to County Commission Chairman Aldridge:

The wiring and plumbing arrangements that your inspectors discovered are inappropriate you say, to “winterized tents,” as the jargon of our initial permits had it. Then, let us call them “substantial dwellings,” which more befits the condition they have grown into. When the sapling becomes a tree, or the bulb a flower, we do not cut it down because it is no longer what it was [...] Is this not cause for rejoicing rather than official rebuke? [...] If our population exceeds that allowable without declaring the existence of a city, then let us declare it a city. We propose the lovely name Varunaville [but] if you wish to give our city a more indigenous-sounding name such as Crusty Elbow or Flat Tire, please do. (141-3)

Even here, we are provided with useful information about Sarah and the other characters. The letter may not originate entirely with her, but it shows that she is willing to be spoken for and through by another man - and thus that her journey of liberation seems to have stalled or even gone into reverse. It also demonstrates that the ashram is a less than healthy stage for her to find a new role: Much of what happens there is illegal, even at the level of building and maintenance, and there is an arrogant and entitled air about the tone of the correspondence. The apparent humility and spirit of good will with which the letter ends fly in the face of the condescension that precedes it: “We future citizens of Varunaville look forward to hearing from you in a spirit of amiable cooperation in achieving our mutual goals.” (143) They want their demands to be met despite not keeping their end of the bargain.

The very next letter in the novel, from Sarah to Sheriff Yardley, is similarly provocative and concerns the arrest of two women on charges of smuggling cocaine and engaging in prostitution for the Arhat.

You ask whether our records show receipts from these poor young women whom you have so cleverly apprehended in the act of bringing a controlled (for obscure reasons, since it is relatively harmless [...] and certainly less corrosive and lethal than tobacco and alcohol, those

brother poisons that powerful vested interests keep pumping into our national bloodstream with scarcely a demur from legislators and law-enforcement officers) substance to those that peaceably desire it for recreational purposes. Our policy is to pay all receipts into the Treasury of Enlightenment without any numerical notation that might encourage an ethic of competition [...] So we most regretfully cannot aid your investigation, only ask your mercy upon the two accused. Their “crimes” are so labelled by a Puritanical and patriarchal society that seeks to punish its own dark cravings. (144-5)

This letter is signed Ma Prem Kundalini, the name given to Sarah in the ashram. Such a signature shows again that Sarah is losing her identity, her self: she adopts not only an assigned name, but also a way of speaking and belittling the outside world. In her letter she continues to suggest that prostitution and drugs should be legal, and calls the law stupid, unjust and even “life-denying”, a statement the old Sarah would never have uttered. (146) Three and a half months in the ashram have greatly changed the insecure housewife of the old order until the point where she is close to brainwashed. Despite the rebellious language she uses, it is clear that Sarah does not understand how serious the offences at the ashram really are. Her judgement and ability to reason are clouded: early in the novel she describes Ma Prapti, the ashram’s head of clinic, as “a *very* impressive woman”, but she later learns that she laced the food of the sannyasins (or pilgrims) with tranquilizers, and drugged officials with herbal tea. (116; 174-5) She also genuinely believes in the ashram’s cause until Alinga shares the Arhat’s secret (although Alinga says “she’d assumed I knew by now.” (210)) This is when Sarah realizes that she has not been the only one keeping secrets, and it is after this that she confronts the Arhat - or Art Steinmetz - while taping the conversation she will be using to blackmail him. She sends this tape to her brother Jerry for safekeeping - and it becomes another in a long line of secrets, which include the whereabouts of private accounts in the Bahamas and Switzerland which she creates about halfway through the novel, at a time when she is ostensibly at her most free of ego and material things. (234; 159-60) It is interesting that in the end the only thing she manages to accumulate, separately from her old life, is material gain, which throughout her life in the ashram is the very thing she is trying to escape. The secrecy persists throughout the novel until the very last letter she writes, where she asks Myron Stern, her old flame, to stamp and mail two letters for her to keep her location hidden.<sup>53</sup> She does not tell him why, except for the short and alarming “in case I die here or am put into prison for some technical reasons I won’t bore you with”. (248) These deceptions

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<sup>53</sup> Although it appears as the third last letter in the novel.



are visible in the novel even when Sarah herself is unaware of them. Despite this, Sarah's sincerity is mostly upheld, as much of what can be seen as untrue can be credited to her naiveté or social background.

### **3.1.3. Authenticity**

Making letters seem authentic is one of the major challenges in epistolary novels. Besides making the correspondent interesting and alive, and her story credible, another challenge for male authors writing about female characters is that no element of gender stereotyping emerges in their creation. Updike successfully manages to hide his presence in the letters, but there is a further narrative contribution made by the unidentified collator or editor of Sarah's tapes to Midge, who makes increasingly frequent comments when transcribing them. This character outside Sarah's world has transcribed her tapes to Midge and the Arhat's tapes and inserted explanatory notes in brackets to separate them from the rest of the text. This persona is not visible until he or she starts making longer comments on the sounds on Sarah's tapes, and the reader might not be aware of him or her until almost halfway through the novel. Although the anonymous transcriber is a source of mystery and confusion, he or she is a necessary tool to make the tapes work. Since what Sarah records on the tapes are spoken words they have to be transcribed for the reader of the novel to have access to them, and the invention of a scribe solves this technical problem, albeit raising questions about her- or himself which are never fully answered.

