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FABRIC AND FABRICATION IN RICHARDSON'S *PAMELA*

BY SHEILA C. CONBOY

Ah, Anna, you make up stories about life and tell them to yourself, and you don't know what is true and what isn't.

—Doris Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*

"What tale do you like best to hear?"

"Oh, I have not much choice! They generally run on the same theme—courtship; and promise to end in the same catastrophe—marriage."

—Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*

It has become so easy to celebrate the superiority of Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* over his early, less mature *Pamela* that recognition for the sophistication and vision of the early novel must be rescued. M. Kinkead-Weekes notes that between the writing of *Pamela* and the writing of *Clarissa* "there is much evidence of technical development," but considers "the moral and spiritual concerns of the novels . . . remarkably similar."¹ In *The Rape of Clarissa*, Terry Eagleton diminishes *Pamela* to

a kind of fairy-tale pre-run of *Clarissa*, a fantasy wish-fulfillment in which abduction and imprisonment turn out miraculously well, the rough beast becomes a prince charming and the poor kitchen maid a beautiful princess. It is, so to speak, a cartoon version of *Clarissa*, simplified, stereotyped and comic in outcome.²

Although Eagleton disagrees with Kinkead-Weekes's emphasis on Richardson's development as author, he describes *Pamela* as "the comic moment of an aspiring class, buoyant, affirmative, and, like all cartoons, magically insulated from grave injury," and he argues that it merely "sets the stage" for *Clarissa* which "in a devastating demystification . . . will give us the tragic reality."³

But *Pamela* warrants examination beyond recognition as the precursor to *Clarissa*. The two novels are connected in many obvious ways, but one of their most significant similarities has been virtually ignored by literary critics: an insistent androgynous vi-

sion. Carolyn Heilbrun discusses the importance of *Clarissa* in terms of the failure of androgyny, but she mentions *Pamela* only as "necessary preparation for *Clarissa*." If *Clarissa* is "the first cry of outrage against the almost total betrayal of the androgynous ideal," then *Clarissa* can triumph only through death; her passivity triumphs over male aggression, and androgyny—if it can be achieved—remains the unfulfilled type of spiritual wholeness.⁴ Yet if Heilbrun's analysis of the novel form as "astonishingly imbued with the ideal of androgyny" is accurate, then *Pamela* must be reexamined as a novel which is unfailingly optimistic that the masculine and feminine characteristics of each individual can be developed—that a true union between individuals is possible when those individuals are themselves complete human beings.⁵ Eagleton may be correct in claiming that the optimism of *Pamela* amounts to "a displacement of women's sufferings into consolatory myth," but the novel is far from "a false, insulting 'resolution' of sexual combat which merely consolidates patriarchal power."⁶ Rather, *Pamela*'s female voice continually undermines Mr. B.'s masculine power, and Richardson's celebration, in the Epilogue, of "the incomparable *Pamela*" merely reveals his own desire to contain female power and sexuality in a portrait of "Virtue Rewarded."⁷

Pamela is a weaver of words who attains her freedom through narrative; her victory lies in art, through which she gains the understanding that the temptation of death is merely a vanity. Contemplating suicide, she can only hope to join the ranks of tragic heroines who became "the Subject of . . . Ballads and Elegies" (152). *Pamela* must instead come to understand that death and sexuality are not inextricably bound—that complexity must be accepted with sexuality—and she discovers the way to sexuality, and to life, through the leading role that she plays in her own romance.⁸ When she rejects the temptation to self-annihilation, she begins to write the way to wholeness for both herself and Mr. B. *Pamela* is an artist in many ways, but her artistic talents and artistry combine to emphasize her greatest creation, her writing, about which she says: "Well, my Story surely would furnish out a surprizing kind of Novel, if it was to be well-told" (213). *Pamela*'s experiences and the process of writing lead to her self-discovery, while her letters—the organization of those experiences in a "kind of Novel . . . well-told"—bring Mr. B. to his. *Pamela* must eventually abandon her self-absorption in order to objectify Mr. B., and

it is only after he has read Pamela's letters and journal that Mr. B. can perceive their situation from her perspective. Her views cause him first to review his actions and then to submit to her imaginative reconstruction of experience. Mr. B. is the original reader of Pamela's novel, and eventually the heroine's perception of his character appears better to him than his perception of himself. Pamela not only achieves self-knowledge by means of language, but also discloses to Mr. B. his best self, and makes him strive to realize it.

