CAPITOLO

8

Letters, Laughter and a Dictionary

"I am not yet so lost in lexicography, as to forget that words are the daughters of earth, and that things are the sons of heaven." — Samuel Johnson, Preface to A Dictionary of the English Language (1755)

OBIETTIVI

1. I can describe mid-eighteenth-century British society — ranks, servants, marriage and property, the culture of sensibility — and place its main events on a timeline.
2. I can explain how Richardson's epistolary novels and Fielding's comic novels tell a story, and what an omniscient narrator is.
3. I can analyse the opening of *Pamela*, the "bill of fare" of *Tom Jones* and three entries of Johnson's *Dictionary*.
4. I can use inverted and formal conditionals (*Had I known…*, *Should you need…*, *Were he to…*) in formal speech and writing.
5. I can persuade and negotiate in a role play and write a letter in character from another point of view.
6. I can compare Richardson's *Pamela* with Goldoni's comedy, Johnson's *Dictionary* with the *Vocabolario della Crusca* and Fielding's "comic epic poem in prose" with Aristotle's remark on Homer's lost comic poem, and use a learner's dictionary and a corpus.

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In November 1740 a London printer published, without his name on the title page, a story told entirely in letters. A fifteen-year-old servant girl writes home to her parents; her young master tries again and again to seduce her; she refuses, writes everything down, and in the end he reads her letters, changes his life and marries her. Within months all London was talking about *Pamela*: some readers wept, some preached sermons about it, and one reader, a playwright called Henry Fielding, found it so absurd that he wrote a parody of it and then a whole new kind of comic novel.

This chapter follows that conversation between two novelists and their public in the middle of the eighteenth century, and ends with the man who tried to put the whole English language between two covers: Samuel Johnson. You read the first letter of *Pamela*, the "bill of fare" that opens *Tom Jones* and three famous entries of Johnson's *Dictionary*; you learn the formal conditionals of eighteenth-century letters (*Had I known…*, *Should you need…*), which are still the conditionals of formal English today; and you compare Richardson's heroine with the Pamela of Carlo Goldoni, Johnson's dictionary with the Italian *Vocabolario della Crusca* and Fielding's new genre with a comic poem that Aristotle attributed to Homer.

8.1 History and Society: Mid-Century Britain

In chapter 5 you saw the Britain of Queen Anne and Robert Walpole; this chapter moves on to the middle of the century, the long reign of **George II** (1727–1760) and the first years of **George III** (from 1760). Britain was at war for much of the period — the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–1748) and the Seven Years' War (1756–1763), which left Britain with Canada and a dominant position in India — but for most people life was shaped less by battles than by rank, work, marriage and money. Figura 8.1 places the events and books of the chapter on one time axis.

8.1.1 A society of ranks

Contemporaries described their society as a ladder of "ranks" and "orders", not yet of "classes". At the top stood a few hundred noble families with seats in the House of Lords. Below them came the **gentry** (Italian *piccola nobiltà terriera*): landowners without a noble title — baronets, knights, "squires" and simple gentlemen — who lived on the rents of their tenants and ran the countryside as magistrates. Squire Western and Squire Allworthy in *Tom Jones* belong to this world. Then came the "middling sort" (chapter 6), such as the printer Samuel Richardson himself. At the bottom were the labouring poor — farm workers, craftsmen, sailors and servants — the great majority of a population of roughly six million in England and Wales.

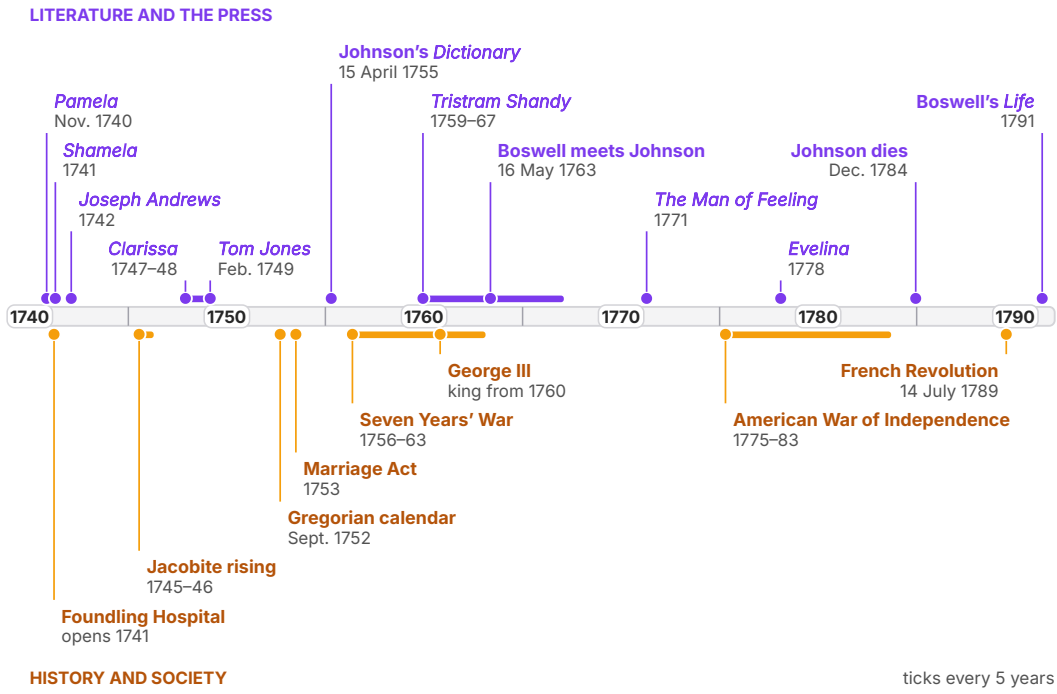


Figura 8.1 Mid-eighteenth-century Britain, 1740–1792, on a proportional time axis (ticks every 5 years). Above the axis, novels and other literary events (violet); below it, history and society (amber). Bars show events that lasted more than a year; the dates of first publication are given where the month is known.

Domestic service was the most common job for young women and very common for young men. A servant was usually hired for a year, received board and lodging and a small annual wage, and needed a *character*, a written reference from the last employer, to find a new *place*. A good place in a rich house could mean security and even some education; a bad one meant hard work, no privacy and no protection. This is exactly the situation of Pamela, a maid who has been taught to read, write and keep accounts by her mistress, and who must decide what to do when that mistress dies.

8.1.2 Marriage, property and the law

Among the propertied ranks marriage was a contract between families as much as a bond between two people. A bride brought a **portion** (a dowry, in Italian *dote*); the groom's family promised her an income if she became a widow; lawyers drew up the settlement. Land normally passed to the eldest son, and an *entail* could forbid him to sell it, so that younger sons and daughters depended on what their family chose to give them. Under the common-law doctrine of **coverture** (from the French *femme couverte*, a woman "covered" by her husband) a married

woman had almost no separate legal identity: her personal property and earnings became her husband's. Divorce needed a private Act of Parliament and was extremely rare.

In 1753 Parliament passed Lord Hardwicke's **Marriage Act**, which came into force in 1754: a valid marriage in England now needed banns or a licence and a ceremony in the parish church, and people under twenty-one needed their parents' consent. The Act was aimed at *clandestine* (secret) marriages, often celebrated for a small fee near the Fleet prison in London, by which a fortune-hunter could marry a young heiress against her family's wishes. It did not apply to Scotland, which is why eloping couples from England later travelled to Gretna Green, just over the border. William Hogarth's series of paintings *Marriage A-la-Mode* (painted c. 1743, engraved 1745) shows, in six scenes, an arranged marriage between an earl's son and a rich merchant's daughter ending in debt, adultery and death: the marriage market was a favourite subject of the age.

8.1.3 Women as readers and writers

More people could read than ever before, and women were a large part of the new reading public. Novels were bought, rented from circulating libraries (chapter 6) and read aloud in the family; moralists worried that they filled girls' heads with romance. Women also wrote them: Eliza Haywood, Sarah Fielding (Henry's sister, *David Simple*, 1744), Charlotte Lennox (*The Female Quixote*, 1752) and later Frances Burney, whose *Evelina* (1778), a novel in letters, was published anonymously. From the 1750s a circle of learned women and men met in the London houses of Elizabeth Montagu and her friends for serious conversation rather than cards; they were nicknamed the **Bluestockings**, and one of them, Elizabeth Carter, published a translation of the Greek philosopher Epictetus in 1758.

8.1.4 The culture of sensibility

A new word for a new ideal spread through these books and conversations. **Sensibility** (Italian *sensibilità*) meant a quick and delicate capacity to feel — for others' suffering, for beauty, for moral right and wrong — and it was widely seen as a sign of virtue: a good person was moved, and showed it. Philosophers had prepared the ground. Lord Shaftesbury (*Characteristicks*, 1711) argued that human beings have a natural "moral sense"; David Hume and Adam Smith (*The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 1759) explained moral judgement through *sympathy*, our ability to imagine ourselves in another person's place. In fiction, tears became a language. Pamela weeps on her first page; Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771) has a hero who weeps on almost every page.

Sensibility also had a practical side: charity. In 1739 the sea captain Thomas Coram obtained a royal charter for the **Foundling Hospital**, which opened in London in 1741 to receive abandoned babies; the painter Hogarth and the composer Handel supported it. A **foundling** (Italian *trovatello*) is a baby found after being abandoned by unknown parents — like Tom Jones, who is discovered as a baby in Squire Allworthy's bed on the first pages of Fielding's novel. By the end

of the century the cult of feeling was being mocked as well as admired; Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), which you will meet in chapter 14, puts its title into a balance.

8.1.5 London's literary life and the last Jacobite rising

London was the centre of print. Booksellers (who were also publishers) bought copyrights, paid authors and ran the trade; the poorer writers who wrote for them lived, proverbially, in **Grub Street**, which Johnson defined in his *Dictionary* as a street "much inhabited by writers of small histories, dictionaries, and temporary poems". An author could still look for a patron (Italian *mecenate*; on patronage see English 3, chapter 9), a rich nobleman who paid for a dedication, but the market of readers was slowly replacing him: Johnson's famous letter to Lord Chesterfield (Texts, T3) is often read as the end of that old system. Writers met in coffee houses and clubs; in 1764 Johnson and the painter Joshua Reynolds founded "The Club", where Edmund Burke, Oliver Goldsmith and later the actor David Garrick talked late into the night.