These explanatory comments, represented in the square brackets associated with editorial remarks, are a part of the triple focus on the correspondence in this novel. The comments range from the short and merely descriptive (“*[Responsive mumble.]*”; “*[Distant shout.]*” ; “*[Click: end of tape, side one.]*” and “*[Laughs]*” (106; 109; 186; 134)); the more elaborate (“*[Leaving off attempted accent and becoming conspiratorial.]*” (119)), to actual intrusive comments:

*[Breathlessly]* O.K., Midge, here we go. *[Noise. Amplified cloth and finger friction. Underlying rustling that may be heartbeat. Much ensuing silence and some unintelligibility. Female voices, difficult to distinguish. One male voice, indicated below by italics.]* (120)

And:

*[Amplified clatter and scraping as of drawer being opened and shut. Subsequent conversation faint and transcribed with difficulty. Male voice in italics as before.] (177)*

In the latter comment especially the unknown persona draws attention to her- or himself, stating that it was difficult to decipher the tape, and pointing out that he or her has transcribed for us before. It is possible to imagine that this persona has gathered all this material and edited it for this novel - much like Jonathan Pue's role in *The Scarlet Letter* which is revealed to us in *The Custom House* that prefaces it. The person who has gathered these letters has also chosen to change the chronological order of the last three letters, placing Myron Stern's letter before the two to the Arhat and Charles, and thus altering not only the sequence but the perspective and context around the last two letters. The unidentified editor's role raises some textual questions which might be argued to problematize the issue of authenticity in the novel. If he or she alters the sequence for reasons that are unclear, we cannot be sure that he or she has not also altered some of the contents. This alerts us to a series of cruxes elsewhere - such as how anyone could retrieve or get access to all of Sarah's letters when they are sent from at least three different locations (a motel, the ashram and Samana Cay), and when they are sent to a range of different people across America and even the world.<sup>54</sup> It is also odd that this editor has chosen to change the order of Myron's letter, while the tape with the Arhat's confession that he is really Art Steinmetz from Watertown, Massachusetts comes before the letter Sarah sends to Jerry in which she tells him to take the tape and hide it. (216-29; 234) It is not clear why the editor would change the first but not the latter, if not to keep the temporal flow intact until the end of the novel, showing the reader that the last two letters in the novel was enclosed in Myron's letter for him to send, and that Sarah has not mailed them so they would not have reached their addressees until if and when Myron sends them.<sup>55</sup> One could speculate that the novel ends because Sarah left for a new location and no one succeeded in finding her (thus preventing more letters from being found), or that the novel ends because the letter never reached Myron and thus that the two last letters were never sent. It also speaks of Sarah's transformation that she leaves it up to fate if the Arhat and Charles receive their letters in the end.

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<sup>54</sup> Pearl is in England and eventually Holland, and Jerry lives in South America.

<sup>55</sup> Sarah does not send these letters to Myron's address, as this is not known to her. She is sending them to a television channel after glimpsing Myron's name in the credits after a documentary on the California condor, and has written Myron's name on the envelope, hoping "that you are important enough for the channel to find you". (241) Therefore it is somewhat unlikely that the letter will reach Myron, and her last letters to Charles and the Arhat will perhaps never be sent.

There is a triple narrative perspective in this novel, the last of which is the one provided by the comments of this external transcriber. In addition, there is the implied perspective of the readers of the novel. Lastly, there is the implied perspective of the intra-textual readers of the letters which comprise the novel. The central perspective is that of the first-person writer of the correspondence - the one inside the letters and tapes themselves. In the very first letter Sarah describes how the man next to her on the plane is irritated by her writing and pretends to sleep in order to avoid consoling her. (11) The tape recorder has to be hastily hidden away when the other sannyasins come back from the Kali Club to prevent it being stolen or discovered by Durga and removed. (40) Sarah also decides not to send the letter she composed to Alinga while she was outside the ashram on a mission to return her previously missing rental car to Hertz, because Durga might read the incoming mail. (99; 101) This triple focus on her correspondence helps to contribute to the novel's authenticity by focusing on the letters as real entities that can be discovered by other characters and the tapes as real tapes which had to be transcribed before they could appear in Sarah's collected correspondence. Sarah herself also contributes to this focus by commenting to Pearl that "[i]f this is news to you, don't worry about it darling, I feel fine now", indicating that she has written many letters and is not certain to whom she reported Vanja's attempted rape. (87)

In addition to this there are several other moments in the novel which increase the impression of its authenticity and immediacy. On three occasions Sarah comments on the sloppiness of her writing being brought about by her exhaustion: "I must be tired all my commas are dropping away"; "[n]ext morning. The words were beginning to blur before my eyes and I could hardly hold my head up"; and "I am crying as I write this and perhaps make insufficient sense". (20; 25; 18) At another juncture, she has to check if the tape recorder is working: "Just let me check and see if this thing is working, the little spools going around. They seem to be", and she comments on her tape being incoherent: "Midge, I know I'm rambling hideously. I'm actually shaking, I'm so cold and probably feverish and achy all over." (30; 32) She often reports crying as she writes, or drawing attention to some other physical imperfection of the materials she writes upon: "Wet spot here because stewardess came with second drink"; "pausing now and then to blot my tears"; and "[t]hose round blurry spots in these 'wiggles' of mine [...] are tears, actual tears". (7; 11; 206) The references to these physical marks are literary devices, promoting a sense of real materials in the life of an historical and not a fictional personality. In *Daddy-Long-Legs*, of course, this was exaggerated by the inclusion of Judy's drawings, where tears were visible. Updike does not go that far, but his references to

tears are both a convention of the epistolary novel, where emotions and experiences are presented in the now, so to speak, without mediation, and a literary device with which to give the impression of traces of actual presence. Sarah's tears are not visible on the pages of this novel in contrast to Judy's drawings, but this absence can be doubly explained by the text having been tampered with and polished by the unknown persona, further increasing authenticity.

Updike uses other ways of simulating the real. In the tapes to Midge, for instance, Sarah says at one point that the rocks look like "a child just got done kneading them. That's k-n-e-a-d". (35) It is not always apparent what she means when one cannot see the words written down, and sometimes clarification is necessary. That is also proven by the transcriber of her tapes, who cannot distinguish between the female voices in the Uma Room. (120) However, the tapes do have some advantages not afforded to the letter. Firstly, words spoken are sometimes easier to interpret than written ones, as such things as tone of voice and external factors help to contextualize the sense. Secondly, the immediacy which is closely associated with the epistolary genre finds a suitable outlet in the tapes. When Sarah, in her first letter to Charles, writes "[t]he distance between us grows, even as my pen hesitates", or "I close my eyes and see our white house" and, "[n]o - I am suddenly *terrified* to be without you (interruption: we have landed and are taxiing) - to be without you now that dinner hour has properly come", we are confronted with one of the problematic aspects of the quest for authenticity through references to immediate experience, especially in the last passage. (3; 14) Even though the plane has landed and the passengers have been transported to an air-shuttle Sarah continues the same sentence as if no time had passed. It is interesting to compare these slightly awkward instances of immediacy in the letters to the sense of immediacy Updike tries to impart through the use of tapes, as in the following sequence where, terrified and alone, Sarah records her thoughts very much as they unfold:

