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Pamela: Autonomy, Subordination, and the "State of Childhood"

by Raymond F. Hilliard

MIDWAY through *Pamela* the heroine makes the one wholly autonomous decision of her career—to yield to Mr. B's plea that she return to him at his Lincolnshire estate and, by implication, to the prospect of marriage. Insofar as the novel offers an unconventional rendering of a staple theme, courtship, Pamela's choice climaxes an episode in which she and B, each acting under the impetus of desire and resisting the insidious power of a social ethos, achieve an astonishing degree of openness, mutuality, and freedom. Following hard upon B's last efforts, including an apparent second rape attempt, to subdue Pamela to his will, the episode has him finally acknowledging her integrity and her right to choose, as well as electing to defy the "World's Censures"¹ by marrying beneath him. As for Pamela, the episode encompasses her recognition of the "ungovernable Heart" (212) which has all along been responsive to B but which she has often addressed as an alien, unaccountable part of herself. Moreover, in going back to B, she disregards significant eighteenth-century strictures on courtship, entrusting herself to him without the "Advice" or "Approbation" of her parents, virtually avowing her feelings, and, in the knowledge that the "World" may judge her conduct as "blameable" (218), jeopardizing a cherished reputation. Finally, if the incident in its entirety marks a triumph of desire and freedom over prudent obeisance to public opinion, Pamela's return by itself would seem to signal a transition not only from one social "condition" to another, but from adolescence to adulthood as well. Richardson implies as much by having his heroine reach her

¹ Samuel Richardson, *Pamela*, ed. T. C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel (Boston, 1971), p. 209. Subsequent references to this edition will be cited in parentheses.

decision while on the road—a place associated in much eighteenth-century fiction with release from social and familial restrictions—between her parents' home and B's.

The episode owes its uniqueness to the strength of a mutual attraction that establishes a temporary equality, a balance of power, between the hero and heroine, lifting them, as it were, above a social context in which personal relations are ordinarily complicated by what Defoe calls "the great law of subordination."² In the first half of the novel the various transactions between Pamela and B are determined in great part by their relationship as servant and master, specifically by B's eagerness to exploit the shared assumption that a subordinate, a fifteen-year-old dependent, will be submissive—"dutiful," "obliging," "obedient," and "grateful"; in the second half the character of their marriage is defined by the same code, self-consciously embraced by both husband and wife. To the principle of subordination Richardson, like his characters, pledges strenuous allegiance, viewing it in conventional fashion as the basis of order and morality in a Providentially ordained social hierarchy.³ In fact, though the major eighteenth-century novelists are all conservative exponents of a deferential social order, no other makes it so conspicuous a theme of his fiction as Richardson. One approach to his interest in subordination—and insubordination—is to explain his social vision as a function of his fascination with sadistic "dominance urges," and his stories as fantasies which derive their force from the author's psychological makeup.⁴ But such an explanation, though by no means putting the cart before the horse, tends to underestimate Richardson's insights into the psychological dynamics of a society that was still hierarchical.⁵ Those dynamics were to be analyzed

² See Daniel Defoe, *The Great Law of Subordination Consider'd* (London, 1724).

³ The conventional view is expounded in such frequently reprinted domestic conduct books as James Allestree's *The Whole Duty of Man* ([1659]); Defoe's *The Family Instructor* (1715); and William Fleetwood's *The Relative Duties of Parents and Children, Husbands and Wives, Masters and Servants* (1705). On Richardson's familiarity with these and similar works, see Katherine G. Hornbeak, *Richardson's Familiar Letters and the Domestic Conduct Books*, *Smith College Studies in Modern Languages*, XIX, No. II (Northampton, Mass., 1938).

⁴ This is the argument of Morris Golden's fine study, *Richardson's Characters* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1963), as also of Gerald Levin's *Richardson the Novelist: The Psychological Patterns* (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey, 1978).

⁵ The long-established conception of society as a divinely ordered hierarchy with each member occupying a fixed "place" was, of course, being eroded by the rise of individualism; see, for example, Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in En-*