Richardson creates an immediacy of action through the epistolary method, but a close examination of *Pamela* reveals careful attention to structure and symmetry. By recognizing Pamela's artistry as the key to the novel's progress toward an androgynous vision, the reader becomes aware that Pamela's narrative sequence produces her individual consequence. She moves from experiencing the world without reflection to discovering analogies to her own experience and interpreting her actions. Her writing not only imposes order on experience for herself, but also, when Mr. B. is moved by her narrative, effects for her the freedom that she lacks in the story proper. Furthermore, the possibility of tragedy at the structural center of the novel emphasizes the importance of Pamela's near suicide for her own spiritual growth and for the future of the novel's world. In retrospect, then, the sense of immediacy produced by Pamela's language is eventually superseded by the perception of a teleology.

Pamela's progress exemplifies this symmetry; she continually foreshadows the various kinds of fabrication that she will perform. The first section of the novel—from the beginning through Pamela's abduction and journey to Lincolnshire—documents her initial sexual awakening and the fears that awakening produces in her. Whereas at first she trusts in appearances, she learns to suspect a covert and antagonistic reality behind all she sees. She responds to her parents' warning about Mr. B.'s advances:

I must needs say, that your Letter has fill'd me with much Trouble. For it has made my Heart, which was overflowing with Gratitude for my young Master's Goodness, suspicious and fearful.

(28)

Not only is Mr. B. no longer trustworthy, but the members of the household arouse suspicion: "Sure they can't *all* have Designs

against me because they are civil" (28). Yet in spite of Pamela's increasing uneasiness about the reality behind the surface of experience, she immerses herself in appearances, most obviously in her attention to clothing. She accepts Mr. B.'s suggestion that she "shall take care of . . . [his] Linen" (25), and she receives from him articles of clothing which will fashion her from without. When Mr. B. makes the first present of clothing to Pamela—"a Suit of my old Lady's Cloaths, and a half a Dozen of her Shifts, and Six fine Handkerchiefs, and Three of her Cambrick Aprons, and Four Holland ones"—she thinks that "he look'd like an Angel" (31). But she soon discovers the deceit behind this mask, for in letter 10 she reveals the folly of believing in Mr. B.'s angelic countenance and says: "He has now shew'd himself in his true Colours, and to me, nothing appears so black and so frightful" (34).

In this same letter, however, Pamela mentions, with no apparent recognition of their significance, her own ties to the world of appearances, for she continues to care for Mr. B.'s linen, thereby ensuring that his deceptive exterior remains the same. And more important than preserving his angelic appearance, her activity with the needle—the creation of new clothing for Mr. B.—adumbrates the method by which Pamela will tailor his internal life: "I work all hours with my Needle, upon his Linen, and the fine Linen of the Family; and am besides about flowering him a Waistcoat" (34). Although her needle revises only his external appearance, her language will later fit him to her perceptions; now she creates his fabric, but her fabrication will create him anew.⁹

Pamela's creation of Mr. B.'s external fabric perpetuates her notion that clothing is an indicator of the wearer's internal worth, and she feels that the individual is responsible for acting out the role that he or she dresses for. Although Pamela has changed her appearance while staying at the B. Manor, she does not deny her humble origins; rather, she assures her parents that the relative finery to which she has become accustomed has in no way altered her essential being. When she resolves to leave Bedfordshire, she purchases clothing suitable for her future life, and as she tries on her simple clothes before she departs, she says, "To say Truth, I never lik'd myself so well in my Life" (60). Pamela again employs a hermeneutic of clothing to interpret Mr. B.'s clothing and its relationship to the wearer. Only three letters later, when Mr. B. asks Pamela to give her opinion of his new suit of clothes, she protests, "I am no Judge . . . your Honour; but I think they look very fine"

(71). When Mr. B. speaks rudely to Pamela, however, she continues:

But Sir, let me say, that if you was not rich and great, and I poor and little, you would not insult me so in my Misery!—Let me ask you, sir, if you think this becomes your fine Cloaths! and a Master's Station!