*Ooh.* What was that? Nothing, I guess. Distant shots. I've made myself this cozy nest in Vikshipta's old A-frame [...] when he came back from Seattle he went straight to her and didn't give me the time of day. At any rate -

Uh-oh. There it was again. It sounded closer than way up the canyon, but then that's how sounds are out here [...] Anyway, this harness or whatever it is is held together by big brass buckles and rings with these designs that if you look -

Oh no. *No*. That was *definitely* footsteps outside, on the gravel. Now something's fiddling at the door! My God, Midge, what shall I do? Somebody's coming in! (176-7)

The use of the tapes can be seen as a response to the problem of Richardson's 'writing to the moment', namely that writing about an event as it happens stretches credibility at times (a problem Fielding satirized mercilessly when he has Shamela write a letter in the middle of an assault on her virtue). A tape solves this problem, at least in theory, because it is slightly easier or less awkward to record sounds than to write them down. It can be argued that Updike therefore uses technological advances in the recording of spoken language to bypass obstacles in the way of, if not writing, then communicating in the moment. Sarah reacts to outside sounds three times in this paragraph, breaking off from her topic and picking it up again, giving the sense not of speech but speaking, not of thought but thinking. And it seems natural and legitimate for Sarah, as she talks to Midge, is interrupted by outside noises, and reacts to them, to explain what is going on: in a letter such information could be filtered. Nevertheless, the tapes still have to be transcribed and written down afterwards, and we never hear or listen to them directly (except in audio versions of the novel), so that even here, as Sarah reacts to the uproar in the ashram immediately before she is visited by the Arhat and they have intercourse for the first time, it is difficult to take the scene entirely seriously.

Another contributor to the novel's credibility are the letters in which Sarah writes to her dentist Doctor Podhoretz, psychologist Epstein and hairdresser Shirlee to cancel appointments she has made with them previous to her leaving Charles, "after all the trouble we went to to find an ideal time". (21) These letters insinuate that Sarah lives in a real universe and has real responsibilities. These letters also show us her character before entering the ashram; she cares about how these people perceive her and even lies to Shirlee, claiming that she is on a romantic vacation with Charles to the Far West. (21) She tells Podhoretz only that she is "a long way from Swampscott", while she admits the partial truth to Epstein, since he gave her the courage to leave in the first place, telling him that she has left Charles, but not where she is going. (21; 29)

Sarah's use of language is a significant contributor to the novel's authenticity. She employs colloquial language like "bumpety-bump-bump", "muddlehead", "ticky-tacky newish houses" and "I'm sitting out in the rocks [...] - you know, where the Fountain of Karma plays - and there's a kind of natural bench - out here where I am, I mean" to describe different things in

her letters and tapes. (36; 63; 35; 42) This kind of language, in combination with mid-sentence interruptions such as “*don’t* let them listen to [end of tape]”, her inability to mimic the accents of the locals and the Arhat, the long descriptions of the landscape and small observations such as noticing wool on a barbed wire fence, make her story seem informal and distracted both by the vagaries of thought and the external events of every-day life. (197; 35; 41; 43; 184; 36) The references in some letters to enclosures (a tape of the Arhat or expensive illegal snakeskin sandals), as in *Daddy-Long-Legs*, adds to the effect of realism, and so too does the fact that an unknown person has transcribed the Arhat’s tapes, making it accessible to the readers of the novel as well as Sarah’s intended recipients. (202; 75-83; 106-10)<sup>56</sup> The amount of letters Sarah writes are highly realistic, adding up to about 25 pages a month including the letters she writes for the Arhat, which considering what she experiences and all the people she corresponds with does not seem excessive. The very fact that she writes professionally also draws attention away from the novel’s artifice, and the overall impression is that Updike has managed to create a credible and well-rounded novel.

#### **3.1.4. Characterization and Character**

The nature of the epistolary novel is such that we only have access to Sarah Worth’s part of the correspondence and are therefore excluded from everything she chooses not to share. This is one of the criticisms that are commonly levelled at characters in epistolary novels, namely that we only get their point of view. Nevertheless, like dramatic poems, letters can reveal much more about the character than he or she might be aware of, and we learn a great deal about who Sarah Worth is. It is probably fair to say that she is the most complicated of the protagonists covered in this thesis.

One of the first traits of the epistolary genre that we can detect operating in *S.* is Sarah’s inherent naiveté, which stems from her time as a homemaker with Charles. Her life is the sheltered one of the traditional wife: she lives for her house and garden, for her role as the domestic partner to the professional man and for her family and friends. Her daughter Pearl’s departure for England, and the exposure of her husband’s infidelity bring about the crisis that fuels the rest of the novel. So in one sense this novel is very different from its predecessors

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<sup>56</sup> Compared to *Pamela*, *S.* is more aware of both authenticity and perspective. In both novels there is only one main letter-writer, but *Pamela* only writes to her parents, and thus only shows one side of her personality; the innocent girl. There are internal readers in *Pamela*, like in *S.*, and colloquial language, but the range of personality and nuances in Sarah’s personality are much more visible and convincing. In addition to this, the tapes make it possible to naturally record immediacy in Sarah’s story.

because it does not end with a marriage but begins with the end of a marriage. But the naiveté still remains, and is especially evident in Sarah's first tape to Midge, where her impressions are coloured by the views of the Arhat and his disciples. Sarah has rejected one man but continues to be defined by others. Although she complains about marriage as a kin to a life of slavery, she does not initially seem aware that her refuge is fairly similar: (15)

[All] day long I shovel this gray goop [...] It's more fun than hoeing artichokes and setting out hybrid heat-resistant tomato plants, which I was doing the first two weeks in this absolutely merciless sun, but, my goodness, your shoulders do ache from pushing the goop around [...] And these aluminum trailers really aren't very well insulated [...] The only heat they have are electric heaters, but between midnight and six electricity is cut off for every place but the guardhouses along the border and the section where the Arhat and his close advisers live and the Kali Club [...] (32)

