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A ROOM OF PAMELA'S OWN

BY ROBERT FOLKENFLIK

The question of women's liberation does not exist for Samuel Richardson, but the problem of woman's self-determination is central to his work. Richardson's views, as has been generally recognized, are essentially conservative, despite the upward mobility of his heroine. The world that Pamela takes as normative is highly stratified. She knows her place (her own phrase), and Mr. B.'s as well. Therefore she sees his attempts to seduce her in terms of his invading a place where he does not belong, and she searches throughout the first half of the novel for a space she can call her own. There are three kinds of spatialization in the book: social hierarchy seen in terms of distance, the actual layout of the house, and Pamela's body, divided into discrete portions which have varying amounts of value. The invasion of one spatial order involves the perversion of all, and Pamela's problem is to create an interior space through the private consciousness constituted by her writings.

In this society, Pamela as a servant girl is totally contingent. Mr. B. is a magistrate, and all authority is either locked in his hands or his by default. The ineffectuality of Parson Williams suggests the subordination of religion to the whim of power. Sir Simon Darnford's answer to his wife when informed of Pamela's plight indicates how little she has to hope for from the gentry:

Why, what is all this, my Dear, but that the 'Squire our Neighbour has a mind to his Mother's Waiting-maid! And if he takes care she wants for nothing, I don't see any great Injury will be done her. He hurts no *Family* by this.¹ (122)

In the midst of phrases which stress intimacy, amiable social solidarity and the importance of kinship ("my Dear," "our

¹ Sir Simon is made to seem less typical as the novel progresses, and in Part II he is presented as a superannuated Restoration rake, a scapegoat of sorts for Mr. B.'s former mode of behavior. I have used the Riverside Edition of *Pamela*, ed. T. C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel (Boston, 1971). All references to this edition will appear in the text.

Neighbour," "he hurts no *Family*"), Sir Simon denies that Pamela exists on a fully human level. Mr. B. may have "a mind to" her, but clearly *her* mind is not taken into consideration.

Mr. B.'s actions early in the novel insist that Pamela has no being of her own. His interest in her is first aroused by her hiding a letter in her bosom. Reading her letters and raping her are presented as cognate activities.² Rape is the ultimate threat to privacy. Eventually the two kinds of invasion come together in a scene which some critics have found ludicrous. Having sewn her papers in her under-coat at hip-level, Pamela is accosted by Mr. B., whose interrogation moves from hiding-places in the house to those about her person:

Are they not about you?—If, said I, I must pluck them out of my Hiding-place, behind the Wainscot, won't you see me?—Still more and more artful! said he—Is this an Answer to my Question?—I have searched every Place above, and in your Closet, for them, and cannot find them; so I will know where they are. (204)

He threatens to strip her, but she gets free by promising to go upstairs and fetch them. Her distress is caused by a combination of threats to body and mind: "I went to my Closet, and there I sat me down, and could not bear the Thoughts of giving up my Papers. Besides, I must all undress me, in a manner, to untack them." Mr. B. is treating Pamela as though she were simply one more object in his house, willed to him with the rest of the furniture by his mother. It is no wonder that Pamela bursts out earlier in the novel, "And pray . . . how came I to be his Property? What Right has he in me, but such as a Thief may plead to stolen Goods?" (116). In fighting Mr. B.'s unjust claim, Pamela does not deny that she is "property"—she simply wants the right to dispose of the goods herself. In asserting her independence, she internalizes his attitude so that she becomes an object to herself. This is why she is more apt to speak of herself as localized object than as person and seems at times to be less a feeling human being than forbidden territory.

In a novel or in real life, people must have somewhere to talk. What is remarkable in this book, however, is the extraordinary number of spatial locutions, one after the other, with few other

² Anthony Kearney has spoken of Lovelace's "violations" of Clarissa's letters through interception and forgery, *Essays in Criticism*, 16 (1966), 48. The term would also apply well to Mr. B.'s treatment of Pamela's letters. See, for example, p. 236.