much later in the century by Mary Wollstonecraft, who would indict the ideology of subordination as a subtly vitiating influence on the character of the powerful and the subordinate alike—or, to invoke William Fleetwood's tell-tale list of analogous pairs, on relations between parent and child, husband and wife, and master and servant.⁶ Wollstonecraft would argue that by enforcing the "submissive demeanor of dependence," men keep their wives "always in a state of childhood"; attacking widely-read eighteenth-century domestic conduct books that were used to inculcate the idea of subordination, she would maintain that women, like other subordinates, cannot attain adult maturity unless they are brought up to be equal and autonomous ("independent") in their relationships with men. Perhaps more surprisingly, she would argue that husbands themselves, their inordinate power allowing them to be willful "tyrants," remain "only overgrown children," incapable of rational self-control.⁷ Wollstonecraft's remarks shed mainly a general light on the first half of *Pamela* (before the decision to return to B), where Richardson's concern, as his heroine advances toward adult "independence," is with the inhibiting effects of her conditioning as a subordinate. In the second half of the novel, Richardson's insistence on the "childish" or regressive behavior of various characters, including Pamela and B, points to a more specific and problematic connection between his endorsement of a hierarchical social order and what I take to be a largely intuitive adumbration of Wollstonecraft's notions about inequality and the "state of childhood."

gland 1500–1800 (New York, 1977), pp. 221–480. Stone (p. 222) prefaces his account of the change with the caveat that eighteenth-century England "remained at all levels a deferential society based, although to a diminishing extent, on the . . . principles of hierarchy and obedience."

⁶ Like Allestree, Defoe, and others, Fleetwood, *The Relative Duties*, 2nd. ed. (London, 1716), pp. 8, 306, 305, defines the desirable behavior of servants and wives in the same language he reserves for children. Just as servants "should behave themselves as becomes their Condition, with all Submission and Humility, with all Obedience," so children are to be "submissive, dutiful . . . and such as become Inferiors toward their Betters."

⁷ *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London, 1792; rpt. New York, 1971), pp. 26–34, 46, 60, 100–1, 177, et passim. Among the earlier writers Wollstonecraft attacks are Rousseau (*Emile*), John Gregory (*A Father's Legacy to His Daughters*, 1774), and James Fordyce (*Sermons to Young Women*, [1759?]).

That Richardson envisions Pamela's story as one about growing up—in one sense, about learning to be and to act on her own—is evident in certain of the childish traits which her plight accentuates: she defers to her parents or to parental surrogates for counsel and approval; she yearns to feel "beloved" by all around her, as by a protective family; and she tries to ignore ambivalence in herself and others.⁸ These tendencies blind her to the influence of subordination and dependency on her fellow servants—she is reluctant, for instance, to admit that Mrs. Jervis is complying with B's plan to delay Pamela's departure from Bedfordshire, and unable to realize that several of B's other servants are not the single-minded well-wishers she likes to consider them. Jonathan and Longman pump her for information about B's doings, some male servants look upon her with lust, and at least one, the cook, resents her privileged position in the household (56, 30, 51). Richardson hints that any concern the servants may have for Pamela is overridden by their fear of the master, just as their more hostile feelings are kept in check by the "Awe" in which they hold Mrs. Jervis because of her "gentle" background. Though a skilled actress herself, Pamela clings to a child's understanding of adults in relation to their social roles, presuming that silver-haired servants are as solicitous as they appear or ought to be. Hence too her mistaken belief that Parson Williams' interest in her is motivated by "Virtue and Compassion" (147) rather than the same ineluctable impulse that will eventually gain B for her, and her unwillingness to see that her parents want to push her into an engagement to Williams despite her disinclination.

Richardson's strategy, which is clear from the beginning in Pamela's distress over the death of B's mother, is the gradual separation of his bewildered heroine from all to whom she would look for "Direction" or "Deliverance," from her parents, Mrs. Jervis, and Parson Williams. Like other eighteenth-century novelists, Richardson

⁸ Three valuable studies of Pamela as adolescent are Stuart Wilson, "Pamela: an Interpretation," *PMLA*, LXXXVIII (1973), 79–91; Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Adolescent Idea: Myths of Youth and the Adult Imagination* (New York, 1981), pp. 19–30; and Terry J. Castle, "P/B: Pamela as Sexual Fiction," *SEL*, XXII (1982), 469–89. Wilson focuses on the conflict in Pamela between desire and conscience; Spacks on the heroine's achievement of self-assertion despite her powerlessness as a servant girl; and Castle on the process of female socialization as experienced by Pamela.