The description of life at the ashram makes it seem like a labour camp, where the unwitting members of the sect work all day for no pay and live in segregated conditions. In addition they are all strongly encouraged to donate all their worldly goods to Treasury of Enlightenment, in order to "represent the love we feel for the Arhat." (33) Sarah is clearly blinded by this love, and does not heed the warnings of the people in the nearby town of Forrest:<sup>57</sup>

[He's] brought in all these hippies to have drugs and orgies and furthermore the city he's putting in illegally is playing havoc with the water table. They told me how he'd gauge all my money out of me and work me to death and pump me full of drugs. (35)

The water table trouble they are angry about is the Fountain of Karma, which Sarah later learns is "perfectly ecological, just the same ten thousand gallons being recycled over and over". (36) Everything that the townspeople tell her turns out to be true, although it takes her seven months to realize this. As readers, however, we see this almost immediately during her initial interview with Durga, where she is asked if she has "venereal disease and how much

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<sup>57</sup> Updike is clearly playing with the history of Puritan settlement in New England, where Europeans gradually encroached on lands and woods belonging to native peoples. Here the people of Forrest complain against the intrusion of the Arhat. The name of Forrest is also interesting because it relocates the pastoral virtue to a small town setting rather than the alternative community Sarah has fled to. In addition, the forest in *The Scarlet Letter* is close to where Hester is banished to and forced to live, and is also the place where people achieve a degree of clarity.

money [was she] bringing to the Treasury of Enlightenment?" (38) Our suspicions are confirmed shortly afterwards, when she is given "a really very thorough examination for venereal diseases", but told to ignore the symptoms of a very bad cold. (40)

Nevertheless, Sarah is a complicated character who combines a certain blind innocence with intelligence. Even though she does not quite realize that the ashram is scamming money she still conceals how much she really has. (38) She also recognizes that the young sannyasins who have been at the Kali Club are "high as kites", and by the end of the novel is able to question how the Arhat could be nervous when he is a *jivan-mukta* - meaning he has attained release from delusion but remains on earth. (40; 179) In addition to this worldly awareness, Sarah also seems well read: in trying to motivate Pearl to continue her education she mentions prime minister Margaret Thatcher, Queen Elizabeth II and the Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw; she is familiar with European countries and thinks that Holland is a dull and flat country, which treated the natives in Java very badly; and in a letter to Dr. Epstein she wonders whether his reticence is another version of the Victorian father's silence. (83-4; 87; 103)

Sarah is also, as touched on earlier, a self-righteous character who justifies her own actions. Nothing is ever quite her fault and she almost always has good reasons for doing what she does, although her actions might not always be morally correct. Though taking money from Charles is not unjustified, it is at odds with her self-professed ambition to be free of ego and materialism. Taking money from the Arhat is excused because he himself was deceiving others, but in stealing the money she takes more than belonged to her in the first place, effectively robbing others. An even more egregious act is advising Mrs Blithedale to transfer more money into an account that she intends to rob.<sup>58</sup> Even from these few examples it is clear to see that Sarah is ethically much more ambiguous than Pamela and Judy, and she takes on some of the characteristics which are normally assigned to males in the epistolary tradition.

An apparent inconsistency in *S.* is Sarah's claim to be free of ego. She proudly declares that "[you] speak of my renewal here as an 'ego trip' when in fact the *flight from ego* is what I

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<sup>58</sup> *The Blithedale Romance* is the title of an 1852 romance by Nathaniel Hawthorne. The novel tells the story of an alternative community, which is based on the historical Brook Farm which both Hawthorne and Margaret Fuller, an important nineteenth century feminist and writer, belonged to. By invoking this novel Updike is showing that the human desire to find a place outside society is a well-established one, but also that individuals are idealistic, resourceful and gullible. Updike actually wrote an introduction to the 2001 edition of this novel.



have undertaken”. (153) In the ashram she strives to be free of ego and materialistic influences and claims to be as “free and poor as the gray-throated flycatchers” and has escaped the “world of petty finance”. (92; 104) Considering she has taken half of Charles’ money with her, this is not true, and she still pesters Charles to remember to send her “half the proceeds” if he rents out their Cape estate, “will settle for half the value of the two houses” in a divorce, and tells her attorney that she will “settle for half of everything but begin by asking for it all”. (65; 170; 239) Including the money she steals from the ashram, if the proceeds of the divorce go her way she will end up a wealthier woman after her flight from materialism than she was before she left Charles.

Self-deception is another one of Sarah’s less attractive traits. Whereas the epistolary genre traditionally shows a conflict between duplicitous men and fairly innocent women, Sarah combines both attributes. She blames her parents and Charles for taking away the love of her life, Myron Stern, and Charles for taking over the role of her parents as an enforcer of the “stale old order”. (43; 13; 91) She also, more trivially perhaps, blames her mother and teacher for “[forcing her] to be right-handed”. (25) She has enough self-knowledge to admit that she has previously been a masochistic-recessive type, “the good girl who retreats into the knowledge that *she’s* not doing anything and somebody *else* is to blame”, but this implies that she has stopped being that, whereas one can find continuing traces of this refusal to accept responsibilities in many of her letters, especially towards Charles; (43)

[Pearl] not going back to Yale is tragic, and I blame you. Through this effete Jan you are acting out your own fantasies of seduction [...] using your paternal power over her to seduce her into “showing me up” by getting married just as I am getting *un*married. I *feel* you, out there, as a dark packet of wounded maleness spitefully taking any tack to “get at” me, even if it means ruining your daughter’s fragile young life. (172)

What Sarah does not see is her own partial impact on Pearl’s life. When she writes to Pearl she gets angry about the insinuation that her own behaviour is embarrassing and potentially detrimental to the life of her daughter and her future in-laws, and her language becomes exaggerated and hyperbolic:

*Perish the thought* that I and my shoeless friends would for a moment cause a frown to cross the stately brow of the beer count where he sits enthroned amid his mighty vats of boiling mash! (157)<sup>59</sup>