Far from London, the old dynasty made one last attempt to recover the throne. In July 1745 **Charles Edward Stuart**, the grandson of James II, landed in Scotland; the Highland clans who joined him took Edinburgh, defeated a government army at Prestonpans and marched south as far as Derby (December 1745) before turning back. On 16 April 1746 the Jacobite army was destroyed at **Culloden**, near Inverness. The repression that followed — executions, the disarming of the Highlands, a ban on Highland dress until 1782 — changed Scottish society for ever. The rising of 1745 is the background of Walter Scott's first novel, *Waverley* (1814), in chapter 14.

> **DA RICORDARE**
>
> **Mid-century Britain at a glance.** George II (1727–1760), George III (from 1760). Ranks: nobility · **gentry** · the "middling sort" · the labouring poor (servants). Marriage = property: portion, settlement, entail, **coverture**; Marriage Act 1753. New readers, many of them women; women novelists (Haywood, Sarah Fielding, Lennox, Burney). **Sensibility**: feeling as a sign of virtue (Shaftesbury, Hume, Smith 1759). Foundling Hospital 1741. The last Jacobite rising: 1745–46, Culloden 16 April 1746. Britain adopted the Gregorian calendar in September 1752.

8.2 Literature: the Novel of Letters and the Comic Novel

In chapter 6 you saw how Defoe made the novel look like a true memoir. In the 1740s two writers with opposite temperaments, Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding, gave the English novel the two forms it would keep for a century: the novel that takes us inside a mind, and the novel in which a confident storyteller shows us a whole society.

8.2.1 Samuel Richardson and the epistolary novel

Samuel Richardson (1689–1761) was not a gentleman or a scholar but a successful London printer, the son of a joiner. Two booksellers asked him to write a book of model letters for people unused to writing them — how to ask for a job, how a servant girl should answer an improper offer. The book appeared as *Letters Written to and for Particular Friends* (1741), but one situation grew into a story of its own: *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740).

Pamela is an **epistolary novel** (Italian *romanzo epistolare*, from Latin *epistola*, letter): a novel told through the letters, and sometimes the diaries, of its characters, without a narrator who stands outside them. Pamela Andrews, the daughter of poor but respectable parents, is a maid in a great house. When her mistress dies, the young master, known only as "Mr B.", begins to pursue her; when she resists, he has her carried off to his estate in Lincolnshire and kept prisoner there. She goes on writing — letters she cannot send, then a journal — and hides the pages in her clothes. Mr B. finally reads them, is moved by her virtue, and asks her to marry him. Virtue is rewarded with a rich husband: this is the happy ending that made some readers cheer and others protest. Admirers ("Pamelists") saw a model of feminine goodness; critics ("Antipamelists") saw a clever girl who had used her virtue to climb the ladder of rank.

The letter form gives the reader a new closeness to a character. Pamela writes immediately after each event, often in the middle of a crisis, without knowing what will happen next; we read her fear, her hope and her confusion as they happen. This technique is usually called **writing to the moment**. In the preface to *Clarissa* Richardson explained that all its letters were written while the writers' hearts were "wholly engaged in their subjects", so that they contain "instantaneous descriptions and reflections". ***Clarissa*** (1747–48), in seven volumes and about a million words, is one of the longest novels in English and his masterpiece: a tragedy in letters about a young woman who refuses the husband her family has chosen, falls into the power of the charming and ruthless Lovelace, and dies rather than accept the life he offers her. A third novel, *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753), tried to portray a perfect gentleman.

8.2.2 Henry Fielding: from parody to the comic epic

Henry Fielding (1707–1754) was everything Richardson was not: a gentleman educated at Eton, a successful writer of satirical comedies until the Licensing Act of 1737 closed the London stage to political satire, then a lawyer and, from 1748, a magistrate in London, where he and his half-brother John organised a small force of paid constables, later known as the Bow Street Runners. He read *Pamela* and found it hypocritical. In April 1741 an anonymous pamphlet appeared, *An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews*, almost certainly by Fielding: in the "real" letters of "Shamela" the heroine is a scheming girl who plans every faint and every tear to catch her master. *Shamela* is a **parody** (Italian *parodia*): a text that imitates the style and the situations of another text in order to make fun of it.

A year later Fielding went further. *Joseph Andrews* (1742) begins as a parody — Joseph is Pamela's brother, a virtuous footman who resists the advances of his mistress, Lady Booby — but soon becomes a story of its own: Joseph and his friend Parson Adams, a kind and absent-minded clergyman, travel home on foot through inns, ditches and country houses, meeting every kind of English character. The title page says the book is "written in imitation of the manner of Cervantes", and its pattern of a journey on the road made of separate adventures is **picaresque** (Italian *picaresco*, from the Spanish *pícaro*, a rogue): an episodic story that follows a wanderer, often a poor and not very respectable one, through many places and social levels, as in the Spanish *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554). In his preface Fielding defined his new form with a paradox: "a comic romance is a comic epic poem in prose". Like an epic it is long, varied and full of characters; unlike an epic its people are ordinary and its tone is comic.

Tom Jones (*The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling*, 1749) is the fullest realisation of that idea. Tom, the foundling brought up by the good Squire Allworthy in Somerset, is generous, brave and often foolish; he loves Sophia Western, the daughter of a hard-drinking, fox-hunting neighbour, but he is expelled from home through the plots of Allworthy's nephew Blifil, a model of correct behaviour and secret malice. The road takes Tom to London, scandal and prison, before the last books reveal the secret of his birth (his mother was Allworthy's own sister) and unite him with Sophia. The plot is famous for its architecture: eighteen books, every coincidence prepared long in advance, each book opened by a short essay in which the narrator talks to the reader.

8.2.3 Who tells the story? The omniscient narrator

Fielding's great invention is his narrator. Richardson hides behind his characters' letters; Defoe's Crusoe tells his own story (chapter 6). The narrator of *Tom Jones* is an **omniscient narrator** (Italian *narratore onnisciente*): a voice outside the story who knows everything about it — every place, every past and future event, the thoughts of every character — and can move freely between them. Fielding's narrator is also an **intrusive narrator** (Italian *narratore intrusivo*): he speaks directly to "the reader", comments on the action, explains why he has skipped a few years, and judges his characters with an ironic smile. He calls himself "we" and treats the book as a meal he is serving. Figura 8.2 compares the three positions you have met so far.

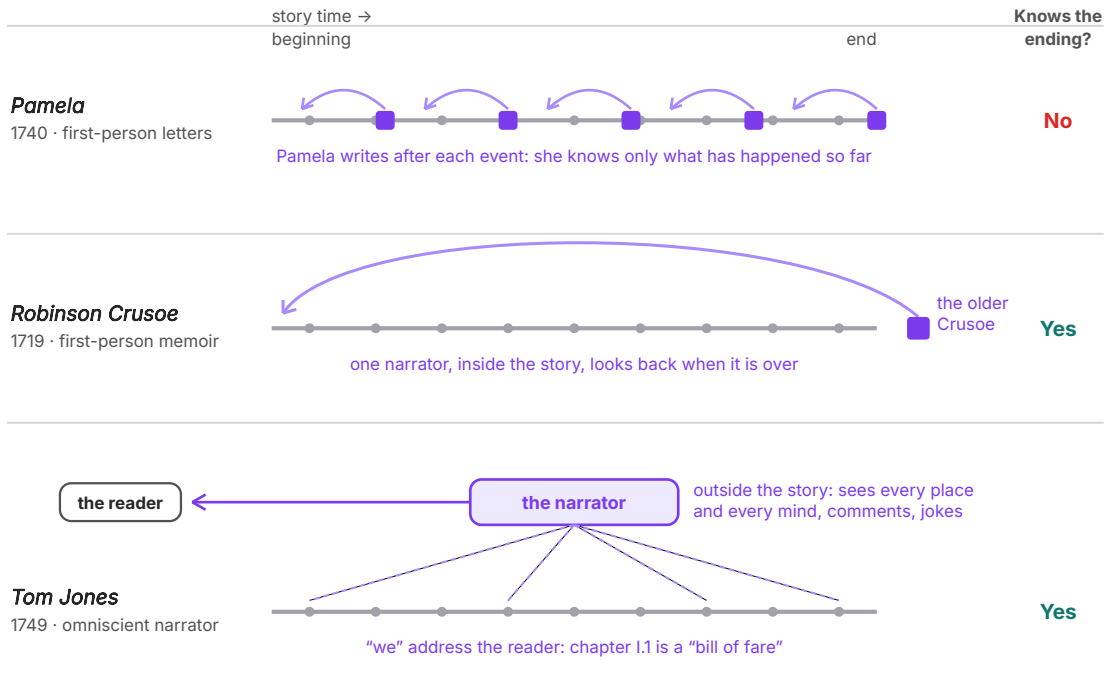


Figura 8.2 Three narrative positions. Pamela writes from inside the story, after each event ("writing to the moment") and without knowing the end; the older Crusoe looks back on his whole life when it is over; the narrator of *Tom Jones* stands outside the story, sees every place and every mind, and talks to the reader.

Laurence Sterne (1713–1768), a Yorkshire clergyman born in Ireland, took the narrator's freedom to its limit. In *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (nine volumes, 1759–67) the narrator sets out to tell his life and takes a very long time even to reach his own birth, because every event reminds him of another. The book plays with its own pages: a black page mourns Parson Yorick, a marbled page is a "motley emblem" of the work, a blank page invites the reader to draw a character.

8.2.4 Samuel Johnson and his Dictionary

Samuel Johnson (1709–1784), the son of a bookseller in Lichfield, had to leave Oxford without a degree because he could not pay, and arrived in London in 1737 with no money and one unfinished tragedy. He lived for years by writing for booksellers. In 1746 a group of booksellers signed a contract with him for an English dictionary, at a price of £1,575; in 1747 he published *The Plan of a Dictionary*, addressed to the Earl of Chesterfield, a famous politician and man of taste, who gave him a little money and then forgot him. Johnson had told a friend he would finish in three years; with six assistants (five of them Scots, as his biographer noted) working in his house in Gough Square, off Fleet Street, it took about nine.