sets out to delineate the behavior of the self in instances of extreme deprivation and isolation; but his portrayal of Pamela differs from, say, Defoe's description of Crusoe on an island, in its attention to the heroine as an adolescent servant girl—that is, as a dependent in three dimensions of her social existence—and to the concomitant problem of personal autonomy. In effect, Richardson explores answers to certain questions: how would such a person who, because of her age, sex, and social status, tends when in difficulty to seek "Protection" from authority figures, act in a threatening situation where she has no choice but to fend for herself? And how might her behavior be affected by a tension between awareness that she must be self-reliant and internalized cultural values that condemn anything more than passive resistance on her part as a refusal to depend for her well-being—her deliverance—on the workings of Providence? Like the matter of the "reduced" self, this tension is one version of a conflict at the heart of many eighteenth-century novels, between, on the one hand, a traditional Christian view of human existence based on such ideals as self-restraint and submission, and on the other, a modern, secular view based on the principles of freedom and autonomy. Richardson's treatment of the conflict is distinctive for its focus on the complications that arise when it is experienced by a youthful heroine, torn by her age alone between a longing for the security of childhood ("O . . . to be safe with my dear Father and Mother!") and the exhilarating prospect of adult self-reliance ("O the Pride . . . if I can secure my Innocence, and escape"). Such tensions animate the two crucial episodes that precede her decision to return to B, the first concerning a temptation to commit suicide, as she depicts it, and the second her successful resistance to B's final attempts on her "Virtue."

Pamela interprets the suicide incident as one in which a timely "Ray of Grace" saved her from an "Act of Despondency . . . a Sin," from a "worse Enemy" than B, "myself"; instead of relying on her "own foolish Contrivances," she claims, she learned to submit "to the Divine Will," to await deliverance by Providence (151–6). As Patricia Spacks has recently pointed out, however, Pamela's motivation in the episode is more complex than she herself knows. Explaining the heroine's behavior in the light of her ongoing struggle with B, Spacks sees the powerless subordinate as eschewing suicide because she senses that she can overcome him through sexual attractiveness

and the "moral leverage" she obtains by posing as a helpless victim.⁹ To the conflict Pamela experiences between her instinct toward active self-reliance and the doctrinal commonplace that a person in trouble ought to rely on Providence, we can add that Richardson deliberately puts her in circumstances ("moneyless, friendless . . . and in a strange Place") which compel her to take action in her own defense and then, once self-reliance appears "fruitless," to rationalize. The result is one of the finest comic scenes in eighteenth-century fiction, but also a turning point which enacts the ultimate paradox in the novel—that the Providential outcome of Pamela's trials is owing to her own endeavors to deliver herself.

The evidence for a reading of the episode as incorporating a comic or ironic perspective lies partly in the way Richardson frames it, for it begins with mention of Mrs. Jewkes's snoring and ends with Pamela, having "thought I could not live two Hours," falling into "a pretty sound and refreshing Sleep" (155–6). But elements throughout the incident—the varieties of diction the heroine uses to record it, her inconsistencies—suggest that the reader's assessment of it is intended by Richardson to be at variance with Pamela's.¹⁰ Her first hope is to escape from her grown-up persecutors—Mrs. Jewkes, Colbrand, and "an angry and resenting Master" (152)—after leaving her upper petticoat in the pond on B's estate and letting them suppose she has killed herself. Having delighted in the "Invention" of this "Stragem," having determined to be her own rescuer, she gives thought to Providence, which she trusts "will direct my Steps to some good Place of Safety" (149). Here and elsewhere in her account, Pamela's references to Providence invariably appear as afterthoughts that varnish actions initiated with other than pious motives: she desperately wishes to take her fate into her own hands, but without violating an ego ideal—all "Duty and Resignation"—nurtured by two agents of cultural indoctrination, the books she has read and the several authority figures in her life (153). The romantic

⁹ *The Adolescent Idea*, pp. 26–8. By contrast, Mark Kinkead-Weekes, *Samuel Richardson: Dramatic Novelist* (London, 1973), pp. 34–57, et passim, takes Pamela's account totally at face value as a triumph of "faith" or "resignation" over self-reliance ("presumption").

¹⁰ Kinkead-Weekes, pp. 91–2, praises Richardson for creating deliberate comic effects at Pamela's expense elsewhere in the novel but dismisses (arbitrarily, in my view) any comedy in the pond episode as an inadvertent consequence of artistic immaturity.