When her mother tries to alert her to other views of the ashram by sending her newspaper clippings, Sarah is unwilling to accept the possibility that she might be misguided, and suspects that Charles is involved: “If Charles hadn’t somehow found out where I was and told you and you hadn’t told all your neighbors they wouldn’t be upsetting you by showing you all these stupid clippings.” (94) What these quotations reveal is a complexity of emotional depth to Sarah that is not matched by any characters in the other epistolary novels that we have read so far. For instance, there is a suspicion that Sarah actually agrees with her mother, her daughter and her former husband, but responds with anger because she feels that she is not being supported in the choices that she makes. At times this emerges in a profession of failure that also verge upon self-pity, as in her first letter to Pearl:

I am in disgrace. I have flubbed my rôle. [...] You have played and are playing so splendidly the rôle of Daughter and your father impeccably assumed the part of Dada but I seem to have forgotten my lines and wandered offstage. (16-7)

The choice of imagery here is very interesting. Social roles are to a large extent inherited: we play the parts of father and mother, brother and sister, daughter and son. That Sarah chooses to do something different means that she cannot fall back on previous narratives and instead seeks to compose her own. Correspondence therefore becomes a way of trying to find a language and identity for her new self. At the same time she seems torn between wanting to leave the past behind and wanting to get credit for it, and nowhere is this more evident than in her letters to her daughter:

Precious Pearl, make no mistake: *I* nursed you, *I* changed your diapers. I dried your tears. I sang you songs when you were nervous at night [...] You sucked milk out of *my* breasts, took hold of life in *my* belly, not your father’s. [...] I am *hurt*, dearest Pearl, by what seems to me not so much your divided loyalty [...] but what can only strike me as *disloyalty*. [...] What *do* you all object to? (156-7)

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<sup>59</sup> Pearl’s boyfriend Jan’s parents are brewers in Holland.

Sarah's pain is very obvious here, but so too is her failure to act as a parent. She seems unable to see that her daughter so-called betrayal and disloyalty might actually be anxiety and concern.

In another letter to Pearl Sarah comments:

I must leave it to your judgement, to what extent it is still true that a young woman compromises and cheapens herself by openly lending herself to the companionship of young men, with all that that implies. [...] they like us to be pure and at their mercy or else whores who needn't trouble their consciences. (92-3)

The language here is not only archaic but self-conscious. At one level this is a statement by an emotionally erratic character in a particular time of her life. At another level the old fashioned language and the theme of a woman's chastity draws attention to the role of female characters in the epistolary novel. In other words, Updike seems to be asking, through his effete style how the epistolary novel can continue to address women's lives if it is mostly concerned with the preservation of virtue and reputation. What he is clearly implying is that the choices of Madonna or whore are no longer applicable or valid. In the same way that it is ridiculous for the mother to suggest that her daughter cheapens herself by having an open relationship with a young man, it is equally ridiculous to expect the epistolary novel to tell the story of a struggle over a young women's virtue.

Consistency is an important element of Pamela's character - it guarantees that her concern with her virtue is a genuine one. But it also makes her a less than interesting character - or, to put it another way, what is interesting about *Pamela* is the situation that the eponymous character finds herself caught up in. Updike clearly tries to change this in his novel and character; running away to join an alternative society is less interesting and less dramatic than Sarah's responses to her actions. In this sense inconsistency becomes important as a novelistic device for creating interest in the character. Throughout the novel Sarah claims to be over her anger at Charles multiple times, and when she writes to the Enrights about their son Vajna, she tells them that "[y]our son is not 'yours' even though you carried him in your womb and paid for his extensive education, frat fees, auto insurance etc.", although in the very next letter she speaks of her daughter as "*my darling dearest Pearl, my only child*". (201; 202; my italics)

Another inconsistency is that although Sarah reacts with anger when anyone judges her, she is the most judgemental of all the characters. When Pearl leaves for England she warns her about “these young English nobility and their dangerous drug habits” and “[homosexuals who] think women are strange, too strange to deal with [...] and competitors furthermore.” (19) She claims to know that “most crimes of passion are committed by Hispanics”, and that “most men [are] just terrible”. (98) When she realizes that Pearl is infatuated with a Dutch boy and plans to go to Holland, she admits to her mother that “I’ve always hated the Dutch ever since that sadistic Mrs. Van Liew you used to stick us with while you and Daddy went off on one of your cruises”. (97) She tells Pearl that “when I try to picture these lumpy Dutch women in bathing suits I *shudder*”, and then in a letter to Charles she calls them a “gross Dutch bunch [who are] materialist, class-obsessed, cruel in their smugness, and smug in their dullness [...] and nothing delights them so much as the destruction of a beautiful innocence like our daughter’s.” (84; 171-2) In the end she groups together even the members of the ashram and says that “[t]hey all love their green cards, these foreigners”. (155)

Sarah is also selfish - and the epistolary genre is therefore a perfect medium for exploring her character because the letters are all written by and about her. When she learns of her daughter’s pregnancy she writes: “[a]fter wounding me in these various other ways you want to make me into a *grandmother* [...] to make me an *ancestor* [...] I’m not ready, I’m still learning how to life, to *be*. [...] I’m having *fun*, honey.” (206) She even refuses to be at the wedding, because “I disapprove so thoroughly of this particular ceremony [...] that my presence there would create a spiritual irritant if not a vocal objection ringing off the scandalized church rafters. [...] Have a lovely wedding.” (208) Despite this, Sarah is also a very sweet character in her naive way. Through her letters she reflects on Pearl’s childhood, calling her writing “wiggles”, remembering her youth, and telling her not to do drugs. (15; 19) She also does this with Charles, showing us the love they shared in a small Birmingham apartment and on a romantic holiday to Saint Martin. (64-5; 259) She has this disarmingly naive way of expressing herself, as when she writes to Pearl that “[y]ou were sweet to reassure me that Jan is not a homosexual”, and confessing: “I very absurdly keep feeling guilty about this rented car of mine that disappeared when I arrived here”. (85; 91) She is also innocent enough not to be overly concerned about the legal trouble she is in, as indicated by the following passage:

Charles has got this new tough lawyer called Gilman who keeps writing me these rather comically officious letters about a Hertz car I mislaid and some other financial details that you can bet if a man had done them wouldn't strike him as nearly so high-handed. But the head cold I came with is quite gone at last. (98)

There is a lovely switch here from the very real dangers associated with a criminal offence to the more banal comment about her cold, which shows a rather charming inability to distinguish between the seriousness of the two. Despite poor judgement and poor choice of language Sarah comes across as a likable character. In the end she decides to perhaps go to Holland after all to help her daughter with her pregnancy, and even apologizes to Charles for trading in their stocks on the advice of Irving's astrology. (262; 263)

Sarah is as a very well rounded character in Updike's novel. Her previous life with Charles has made her innocent and naive to the outside world, while his infidelity creates a resentful, self-righteous and selfish response. In her own eyes she is in the process of liberating herself, while not quite sure how.