"realistic" or descriptive details. The emphasis is on the movement from one room to the next—the flights, pursuits, withdrawals and entrances take place in a maze of passages, halls, alcoves, bedrooms, dressing-rooms, summer-houses and closets. Pamela is imprisoned and chased, ordered about and pushed around so much that the difference between Mr. B.'s pushing her into a room or pulling her down on his lap is blurred. Pamela treats the invasion of her person as a more intensified case of invasion of privacy.

Places and not actions take on the strongest attributes. She does not refer in retrospect to Mr. B.'s kissing her or fondling her, but to the "Summer-house Trick" (64; cf. also 63, 66), "the last Closet-work" (78), and the "sad Closet affair" (112). These are not mere euphemisms. They are able to take on their peculiar erotic force because they are often described affectively, but the sexual actions with which they are associated are usually not. Quoting a passage from the genteel pornography of Eliza Haywood, John J. Richetti says:

Amena [the heroine of *Love in Excess*] is systematically stripped of her defences, external and internal; the balanced phrases and clauses just about contain the rushing participles which do the actual describing ("surrounded . . . attack'd . . . betray'd . . . panting . . . heaving . . . press'd . . . dissolv'd . . . grasp'd . . . trembled . . ."). The construction matches the erotic tension of guilty and illegal lovers on dangerous ground. This tension is to be maintained through all three parts of the novel, as we pass from one near-climax to another. (Richardson was to do the same thing, of course, especially in *Pamela*.)³

Actually, Richardson's near-climaxes alternate with scenes of more tender treatment. (It would be hard to say from Mr. B.'s viewpoint which constituted backsliding.) But what separates his work most firmly from Mrs. Haywood and her peers is best conveyed by the participles Richetti quotes. Pamela may "tremble" from time to time or her heart may go "pit-a-pat," but what we generally lack in an emotional response of either attraction or revulsion. There is, of course, a technical side to this behavior. Richardson's problem was precisely to avoid suggesting that she feels either pleasure or disgust at the advances of a man who attacks her virtue but will become her husband.

³ *Popular Fiction before Richardson: Narrative Patterns 1700-1739* (Oxford, 1969), p. 188.

(We are left in no doubt about Clarissa's physical feelings towards Solmes, and Anna Howe prompts her to describe her response to Lovelace.)

Passages throughout the novel show how Pamela invests location with feelings. Early in the novel she looks forward to being at home in her "dear, dear, happy Loft once more" (46). Later, her "sun-flower Correspondence" with Mr. Williams consists of committing her letters "to the happy Tiles, and to the Bosom of the Earth" (116). This hiding place she calls "the hopeful place" and "the dear place" (116). By a kind of metonymy places absorb human emotion. Places and even objects become personalized.⁴ As Mr. B. notes after their marriage Pamela can "engage the Stones in the Street, or the Grass in the Field to act for her, and help on her Correspondence" (230).

Pamela's first encounter with Mr. B. is firmly located: "I have been scared out of my Senses; for just now, as I was folding up this letter in my late Lady's Dressing-room, in comes my young Master" (26). Mr. B. is all smiles and kindness, but his intrusion on her privacy sets the pattern for what is to come. The dressing-room in which she served and was educated and protected has now lost its former character, and Pamela will soon call it "a Room I once lov'd, but then as much hated" (43)—an understandable shift in attitude which prepares us for her more difficult shift towards persons. The whole house, as Mr. B. never tires of reminding her, is now his. And yet it is also not his. These rooms, so solidly there, are in a sense the violated social order. The shock is not only what is happening to Pamela personally, but that the whole topography of the house has been perverted.

The first real scene of attempted seduction takes place in the summer-house. Mr. B. comes to her "as I was in the Summer-house in the little Garden," and refuses to let her leave: "you always fly me so, whenever I come near you." She replies, "It does not become your poor Servant to stay in your Presence, sir, without your Business requir'd it; and I hope I shall always know my Place." He insists, "I have a mind you should stay . . ." and she "stood all confounded, and began to tremble, and the more when he took me by the Hand; for now no Soul was

⁴ I would see the treatment of Pamela's clothes basically from this perspective. For an interesting analysis of the clothes motif see Carey McIntosh, "Pamela's Clothes," *ELH*, 35 (1968), 75-83.