quality of her "Enterprise" is attested by her extravagant phrasing and by her selective recourse to the second or third person in writing about herself. "What now . . . must become of the poor miserable *Pamela*," she exclaims after falling and hurting herself. And when she abandons the idea of suicide she writes, "Quit with Speed these guilty Banks, and fly from these dashing Waters" (151, 153). Such passages contrast with the more direct, homely language she favors when writing about what truly upset her—her injuries and her frustration over the miscarriage of her original scheme: "the Wall being old, the Bricks I held by, gave way . . . and I broke my Shins and my Ankle besides . . . Then I began to wish myself most heartily again in my Closet, and to repent of my Attempt, which I now censur'd as rash, *because it did not succeed*" (151, my italics). This passage is followed by another suspect one in which she thanks God for the "divine Mercies" that withheld her from self-murder: "but my Weakness of Body made me move so slowly, that it gave Time for . . . a Ray of Grace to dart in upon my benighted Mind" (151). Richardson neither presents Pamela as an unconscious hypocrite nor purposely undermines the idea of Providential intervention; rather, he depicts his heroine's maneuvering as that of a hysterical but supple-witted fifteen-year-old who typically makes sense of her consternation by turning it into an exculpatory and entirely self-centered fiction—her own version of a biblical or romantic captivity/deliverance narrative—about a "poor Innocent" whose inability to escape from an "inhuman Tigress" is compensated by a divinely inspired avoidance of sinful self-sufficiency. On one level, the novel as a whole is about the sort of Providential rescue that Pamela relates, and her pieties mirror Richardson's own orthodox beliefs. At the same time, through her, he is eventually forthright about the ambiguity that underlies this episode in particular and the novel in general. Pamela will often recur to the suicide incident, and for good reason: B, who calls it a "very moving Tale," will finally be won over by her most elaborate recounting of it (208). When she wonders at the ensuing happy denouement, she cannot help noting that "after all, it was necessary I should take the Steps I did, to bring on this wonderful Turn!" (261)¹¹

¹¹ The pond-suicide episode in *Pamela* is comparable in function to the well-known incident in *Robinson Crusoe* where Defoe's protagonist, having discovered English barley growing on his island, wavers between attributing it to Providence or to mere "chance." See Michael Shinagel's edition of *Crusoe* (New York, 1975), pp. 62–3.

In a long stretch of the story after the pond episode, B intensifies his efforts to undo Pamela through various "Menaces and Temptations" (362), first by aggravating her irrational guilt feelings as an "undutiful" or "ungrateful" dependent, and then by offering to "provide" for her and her penurious family. The menaces and temptations alike reflect B's grasp of subordination and the system of "exchange" or reciprocal "obligation" in which it entangles dependents. As Pamela's master, he has been able to impress her from early in their relationship by his "Power to Oblige, and . . . Authority to Command" (32). He exerts the power to oblige—apt double meaning—by giving presents and acting as a provider for those unable to provide for themselves. Pamela's initial perplexities in the story are caused not only by uncertainty about who is to maintain her after the loss of B's mother, but also by her growing realization that his presents impose "obligations," his blandishments as a would-be provider eventually culminating in the written articles of "Exchange" that she rejects because the "grateful Return" demanded of her is too high a "Price" (166–7). If her experiences in the first half of the novel force her away from dependence on such failed provider-deliverers as her father and Parson Williams, they also teach her that in any exchange with "the Mighty Rich," dependents, with nothing else to give, surrender their "free Agency": "People . . . don't know how they shall act," she comments in explaining the necessitous Mrs. Jewkes's "implicit Obedience," "when their Wills are in the Power of their Superiors" (95, 362).

B uses his "authority" in like fashion to unsettle Pamela's carefully cultivated but youthfully precarious sense of herself as a moral being. Dreading the arrival of her "angry and incensed Master" after the suicide episode, she wonders why "the Guiltless tremble so" (157, 160). Though B is the "guilty Aggressor," by putting on a "stern and majestic Air" and playing the judge at a tribunal—not the first time this local justice of the peace has cast Pamela in the role of one who is answerable for offenses—he nearly convinces her that she is an "ungrateful Runaway," a "Hypocrite," a "Mistress of Arts" who ought to beg "Forgiveness." "I could not speak," she writes, "but throwing myself on the Floor, hid my Face, and was ready to die with Grief and Apprehension" (160). Stirring guilt over her earlier attempts at self-reliance and the verbal aggressiveness ("Sauciness") by which she has frequently repulsed him, B's tactic almost suc-

ceeds.¹² Her primary psychological defense having been to conceive of herself as an "Innocent," a "good Girl," Pamela is nearly broken: "Surely . . . I am the wickedest Creature that ever breath'd"; "in spite of all I could do to refrain crying, [I] sobb'd as if my Heart would break" (160–2). There is no theatricality in this section, no intrusion of the second or third person, only fear and impending collapse. This, not either of his two physical assaults, is B's most dangerous attack on Pamela, whose reaction exemplifies the problem of self-definition for subordinates in a hierarchical society.