A Dictionary of the English Language appeared on 15 April 1755 in two large folio volumes. It explained about 40,000 words and illustrated their meanings with more than 100,000 quotations from English writers from the late sixteenth century onwards — Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Pope, the Bible translators, scientists and philosophers. It was not the first English dictionary (Robert Cawdrey's *Table Alphabeticall*, 1604, and Nathan Bailey's dictionary, 1721, are earlier ones), but it was the first great English dictionary to show what words mean by showing how good writers used them, and it remained the standard for more than a century. Johnson was also an essayist (*The Rambler*, 1750–52) and the author of *Rasselas* (1759), a philosophical tale written, according to Boswell, to pay for his mother's funeral. On 16 May 1763 a young Scottish lawyer, **James Boswell** (1740–1795), met him in a London bookshop; twenty-eight years later Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) made Johnson's conversation as famous as his books.

ERRORE FREQUENTE

✗ «Johnson scrisse il primo dizionario della lingua inglese.» → ✓ Esistevano già dizionari inglesi (Cawdrey 1604, Bailey 1721): il *Dictionary* del 1755 è il primo **grande** dizionario che illustra i significati con citazioni d'autore.

✗ «*Tom Jones* è narrato da Tom.» → ✓ *Tom Jones* ha un **narratore onnisciente** esterno alla storia, che parla al lettore; sono *Pamela* (lettere) e *Robinson Crusoe* (memoria) a essere in prima persona.

IN SINTESI

Tabella 8.1 Richardson and Fielding compared

	Samuel Richardson	Henry Fielding
Life	London printer, 1689–1761	gentleman, playwright, magistrate, 1707–1754
Main novels	*Pamela* (1740), *Clarissa* (1747–48), *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753)	*Shamela* (1741, parody), *Joseph Andrews* (1742), *Tom Jones* (1749)
Form	epistolary novel; "writing to the moment"	"comic epic poem in prose"; picaresque journeys
Narrator	none outside the letters: the characters speak	omniscient and intrusive: "we" talk to "the reader"
Effect	closeness, suspense, the inner life	distance, irony, a panorama of society

8.3 Texts: a Letter, a Bill of Fare and Three Definitions

The novels are quoted from Project Gutenberg editions of the eighteenth-century texts, with their spelling and punctuation; omissions are marked […]. Johnson is quoted from scans of the first edition of the *Dictionary* (1755) and from Boswell's *Life of Johnson*; the long ſ of eighteenth-century printing is printed as *s*.

8.3.1 T1 · Samuel Richardson, *Pamela*, Letter I

Context. The first page of the novel. Pamela writes to her parents, who live in a village and work hard to survive. Her mistress, who had taken her into service and taught her to read, write, keep accounts and sew, has just died.

Tabella 8.2 T1 — Richardson, *Pamela*, Letter I, the opening (Project Gutenberg eBook #6124)

DEAR FATHER AND MOTHER,
I have great trouble, and some comfort, to acquaint you with. The trouble is, that my good lady died of the illness I mentioned to you, and left us all much grieved for the loss of her; for she was a dear good lady, and kind to all us her servants. Much I feared, that as I was taken by her ladyship to wait upon her person, I should be quite destitute again, and forced to return to you and my poor mother, who have enough to do to maintain yourselves; […] but God, whose graciousness to us we have so often experienced at a pinch, put it into my good lady's heart, on her death-bed, just an hour before she expired, to recommend to my young master all her servants, one by one; and when it came to my turn to be recommended, (for I was sobbing and crying at her pillow) she could only say, My dear son!—and so broke off a little; and then recovering—Remember my poor Pamela—And these were some of her last words! O how my eyes run—Don't wonder to see the paper so blotted.

Glosses. *acquaint you with*: tell you about · *much grieved*: very sad · *wait upon her person*: be her personal maid · *destitute*: without money or a home · *have enough to do to maintain yourselves*: can hardly support yourselves · *at a pinch*: in a difficult moment · *expired*: died · *broke off*: stopped speaking · *my eyes run*: I am crying · *blotted*: stained with ink (here, with tears).

Analysis

Form. The novel opens without a narrator, a title for the chapter or a description of the heroine: just a salutation and a letter. Everything we learn, we learn from Pamela, in the order in which she chooses to tell it. The first sentence announces the structure of the whole letter — "great trouble, and some comfort" — and the letter follows it: first the trouble (the death), then the comfort (the master's promise). The sentences are long chains of clauses joined by *and*, *for*, *but* and semicolons, like speech; the dashes in the last lines break the syntax as the emotion breaks the writer.

Language. Pamela's English is simple but not uneducated: *acquaint*, *graciousness*, *expired* show the reading her lady gave her. Notice the fronting "Much I feared" (chapter 6), which puts

the feeling first, and the way she reports the dying lady's words without quotation marks, in the middle of her own sentence. The present tense breaks in at the end ("O how my eyes run"): the moment of writing and the moment of feeling coincide. This is "writing to the moment" on the very first page.

Themes. Three themes of the whole novel are already here. *Rank*: Pamela owes her place, her education and her safety to the favour of her betters, and her greatest fear is to become "destitute". *Providence and virtue*: she reads every event as God's care for the good. *Sensibility*: tears are proof of a feeling heart, and the blotted paper turns them into a material object that her parents — and we — can see.

1. What is the "trouble" and what is the "comfort" that Pamela announces in her first sentence?
2. Why was Pamela afraid of becoming "destitute"? What does this tell you about the life of a servant?
3. Find three words or phrases that show Pamela's religious way of seeing events.
4. How do the dashes and the present tense at the end of the extract create a sense of immediacy?
5. Pamela's lady recommends her servants to her son "one by one". Why might this detail be important for the rest of the story?

ESEMPIO SVOLTO

Writing a PEE paragraph on T1 (Point, Evidence, Explanation — English 3, chapter 6).

1. **Point**: state one claim about the text. *Richardson makes the reader feel that Pamela is writing in the very moment of her emotion.*
2. **Evidence**: quote briefly and exactly. *At the end of the extract she breaks off with dashes and exclaims, "O how my eyes run—Don't wonder to see the paper so blotted."*
3. **Explanation**: show how the evidence proves the point, and why it matters. *The switch from the past tense of the story to the present tense of the writer, and the reference to the paper itself, collapse the distance between event and narration: we seem to hold the tear-stained letter in our hands. This immediacy is what made readers trust Pamela — and what Fielding would later mock in Shamela.*

8.3.2 T2 · Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, Book I, chapter 1

Context. The first chapter of the novel is not part of the story at all. Its title is "The introduction to the work, or bill of fare to the feast". A *bill of fare* is a menu; an *ordinary* was an eating house where anyone could have a meal at a fixed price.

Tabella 8.3 T2 — Fielding, *Tom Jones*, I.1 (Project Gutenberg eBook #6593); the italics are the edition's

An author ought to consider himself, not as a gentleman who gives a private or eleemosynary treat, but rather as one who keeps a public ordinary, at which all persons are welcome for their money. […]
To prevent, therefore, giving offence to their customers by any such disappointment, it hath been usual with the honest and well-meaning host to provide a bill of fare which all persons may peruse at their first entrance into the house; and having thence acquainted themselves with the entertainment which they may expect, may either stay and regale with what is provided for them, or may depart to some other ordinary better accommodated to their taste. […]
The provision, then, which we have here made is no other than *Human Nature*. Nor do I fear that my sensible reader, though most luxurious in his taste, will start, cavil, or be offended, because I have named but one article.

Glosses. *eleemosynary treat*: a free meal given as charity · *hath*: has · *peruse*: read carefully · *regale*: feast, enjoy a meal · *accommodated to*: suited to · *provision*: the food provided · *sensible*: intelligent, with good judgement · *start*: jump in surprise · *cavil*: make petty objections · *article*: item (on a menu).

Analysis

Form. Fielding builds the chapter on one extended metaphor: the author is an innkeeper, the readers are paying customers, the book is a meal and this chapter is the menu. The metaphor is also an argument about the market: a writer who lives by selling books, not by a patron's gifts, must give the public what it pays for — and tell it in advance what that is. The tone is mock-serious: long, balanced Latinate sentences (*eleemosynary*, *peruse*, *accommodated*) about something as ordinary as dinner.

The narrator. Everything you saw in Figura 8.2 is here. The narrator stands outside the story, which has not yet begun; he speaks directly to "my sensible reader"; he moves between "we" (the author as host) and "I" (a personal voice). The comic surprise is the menu itself: one single dish, *Human Nature*. The joke hides a serious programme: the novel will be about ordinary people, observed with sympathy and irony — the opposite of the old heroic romances.

1. In the metaphor, who is the innkeeper, who are the customers, and what is the "bill of fare"?
2. Why does the author compare himself to the keeper of a public ordinary and not to a gentleman who gives a free dinner? What does this say about writers and readers in 1749?
3. Find two words or phrases that are deliberately formal for the subject. What is the effect?
4. Why might a reader be surprised that the menu contains only "one article"?
5. Compare the first lines of T1 and T2: who is speaking, to whom, and from what position?

8.3.3 T3 · Samuel Johnson, three definitions and a letter

Context. Johnson's definitions are usually objective and precise, but now and then his personality shows through. The three below are among the most quoted. The letter to Lord Chesterfield was written on 7 February 1755, two months before the *Dictionary* appeared, when Chesterfield had published two articles praising the coming work: Johnson felt that the lord who had ignored him for seven years now wanted the honour of a dedication.