near us." He tells her about Lady Davers' proposal that Pamela should go to live with her, but asks, "with some Eagerness; had'st thou not rather stay with me?" Pamela starts to excuse herself, but he protests that he can do better for her, "if you . . . don't stand in your own Light; and so saying, he put his Arm about me and kissed me." At this Pamela "[sinks] down, and found myself in his Arms": when at last she recovers, she "burst from him, and was getting out of the Summer-house; but he held me back, and shut the Door." At this point she explains to him that he has done her

the greatest Harm in the World: You have taught me to forget myself and what belongs to me, and have lessen'd the Distance that Fortune has made between us. . . . (35)

This is no new metaphor—it is such standard eighteenth-century language that it hardly qualifies as a figure of speech. Yet it is not ridiculous: when Pamela has been fainting on the floor, kissed against her will, frightened for her life, it somehow makes sense that she should say that the harm done to her is Mr. B.'s lessening the distance between them. This is because the seduction scene has in fact been presented in spatial terms, which extend to the socio-economic problem as well: Mr. B. has not only abolished the physical distance between them but threatened to prevent her finding a way out, by shutting the door of the summer-house and refusing to permit her to enter Lady Davers' household at one and the same time. Lessening "the Distance that Fortune has made between us" thus has so many overtones that social stratifications begin to take on the same intensity as the walls and doors of the summer-house. After Pamela's protest Mr. B. makes a partial retraction and dismisses her. This dismissal is also presented in spatial terms, although of decreasing intensity, since he is permitting her greater latitude: "Go, take a Walk in the Garden, and don't go in till your blubbering is over." She "[takes] the Opportunity to open the Door, and [goes] out of the summer-house." The emotional tension of the scene slowly subsides; he calls out to her: ". . . don't go in yet, as I told you," and she obeys him: "I took a Turn or two in the Garden, but in Sight of the House, for fear of the worst."

It is very difficult to say here what is primary and what is secondary. Pamela says at the beginning of the intrusion "I hope I shall always know my Place," and at the end "You have

taught me to forget myself, and what belongs to me." His lessening of the distance between them has thrown her into one of her strange semi-conscious states: "I sunk down, not in a Fit, and yet not myself," so that when she says she has forgotten herself it is true in more ways than one. Pamela's faintness is a loss of social identity. Her physical existence, the house and grounds in which she moves and the society in which she must find her place are fused together to form the particular world-view which constitutes the vision of the novel.

After her tears have dried, she goes in and writes to her parents: "... don't be angry I have not yet run away from this House, so late my Comfort and Delight, but now my Anguish and Terror" (36). When a Gothic heroine says something along these lines, she is located in a house whose hideous features (secret passageways, torture chambers, haunted rooms) have become apparent to her, but in *Pamela* the change in occupant is seen as a change in the nature of the house. This attitude is a vestige of the medieval conception of the family as an impersonal society, a "house."⁵

The most significant space at the Lincolnshire estate, the scene of a major portion of the novel, is Pamela's closet. As her spatial freedom radically contracts, the closet in the bedroom she shares with Mrs. Jewkes, her "wicked Bedfellow," becomes the locus of her being, her only private place. She gains it initially by begging Mrs. Jewkes to let her have it for her things. A closet in the eighteenth century, not to be confused with our clothes closet, was a small room off a bedroom or another larger one.⁶ The closets earlier in the novel give us an idea of their normal scope. The one Mr. B. hides in has "a few Books, and Chest of Drawers" (64).⁷ Closets usually have but one door, a feature which makes them useful to the Richardsonian heroine as strong-

⁵ Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York, 1962), trans. Robert Baldick, pp. 371-72. Warren Hunting Smith, *Architecture in English Fiction* (New Haven, 1934), pp. 65-70, sees the pursuit of the maiden in Richardson as an anticipation of the Gothic novel, but his interest is architectural not spatial. See also Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York, 1966), pp. 128-29, for a comparison of Richardson and Gothic novelists.

⁶ For several excellent pages on the importance of the closet for Richardson's heroines see Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley, 1964), pp. 188-89.