By the time of the gradual rapprochement between Pamela and B—the episode capped by her choice to return to him—she might be described as having achieved ascendancy over her master, for she has established a portrait of herself that totally seduces him; neither will ever discern the complexities behind her idealized self-representation ("Meekness of Temper," "noble Sincerity"); as we shall see, in the second half of the story B easily adapts it to his need for a wife who is both a compliant child and an exemplary mother. But Richardson's development of the episode itself carries a quite different emphasis: on the readiness of both hero and heroine to make themselves vulnerable, to each other and to public opinion, by stepping out of the various conventional roles—including those of master and servant—they have earlier exploited for purposes of manipulation and self-protection. B, "in spight of the Pride of [his] . . . Heart," declares in his letter beseeching Pamela to come back that "I cannot live . . . without you" (216). She has already "as good as confessed I love him," despite the risk of giving him "too much Advantage" (196). "Quite overcome" by "so much Openness, so much Affection," and fearful lest he construe a refusal to oblige him as "a silly female Piece of Pride," she resolves to brave the "Censurers" of a "wise World, that . . . judges always by Events" (214–8). At no other point in the story does either make choices with so little regard for the censure or approbation of others; at no other point is their relationship characterized by so much equality and voluntary reciprocity.

¹² Eliza Haywood, *A Present for a Servant-Maid* (Dublin, 1743), admonishes servant girls that, "even tho' your Mistress should be angry without a Cause," "going about to defend yourself by a saucy Reply, gives her a real Occasion for Offence."

II

If the first half of *Pamela* embodies a movement toward self-reliance and autonomy, and thus toward the tantalizing possibility of an ideal relationship, the second half, in which Richardson has the heroine reaping her rewards and exhibiting fitness for her new estate, disappoints modern readers because it displays the complex, defiant Pamela becoming a conduct book stereotype, an exemplar of "humility" who wishes to "please" and "obey." What has been in great measure an internal conflict—the strain a young person undergoes as she tries to accommodate two rival codes of value in eighteenth-century culture—becomes largely external, with the flawless Pamela easily surmounting the hostility of B's family and social equals. In brief, because Richardson's materials seem less under the sway of his imagination than of his intentions as a didactic writer, there is no longer an ironic distance between him and his heroine, and there would appear to be little to say except that he methodically dramatizes the principle of subordination as it is meant to govern relations between husbands and wives. Through Wollstonecraft's suggestions about the nature of subordination, however, we can elucidate certain undercurrents that disturb the smooth surface of the story—its meanings as expounded by Pamela. Specifically, the second half of the novel can be said to illustrate the kinds of "childish" behavior that Wollstonecraft associates with both inferiors and superiors in any hierarchical order, and in particular with the model wives and husbands in the conduct books. Wollstonecraft was the first British social critic to study the psychology of subordination, to argue that the conventions of subordination induce undesirable psychological and behavioral traits; she believed that a woman's continual recourse to her "submissive charms"—and she was especially concerned with the reigning notion that a woman's paramount duty is to "please"—leads initially to self-abasing behavior as a strategy in the power struggle between the sexes, and ultimately to a situation in which there is no effective difference between inner and outer selves, between a woman and the "child" she pretends to be. Such a person is kept in subjection by a husband who, because of his superior status, is not required to curb his more egoistic propensities, to practice self-restraint. Wollstonecraft opposes these mutually reinforcing modes of conduct—the abject though often cunning submissiveness of those who lack power and the tendency toward "tyranny" of those

who have it—to what she sees as the essential ingredients of adult maturity: the strength to defer to no other “authority” than one’s own “reason,” and the capacity to “regulate the passions,” among them the urge to dominate.¹³ If her commitment to autonomy for all adults separates her from earlier writers of educational tracts, her point that the undue power of men renders them childishly domineering is equally original as an adaptation—to the issue of hierarchical social relationships—of the eighteenth-century commonplace that becoming an adult ideally means learning to subordinate the “passions” or the “will” to “reason.”¹⁴ In the second half of *Pamela* the various personal interchanges—between B and Lady Davers, between B and Pamela, and so on—engage the partners, sometimes alternately, in the roles of “parent” and “child,” and in so doing reflect the two forms of regressiveness identified by Wollstonecraft as symptomatic of unequal relationships. In brief, Richardson sketches a social world where, by his own half-explicit criteria, it is impossible to be “grown up.”