(72)

Pamela's concern is that one should be what one appears to be; she has revised her own exterior to maintain accord between inner and outer realities, and she would have Mr. B. follow her example.

Of all the devices used to move the plot forward, none is so obvious as the reason for Pamela's continued stay at Bedfordshire. Although Mr. B. has already tried her virtue, she tells her parents: "I forgot to say, that I would stay to finish the Waistcoat; I never did a prettier piece of Work; and I am up early and late to get it finished, for I long to come to you" (51). Indeed, as Pamela's continuance at Bedfordshire agitates her master even further, the parallel between the transformation of Mr. B.'s exterior by Pamela's needlework and of his interior by her literary art suggests that the "piece of work" she accomplishes by her writing is a far more important activity than the waistcoat. The waistcoat will be exactly as Pamela has fashioned it, whereas the character she gives to Mr. B. requires his assent—his individual acts of interpretation, understanding, and acceptance.

Mr. B.'s assent is not easily come by. If Pamela's account of her last week at Bedfordshire is meant to seem like the simple documentation of experience, then she is already beginning to read her life with a hermeneutical eye, already beginning to recognize that all is not as it seems. Moreover, the reader is invited to study Pamela's artifact when it becomes apparent that there are conflicting readings of her experience, that is, conflicting versions of authority and authorship. Several characters want a hand in writing Pamela's future; for example, "Says Lady *Towers*, Can the pretty Image speak, Mrs. Jervis? I vow she has speaking Eyes! O you little Rogue, says she, and tapt . . . [her] on the Cheek, you seem born to undo, or to be undone!" (58). Lady *Towers* has no idea that her question is loaded: not only can Pamela speak, but her language will perform that act of "undoing." But more significant than the predictions of minor characters are those of Pamela and Mr. B. themselves, each giving herself or himself power in a

personal version of reality. In the first section of the novel, Pamela and Mr. B. present irreconcilable readings of their situation. Mr. B. styles his romance after *The Rape of Lucrece*, and he tries to persuade Pamela that she will not receive the world's censure if she submits to him: "Who ever blamed Lucretia, but the Ravisher only? and I am content to take all the Blame upon me; as I have already borne too great a Share for what I have deserv'd" (42). But the reader is already aware that Mr. B.'s masculine superiority is threatened, for he has told Mrs. Jervis that Pamela "will not write the Affairs of my Family purely for the Exercise of her Pen and her Invention. I tell you, she is a subtle artful Gypsey, and time will shew it you" (39–40). Mr. B. hardly guesses the significance of his words, but Pamela is anxious to challenge his hope for a repetition of the rape story. She asks if, when his plot is accomplished, she may see the story through: "May I, *Lucretia* like, justify myself with my Death if I am used barbarously?" (42). Although Mr. B. is surprised at her education and reading, he still assumes that male virility will prevail. He comments that "we shall make out between us, before we have done, a pretty Story in Romance, I warrant ye!" (42).

Each of the main characters projects a fabrication, and while the narrative sequence unravels Mr. B.'s version of romance, it knits up the competing fiction which Pamela presents. The initial thirty-one letters of *Pamela*—up to the point of her imprisonment at Lincolnshire—set out a variety of possibilities for the future of the novel's world. But it is in the structural center of the novel, Pamela's journal, that Pamela accomplishes two essential ends for her "fabrication": first, she analyzes the process of her writing to achieve self-knowledge; and second, through her writing she creates in Mr. B. the desire to penetrate her not physically, but psychologically, to complete his feminine side and play his role in the triumph of an androgynous vision.