⁷ Mrs. Jervis's closet into which she puts "her Sweet-meats and such Things" is more properly a cupboard (78). One obvious way of interpreting the closets and the other rooms would be to treat them as the expression of the sexual thoughts Pamela consciously represses.

holds. Characteristically, they were used as rooms for reading and writing. Angel Day's *The English Secretary* (1625) gives a good example of the word as it was used in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: "we doe call the most secret place in the house appropriate unto our owne private studies . . . a Closet" (*OED*). An important change, however, had taken place between the late seventeenth century and the middle of the eighteenth. "The women had not then," says Johnson in his *Life of Milton*, "aspired to literature, nor was every house supplied with a closet of knowledge." The sense of privacy, secrecy and security suggested by the closet is still conveyed today by the verb. One can "closet" oneself without overtones of mothballs or hangers. Though Pamela has to hide extra writing implements, the room seems effectively hers. We soon find her referring to "my Closet, as I call it" (110). The closet is a cell within the larger prison of Mr. B.'s Lincolnshire estate, but Pamela has the key to lock others out of it. She can both lament her plight and take some pleasure in her security: "my Pen and Ink (in my now doubly-secur'd Closet) are all I have to employ myself with . . ." (150). After she bruises and bloodies herself climbing the wall, "I began to wish myself most heartily again in my Closet" (151). The closet becomes a refuge of some positive comfort and safety.

Mr. B.'s conversion is marked by the shift in function of Pamela's closet. This room becomes the scene and touchstone of their formally changing relationship: "my master came up to me to my Closet, and brought me the Licence" (274). Pamela does not control the action, but his recognition of her closet as her private place plays a large role in what may fairly be called his courtship of her. When Mr. B. tries to overcome Pamela's shyness, he does it with "love and tenderness": "I begged to be excused Supper; but he brought me down himself from my Closet, and placed me by him . . ." (280). At supper the bashful Pamela, all "sweet Confusion," tells Mr. B.: "You should have still indulg'd me in my Closet! . . . I am ready to beat myself for this ungrateful Return to your Goodness" (281). Shortly after this remark Mr. B. says at supper, "My dearest Girl, I fear you have had too much of my Company for so many Hours together; and would better recollect yourself, if you retir'd for half an Hour to your Closet" (295). The place now begins to take on a sanctity: "I went to my Closet; and the first thing I did, on my Knees, again thanked God for the Blessing of the

Day" and then she writes (295). Later, when she does not go to chapel, "I bestowed the Time, from the Hour of my Beloved's rising, to Breakfast, in Prayer and Thanksgiving, in my Closet . . ." (388).⁸ The King James translation of Matthew 6:1 would encourage the strong association of the closet and prayer: "when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." Thinking of the subtitle of the novel, *Virtue Rewarded*, one can almost take this text as a gloss on *Pamela*.

The special quality of private space in this novel can be seen in Pamela's description of Mr. B.'s closet as well as her own. Her account of his closet has an intensity beyond that found in personal description of Mr. B.:

He then went into his Closet, which is his Library, and full of rich Pictures besides; a noble Apartment, tho' called a Closet, and next the private Garden, into which it has a Door that opens. (82)

This intensity shows itself in the repetitious dislocation of the sentence. The contorted sentence is characteristic of Pamela's ungrammatical excitement at moments of high tension (one aspect of Richardson's "writing to the moment"), and it is also characteristic of this novel that at such a moment her tension takes form as a consciousness of space. Anxious to be reassured, she is happy to find things that are reassuring. His closet, his private place, contains far more than she would have guessed. Pamela is not sizing up the property like Fielding's little gold-digger, Shamela. The suggestions of wealth, taste and intellect which will contribute to the marital happiness of the B.'s are secondary to the moral qualities suggested by the spaciousness and openness of his remarkable closet.