Nowhere is the predisposition of all the characters to adopt the role of parent and child with one another more pronounced than in the volatile relationship between B and his sister. After bringing Lady Davers into the story to personify the challenge Pamela faces in trying to win the acceptance of B’s family, Richardson allows the sister to occupy a larger than necessary place in the plot by writing an extended scene in which she is shown to be “childish,” a word B twice applies to her (354). Rather than a serious threat to his union with Pamela, Lady Davers turns out to be a “spoiled” brat (332), easily reduced to stamping her foot, pouting and crying, and eventually to being humored by B’s fatherly “Managements” (“I love to be sooth’d by my Brother”). Then B, “too nearly ally’d in Mind as well as Blood” (277) to his sister, enjoys a prolonged temper tantrum of his own which, like hers, he imputes to a style of child training that produces young men and women “violent in [their] Wills” and unfit

¹³ *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, pp. 31–2, 40, 68, 73–5, 100, 105–6, 149, et passim.

¹⁴ An early and influential purveyor of this notion is John Locke, in *Some Thoughts concerning Education*, a treatise admired by both Richardson and Pamela. “The great principle and foundation of all virtue and worth is placed in this,” Locke states, “that a man is able to deny himself his own desires, cross his own inclinations, and purely follow what reason dictates as best, though the appetite lean the other way.” See *John Locke on Education*, ed. Peter Gay (New York, 1964), pp. 26–35.

for marriage ("The Gentleman has never been controuled: the Lady has never been contradicted")—young people who must often turn to their parents for guidance (366). With its reversal of roles for brother and sister and its highlighting of their regressive behavior, the context bears out B's explanation that an upbringing in the families of the propertied and powerful ("People of Fortune") normally yields grown-ups who are still children in their overbearing willfulness and lack of self-control.¹⁵ Like Wollstonecraft, Richardson relates a familiar concept of maturity—regulation of the "passions"—to the psychological consequences of inequality, dramatizing the paradox that people with power can be like children in their very attempts to assert dominance in the guise of "parent." Lady Davers' main ploy in her brief battle with Pamela is to address her repeatedly as "Child," just as with B—so he protests—she hopes to wield a parent's authority (347, et passim); in both instances, when thwarted, she loses self-command and the power to act rationally, her capitulation to B instancing again that subordinates, even the most reculant, can be made to feel—to submit—like children. B, self-conscious in his status as male heir, has prevailed over his aggressive sister since childhood; Pamela, drawing confidence from her new "place" as B's wife, unnerves both Lady Davers and her agent Jackey ("Twenty or Thirty Years hence, when you are *at Age*, I shall know how to answer you") by treating *them* like children (317–30). Elsewhere the comically servile Parson Williams submits to an angry patron who was once his school fellow ("But, Sir, I am a young Man. I meant no Harm."); Pamela's helpless father, always tearful and speechless in the presence of superiors, is led by B to be "caressed" by the Darnfords; and B's Bedfordshire servants line up to receive gifts and a squeeze of the hand from their young mistress (378ff.), now endowed with the power to oblige. Such a ceremony of submission ratifies the exemplary relationships that B and his creator promote as the foundation of a well-ordered family; but as we witness it we recall our earlier glimpses of the life domestics lead behind the scenes—a frustrated

¹⁵ John Dussinger's suggestive Freudian reading of the tension between B and his sister, "What Pamela Knew: An Interpretation," *JEGP*, LXIX (1970), 389–91, errs, I believe, in describing B as persistently passive and helpless in his relationship with Lady Davers. Dussinger ignores Richardson's (B's) own interpretation of the conflict, which grounds the behavior of both characters in the determining particularities of subordination and class, and which therefore allows us to see why B has always ultimately had the upper hand. With respect to class, Stone, *The Family, Sex and Mar-*

Longman, for example, grumbling to Pamela that a servant, however aware of his master's misdoings, must "hear, and see, and say nothing" (57). As Parson Williams' habitual manner testifies—his show of "Gratitude" parodies Pamela's own effusions—the "humble," "obliging" demeanor of subordinates, though second nature with them, can be indistinguishable from manipulative or self-defensive play-acting.

Like Williams, Lady Davers and Jackey serve in part to offset our impression of a diminished Pamela in the later part of the story. Just how far Richardson was mindful of a need to employ them as foils is unclear, but his emphasis on their child-like submissiveness does betray an uneasiness about his heroine's own increasingly humble behavior, especially to the extent that it entails a "performance." Well before her marriage, as one of the youngest and lowest-ranking members of B's household, Pamela learned to carry herself so "as to have every body's good Word," how to appear "mild and meek" (51, 74) despite favored treatment. The most troubling impediment to her returning to her parents' neighborhood is that she would have "to make myself as much beloved . . . as I am here," for "poor Folks are envious, as well as rich"; and one of her principal concerns after her wedding is to prove to B's neighbors that her change of condition has left her unassuming, because "the fewer Enemies I made myself, the more I engaged every one to think, that my good Benefactor had been less to blame in descending as he has done" (52, 362). She therefore retains the "good Lessons that were taught" her by B's mother—how to act the "good Girl" and thus to be "loved" and "respected" "as if I was a Gentlewoman," the essence of a social education and a personal "History" which she often rehearses, usually "in a prattling Vein" (173–4) that endears her to B. Disarm and ingratiate: the approach she perfected as child and servant remains characteristic of her even after her elevation.