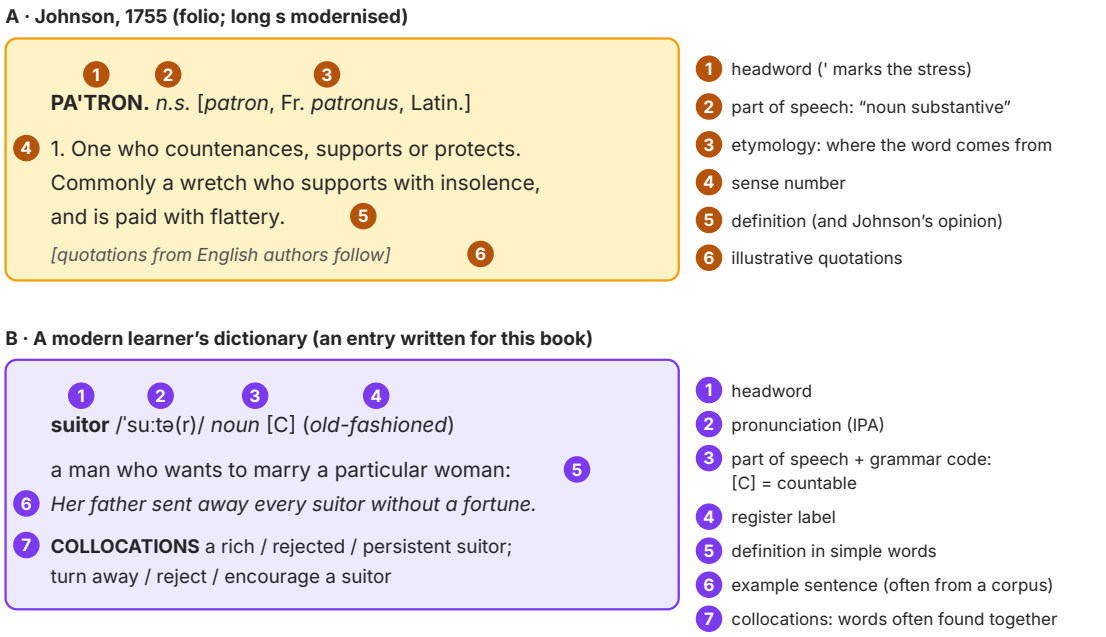


Figura 8.3 The anatomy of a dictionary entry. A: Johnson's entry PATRON (1755; long *s* modernised), with the main parts of an entry. B: an entry for *suitor* written for this book in the style of a modern learner's dictionary, which adds pronunciation, grammar codes, register labels, examples and collocations.

Tabella 8.4 T3 — Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), three entries (definitions only; etymologies and quotations omitted), and a sentence of the letter to Lord Chesterfield, 7 February 1755, in Boswell's *Life of Johnson* (Project Gutenberg eBook #1564)

LEXICOGRAPHER. A writer of dictionaries; a harmless drudge, that busies himself in tracing the original, and detailing the signification of words.
OATS. A grain, which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland supports the people.
PATRON. 1. One who countenances, supports or protects. Commonly a wretch who supports with insolence, and is paid with flattery.
To Lord Chesterfield: The notice which you have been pleased to take of my labours, had it been early, had been kind; but it has been delayed till I am indifferent, and cannot enjoy it; till I am solitary, and cannot impart it;

till I am known, and do not want it.

Glosses. *drudge*: a person who does hard, boring work · *busies himself in*: keeps himself busy with · *the original*: the origin (of a word) · *signification*: meaning · *countenances*: approves, encourages · *wretch*: a despicable person · *insolence*: rude arrogance · *notice*: attention · *had been kind*: would have been kind · *solitary*: alone (Johnson's wife had died in 1752) · *impart*: share · *want*: need.

Analysis

Form and humour. Each definition starts with a neutral, correct definition and then turns. A **lexicographer** (Italian *lessicografo*) *is* a writer of dictionaries — and, Johnson adds about himself, "a harmless drudge". Oats *are* a grain — and the second half of the sentence becomes a joke about the poverty of Scotland, built on a perfect antithesis (*in England … horses / in Scotland … the people*). Johnson later admitted to Boswell that "by my definition of OATS I meant to vex" the Scots. The definition of *patron* moves from a dictionary sense ("one who … supports") to a bitter generalisation ("Commonly a wretch…"). Figura 8.3 shows how a full entry of 1755 was built around its **headword** (Italian *lemma*), the word that the entry explains, and what a modern learner's dictionary adds.

The letter. The famous sentence is a small machine of rhetoric. Its first half is a formal conditional with inversion — "had it been early, had been kind" — in which Johnson uses the old form *had been* where we would write *would have been* (Language section). Its second half is a triple structure, three clauses that begin with *till I am*, each followed by its consequence: *indifferent → cannot enjoy it*, *solitary → cannot impart it*, *known → do not want it*. The rhythm grows more cutting at each step, and the last clause is the sharpest: Johnson has become famous without help, so Chesterfield's help is now useless. The letter was copied and passed around, and it has been read ever since as a declaration of independence of the professional writer.

1. Which part of each definition is neutral and objective, and which part expresses an opinion?
2. Explain the antithesis in the definition of *oats*. Why would it "vex" a Scottish reader?
3. What connects the definition of *patron* to the letter to Chesterfield?
4. Rewrite "had it been early, had been kind" in modern English, beginning with *If*.
5. Find the three *till I am…* clauses. Why is the order of the three effective?

8.4 Language: Inverted and Formal Conditionals

You know the zero, first, second and third conditionals (English 2) and the mixed conditionals (English 3, chapter 7); in chapter 7 you met *If… were to* and *If it were not for*. Formal English has another way to express a condition: it drops *if* and puts an auxiliary verb before the subject. This **inverted conditional** (Italian *periodo ipotetico con inversione*) is common in formal letters

and emails, in legal and official texts, in speeches and in literature — Clarissa writes of Lovelace that she could easily recognise a hypocrite "were he to pretend to instantaneous lights and convictions" (*Clarissa*, Letter XXXVI).

8.4.1 Had, should, were

Only three auxiliaries can begin an inverted conditional. Tabella 8.5 shows them with their neutral equivalents, and Figura 8.4 shows the transformation step by step.

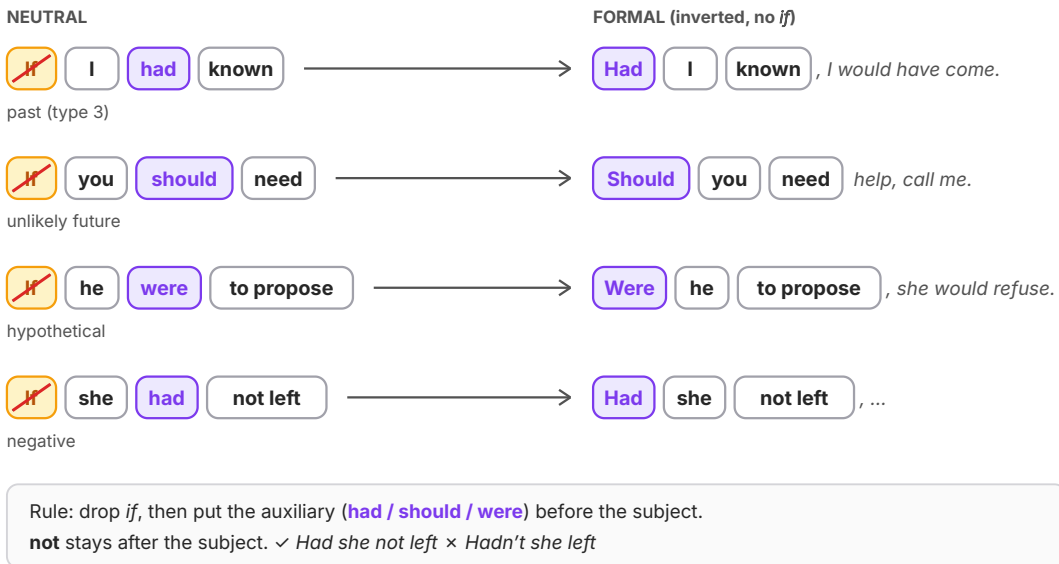


Figura 8.4 From neutral to formal: drop *if* and move the auxiliary (violet) in front of the subject. In the negative, *not* stays after the subject.

Tabella 8.5 Inverted conditionals: form and use

Neutral	Inverted (formal)	Use	Example
If + past perfect	**Had** + subject + past participle	unreal past (third and mixed conditionals)	*Had Pamela left the house, she would have been destitute.*
If + present (*should*)	**Should** + subject + base form	possible but unlikely future; polite offers and instructions	*Should you need a reference, I will gladly write one.*
If + subject + *were to*	**Were** + subject + *to*-infinitive	hypothetical future	*Were he to propose, she would refuse him.*
If + subject + *were*	**Were** + subject + noun / adjective	unreal present	*Were I in your place, I would accept.*

If it were not for / If it had not been for	**Were it not for / Had it not been for** (+ noun)	"without" in the present / past	*Had it not been for her lady, Pamela would never have learned to write.*

Look at the clause that is *not* inverted: it does not change. After *Had…* we still use *would have* + past participle (or *would* + base form in a mixed conditional: *Had Pamela gone home, she would be working in the fields now*). After *Should you…* the main clause is usually an imperative or *will*: *Should you have any questions, please contact the school office*. *Should* here does not mean obligation; it makes the condition sound less likely, or more polite.

GRAMMAR IN ITALIANO

Il periodo ipotetico con inversione. Nel registro formale l'inglese può eliminare *if* e mettere l'ausiliare prima del soggetto: *If I had known* → ***Had I known*** (= se avessi saputo); *If you should need* → ***Should you need*** (= se le dovesse servire, qualora le servisse); *If he were to propose* → ***Were he to propose*** (= se dovesse fare una proposta). Solo *had*, *should* e *were* ammettono l'inversione. **Confronto con l'italiano:** anche l'italiano può fare a meno di *se* con il congiuntivo — *Avessi saputo, sarei venuto*; *Dovesse servirle qualcosa, mi chiami*; *Fosse per me, partirei subito* — ed è un modo naturale per tradurre le forme inglesi. La frase principale resta invariata: *Had I known, I **would have come***.

8.4.2 Negatives and fixed expressions

In the negative, *not* comes **after** the subject, and contractions are impossible: *Had she not kept a journal, nobody would have believed her* (✗ *Hadn't she kept…*); *Should the letter not arrive, write again*; *Were it not for his money, nobody would visit him*. Two fixed expressions are especially frequent: ***Were it not for*** + noun (= without, in the present) and ***Had it not been for*** + noun (= without, in the past). Both can be replaced by ***But for*** + noun (chapter 7): *But for Boswell, we would know much less about Johnson's conversation*.

ERRORE FREQUENTE

✗ *Hadn't I known the truth, I would have accepted.* → ✓ ***Had I not*** *known the truth…* (nell'inversione niente forme contratte: *not* va dopo il soggetto).