The scene in which this description is set contrasts strongly with that of Mr. B.'s attack the day before. Here, though he still uses the imperative mood ("Shut the Door, *Pamela*, and come to me in my Closet"), he speaks to her "in a kinder Manner than I have ever known from him." The frightening motion of Mr. B. rushing out of the closet in Mrs. Jervis's bedroom "in a rich silk and silver Morning Gown" (66)—like an

⁸ In a letter to George Cheyne (31 Aug. 1741) Richardson writes of *Pamela* II, "I often make her retire to her Closet for her Devotions; but, I own, so far from excluding her Husband, that she Hopes . . . to induce him to join with her in it . . ." (*Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson* [Oxford, 1964], ed. John Carroll, p. 46).

aroused male bird—is replaced by the decorum of his sitting on a “rich Settee.” In *his* private place he tells Pamela that she will no longer be considered a servant and confesses his love. Though she still has the Lincolnshire captivity to endure, the location of his confession attests to its sincerity.

Throughout *Pamela* the broad or subtle modulations of speech and gesture within a given space mark the shifts in human relationships.⁹ By locating his scenes specifically Richardson can juxtapose what happens at one time in a particular place against what happens there the next time, or he can oppose an action in one place to an action in another. Hence the shifts in relationship take place, to use one of Pamela’s favorite locutions, “by degrees” (e. g., 34, 78, 104, 224, 279). Time is converted into space as scene follows scene. Looking at the grounds after her marriage, Pamela says of the Lincolnshire estate:

What a different Aspect every thing in and about this House bears now, to my thinking, to what it once had! The Garden, the Pond, the Alcove, the Elm-walk. But, Oh! My Prison is become my Palace; and no wonder every thing wears another Face! (293; and cf. 254)

Space takes on qualities, but the qualities may be changed by subsequent events. These places which were formerly stations of her cross have become entirely different for her.

In a sense the only space that Pamela can occupy before her marriage is the space she creates in her letters. This is the same space as that of the house—the letters after all are our only way of knowing the events of the novel—but what happens in this space, frightening though it seems, is put into her perspective and socialized by being addressed to a real or projected audience. Thus she is able to affirm at every point through the existence of her letters the being which Mr. B. denies. We may say that the reason for the post-hymeneal dullness of this novel and of the sequel is that the letters have lost their existential urgency and have become merely a literary convention.

The social scope of Pamela’s writing, like her physical scope, is increasingly constricted. First, she stops receiving letters; then

⁹ George Sherburn considers the importance of gesture for Richardson’s novels in “‘Writing to the Moment’: One Aspect,” in *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Literature: Essays in Honor of Alan Dugald McKillop*, ed. Carroll Camden (Chicago, 1963), pp. 201-09. For a suggestive account of human space in painting during the period, see Ronald Paulson, “Living Space in Eighteenth-Century Art: Longhi and the View Painters,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 4 (1971), 458-70.

she is unable to send any; finally her letters give way to a journal. As she is forced to express her consciousness of her predicament, she dialectically creates the self which Mr. B. is trying to deny. Lady Davers pays tribute to this aspect of Pamela's letters in Part II:

I'll tell you what has been a great Improvement to you: it is your own Writings. This Itch of Scribbling has been a charming Help to you. For here, having a natural Fund of good Sense, and a Prudence above your Years, you have, with the Observations these have enabled you to make, been Flint and Steel too, as I may say, to yourself. . . .¹⁰

In bearing witness, Pamela brings into being the very consciousness that converts Mr. B. ("O my dear Girl! You have touch'd me sensibly with your mournful Relation, and your sweet reflections upon it" [208]) and the rest of the world with him.

Once Pamela and Mr. B. are married, Lady Davers' opposition provides the major action of the novel. Her interrogation of Pamela in many ways repeats the actions of Mr. B.¹¹ Pamela would leave, but her escape is blocked. Lady Davers orders her servant to shut the door and reproves Pamela for her "freedom," but Pamela is now her match:

If you, Madam, said I, lessen the Distance yourself, you will descend to my Level, and make an Equity, which I don't presume to think of; for I can't descend lower than I am,—at least in your Ladyship's Esteem! (318)

The coy final phrase reminds us that the wife of Mr. B. is in a very different situation from that of Pamela Andrews. Though she is pushed about and a chair is put in front of the door, she is now able to assert herself and successfully flee out the window to her husband and a sympathetic social audience, precisely the audience she originally lacked. Here Pamela manages to escape from a space in which she has been imprisoned by Lady Davers. The shift in their relationship is later marked by her running voluntarily out of a safe place, the sanctuary of her closet, to plead for her sister-in-law. This action indicates a movement from her heretofore necessary concern with self to a more broadly social role. The polarities of self and others which provide the

¹⁰ Shakespeare Head Edition (Oxford, 1929), III, 54.

