



Epistolary Novel

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Abstract:

"Epistolary Echoes" is a captivating and enchanting epistolary novel that explores the depths of human emotions and connections through a series of intimate letters exchanged between the main characters. Set in the romantic backdrop of the late 19th century, the novel weaves a tale of love, longing, and self-discovery. The story unfolds through a series of letters that transcend time and space, connecting two individuals from vastly different walks of life. The first voice we encounter is that of Elizabeth, a spirited young woman with a passion for literature, who resides in the bustling streets of London. The recipient of her letters is Alexander, a reclusive artist living in a remote village in France, struggling with a painful past that has left him isolated from the world.

Historical Background:

The word epistolary is derived from the Latin 'Epistola' which means a letter. The word epistle is an ancient term used to mean a letter. An epistolary novel is a novel whose story is told through a series of letters. The fictional epistolary novel is one in which the author conveys the story through documents. In the most traditional understanding, epistolary novels are series of letters. Some authors expand their novels to include newspaper clippings, diary entries, and articles. For the purposes of this memo and all others relating to this topic, we include novels which use documents other than letters, but borrow Janet Altman's clarification that the "letter's formal properties... create meaning" (qtd. in Keskinen 384).

Altman also states that letters addressed to confidants of the writer are "the fundamental vehicles of epistolary narrative" (48). Letters that advance the story or plot must be included for the novel to be considered epistolary. The epistolary novel has existed in various forms, specially There are mainly three types of epistolary novels:

Types of epistolary novels:

1. monologic (giving the letters of only one character, like 'Letters of a Portuguese nun),
2. dialogic (giving the letters of two characters, like Mme Marie Jeanne Riccoboni's 'Letters of Fanni Butlerd (1757), and
3. polylogic (with three or more letter-writing characters, such as in Bram Stoker's Dracula).

Critical Reception:

In addition, a crucial element in Polylogic epistolary novels like ‘Clarissa’ and ‘Dangerous Liaisons’ is the dramatic device of ‘discrepant awareness’: the simultaneous but separate correspondences of the heroines and the villains creating dramatic tension and understandings since the Roman poet Ovid first used epistles in his writings, but it truly began in its traditional form in the 1600s and hit peak popularity in the eighteenth century. The epistolary form entails a type of fracturing of the story. The reader of the novel knows more than the letter writer and the letter reader, because “the reader of the epistolary novel is aware that within its boundaries there is another reader” (Campbell 336). Male critics of the genre believe that the epistolary genre is “particularly suited for the female voice” (Goldsmith), a belief informed by the historical context of its rise. Originally, males imitating the “female voice” produced epistolary writing (ibid.). In the eighteenth century, the epistolary form was “the favored mode of moral instruction for women” (Gilroy and Verhoeven). As women began to receive education, they were taught to write letters as a form of exercising their newfound knowledge. “Newly educated women could easily learn to write letters, and, as epistolary theory became more adapted to worldly culture, women’s letters began to be considered the best models of the genre” (Goldsmith). When the epistolary novel began enjoying a market in the eighteenth century, even more male writers, including Rousseau and Richardson, began perfecting the technique of imitating female writing seen in previous publications (Goldsmith). “Female letters traditionally focused on domestic life or on love; they spoke in the private voice appropriate to women whose roles were increasingly circumscribed within the constraints of bourgeois ideology” (Gilroy and Verhoeven).

The epistolary novel as a genre became popular in the 18th century in the works of Samuel Richardson, with his immensely successful novels ‘Pamela’_Richardson’s first novel *Pamela* often collapses the time of action with the time of narration. This sense of the novel’s focus on temporality can be seen in the following moment when Pamela, a 15-year- Old servant girl under threat from her master’s sexual advances, wonders what her ultimate Fate will be in a letter to her parents: I don’t know what to think – nor how to judge; but I shall ne’er believe I am with you till I am on my Knees before you, begging both your Blessings. ... There is, I see, the Chariot Drawn out ... What will be the End of all this! (1740) and ‘Clarissa’ (1749). In France, there was ‘Letters Persanes’ (1721) by Montesquieu, followed by ‘Julie, ou la nouvelle Heloise’ (1761) by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Story of two lovers written in letters form who lives in a small town at the foot of the ‘Alps’ And ‘Laclos’Les Liasons dangereuses’ (1782), which used the epistolary form to great Dramatic effect, because the sequence of events was not always related directly or explicitly. In Germany, there was Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s ‘Die Leiden des jungen Werthers’ (1774) (The Sorrows of Young Werther) and Friedrich Hölderlin’s ‘Hyperion’. The first North American novel, ‘The history of Emily Montague’ (1769) by Frances Brooke Was written in epistolary form.

In the 18th century, the epistolary form was subject to much ridicule, resulting in a number Of savage burlesques. The most notable example of these was Henry Fielding’s ‘Shamela’ (1741), written as a parody of ‘Pamela’. In ‘Shamela’ the female Narrator can be found wielding a pen and writing her diary entries under the most dramatic And unlikely of circumstances. In 18th century, Jane Austen tried her hand at the epistolary In juvenile writings and her novella ‘Lady Susan’ she abandoned this structure for her later Work. It is thought that her lost novel “First Impressions” which was redrafted to Become ‘Pride and prejudice’ may have been epistolary. *Pride and prejudice* contain unusual number of letters quoted in full and some play a critical role in the plot.

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