Writing to his friend George Cheyne, who had complained about the obsequiousness of the married Pamela and her parents, Richardson defended her comportment as "not altogether unnatural" in a person whose moral duty to her benefactor is to be "a meek, hum-

riage, pp. 435–8, 448–9, notes that by the 1730's there had developed widespread concern in England about the possible long-term effects of "an astonishingly permissive style of child-rearing" in "some high professional and landed circles in England."

ble, grateful Wife."¹⁶ Yet the novel flirts with less comfortable meanings, which we can get at by posing another question implicit in the text itself: what would be the preoccupations of a girl like Pamela if she were to marry her master? In relation to the code of exchange, she would be deeply and perpetually anxious about "unreturnable Obligations": "I . . . ought rather to be more *humble*, as I am more oblig'd: For it must be always a Sign of a poor Condition to receive Obligations one cannot repay" (382, 233). She would, accordingly, devote herself to preserving her husband's love through self-effacing behavior: "I only fear, and, sure, I have great Reason, that I shall be too unworthy, to hold the Affections of so dear a Gentleman!—God teach me . . . to know my own Demerit" (279). Thus Pamela's agitation when an enraged B scolds her, most unjustly, like a disobedient child because she fails to meet him on time at the Darnfords': "O dear Sir . . . pray, pray, hear me, and you'll pity me, and not be displeased!" (331) The "sincerity" of Pamela's desire to please is not in doubt, but Richardson makes clear that her new condition often elicits a half-calculated display of humility.¹⁷ He would like to see his heroine become one with her role, her external actions a reliable index to internal qualities; yet his sense of how relations between subordinates and their superiors evoke repeated performances—performances that involve the participants in acting like children or parents—accounts for a disharmony in the world of the novel between the self and its public poses. Just as Pamela's dependent status impels her to act out or affect certain attitudes, so B's socially sanctioned role as husband permits him, as in the exchange at the Darnfords', to be a selfish "Tyrant" (332).

To dismiss such behavior as simple hypocrisy evoked by a double

¹⁶ Richardson's letter is dated 31 August 1741; see *Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson*, ed. John Carroll (Oxford, 1964), pp. 49–50. Cheyne's comments were sent in a letter of 24 August 1741; see *The Letters of Doctor George Cheyne to Samuel Richardson* (1733–1743), ed. Charles F. Mullett (Columbia, Missouri, 1943), p. 69. Richardson was later to view the matter in another perspective. In a letter to Solomon Lowe dated 21 January 1748, he justifies Clarissa Harlowe's refusal to marry Robert Lovelace by referring to the earlier heroine: "It is apparent by the whole Tenor of Mr. B's Behaviour to Pamela after Marriage, that nothing but such an implicit Obedience, and slavish Submission, as Pamela shewed to all his Injunctions and Dictates, could have made her tolerably happy" (*Selected Letters*, p. 124).

¹⁷ Spacks, *Imagining a Self: Autobiography and Novel in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), pp. 193–226, examines Pamela's inveterate theatricality—her tendency to enact her virtue—in relation to the ideal of sincerity and to the power of public opinion in Richardson's fictional world.

standard would be to ignore how thoroughly rooted it is in underlying compulsions, themselves socially conditioned. In her brilliant Freudian essay on female socialization in *Pamela*, Terry J. Castle implies that the heroine's psychosexual history is one of arrested development: as Pamela discovers the culturally defined differences between men and women and transfers her desire from mother surrogates to B, a father surrogate, her career symbolically recapitulates a girl's passage from a pre-Oedipal to an Oedipal stage of growth and thus models an enduring myth of female inferiority; Pamela's sexual identity, in other words, predetermines her eventual surrender to B, a process completed in the "extended Oedipal comedy" that constitutes their married life.¹⁸ Wollstonecraft's comments enable us to appreciate that B's story is one of equally arrested development, that the powerful as well as the subordinate in the novel, men as well as women, are the prisoners of their conditioning. Once married, B fluctuates between playing the exigent patriarch who lays down rules for Pamela and idealizing her as a mother surrogate who can help him to check his unruly tendencies, both sexual and aggressive. Hoping to "find . . . [his] . . . bad Actions aton'd by [her] exemplary Goodness," he renounces the class and gender-related prerogatives of his youth, "Profligacy" and "Duelling" (227, 357); nevertheless, because his permissive upbringing softens any resolution to bring his "Will" into conformity with "Reason," Pamela must not expect "the greatest Purity" in him or "be over serious with [him], all at once" (365-6, 278-9). Like his "good Mother," she must herself abide by "the good old Family Rules," but influence her husband's conduct by a "culpable Indulgence" (303, 366).¹⁹ As we have seen, B's idea