¹¹ Robert Alan Donovan, *The Shaping Vision: Imagination in the English Novel from Defoe to Dickens* (Ithaca, N. Y., 1966), p. 65, sees the importance of the scene. It enables us to say that rape is overrated as the motivating force behind the novel.

major dynamics of the novel blend towards the end with the polarities of private and public.

What, then, is the importance of space in this novel? The ordering of space in *Pamela* seems to be a bourgeois analogue of the mythic ordering of the cosmos in Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Richardson was always concerned about the "relative duties," and space in the novel operates as a way of suggesting what certain relationships should be, as well as measuring their distance from the norm. When Mr. B. improperly encroaches on Pamela's space, we do not find that Birnam Wood moves to Dunsinane, but, as we have observed, Pamela can "engage the Stones in the Street, or the Grass in the Field to act for her. . . ."

We might glance at *Clarissa* for an interesting corroboration of the importance of space in Richardson's work. Clarissa's "flaw," insofar as she has one, is leaving her father's house. As a result she too has no place of her own and stays in a genuinely perverted house, the brothel of Mrs. Sinclair. Lovelace becomes the "vile encroacher" and she (to him) the "sweet seceder." "O house, house," she apostrophizes, as though it were to blame. And after escaping, while near death, she wants to buy a "house," her term for the coffin to which the earthly space she can call her own has shrunk. But if this is the tragic moment, Clarissa's triumph is also represented in terms of space. Her allegorical letter to Lovelace speaks of her reception into her "Father's house," the only place where she can now have a liberated existence. The extreme restrictions of her earthly house will give way to a Christian conception of a place of familial comfort. The flight from her earthly father's house is replaced by her assurance that her heavenly father is prepared to receive her.¹²

Privacy requires a space that one can have to oneself. Pamela's oneness with Mr. B. is indicated when she finds him "reading in a little Alcove":

And I said, Sir, am I licens'd to intrude upon you,—without your Command? No, my Dear, said he, because you cannot *intrude*. I am so wholly yours, that where-ever I am, you have not only a Right to join me, but you do me a very acceptable Favor at the same time. (311)

Their mutual privacy should be seen in conjunction with Richardson's attempt to work out the thorny problems of selfhood sug-

¹² Alastair M. Duckworth touches on some of the same issues in *The Improvement of the Estate* (Baltimore, 1971), p. 15.

gested by Pamela's behavior after her marriage. (She still calls him "master" and seems to behave submissively.) In the sequel to the novel, Pamela explains to Lady Davers:

when (as I told him) his Goodness for me, made him rather study what would oblige me, than himself, even to the Prevention [i. e., anticipation] of all my Wishes, how was it possible for me not to receive with Pleasure and Gratitude every Intimation from him, in such a manner, as that tho' it might seem to be the effect of an implicit obedience to his Will, yet was it (nor could it be otherwise) entirely agreeable to my own?¹³

Yet towards the end of Part I, Mr. B.'s rage for privacy when angered should leave us in little doubt as to where privilege lies:

Pamela, said he, and made me tremble, How dare you approach me, without Leave, when you see me thus disturb'd!—Never, for the future, come near me, when I am in these Tumults, unless I send for you. (359)

This power is at the source of Mr. B.'s ordinarily generous treatment of his wife. It reminds us that privacy in this novel is a luxury within the husband's gift. In prescribing Pamela's daily activities after their marriage, Mr. B. gives her leave to "lie half an hour after me, or so" and then another two hours for herself before a nine o'clock breakfast, followed by more time until dinner at two, and her own time again until eight. The time for herself and by herself is substantial—this is a benevolent dictatorship indeed—but the absolute structuring of it points to the fact that for Pamela to have a room of her own, she must be content to have it in Mr. B.'s house. The privacy which in the first part of the novel she fought to create for herself, she now after their marriage accepts from him.

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¹³ Shakespeare Head, III, 61.