✗ *If had I known…* → ✓ *Had I known…* oppure *If I had known…* (o l'uno o l'altro: mai *if* più inversione).

✗ *Would you need help, call me.* / ✗ *Did I know, I would tell you.* → ✓ *Should you need help…* / ✓ *Were I to know…* o *If I knew…* (solo *had*, *should*, *were*).

✗ *Were he propose, she would refuse.* → ✓ *Were he **to** propose…*

8.4.3 Register, and Johnson's *had been*

Inverted conditionals belong to formal, mostly written English. In a conversation with a friend, *Had I known you were coming, I'd have baked a cake* sounds either theatrical or ironic; in a formal email, *Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me* is a standard closing formula. Legal and official texts use *should* constantly: *Should the tenant fail to pay the rent…*. Use inversion in essays, formal letters and speeches, sparingly, at the point where you want weight and rhythm.

Finally, recognise — but do not imitate — the eighteenth-century pattern in Johnson's letter: "had it been early, **had been** kind". In older English the past perfect could appear in the main clause too, with the meaning of *would have* + past participle. Today we write: *Had it been early, it would have been kind*, or *If it had been early, it would have been kind*.

ESEMPIO SVOLTO

Key-word transformation with inversion. *Pamela kept her place only because her lady had recommended her.* (HAD) → ___ *her lady's recommendation, Pamela would have been dismissed.*

1. Identify the meaning: the recommendation prevented the dismissal; without it → dismissal. This is a "without" in the past.
2. Choose the structure: *If it had not been for* + noun → inverted: ***Had it not been for***.
3. Check the gap: the noun phrase *her lady's recommendation* is already there; the key word is used; five words.
4. Answer: **Had it not been for** her lady's recommendation, Pamela would have been dismissed.

8.5 Skills: Persuading and Negotiating

8.5.1 Vocabulary: manners, morality and money

The novels of this chapter are full of words that join character and cash: in Richardson and Fielding a person's *virtue* and *reputation* are discussed in the same breath as their *fortune*. Tabella 8.6 collects the most useful ones; all of them are still current.

Tabella 8.6 Manners, morality and money

Word	Meaning	Example
virtue (n.), **virtuous** (adj.)	moral goodness; in the 18th century, often a woman's chastity	*Pamela's virtue is rewarded with marriage.*

reputation (n.)	what people think and say about someone	*One scandal could ruin a young woman's reputation.*
servant (n.)	a person paid to work in someone's house	*The servants were given a year's wages.*
gentry (n., plural verb)	landowners just below the nobility	*The local gentry were invited to the ball.*
inheritance (n.), **inherit** (v.), **heir / heiress** (n.)	money or property received when someone dies; the person who receives it	*Sophia is the heiress to a large estate.*
fortune (n.)	a large amount of money; also luck, fate	*He married her for her fortune.*
suitor (n.)	a man who wants to marry a particular woman	*Her father chose the richest suitor.*
propose (v.), **proposal** (n.)	ask someone to marry you	*Mr B. finally proposes to Pamela.*
scandal (n.), **scandalous** (adj.)	an event that shocks people and damages a reputation	*The secret marriage caused a scandal.*
match (n.)	a marriage seen as a deal: a good / poor match	*For his family it was a poor match.*
wages (n. pl.)	money paid regularly for work, especially manual work	*She sent her wages home to her parents.*

Word formation: adjectives that end in *-ly*

In English 1 (Unit 6) you met adjectives like *friendly* and *lovely*, which look like adverbs. At B2 you need the whole family. Many are formed from a **noun + *-ly*** and mean "like / typical of": *friend → friendly*, *coward → cowardly*, *scholar → scholarly*, *order → orderly*, *cost → costly*, *time → timely*, *world → worldly*, *mother → motherly*. Others are simply adjectives: *lovely, lively, lonely, likely, ugly, silly, elderly, deadly*. Frequency words such as *daily, weekly, monthly, yearly* and *early* are both adjectives and adverbs (*a daily letter*; *she wrote daily*). The others normally have **no adverb form**: ✗ *friendlily*, ✗ *he behaved cowardlily*. Use a phrase instead: *in a friendly way*, *in a cowardly manner*, *in a lively fashion*.

8.5.2 Listening: Letters Night

Before you listen. Have you ever written a real letter, on paper? To whom, and why? **Listen (books closed)** while two classmates read the script. In November the Link Reading Club held a "letters night" on video: each member wrote a letter in character and read it aloud. Answer the questions: a) Who does Giulia pretend to be, and to whom is she writing? b) What does Sam's character want from his employer? c) What mistake does Sam make with a conditional? d) What does Prof.ssa Rossi ask the students to do next?

Tabella 8.7 Listening script — Letters Night

Mrs Hill	Right, Bristol is connected, Turin is connected. Welcome to Letters Night! The rules: one letter each, in character, eighteenth-century style. Giulia, you volunteered to start.
Giulia	Yes, because if I wait I'll lose my nerve. So — I'm Sophia Western, from *Tom Jones*, and I'm writing to my aunt in London. "Dear Madam, my father insists that I marry Mr Blifil. Were I to feel the smallest affection for him, I would obey with pleasure. But I have none. Should you speak to my father on my behalf, I would be grateful to you for ever. Were he to force me, I would rather leave the house than break my heart."
Sam	That's brilliant. Very scandalous. Very virtuous.
Giulia	Thank you. I spent two hours on three sentences. Marta helped me with the inversions.
Mrs Hill	It shows. Sam, your turn.
Sam	OK. I'm a footman in a big house in Somerset — no name, just "Thomas" — and I'm writing to my master. "Sir, I humbly beg the favour of one day's leave on Sunday next. My mother is ill, and I have not seen her these twelve months. Hadn't I served you faithfully for three years, I would not dare to ask…"
Prof.ssa Rossi	Sorry, Sam — stop there. Can anyone in Turin hear the problem?
Giulia	"Hadn't I served"… It should be "Had I not served". No contraction with inversion.
Sam	Of course. A footman would never use a contraction anyway — far too lively for a letter to his master. "Had I not served you faithfully for three years, I would not dare to ask. Should you grant me this favour, I will work twice as hard on my return. Your most obedient servant, Thomas."
Mrs Hill	Lovely. And notice what Thomas does: he gives a reason, he reminds his master of his loyalty, and he offers something in exchange. That's negotiation.
Prof.ssa Rossi	Exactly. For next week, I want you to write the master's answer. He can say yes, no, or "yes, but…" — and in Turin, you'll do the same with Sophia's aunt.
Sam	I think the master will say yes. He's a man of sensibility.
Giulia	Or he's worried about his reputation!

After listening. Find in the script: three inverted conditionals in Giulia's letter; one adjective in *-ly* that has no adverb; two words from Tabella 8.6. In Sam's letter, what three strategies of persuasion does Mrs Hill identify?

8.5.3 Speaking: persuading and negotiating in a role play

To persuade, you give reasons and appeal to the other person's interest; to negotiate, you look for a solution that both sides can accept, which usually means offering something in return. The register depends on the relationship: a servant in 1750 and an employee today both ask their employer for a favour, but with very different words.

Tabella 8.8 Useful language — persuading and negotiating

Function	18th-century style (formal, deferential)	Today (polite, neutral)
Making a request	*I humbly beg the favour of…; Might I be permitted to…?*	*Would it be possible for me to…? I was wondering if I could…*
Giving reasons	*I would not presume to ask, were it not that…*	*The reason I'm asking is that…; It's really important to me because…*
Appealing to the other's interest	*Should your Honour grant it, I will…*	*It would actually help the team if…; That way you'd…*
Offering a compromise	*I am ready to make up the time on…*	*How about if I…? I could always… in exchange.*
Conceding	*I perfectly understand that…*	*I see your point. Fair enough, but…*
Closing the deal	*I am infinitely obliged to you, Sir.*	*So we're agreed, then? Thanks, I really appreciate it.*

1. **Then.** Student A is a servant in a country house in 1750 who wants a day off to visit a sick parent; Student B is the employer, who is giving a dinner for twelve guests that day. Negotiate for three minutes in an eighteenth-century register. Use at least one inverted conditional.
2. **Now.** Student A works on Saturdays in a café and wants the Saturday of a school trip free; Student B is the manager, who is short of staff. Negotiate for three minutes in a modern register. Then compare: which phrases changed, and which strategies stayed the same?

8.5.4 Writing: a letter in character

A **letter in character** is a creative text written in the voice of a character from a novel (or of an invented character in the world of the novel), often to show a scene from another point of view. The challenge is consistency: the character must know only what he or she can know, and must sound like a person of that time, rank and personality. The model below imagines Mrs Jervis, the housekeeper of T1, writing to her sister on the day of the funeral. It invents nothing that the novel's first letter contradicts.

Tabella 8.9 Model text — a letter in character (220 words, place, salutation and closing excluded)

Bedfordshire, Thursday night
Dear Sister,
Our good lady was buried this morning, and the house is so quiet that I hear the clock in every room. Had you seen the servants at the grave, you would have thought each of us had lost a mother.

The young master behaved handsomely. He called us together in the hall, promised that none of us should be turned away, and gave every one a year's wages and mourning. Were I a younger woman, I confess I should have wept for joy as much as for grief.

But I write chiefly about our Pamela. You remember the child: fifteen, quick, lively, with a hand as neat as a clerk's, for my lady taught her to write and cast accounts. Before she died, my lady could only say to her son, "Remember my poor Pamela." He has remembered her already. He gave her four guineas with his own hand, and took her hand too, before us all.

Perhaps I am an old fool. He is kind, and she is good, and goodness ought to be safe in a Christian house. Yet should anything happen that troubles me, I will not keep silent. She is too pretty to be a maid, and too poor to be anything else.

Pray for us all, and burn this letter when you have read it.

Your affectionate sister

ESEMPIO SVOLTO

Analysing the model.

- **Point of view**: the same events as T1 (death, wages, the four guineas, "Remember my poor Pamela") are seen by an older servant who notices danger where Pamela sees only kindness.
- **Knowledge**: Mrs Jervis knows only what she has seen; her fear is expressed as a feeling ("Perhaps I am an old fool"), not as knowledge of the plot.
- **Period register**: *behaved handsomely, I confess, chiefly, cast accounts, Pray for us all*; no contractions; *should* after *promised that*; inverted conditionals (*Had you seen…*, *Were I…*, *should anything happen…*).
- **Structure**: place and date → salutation → the news → the main subject (Pamela) → a reflection and a hint of conflict → closing formula and signature.
- **Voice**: a final antithesis that the reader remembers ("too pretty to be a maid, and too poor to be anything else").