### **3.1.5. Men**

In her old life Sarah was secluded and happy about the small things, even loving the bodily smells Charles left in the bathroom. (8) She was woken up from her tranquil life by realizing that Charles had several affairs and she left him to go the ashram. Here she is almost raped by a boy named Vajna, which further wakes her up from her passive innocence, and after this she engages in several affairs with Fritz, Alinga and in the end the Arhat himself. Because of her past Sarah harbours a lot of resentment towards men, and after the break with Vikshipta she becomes hostile towards them, so much so that she begins a lesbian affair. She also tries to influence Pearl by recounting her mistakes, and tries to put her off Jan:

Of course your Jan seems to you to be a fully feeling and responsive human being now, just as Fritz [Vikshipta] did to me a month ago. But afterwards, if you can bear to talk to them - these meaningful men - it turns out that their minds even at the *height* of the involvement were totally elsewhere - were not really in the relationship at all! (86)

Sarah has an understandably human tendency to universalize her life experience, disappointed by one man she generalizes and as already mentions she comments: "aren't most men just

terrible?" (98). It is interesting to note however that as Sarah becomes more secure in herself as a woman, she seems to become more like a man. Alinga once referred to her as "a dark and stormy prince", and the Arhat comments that she has "spoken like a man" and has "gotten a bit butch since coming here", and Sarah herself remarks that she feels like a "strangely weak man." (166; 229; 167) When she learns from Midge that Gloria's husband Ducky has left her because he is gay she concludes that "men *do* make you feel foolish, unless you watch your step with them *every inch*. What a woman has to realize is that as far as she's concerned *she's* number one, too, just like a man." (114) This is an important realization, and Sarah has clearly grown more confident in herself since the beginning of the novel, where she referred to women as "the frailer sex", and revealed that she herself was a person of 'the stale old order' by commenting to Pearl that in her day "a young man would either pay for such an excursion as the one Jan proposes or else not invite the young lady to come on it." (15; 92) Sarah has admitted that because of her life as a homemaker, she has missed out on the female liberation, but even the language here is curiously nineteenth century, as Sarah's phrase 'frailer sex' is a version of the 1960's classification of women as the 'weaker sex', and 'young lady' is typical language of the middle-class. It is important to realize that Sarah's changes are gendered by others as male: In other words by becoming more self-confident, decisive, active, and concerned for her own welfare, she is behaving in a way that is associated with men - it is not that her biological identity has been compromised.

The nature of epistolary fiction means that we only get Sarah's perspective of Charles, and it is therefore difficult to judge him or indeed to evaluate the accuracy of Sarah's views of him. What emerges from the letters is that he used to be loving and caring, but became a cold man who ended up using her to advance his career before discarding her. In many ways Sarah's judgement is close to the descriptions of married life that are recorded in Betty Friedan's classic *The Feminine Mystique*, the 1963 study of the lives of American housewives during the 1950's and 60's. In one way the proximity of what Friedan has to say about the lives of married women to some degree corroborates what Sarah feels about her own marriage, where Charles treated her as a piece of furniture or a housewife-puppy, "offering up her pathetic worried bones and chewing sticks", and indirectly pressurizing her to account for every minute of the day and every dollar spent. (15) But nevertheless we do get glimpses into his point of view. He is led to believe by Sarah herself that she has left him for another man, so it seems reasonable for him to hire an attorney to reclaim the money she stole from him. Indeed Updike offers the structural parallel to his demands when Sarah later asks her mother to make

sure that the admiral who courts her is financially solvent as a way to make sure that he does not steal her money. Charles also seems to be a good father to Pearl, visiting her in Holland and supporting her relationship with Jan, although Sarah believes strongly that he is only doing this to spite her.

In one way not knowing a whole lot about Charles makes us give him the benefit of the doubt from time to time, whereas learning a lot about the Arhat enables us to see a discrepancy between his behaviour and Sarah's blinkered view of him. Sarah's letters and tapes are full of comments about his greatness, but Updike allows us to see behind her infatuation - as for example when he is chauffeured daily in a limousine and passes by a worship crew of workers who live in terrible conditions and do not even get enough food. (30; 32; 31) Although the first person perspective of the epistolary novel can create a skewed and unreliable view of reality, sometimes the bias is so obvious and extreme that it pushes us to an opposite understanding of the facts:

He *is* beautiful [...] So beautiful. The posters we had don't really do justice to the *glow* he has in person [...] this incredible olive smoothness of his skin [...] and thick black eyebrows in two perfect arches, and these rich chocolaty eyes there seems no bottom to [...] and this amazingly gentle smile that isn't exactly mocking but on the verge of it, and these delicate graceful hands with all their rings flashing when he waves through the limousine window. (33-4)

The Arhat has flashy rings on his fingers, expensive furniture and air-conditioning, while his disciples have to suffer, and yet he claims to be the one who is "penniless" and "beyond material things". (96) Later in the novel we find out that the limousines are not even paid for. (69) It is clear too that Sarah's behaviour is partly the product of her being in love, but also because she has been brought up to accept being secondary as the norm for a woman. She claims to have left her masochistic side behind her, but it resurfaces strongly in her attraction to the Arhat: "God, I love him, even though he makes me suffer. Love - *luff*, he says - is agony. *A-go-ny*, Midge. (43)

The Arhat has fabricated a story that he was an orphan from Ellora in India who grew up wanting to "wake people up". (53; 51) To Sarah his childhood explains why he has some controversial opinions, especially about children, whom he calls "human tadpoles", and claims to be the cause of the starvation in India and Africa which creates conditions which are

worse than Hitler's camps. (151) According to Sarah children are the only area where he "isn't totally accepting and benign", but we also learn that he can be very cruel. When Sarah gets a job as his letter writer, her first letter is to Mrs Blithedale. (151) While writing this the Arhat stops Sarah several times to ask "if I thought a certain sentence was funny enough", and after they have finished the letter he says "[w]e will buffalo that old bitch". (73) Even though this is evidence that the Arhat is less than benign Sarah is still not able to see through his facade. Indeed one of the most telling details about the description of his beauty quoted earlier is that she records things that are suspect, but fails to understand their true significance. For instance - that his smile is always on the verge of mockery, which makes him less than appealing, or that the hands of this supposedly spiritual man is covered in expensive jewellery.