Pamela's self-knowledge cannot be achieved until she allows herself to admit to the complexity of her life. Her increasing awareness of her own sexuality elicits from her the desire to deny the complexity that accompanies sexual awakening, to negate her confusing and ambivalent feelings. At the end of the first section of the novel, just as Pamela prepares to leave Bedfordshire, she describes her three "Bundles" of clothes, symbolizing her division of herself into three parts: the first contains the clothes her Lady had given her and the second "the Presents of my dear and virtuous

Master”; the third she calls, “The Companion of my Poverty and the Witness of my Honesty,” adding, “may I never deserve the least Rag that is contained in thee, when I forfeit a Title to that Innocence that I hope will ever be the Pride of my Life” (80). This bundle she hugs to her chest, and it seems that the simple version of her life that it offers is its chief attraction.

When Pamela is abducted to Lincolnshire, however, she is forced to come to terms with sexuality, and she accomplishes this by reversing the terms of power that are forced upon her and accepting the complexity of life she sought to disavow in her narrowing divisions. Like Anna Wulf in Doris Lessing’s *The Golden Notebook*, Pamela eventually recognizes that “we must not divide things off, must not compartmentalize.”¹⁰ If Pamela seems unable to control the fictive situation, then the reader must look beyond the external indicators of power to understand the control that Pamela has attained within the narrative. Her imagination subsumes the “facts,” and she projects them onto the world in new ways. Whereas Mr. B. was a present sexual threat at the Bedford estate, his absence causes Pamela to cast her hidden fears out of herself, allowing her to understand her own sexuality after she has seen various distortions of it. Most obviously, Pamela’s fear of physical penetration manifests itself anew in her fear of Mrs. Jewkes’s homosexuality, in her certainty that she will be gored by the bull, and in the phallic threat presented by Mr. B.’s Swiss messenger, Mr. Colbrand.

Although Mrs. Jewkes would seem to provide the symmetrical counterpart for Mrs. Jervis in this second portion of the novel, Pamela is unable to trust her new “guardian.” Mrs. Jewkes seems unnatural to Pamela, who silently criticizes her guardian’s appearance and questions her sexuality: “She has a hoarse man-like Voice, and is as thick as she’s long; and yet looks so deadly strong, that I am afraid she would dash me at her foot in an Instant, if I was to vex her” (107). And when Mrs. Jewkes tries to kiss her, Pamela balks, saying: “I don’t like this sort of Carriage, Mrs. Jewkes; it is not like two Persons of one sex” (102). As Pamela acknowledges a difference between the actions of her master and those of Mrs. Jewkes, she tacitly affirms the normality of kissing a person of the opposite sex.

Although Mrs. Jewkes offers no real threat to Pamela, Pamela’s imagination discovers other plots against her; indeed, in her fear of the bull, her imagination quite runs away with her. She is first

convinced that “Lucifer is bribed, as well as all about me, and is got into the Shape of that nasty grim Bull, to watch me” (136), and she then concludes that this is part of a larger conspiracy in which “Every thing, Man, Woman and Beast is in a Plot against your poor Pamela” (136). The reader slowly recognizes the extent to which Pamela’s imagination has lost is power to overcome negative circumstances, for her fear of phallic attack has impaired her vision, rendering her unable to effect the escape she desires. She emphasizes her terror of Mr. B. and of Mrs. Jewkes at once when she exclaims:

I looked and saw the Bull, as I thought, between me and the Door; and another Bull coming towards me the other way: Well, thought I, here is double witchcraft, to be sure! . . . O help! cry’d I, like a Fool, and run back to the Door, as swift as if I flew. When I had got the Door in my Hand, I ventur’d to look back, to see if these supposed Bulls were coming; and I saw they were only two poor Cows, a grazing in distant Places, that my Fears had made all this Rout about. But as every thing is so frightful to me, I find I am not fit to think of my Escape: For I shall be as much frightened at the first strange Man that I meet with.