Checklist. ✓ a clear speaker, addressee and moment · ✓ the character knows only what he or she could know · ✓ consistent voice and period register (no modern slang, no contractions) · ✓ a structure with opening, development and closing formula · ✓ at least two formal structures from the Language section · ✓ 200–250 words.

Task. Write a letter in character (200–250 words). Choose: a) Mr B. writes to a friend about Pamela after her mistress's death (careful: he does not yet know how the story will end); b) Squire Allworthy writes to his sister on the night he finds the baby Tom in his bed; c) Lord Chesterfield replies to Johnson's letter of 7 February 1755. **TIC:** read the full text of your novel's opening chapters on Project Gutenberg (gutenberg.org) to check facts and names; note which edition you used, and do not trust a summary website that gives no source.

LEARNING TO LEARN

Using a monolingual learner's dictionary. At B2, a bilingual dictionary is not enough: it gives you a translation, but not how the word behaves. A learner's dictionary (on paper or a reliable online edition from a major publisher) gives you: (1) the **definition** in simple English, which teaches you vocabulary while you look up one word; (2) the **pattern** — countable or uncountable, the preposition or the verb form that follows (*propose **to** sb*; *insist **on** doing*); (3) **register labels** such as *formal, informal, old-fashioned, literary*; (4) **collocations** and examples taken from real texts. Method: read all the senses before choosing one; copy the pattern, not just the word, into your notebook; check the register before you use the word in an essay. Transfer it: the same habit works with a monolingual Italian dictionary (Treccani online, Zingarelli) and with your Latin and Greek dictionaries, which are built in the same way — the principal parts and the case a verb governs are its **pattern**, and the quotations from Cicero or Plato do the work of Johnson's quotations. Read the whole entry, not the first line.

8.6 Connections: Pamela in Venice, Two Dictionaries

8.6.1 Goldoni's *Pamela*

Pamela crossed Europe quickly: a French translation began to appear in 1742 and an Italian one was printed in Venice from 1744. In 1750 **Carlo Goldoni** (1707–1793) turned it into a comedy, *Pamela*, later known as *Pamela nubile* to distinguish it from its sequel *Pamela maritata* (1760). The setting stays English — London, the house of "Milord Bonfil" — and the cast list contains no traditional masks of the *commedia dell'arte*: every part is a written role, a sign of the reform by which Goldoni replaced improvised scenes and fixed masks with written comedies of character.

Goldoni changed one essential thing, and he said so in the note to the reader he printed in 1753:

Tabella 8.10 Goldoni on Richardson's ending, and the "solution" of the comedy (text of the Venice edition of Goldoni's *Opere complete*, vol. V, 1909, from it.wikisource) and a translation by the editors

Italiano	English (translation by the editors)
«Il premio della virtù è l'oggetto dell'Autore Inglese [...].» (*L'autore a chi legge*)	"The reward of virtue is the English Author's aim [...]." (*The author to the reader*)
«Pamela, benchè vile ed abbietta, merita di essere da un Cavaliere sposata, ma un Cavaliere dona troppo al merito di Pamela, se non ostante la viltà de' natali, la prende in isposa.» (*ibid.*)	"Pamela, though low and humble, deserves to be married by a gentleman; but a gentleman gives too much to Pamela's merit if, in spite of her low birth, he takes her as his wife."
«Io sono un ribelle della corona Britanna, sono il conte Auspingh, non ultimo fra le famiglie di Scozia.» (Andreuve, Atto III)	"I am a rebel against the British crown; I am the Count of Auspingh, not the least among the families of Scotland." (Andreuve, Act III)

In Richardson the gentleman marries the servant; in Goldoni he cannot, because — Goldoni explains — on Italian stages the marriage of a nobleman with his maid would have seemed improper. So in the last act Pamela's old father, Andreuve, reveals that he is really a Scottish count, a rebel who had hidden for thirty years after a rising against the crown: Pamela is noble by birth, and the marriage offends nobody. Richardson rewards virtue against rank; Goldoni rewards virtue *and* saves rank. The two endings are a good measure of two societies: a London where a printer could imagine a servant becoming a lady, and a Venice where the comic stage still needed noble blood.

8.6.2 Johnson's *Dictionary* and the *Vocabolario della Crusca*

Italy had a great dictionary 143 years before England. The **Accademia della Crusca**, founded in Florence in the early 1580s, took its name from *crusca*, the bran that is separated from flour when it is sifted: the academicians wanted to separate the good words from the bad. The *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca* (Venice, 1612) was built mainly on the Florentine writers of the fourteenth century — Dante, Petrarca, Boccaccio — and on the idea that the best Italian was the Tuscan of the great authors. It was the work of an academy, revised in later editions, and became a model for national dictionaries in Europe.

Johnson knew it, and he mentions the Italian academicians in his Preface. His project was different in two ways. It was the work of one man, not an academy: "the English Dictionary was written with little assistance of the learned, and without any patronage of the great", he wrote in the Preface. And it described the language of the best English writers over a century and a half without pretending that an authority could stop language from changing: "sounds are too volatile and subtile for legal restraints". The Crusca chose a golden age of the language and defended it; Johnson recorded usage and admitted that it would move on. Both ideas — a language

to protect and a language to describe — are still alive in the debates about English and Italian today.

8.6.3 Fielding and the lost comic Homer

When Fielding needed a name for his new kind of novel, he looked where a reader with a classical education looked first: in Aristotle's *Poetics*, which you met in English 3 (chapter 13) as the first theory of tragedy and catharsis. In chapter 4 Aristotle says that Homer was the master of serious poetry and also the first to show the outline of comedy, "dramatising not insult but the ridiculous", in a comic poem about a famous fool, the *Margites*. The comparison that follows is one sentence long.

Tabella 8.11 Aristotle, *Poetics* 4, 1448b38–1449a2 (Greek text as in R. Kassel's Oxford edition, from the Perseus Digital Library), with a transliteration and a translation by the editors

Greek	English (translation by the editors)
«ὁ γὰρ Μαργίτης ἀνάλογον ἔχει, ὥσπερ Ἰλιὰς καὶ ἡ Ὀδύσσεια πρὸς τὰς τραγῳδίας, οὕτω καὶ οὗτος πρὸς τὰς κωμῳδίας.» (*ho gar Margitēs analogon echei, hōsper Ilias kai hē Odysseia pros tas tragōidias, houtō kai houtos pros tas kōmōidias*)	"For the *Margites* stands in the same relation to comedies as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* stand to tragedies."

Fielding turns this sentence into the first argument of his Preface (1742): "HOMER, who was the father of this species of poetry, gave us a pattern of both these, though that of the latter kind is entirely lost; which Aristotle tells us, bore the same relation to comedy which his Iliad bears to tragedy." The reasoning is almost a syllogism. The epic, like drama, has a tragic and a comic kind; Homer wrote both; the comic model was lost, and so it found no imitators. A long, varied, comic story about ordinary people is therefore not a low romance but the heir of a lost Homeric genre — "a comic epic poem in prose". The Preface does not name the poem; Parson Adams does later in the novel (III.2), praising Homer's *Margites*, "which is deplorably lost" — a fitting speech for a clergyman who carries in his pocket an Aeschylus he copied out by hand.

Two warnings for a classico reader. The *Margites* survives only in a few fragments, and modern scholars do not believe that Homer wrote it: Fielding's ancestor is Aristotle's Homer, not the Homer of philology. And the *Poetics* promises to speak about comedy "later" (chapter 6), but no such discussion survives; the lost pages on comedy are the mystery at the heart of Umberto Eco's novel *Il nome della rosa* (1980). With Homer's comic model and Aristotle's theory of comedy both lost, the field was free: Fielding could fill it with a modern genre and still claim the oldest authority in European literature.

1. Compare the endings of Richardson's novel and Goldoni's comedy. What does each ending say about rank and virtue?

2. Why do you think Goldoni kept the setting in England instead of moving the story to Venice?
3. Explain the difference between the Crusca's idea of a dictionary and Johnson's. Which idea do you find closer to the way you use Italian and English?
4. What did Fielding gain by presenting his novel as the heir of Homer's lost comic poem? Would the claim have impressed the readers of 1742 more than a modern reader?

COLLEGAMENTI

Lexicography and data: how a modern dictionary uses a corpus. Johnson found his examples by reading and marking books by hand. Modern lexicographers start from a **corpus** (plural *corpora*): a large, searchable collection of real texts, written and spoken, stored digitally — the British National Corpus, for example, contains about 100 million words of British English of the late twentieth century. A computer can then calculate the **frequency** of a word (how often it occurs per million words), which decides which words a learner's dictionary includes and which senses come first, and it can display a **concordance**: a list of every occurrence of a word, each in its context, aligned on the word (a "key word in context", or KWIC, display). Reading a concordance shows a word's typical patterns and collocations at a glance — exactly what Johnson tried to show with his quotations.

Tabella 8.12 A KWIC concordance for *reputation* (five lines invented for illustration, in the format a corpus tool displays)

Left context	Key word	Right context
a scandal could easily damage her	**reputation**	in a small town
the firm has built a solid	**reputation**	for honesty over the years
he quickly earned a	**reputation**	as a brilliant teacher
the novel's	**reputation**	has grown since 1749
she was worried about her	**reputation**	among the neighbours

From these lines a lexicographer would note the verbs (*damage, build, earn*), the adjectives (*solid*) and the prepositions (*reputation **for*** something, *reputation **as*** someone, *reputation **among*** people). **TIC:** try a free online tool such as the Google Books Ngram Viewer, which shows how the frequency of a word in printed books changes over time; compare *sensibility* and *sensitivity* between 1700 and 2000. Source check: the tool reads old books by optical character recognition, which often confuses the long ſ with *f* before about 1800, so early results can be wrong; always open a few of the original pages before you draw a conclusion.