¹⁸ Castle, "P/B: *Pamela* as Sexual Fiction." Castle's point that Pamela is erotically attracted to B as a powerful father-figure has also been made by Judith Laurence-Anderson, "Changing Affective Life in Eighteenth-Century England and Richardson's *Pamela*," *SECC*, X (1981), 445-56, who emphasizes the "parent-child nature of domestic service" in the period. Castle's larger thesis employs psychoanalytic concepts as a heuristic device for explaining the psychological proclivities of Richardson's heroine in relation to one of their cultural determinants, the myth of the Lady; as I suggest at the end of my essay, such concepts readily complement an application of Wollstonecraft's argument to the novel inasmuch as she too (like Richardson, as I am contending) posits a correlation between personal psychology (regressiveness, inability to govern the passions) and social circumstance (subordination).

¹⁹ Levin, *Richardson the Novelist*, pp. 42-5, also describes B as seeking a mother surrogate in Pamela, but, overlooking the social context, typically attributes this tendency to a strong element of "masochism" in him. Stone, pp. 448-9, discussing the permissive child-rearing patterns followed by many middle-and upper-class parents in

about his lack of self-restraint as a product of the ruling class agrees with indications elsewhere in the narrative of a causal relationship between superior status and regressiveness, yet his self-understanding stops short of what the story further reveals. Throughout the novel, B's worry about his irrational urges, beginning with his irresistible attraction to a servant girl, gets displaced into an obsession with what he perceives as the dangerous refractoriness of women. His nervous aspersions on the wily seductiveness of Pamela and Sally Godfrey, his aversion to marrying a woman of his own class ("Perverseness and Contradiction"), his penchant for affixing military metaphors to assertive women, his violent nightmare about the angry Lady Arthur, his demand that Pamela disguise even her slightest annoyance ("Passions") with him by a "uniform Complaisance" (309-10)—all point to the source of a misogynic anxiety that stands behind his attachment to order and subordination. Fearing women for their capacity to arouse his own all too recalcitrant energies—"Your Sex is the D—; how strangely can you discompose . . . and turn . . . us poor Weathercocks of Men!" (360)—B can be at ease only with a wife who alternates as child and mother: the grateful, submissive Pamela who calls him "Lord of my Wishes" (290) and the tolerant "Paragon" who tames his waywardness.

Whatever its origin in Richardson's own psyche, B's disquiet—and his habit of "projecting"—is completely consistent with the novel's vision of personal relations in a deferential society. An imaginative extension of the insight that people possessed of power are at the mercy of their own worst passions, it is but one way that B overreacts to signs of intractability in subordinates; his unreasonable jealousy of Parson Williams persists until his predictable, almost ritualistic humiliation of the dependent clergyman. Indeed, it can be argued that while the first half of the novel, which gives free play to the insubordinate impulses of both hero and heroine, reflects Pamela's point of view as youthful female servant, the second half, though narrated by her, is wholly dominated by B's perspective as squire and husband: every major incident shows him restoring the once-rebellious—Williams, Lady Davers, Pamela's father, various servants, and

eighteenth-century England, observes that the sons of such families often formed a lasting Oedipal attachment to the indulgent mothers who trained them until boarding school age. Avoiding far-fetched speculation, we can simply note that the strong and memorable parent in B's life is his mother, whom he holds up as a model for Pamela.

the protagonist herself—to a posture of childlike subservience. To put the relationship between the two parts of the story in different terms: in the first half the unusual situation of B and Pamela—his overwhelming infatuation, her sense of a dire threat and her unconscious attraction to him—propels them toward the emotional center of the novel, that brief moment when, as Richardson imagines it, they for once rise above their ordinary social selves and interact as free and authentic human beings; in the second half Richardson has no choice but to relocate them in a social setting where, as he instinctively shows, superiors and inferiors can relate to one another only as “parents” or “children,” the parents themselves merely “overgrown children.”

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