(137)

The dread that the strong inflict upon the weak is manifested again in Pamela’s description of Mr. Colbrand, which elaborates her panic about phallic penetration and her denial of sexuality by accentuating in Colbrand’s appearance the power she only guessed at in Mr. B.:

He is a Giant of a Man, for Stature; taller by a good deal, than *Harry Mawldge*, in your Neighborhood, and large-bon’d and scraggly; and a Hand!—I never saw such an one in my Life. He has great staring Eyes, like the Bull’s that frighten’d me so. Vast Jaw-bones sticking out; Eyebrows hanging over his Eyes; two great Scars upon his Forehead, and one on his left Cheek; and two huge Whiskers, and a monstrous wide Mouth; blubber Lips; long yellow Teeth, and a hideous Grin. He wears his own frightful long Hair, ty’d up in a great black Bag; a black Crape Neckcloth, about a long ugly Neck; and his Throat sticking out like a Wen. As to the rest, he was drest well enough, and had a Sword on, with a nasty red Knot to it; Leather Garters, buckled below his Knees; and a Foot—near as long as my Arm, I verily think.

(147–48)

Hardly a feature of Colbrand's fails to connote masculine sexuality, and that Pamela has connected Mr. B. and Colbrand in their respectively hidden and obvious "hideousness" is clear, for she is so terrified of Colbrand that she comments: "I could think of nothing but his hideous Person and my Master's more hideous Actions; and I thought them too well pair'd; and when I dropt asleep, I dreamed they were both coming to my Bed-side, with the worst Designs" (148). Pamela's overwrought imagination has become an enemy to her. As she attempts to simplify her values and repress her sexuality, her single fear of penetration reappears in various distortions, and these distortions, coupled with the suspicion that the world conspires against her, lead Pamela to the moment of self-recognition in which she rejects death for life and determines to allow the ambivalent feelings she has for Mr. B. to coexist in a complex sexual arena.

Pamela's moment of recognition occurs when she meets death as the tempter. Although she has planned to only feign suicide, she is so bruised and broken when she reaches the pond that she is almost determined to throw herself in. She interprets suicide as an act of power, a sort of child's revenge that she cannot even live to see. Suicide is the way that she can write her own ending to Mr. B.'s story; if she cannot conquer him, she will at least thwart his plan from reaching its desired effect:

And then thought I, (and Oh! that Thought was surely of the Devil's Instigation; for it was very soothing and powerful with me) these wicked Wretches, who now have no Remorse, no Pity on me, will then be mov'd to lament their Misdoings; and when they see the dead Corpse of the unhappy *Pamela* dragg'd out to these slopy Banks, and lying breathless at their Feet, they will find that Remorse to wring their obdurate Hearts, which now has no Place there!—And my Master, my angry Master, will then forget his Resentments, and say, O this is the unhappy *Pamela*! that I have so causelessly persecuted and destroy'd! Now do I see she Preferr'd her Honesty to her Life, will he say, and is no Hypocrite, nor Deceiver; but really was the innocent Creature she pretended to be!

(152)

But this moment involves acts of both writing and reading, as once Pamela has imaginatively fabricated her own revenge tragedy, she rereads and performs an exegesis upon it. She proceeds to ques-

tion her own motives (“wilt thou be the guilty Aggressor?”) and place her self-obsession into a larger context: “Because wicked Men persecute thee, wilt thou fly in the Face of the Almighty, and bid Defiance to his Grace and Goodness, who can still turn all these Sufferings to thy Benefits?” (153). Pamela rejects the power which death would give her and turns again to the power that is left within her. In choosing life, she moves toward the recognition that her outward aggressors are not her only enemies, and she tells her parents: “tho’ I should have prais’d God for my Deliverance, had I been freed from my wicked Keepers, and my designing Master; yet I have more abundant Reason to praise God, that I have been deliver’d from a far worse Enemy, *myself!*” (154). As Pamela lives and continues to write, she unwittingly weaves the material that will truly reverse the ratio of power in her relationship with Mr. B. She also acquires an acceptance of the ambiguity and the unfairness in life and more ease with her varied feelings toward Mr. B. Only the day after her consideration of suicide, her journal entry reveals the complexity of her emotions. When Mr. B. is reported to have narrowly escaped drowning, she asks: “What is the Matter, with all his ill Usage of me, that I cannot hate him?” (157). And even after his insulting proposals that she become his mistress, she states: “What a pity his Heart is not as good as his Appearance! Why can’t I hate him?” (171).