SINTESI

- Mid-century Britain (George II, 1727–1760; George III from 1760) was a society of ranks: nobility, **gentry**, the "middling sort" and the labouring poor; domestic service was the commonest job for young women.
- Among the propertied, marriage was a property contract (portion, settlement, entail); under **coverture** a wife's property became her husband's; the Marriage Act of 1753 ended clandestine marriages in England.
- Women were a large part of the new reading public and wrote novels too (Haywood, Sarah Fielding, Lennox, Burney); the Bluestockings met for learned conversation.
- **Sensibility** — feeling as a sign of virtue — linked moral philosophy (Shaftesbury, Hume, Smith 1759), tearful fiction and charity (the Foundling Hospital, 1741).
- The last Jacobite rising (1745–46) ended at Culloden on 16 April 1746; it is the setting of Scott's *Waverley*.
- Samuel Richardson created the **epistolary novel**: *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1747–48), written "to the moment", from inside the characters' minds.
- Henry Fielding answered with a **parody** (*Shamela*, 1741), then with the "comic epic poem in prose": *Joseph Andrews* (1742), a **picaresque** journey, and *Tom Jones* (1749).
- The narrator of *Tom Jones* is **omniscient** and intrusive: outside the story, he knows everything and talks to the reader (I.1: the "bill of fare" of *Human Nature*).
- Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759–67) plays with the narrator and the book itself; Johnson's *Dictionary* (15 April 1755) defined about 40,000 words with over 100,000 quotations — not the first English dictionary, but the first great one.
- Johnson's letter to Chesterfield (7 February 1755) is a manifesto of the independent writer; Boswell's *Life of Johnson* appeared in 1791.
- Inverted conditionals drop *if*: *Had I known…*, *Should you need…*, *Were he to…*, *Were it not for / Had it not been for…*; negative *Had I not…* (✗ *Hadn't I…*); formal register.
- Goldoni's *Pamela* (1750) makes the heroine a Scottish count's daughter to save rank; the Crusca's *Vocabolario* (1612) protected a model language, Johnson described usage; modern dictionaries are built from corpora; Fielding defended his "comic epic poem in prose" with Aristotle's remark (*Poetics* 4) on Homer's lost comic *Margites*.

ESERCIZI

History and Literature

1. ● Which of these novels is NOT written in letters?
   - **A.** *Pamela*
   - **B.** *Clarissa*
   - **C.** *Tom Jones*
   - **D.** *Evelina*

2. ● What was *Shamela* (1741)?
   - **A.** Richardson's sequel to *Pamela*
   - **B.** a parody of *Pamela*, almost certainly by Fielding
   - **C.** Goldoni's Italian version of *Pamela*
   - **D.** a manual of model letters for servants

3. ● Under coverture, a married woman's personal property…
   - **A.** remained entirely hers
   - **B.** went to her eldest son
   - **C.** passed to her parents
   - **D.** became her husband's

4. ● Which is true of Johnson's *Dictionary*?
   - **A.** It illustrated meanings with quotations from English writers.
   - **B.** It was the first dictionary of English ever published.
   - **C.** It was written by forty members of an academy.
   - **D.** It contained about 400,000 words.

5. ● True or false? Correct the false statements. a Richardson was a gentleman educated at Eton. b The Marriage Act of 1753 did not apply to Scotland. c In *Joseph Andrews*, Joseph is Pamela's brother. d The Jacobite army won the battle of Culloden. e Tom Jones is a foundling. f Boswell met Johnson in 1791. g According to Aristotle, the *Margites* is to comedy what the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are to tragedy. h Fielding names the *Margites* in the Preface to *Joseph Andrews*.

6. ● Match each work with its author and its date. Works: *Clarissa* · *Joseph Andrews* · *Rasselas* · *Tristram Shandy* · *Life of Samuel Johnson* · *The Man of Feeling*. Authors: Boswell · Fielding · Johnson · Mackenzie · Richardson · Sterne. Dates: 1742 · 1747–48 · 1759 · 1759–67 · 1771 · 1791.

7. ●● Complete the timeline in the correct order, with dates: Johnson's *Dictionary* · *Pamela* · Culloden · *Tom Jones* · Goldoni's *Pamela* · George III becomes king · *Shamela*.

8. ●● Explain in 50–70 words what "sensibility" meant in the eighteenth century and give two examples of how it appeared in books or in society.

Text Analysis

9. ● In T2, what does the “bill of fare” correspond to?
   - **A.** the price of the book
   - **B.** the first chapter, which tells readers what the book offers
   - **C.** the list of characters
   - **D.** the dedication to a patron

10. ● T1. Answer briefly. a Who is Pamela writing to? b What has happened to her mistress? c What did her mistress say about her before dying? d Why is the paper “blotted”?

11. ●● T1. Paraphrase in modern, simple English: a “I have great trouble, and some comfort, to acquaint you with.” b “Much I feared, that … I should be quite destitute again.” c “God, whose graciousness to us we have so often experienced at a pinch…”

12. ●● T2. Find in the text: a a phrase meaning “a free meal for the poor”; b the phrase the narrator uses to address the reader; c the only “article” on the menu; d two verbs that describe possible negative reactions of the reader.

13. ●● T3. For each definition (*lexicographer*, *oats*, *patron*), copy the neutral part and the part that expresses Johnson’s opinion or humour.

14. ●●● Compare T1 and T2 (80–100 words): who speaks, to whom, from what position in relation to the story, and with what effect on the reader? Use the terms *epistolary* and *omniscient narrator*.

15. ●●● Write a PEE paragraph (80–100 words) on this claim: “Johnson’s letter to Chesterfield turns a private complaint into a public declaration of independence.”

Language

16. ● ___ you require any further information, please contact the school office.
   - **A.** Would
   - **B.** Should
   - **C.** Had
   - **D.** Did

17. ● ___ Boswell, we would know very little about Johnson’s conversation.
   - **A.** Had it not been
   - **B.** Were it not
   - **C.** Were it not for
   - **D.** Should it not be for

18. ● ___ the truth, she would never have trusted him.
    A. Hadn't she known
    B. Had she known not
    C. If had she known
    D. Had she known

19. ● Rewrite the sentences with inversion, without *if*. a If I had known about the meeting, I would have come. b If you should see Marta, give her my love. c If the master were to refuse, Thomas would leave. d If it were not for her education, Pamela would be a farm worker. e If they had not read the letters, nobody would have believed her. f If I were in your position, I would accept the offer.

20. ●● Complete with *had*, *should* or *were*. a ___ the Jacobites reached London, history might have been different. b ___ anyone call while I am out, please take a message. c ___ it not for the rain, we would go for a walk. d ___ Fielding not read *Pamela*, he might never have written a novel. e ___ you to change your mind, the offer is still open. f ___ the parcel be damaged, return it within fourteen days.

21. ●● Find and correct the mistake in each sentence (✗). a Hadn't she refused him, she would be rich now. b Should you will need help, call me. c Were he propose to her, she would accept. d If had I listened, I would have understood. e Had it not been her mother's advice, she would have accepted.

22. ●● Mixed conditionals with inversion. Complete with the correct form of the verbs. a Had Giulia not studied English for four years, she ___ (not / be) ready for her B2 exam now. b Were Pamela less virtuous, Mr B. ___ never ___ (marry) her. c Had Johnson not written the *Dictionary*, he ___ (not / be) so famous today.

23. ●● Formal email. Rewrite these neutral sentences for a formal letter to a hotel, using inversion: a If you have any rooms available on 3 May, please let me know. b If I had known about the extra charge, I would have booked elsewhere. c If it weren't for the excellent reviews, I wouldn't have chosen your hotel.

24. ●●● Translate into English using inverted conditionals. a Avessi saputo che Johnson aveva lavorato nove anni, avrei letto il *Dictionary* con più rispetto. b Dovesse arrivare una lettera per me, mettila sulla mia scrivania. c Se non fosse stato per Richardson, Fielding forse non avrebbe mai scritto *Joseph Andrews*.

Vocabulary

25. ● Complete with the words in the box in the correct form: *fortune · inheritance · propose · reputation · scandal · suitor · virtue · wages*. a Sophia rejected every ___ her father chose. b The servants were paid their ___ once a year. c Mr B. finally ___ to Pamela. d A single rumour could destroy a woman's ___. e He made a ___ in the sugar trade. f The secret marriage caused a terrible ___. g She received a large ___ from her grandmother. h For Richardson, ___ deserves a reward.

26. ●● Adjectives in *-ly*. Rewrite the sentences using the word in brackets, without changing the meaning. a She welcomed us like a friend. (FRIENDLY) b The repairs cost a lot of money. (COSTLY) c He ran away like a coward. (COWARDLY) d The conversation was full of life. (LIVELY) e She keeps her desk very tidy. (ORDERLY)

27. ●● Collocations. Match the verbs and the nouns, then write a sentence with three of them: *damage · earn · make · turn down · inherit + a fortune · a proposal · a reputation (×2) · an estate*.

Writing and Speaking

28. ●● Write a letter in character (200–250 words): Pamela's father replies to Letter I. He is proud of her and grateful to the master, but he is worried. Keep the period register, use at least two inverted conditionals, and remember that he knows only what Pamela has written.

29. ●● Role play (pairs, 3 minutes). Student A is a young servant in 1750 who wants permission to learn to read with the house chaplain in the evenings; Student B is the housekeeper, who thinks reading is useless for a maid. Persuade, negotiate and reach an agreement.

Towards B2

30. ●● Multiple-choice cloze. Choose the correct answer (A, B, C or D) for each gap.
When Johnson began his *Dictionary*, he (1) ___ to finish it in three years. In the end, the work (2) ___ him about nine. He read hundreds of books, marking the passages that (3) ___ the meaning of a word, and his assistants copied them out. (4) ___ it not been for the booksellers' money, he could not have survived; but he received no help from Lord Chesterfield, and he (5) ___ him know it in a famous letter.
1 A waited B expected C hoped for D looked · 2 A spent B passed C took D lasted · 3 A showed B said C told D meant · 4 A Was B Were C Had D Should · 5 A made B let C got D gave

31. ●● Open cloze. Write ONE word in each gap.
Richardson's heroine writes (1) ___ the moment: she tells us what has just happened (2) ___ knowing what will come next. Fielding, (3) ___ the other hand, stands outside the story. (4) ___ he not addressed the reader so often, his novel would feel very different. Both writers, however, wanted to show readers (5) ___ ordinary people really behave.