Updike treats sex in a more direct and vulgar manner than is the case in the other novels examined here, and in addition to his unsympathetic nature the Arhat is very preoccupied with sex. His ashram practices what outsiders would call orgies but what Sarah calls chakra puja (centre worship) or purnabhisheka (ritual copulation), and the sannyasins are naked for the only other group activity documented in the letters. (51; 43) One of the tapes included in the letters concerns women and sex, how sex is a part of his religion and how Buddhahood is in the vagina - "Buddhatvam yoshisyonisamsritam". (106) On the tape he explains how Buddha conquered death "by the technique of maithuna, of fucking," and how Radha, Krishna's favourite mistress, became a goddess "bruised as she was for love, scratched and bloody with love". (107) This focus on sex the Arhat excuses with Buddha's words "[w]omen are the gods. Women are life", but he obviously benefits from this belief himself. (108) He is not very good at concealing his true identity, as we learn from the tape where Sarah has recorded the conversation between herself, the Arhat and a couple of other women. Here Durga straight out calls him Art, comments that "these greedy fat Yanks [are] supposed to come here giving us all their worldly goods as the most basic spiritual exercise, the very bloody least they can do" and 'Art' suggests that they publish that he has reached a new level of enlightenment as a solution to their popularity declining, hereby insinuating that his ascension is a sham and the only higher levels he reaches are sexual and materialistic. (126)

Unlike in *Pamela* where Mr B.'s intentions seem initially less than pure, and *Daddy-Long-Legs* where Jervis' intentions are questionable, Arhat's motives are transparent to everyone except for Sarah and the inmates. The Arhat can be seen as an extreme and close to one-



dimensional version of Mr B. and Jervis at their most suspect. Mr B.'s goals at the outset include flirtation and seduction, but he is reformed by Pamela's innocence and becomes a respectable man. Jervis seems manipulative and attracted mainly by Judy's good looks, but does not use his influence to initiate a sexual seduction, and is anything but a libertine: Like Mr B., he is a perfect match. Updike clearly suggests that marriage as a goal of courtship is no longer a realistic convention of the novel, and his sexual predator is successful, unsympathetic, and uninterested or incapable of reform. If the epistolary is a novel which seeks to educate (like *Pamela*), the lesson to be learned here is that women cannot reform men, and women cannot get to know a man's true nature except over time - and perhaps over many years. In that sense, *S.* involves a fairly radical revision of the epistolary genre's conventions, but it still places a woman at the centre of its activities, implying that it is no longer a woman's job to educate men, or to get married: in the twentieth century, some degree of self-knowledge is as much as anyone can aim for.

### **3.2. Synopsis**

There is no conventional happy ending to the novel: Instead of Sarah finding someone or somewhere she can attain self-fulfilment, it is Midge and Charles, the secondary characters, who get married. However, Sarah does attain a great deal of money and has left the ashram to live in what may seem like a paradise in Samana Cay. She feels serene and happy there, although she is now alone, indicating that she has finally found real inner peace and realized that she does not need a man or anyone else to make her whole. (262) There is a lot of deception in the novel and there is no clear villain or antagonist, though Charles is the clearest candidate for the position, as he betrays Sarah, using the money from her trust fund for his education, abandoning and cheating on her, and eventually marrying her best friend. The Arhat is less than blameless, exploiting Sarah's sexuality, as well as committing fraud and conning credulous people out of their life savings. Durga is certainly a wrongdoer, corrupting the Arhat and - in keeping with her name - provoking the people of the "outer states". (89) Even the boy Vajna tries to rape her. (43) Despite all this, Sarah forgives them all in the end, and of course in comparison with Pamela she is hardly a paragon of virtue, she is sexually promiscuous, lies and steals.

*S.* does not adhere to all the traditional traits of the epistolary genre, as the novel includes plenty of deception, sex and female liberation, strangely enough not always the norm in this genre about and by women, especially the novels under scrutiny here. However, when

compared to the contemporary Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* for example, they add up to a new image not only for the female role, but also a new role for the epistolary genre. Together they show that despite not doing so frequently in the past, the epistolary novel has the potential to incorporate almost any theme or plot into its pages.

## Conclusion

The epistolary novel was born with Samuel Richardson's 1740 novel *Pamela*, but with the advent of realism in the 19th century novel it is possible to argue that the genre fell into a period of relative neglect and disuse. Nevertheless what my thesis has shown is that some of the finest novelists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as well as some of the most popular have continued to experiment with the possibilities of the epistolary form. As they do so the conventions and shape of the epistolary novel have necessarily altered. With Henry James the novel shortened to story form and from a single to multiple characters - both of which are highly innovative and interesting developments. Instead of relying on a single protagonist in a dramatic situation, James takes several characters and creates drama from their conflicting perspectives on the same events. In doing so James gives us insights into the nature of perception and the relativity of truth. Perhaps his greatest contribution to the epistolary genre however, is that he manages to combine the serious and the comic: the differences in opinion between his characters as they respond to the same journey for example, are just as often humorous and entertaining as they are thought provoking.