Although these changes seem to support Mr. B.’s hopes for prevailing, his desire to fathom Pamela encompasses more than his physical attraction to her. At various points in the novel, the reader is informed of methods by which Mr. B. has procured Pamela’s letters; reading her story is one of the ways he attempts to know her completely, but his motives in this desire to penetrate to Pamela’s inner life—to interpret her version of their story—change as the narrative progresses. Just as Pamela’s revision has changed her views of the world, her views in turn revise Mr. B. Before Pamela is abducted to Lincolnshire, he admits: “I have seen more of your Letters than you imagine . . . and am quite overcome with your charming Manner of Writing, so free, so easy, and so much above your Sex; and all put together, makes me, as I tell you, love you to Extravagance” (83). At this point Pamela appears desirable to him not as an equal but as a possession. As Pamela has dangerously narrowed herself in order to simplify her sexuality, so Mr. B. will narrow himself to have Pamela on his

terms; he fails to take into consideration the feeling of her letters, analyzing only the form.

Mr. B. moves through stages in his transformation, and although he still tries to impose his story, as yet another rape attempt occurs at Lincolnshire, he will also endeavor to use Pamela's own story against her. When she calls him a devil, he responds: "How . . . can you expect anything but the worst Treatment from me?—You have given me a Character, Pamela, and blame me not that I act up to it" (181). If Mr. B. cannot choose the terms of his romance, then he will reverse Pamela's own intentions. Although he covertly admits that she is creating him, giving him "a Character," he is still not ready to immerse himself in her view of the situation.

This character is most fully fabricated by a set of circumstances not obviously in the realm of Pamela's own plot. When some of her letters are seized by Mrs. Jewkes, Mr. B. insists upon reading them, and the exposure which Pamela fears parallels the sexual threat that she has previously tried to suppress. But Pamela's writing, which she would prefer that Mr. B. did not read, provides a subtext that the two characters can examine together. Here the complexity of their relationship as writer and reader emerges, for if Pamela has succeeded as the shaper of the experience, the artistic weaver, then Mr. B. has provided her with the necessary materials. He requests the rest of her letters for his perusal and is determined that if she has woven the intrigue, then he will supply the ending: "there is such a pretty Air of Romance, as you relate them, in your Plots, and my Plots, that I shall be better directed in what manner to wind up the Catastrophe of the pretty Novel" (201). At this point Mr. B. once again looks fearful to Pamela, for he is intent upon having the papers that are hidden in her clothing. His conduct, which for many days has been extraordinarily kind, now is reminiscent of his earlier rakishness. Indeed, he threatens to excavate to the point in her clothing where the papers are lodged, and warns: "it is my Opinion that they [the papers] are about you; and I never undrest a Girl in my Life, but I will now begin to strip my pretty *Pamela*, and hope I shall not go far, before I find them" (204). Pamela's confusion is so great that she hardly knows what would be worse, that he should "go far"—physically penetrate or expose her—or that he should "find them" and thereby penetrate metaphorically to the essential self that the letters expose. Unlike Mr. B.'s previous attacks on her person, his

threat of disrobing her parallels his voyeuristic perusal of her letters: he saw in the letters a little portion of her, and he wants to see more.

If Mr. B. insists upon reading the rest of the letters, however, the “catastrophe” which he thinks he will “wind up” has been written for him. If thus far Pamela’s fabrication has been the effect of which Mr. B.’s actions were the cause, then a new cause and effect relationship is about to emerge. Pamela’s writings now become the cause of Mr. B.’s conversion; for when he reads the scene by the pond—the moment of Pamela’s own self-awakening—he cries: “Oh my dear Girl, you have touch’d me sensibly with your mournful Relation, and your sweet Reflections upon it. I should truly have been miserable, had it taken Effect.” (208). Instead of the actual deed, her relation of the moment takes effect, and if she has previously wished that “he had deserved a better Character at . . . [her] hands” (206), her artifact now makes him a better one. He, in turn, can admit that her present company gives him “more sincere pleasure than . . . all the Guilty Tumults that my desiring soul put me into, in the Hopes of possessing you on my own Terms” (188).