32. ●● Word formation. Use the word in capitals to form a word that fits the gap. a The letters show Pamela's ___ to her parents. (OBEY) b Johnson's definitions are usually precise and ___ . (OBJECT) c Fielding's narrator speaks with gentle ___ . (IRONIC) d The ___ of the *Dictionary* took nine years. (COMPILE) e *Tom Jones* was an immediate ___ . (SUCCEED) f Many readers found Pamela's marriage ___ . (BELIEVE — negative)

33. ●●● Key-word transformation. Complete the second sentence so that it means the same as the first, using the word in capitals. Use two to five words, including the word given.
a If you need anything, ring the bell. (SHOULD) ___ anything, ring the bell. b If Johnson had had a patron, he would not have been so poor. (HAD) ___ a patron, he would not have been so poor. c Without her education, Pamela could not have written her letters. (BEEN) Had it ___ her education, Pamela could not have written her letters. d If the master refused, Thomas would be very disappointed. (WERE) ___ refuse, Thomas would be very disappointed. e She did not know the truth, so she trusted him. (HAD) ___ the truth, she would not have trusted him.

PER APPROFONDIRE

- [WAT] I. Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*: the chapters on Richardson ("Love and the novel: *Pamela*") and on Fielding as a novelist.
- [NOR] S. Greenblatt (ed.), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, vol. C: the introduction to the Restoration and the eighteenth century, and the selections from Johnson and Boswell.
- [SAN] A. Sanders, *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*: the chapter on the eighteenth-century novel and on Johnson.
- [POR] R. Porter, *Enlightenment*: the chapters on print culture and on sensibility.
- [MOR] K. O. Morgan (ed.), *The Oxford History of Britain*: the chapter on the eighteenth century (society, the Jacobites).
- [ABR] M. H. Abrams, G. G. Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*: the entries "epistolary novel", "point of view" and "picaresque narrative".
- [SWA] M. Swan, *Practical English Usage*: the entries on inversion and on *if*-clauses without *if*.
- [HEW] M. Hewings, *Advanced Grammar in Use*: the units on inversion in conditional clauses.

Glossario del capitolo

Concordance
concordanza — a list of all the occurrences of a word in a corpus, each shown in its context.

Corpus
corpus (pl. *corpora*) — a large digital collection of real texts used to study how a language is used.

Coverture
coverture (status giuridico della donna sposata) — the common-law doctrine by which a married woman's legal identity and property were absorbed by her husband's.

Drudge
sgobbone, chi fa un lavoro ingrato — a person who does hard, boring work; Johnson's word for the lexicographer.

Epistolary novel
romanzo epistolare — a novel told through the letters (and diaries) of its characters, without an external narrator.

Foundling
trovatello — a baby found after being abandoned by unknown parents.

Gentry
piccola nobiltà terriera — landowners ranking just below the nobility, without a noble title.

Heir / heiress
erede — the man / woman who will receive someone's money or property after their death.

Inverted conditional
periodo ipotetico con inversione — a formal condition without *if*, with *had*, *should* or *were* before the subject: *Had I known…*

Lexicographer
lessicografo — a person who writes dictionaries.

Omniscient narrator
narratore onnisciente — a narrator outside the story who knows everything about it, including the characters' thoughts.

Parody
parodia — a text that imitates the style and situations of another in order to make fun of it.

Picaresque
picaresco — of a story made of episodes that follow a wanderer, often a rogue, through many places and social levels.

Portion
dote — in the 18th century, the money or property a bride brought to her marriage.

Sensibility
sensibilità — in the 18th century, a delicate capacity to feel for others, seen as a sign of virtue.

Suitor
pretendente, corteggiatore — a man who wants to marry a particular woman.

Writing to the moment
scrivere "sul momento" — Richardson's technique: letters written during the events, before the writer knows the outcome.

Soluzioni

1. C (*Tom Jones* has an omniscient narrator; *Evelina* is a novel in letters).

2. B (published anonymously in April 1741).

3. D.

4. A (it was not the first English dictionary — Cawdrey 1604, Bailey 1721 — and it explained about 40,000 words).

5. a False: he was a London printer, the son of a joiner (Fielding was educated at Eton). b True. c True. d False: the Jacobites were defeated at Culloden (16 April 1746). e True. f False: they met on 16 May 1763; the *Life* was published in 1791. g True (*Poetics* 4, 1448b38–1449a2). h False: the Preface speaks of Homer's lost comic poem without naming it; Parson Adams names the *Margites* in III.2.

6. *Clarissa* – Richardson – 1747–48 · *Joseph Andrews* – Fielding – 1742 · *Rasselas* – Johnson – 1759 · *Tristram Shandy* – Sterne – 1759–67 · *Life of Samuel Johnson* – Boswell – 1791 · *The Man of Feeling* – Mackenzie – 1771.

7. *Pamela* (1740) → *Shamela* (1741) → Culloden (1746) → *Tom Jones* (1749) → Goldoni's *Pamela* (1750) → Johnson's *Dictionary* (1755) → George III becomes king (1760).

8. Model: Sensibility was a quick and delicate capacity to feel — for other people's suffering, for beauty, for right and wrong — and it was considered a sign of virtue. Philosophers such as Shaftesbury, Hume and Adam Smith explained morality through feeling and sympathy. It appeared in novels full of tears, such as *Pamela* and Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771), and in charities such as the Foundling Hospital (1741). (Any two correct examples.)

9. B.

10. a Her father and mother. b She has died of an illness. c "My dear son! … Remember my poor Pamela." d Because Pamela is crying as she writes: her tears have stained the ink.

11. Models: a I have some bad news and some good news to tell you. b I was very afraid that I would be left with no money and no home again. c God, who has so often helped us when we were in trouble…

12. a an eleemosynary treat · b "my sensible reader" · c *Human Nature* · d any two of: *start*, *cavil*, *be offended*.

13. *Lexicographer*: neutral "A writer of dictionaries"; opinion/humour "a harmless drudge, that busies himself…" (self-irony). *Oats*: neutral "A grain"; humour "which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland supports the people" (a joke on Scottish poverty). *Patron*: neutral "One who countenances, supports or protects"; opinion "Commonly a wretch who supports with insolence, and is paid with flattery".

14. Traccia: In T1 Pamela speaks in the first person, to her parents, from inside the story, immediately after the events (epistolary form, "writing to the moment"): she does not know what will happen, and the reader shares her emotion and uncertainty. In T2 an omniscient narrator speaks to "the reader" from outside the story, before it has even begun; he controls the whole book and comments on it with irony. The effect is closeness and suspense in Richardson, confident distance and humour in Fielding.

15. Model: Johnson turns a private grievance into a public statement about the dignity of writers. In the letter he writes that Chesterfield's notice, "had it been early, had been kind", but now comes "till I am known, and do not want it". The balanced, formal sentence is not the cry of an offended man but a carefully built argument: the climax of the three "till I am" clauses shows that he has become famous through his own work. Copied and circulated, the let-

ter was read as the end of patronage and a declaration of independence of the professional author.

16. B.

17. C (*Were it not for* + noun; A and B lack *for*; D is not a fixed expression).

18. D (no contraction with inversion; never *if* + inversion).

19. a Had I known about the meeting, I would have come. b Should you see Marta, give her my love. c Were the master to refuse, Thomas would leave. d Were it not for her education, Pamela would be a farm worker. e Had they not read the letters, nobody would have believed her. f Were I in your position, I would accept the offer.

20. a Had · b Should · c Were · d Had · e Were · f Should.

21. a Had she not refused him… · b Should you need help… · c Were he to propose to her… · d Had I listened… (or If I had listened…) · e Had it not been **for** her mother's advice…

22. a would not be (wouldn't be) · b would … have married (*would never marry her* is also accepted if the story is told in the present) · c would not be (wouldn't be).

23. a Should you have any rooms available on 3 May, please let me know. b Had I known about the extra charge, I would have booked elsewhere. c Were it not for (or Had it not been for) the excellent reviews, I would not have chosen your hotel.

24. a Had I known that Johnson had worked for nine years, I would have read the *Dictionary* with more respect. b Should a letter arrive for me, put it on my desk. c Had it not been for Richardson, Fielding might never have written *Joseph Andrews*.

25. a suitor · b wages · c proposed · d reputation · e fortune · f scandal · g inheritance · h virtue.

26. a She welcomed us in a friendly way (manner). b The repairs were costly. c He ran away in a cowardly way (manner). d It was a lively conversation. e Her desk is very orderly.

27. damage a reputation · earn (or make) a reputation · make a fortune · turn down a proposal · inherit an estate (other correct pairs, such as *inherit a fortune* or *make a proposal*, are accepted). Example: *Tom's behaviour in London damaged his reputation, but he never stopped hoping to inherit an estate.*

28. Model opening: "My dear child, Your letter has given your mother and me both joy and fear. We bless your good lady's memory, and we are thankful to your master for his kindness. Yet, my dear, should he ever say a word that a good girl ought not to hear, come home at once: we had rather see you poor and honest than rich and ruined. Had we known that the four guineas came with his hand in yours, we should have slept less easily…" Assessment: consistent voice of a poor, pious, loving father; knowledge limited to Letter I; period register without contractions; at least two inverted conditionals; 200–250 words.

29. Model exchange: A: "Might I beg a favour, Mrs Jervis? The chaplain has offered to teach me my letters in the evenings." B: "Reading, child? A maid needs her needle, not books." A: "I perfectly understand, madam. But were I able to read, I could read the labels in the stillroom and the lists for the kitchen, and save you trouble." B: "And your work?" A: "I would finish everything first; should anything be left undone, you may stop the lessons at once." B: "Very well — one month, and we shall see." (Request, reasons appealing to the other's interest, a compromise, an agreement.)

30. 1 B · 2 C (*take* sb + time) · 3 A · 4 C (*Had it not been for*) · 5 B (*let* sb know).

31. 1 to · 2 without (also accepted: *not*) · 3 on · 4 Had · 5 how.

32. a obedience · b objective · c irony · d compilation · e success · f unbelievable.

33. a Should you need · b Had Johnson had (or Had he had) · c not been for · d Were the master to · e Had she known.