Another contribution that James makes to the epistolary genre is to provide the successive but overlapping responses of multiple male and female characters to the same set of experiences. Epistolary novels often involve a female protagonist often writing about or to a man, and James widens and complicates this perspective. However, it is the role of the female protagonist in several epistolary novels that I have found most fascinating in writing this thesis. In a way, the epistolary novel can be seen as a female *bildungsroman*, dealing with the transition from adolescence into early maturity of young women in the same way as the novel of education deals with the transition of adolescent men into a similar maturity. But whereas men take part in society and find professional or artistic roles, women usually gained entrance into society via marriage or relationships with men. What my thesis demonstrates is that with the development of the epistolary novel this entrance is managed in different ways, and sometimes even rejected. The lesson for young women reading *Pamela* is that virtue is the most important form of currency available to them. For the readers of *Daddy-Long-Legs* the concern with virtue is displaced onto the man - it is Jervis who is most preoccupied with this and not Judy. Instead, Webster creates a little space for Judy at the end of girlhood and before marriage where she achieves a measure of emotional, cultural and economic independence. Here we see a change: whereas *Pamela* is like the heroine of fairy-tales who is told to stay on

the path of virtue, Webster suggests that some degree of growth or self-knowledge is recommended before marriage, and there are differences in attitudes to their family background: Pamela's parents are good and simple people who have brought their daughter up in the right way, whereas Judy is an orphan and her family history is therefore less important than her formal and personal education. But in *S.*, as in *The Scarlet Letter* which it is partly based on, the novel begins after an act of adultery and the end of a marriage, both of which can be seen as symbolic choices on the author's part: a woman's life no longer precludes being sexually active and involves other choices than marriage and family. Already in this short synopsis then, we can see that the epistolary genre has come a long way from its origins. Of course, these changes to the original conventions have to be seen in the context of historical changes in the behavioral models that are available to women.

Gender roles are central to the epistolary novel. In both *Pamela* and *Daddy-Long-Legs* the male characters are ethically more complicated and dubious, whereas women are associated with innocence and virtue, notwithstanding Judy's small acts of rebellion. Again *S.* differs from the norm. Sarah is less passive than Pamela and Judy because she actively leaves Charles and takes half their money with her. She is empowered by these acts, but she also loses the innocence which is usually associated with the female character in the epistolary novel. Her character is also affected by the ashram to the extent that she starts to steal, lie and manipulate. In the epistolary tradition some of these characteristics would be assigned to the man, and indeed as *S.* progresses people comment that Sarah has become more like one. Being more like a man in a novel of letters has a morally ambiguous status, but it does have its positive aspects: Sarah herself comments that in the ashram women have the kind of influence that men outside normally have because they have money. (88) However, in the end she is again deceived by a man, the very man she chose to replace Charles with. So for Sarah all the men she encounters are suspect, with the possible exception of her brother Jerry and her attorney Ducky, who is "preoccupied with coming out of the closet", and she ends up leaving the continent where the men in her life reside. (155; 234) But what is most interesting about *S.* is that it moves away from men and marriage as the primary roads to self-fulfilment for women, and in this sense it represents an interesting break from the conventions of the epistolary genre.

What I hope my thesis has shown is that the genre is robust and adaptable enough to have survived into the twenty-first century and that it has managed to transform with changing

times and technologies. It has even been translated onto the screen - in film adaptations such as *Daddy Long Legs* (1931), *Up the Down Staircase* (1967), *The Color Purple* (1985), *84 Charing Cross Road* (1987) and *We Have to Talk About Kevin* (2011; Indeed, there is a thesis to be written about screen adaptations of epistolary novels).<sup>60</sup> The epistolary novel has survived well beyond its source and beyond its apparently fatal satirization in *Shamela*.

In 2012 the Chinese Room game development studio released a PC game entitled *Dear Esther*, with its subtitle “A deserted island... a lost man... memories of a fatal crash... a book written by a dying explorer”. *Dear Esther* won, among other awards, prizes for the “Best Use of Narrative” and the “Best Original Idea” of 2012.<sup>61</sup> In the game players wander around a bleak and deserted island while a man’s voice is heard narrating excerpts from his letters to a woman named Esther. Over the course of the journey around the island which culminates at a lighthouse, more is revealed about the marooned man and Esther’s fate. Although the references to the deserted island and a lost explorer inevitably invoke associations with Robinson Crusoe, the narrative is strictly speaking epistolary: the story revolves around the main character’s letters and this together with the game’s title can be argued to represent a continuation of the epistolary tradition. Like the novel of letters, this game affords us examples of a solitary character writing in the moment, as well a sense of intimacy or confidentiality, but also a feeling of immediacy and suspense because events are allowed to unfold in the present and as such we do not know the final outcome. Remarkably, many of the traits associated with the epistolary novel in its original form continue to appear in different times and technologies. In *Pamela*, authenticity is brought about partly by the simple device of the novel being divided into sections that begin with “My Dear Father and Mother” and “My dearest Lady” and that end with “Your faithful and obliged Servant” and “Your ever-dutiful Daughter” (to take only a few examples): in other words the conventions of letter writing are used to give us the impression that these fictional letters are real. In *Dear Esther* a similar authenticity is achieved in slightly different ways: first, we find physical letters and a journal; second, we hear the voice of a man speaking. Sincerity is achieved in part by the letter writer being marooned on an island with little hope of rescue and therefore no need to lie - he is able to say exactly what he feels because there is no danger of embarrassment or humiliation and rejection. There is also an element of confession about the letters as the man begins to realize and admit that he might have been responsible for Esther’s death. At the

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<sup>60</sup> All these films are adapted from original novels.

<sup>61</sup> Awarded by Develop and HoPlay respectively.

same time, changing technology means that the player is able to participate much more actively than in a novel: the game allows us to make more decisions on our own and to create our own narratives and conclusions to a greater extent than is possible when reading a book. The game allows us to enter the first person consciousness of the letter writer, but also to see him from the outside in a way associated with the third person perspective of the novel.

The end of the epistolary fiction is not yet in sight, and the last letter has not yet been written. An online review of *Dear Esther* can in many ways sum up the continuing and changing attractions of the genre:

I'm not exactly sure what to call *Dear Esther*. Is it a game? Is it an 'interactive narrative experience'? Is it something else entirely? Your guess is as good as mine, but I do know one thing: It's pretty damn great! (Grayson)

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