After Pamela’s marriage to Mr. B. the dramatic action of the novel falls off, and the reader soon tires of the endless compliments to Pamela’s excellence. Yet even in this section of the novel, Pamela’s artistry moves toward a kind of perfection of form. The symmetry of scene and of character which previously drew the reader’s attention to the consciousness of the artificer now repeats itself as the world of the novel is reformed. Whereas Pamela was once literally held captive, Mr. B. admits that he has changed positions with her, and has done so willingly, for he tells Goodman Andrews: “the sweet Girl has taken me Prisoner; and, in a few Days, I shall put on the pleasantest Fetters that ever Man wore” (248). For Pamela, the freedom hardly imagined as possible is realized in metaphors of space; on her wedding day she describes her transformed vision 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! We sat down in the broad Style, leading towards the

Road, and Mrs. *Jewkes* was quite another *Person* to me, to what she was the last time we sat there!

(293)

The entire world has a new “aspect” to Pamela, and a heightened perception of the changes around her evokes echoes of her earlier confinement and, by contrast, emphasizes her present freedom.

The most obvious and important scene of structural symmetry in the last part of the novel is Pamela’s battle with Lady Davers; this larger-than-life woman provides the sexual reversal of the original threat to Pamela by Mr. B. If ever Pamela’s artistry with words has been necessary, she must now call up all the forces of language to win the match of repartee with Lady Davers, for Lady Davers’s vision of the world is as destructive as was Mr. B.’s before he submitted to a feminine imagination. Margaret Doody intelligently argues that Pamela’s match with Lady Davers is part of a recurring theme in the novel, and that in this scene Pamela must both modify Lady Davers’s exaggerated anger and resolve her own new position in society with her essential self.¹¹ Yet the parallel between Lady Davers’s and Mr. B.’s attacks on Pamela is important for other reasons. Thus far, Pamela’s trial and misery have been largely private affairs, known only to a small body of individuals privy to Pamela’s letters and journal. Although upon their marriage Pamela and Mr. B. are welcomed into the narrow segment of society represented by the Darnford family, Lady Davers represents the larger and more hostile segment; she is Mr. B.’s sister, yet she agrees with what even the most common outsider might say of Mr. B.’s marriage to one so below him in station. Pamela’s story must make this move toward the general public; she must win the hearts of her detractors within the fiction in order for her position as exemplar to touch other readers of her tale. Mr. B.’s hope that Pamela “can make as great a Convert of . . . [Lady Davers] from *Pride* as she has . . . [him] of *Libertinism*” (351) is well-founded, and once Lady Davers reconciles herself to the marriage, she exhibits curiosity about the course of Pamela’s trials with Mr. B.

One again, then, Pamela’s language becomes the force that completes the transformation of an individual; Lady Davers says that she must read the story and is certain that it “will not only give . . . [her] Pleasure in reading, but will intirely reconcile . . .

[her] to the Step . . . [her brother] has taken" (374). Pamela not only has convinced Lady Davers of her innate value, but she has also won her first battle of social repartee, a battle that obviously echoes the language of society on the eighteenth-century stage. And with the reformation of Lady Davers, Pamela need not fear "the World's Censure" that Mr. B. knew he would invite by marrying her. As Pamela's goodness becomes universally recognized within the fiction, a public display of her "incomparable" nature is called for by the editor who "indulge[s] us in a few brief Observations" (409) at the end of the text. Once the editor claims to be himself enlightened by the study of Pamela's thoughts and actions, he admits that, in publishing her tale, his end is to "inspire a laudable Emulation in the Minds of any worthy Persons, who thereby intitle themselves to the Rewards, the Praises, and the Blessings, by which she was so deservedly distinguished" (412). The public nature of Pamela's progress has been established not only by the forces within the text that demand explanation for her actions in the name of propriety, but by the shape of the text itself, which has moved from private experience in Pamela's letters to moral example in the novel form.

Pamela's artifact of words has expanded in purpose, and what was meant as a personal record has become a "surprising kind of Novel" that weaves and reweaves the stuff of characters and of the readers who encounter it. Pamela's artistry, likewise, moves from the realm of the traditional woman's role, her needlework, to the role of writer, weaver of words. The honesty with which she seeks to analyze her own experience attests to the truth in her work; it is not the mere "artfulness" that Mr. B. accuses her of, but an artistry that reveals new or hidden truths for her readers. As a re-reader of her own experiences, Pamela can discern the structure and the symmetry that her narrative has imposed on reality; her needlework on the waistcoat adumbrates the method by which her narrative will transform Mr. B., and her projection onto the outer world of the phallic threat imposed by Mr. B. helps her to accept the complexity of living as a sexual being.

The other fictional reader of Pamela's novel, Mr. B., grows from an insensitive perceiver of Pamela as merely a desirable object to her true lover; he becomes a man who likes her completion of his character so well that he gives her the power to transform his estate, to raise his illegitimate daughter—in short, to reweave the whole fabric of the society that he has unravelled. Whatever

freedom Pamela lacked in the first half of the novel she attains as a direct result of shaping her own narrative; once she has achieved self-knowledge and Mr. B. has developed his feminine perceptions, they can live together in a harmony that supports the hope for an androgynous movement in the world.

And Richardson's weaving fabricates yet another reality, what Nancy K. Miller would call "a locus of cultural commonplaces about women's identity and woman's place," or "the ideological subscript of *literary* femininity in the eighteenth century."¹² Richardson helped shape a fiction of woman that produced a cultural ideology for the eighteenth century and determined the ways in which women read even their own lives. The harnessing of narrative sequence to individual consequence has ramifications for the reading audience, as well as for the future woman writer who, if she has gained a kind of power through Pamela's transforming expression, must go on to deconstruct the notion that, in the words of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, "women cannot and should not do what . . . [the woman writer] is herself accomplishing in her book."¹³ If in *Clarissa*, Richardson himself recognizes the inherent destructiveness of his androgynous ideal, women writers, too, will be forced to balance the ideal against its social impossibility.¹⁴ The anxiety of authorship hangs heavily on female authors in the nineteenth century, and Charlotte Brontë is left with the task of reinventing womanhood—of transforming and spiritualizing the *Pamela* story and of validating a female imagination.

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NOTES

¹ M. Kinkead-Weekes, "Pamela," in *Samuel Richardson: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. John Carroll (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969), 21.

² Terry Eagleton, *The Rape of Clarissa: Writing, Sexuality, and Class Struggle in Samuel Richardson* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1982), 37.

³ Eagleton, 39.

⁴ Carolyn Heilbrun, *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 63, 59.

⁵ Heilbrun, xx.

⁶ Eagleton, 37.

⁷ The Riverside Edition of *Pamela*, ed. T. C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), 408. Citations in parenthesis refer to page numbers in this edition, which is based on the first edition, published in 1740 and dated 1741. Some of the material in the quotations therefore may differ from Richardson's final revision, not published until 1801 (corrected 1810), and now reprinted in the Penguin edition.

⁸ As I argue later in the essay, Pamela reads her situation quite astutely, but she and B. have competing versions of their romance. Both Terry Castle's *Clarissa's Ciphers*:

Meaning and Disruption in Richardson's "Clarissa" (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1982) and William Warner's *Reading "Clarissa": The Struggles of Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1979) address similar battles over interpretation in *Clarissa*. Castle is particularly interesting in this light, for she insists: "In the case of *Clarissa*, it is true that Clarissa and Lovelace 'collide and contend' in their efforts to affirm their 'constructions' of experience and each other, but they are nowhere equal combatants in a political sense: Lovelace has available to him a kind of 'force' Clarissa does not—all the institutionalized advantages of patriarchal power, including the power of sexual intimidation" (193). Clearly Mr. B., too, has all these advantages, and Pamela's rise can be effected only through his agency. But Pamela can be seen as a model for something other than feminine propriety, which Mr. B. and the male "editor" clearly see her as; she is also a model for the subversive woman writer, who, though she cannot escape male authority, finds ways to use it to her advantage.

⁹ The connection between the needle and the pen is also made by Anna Howe in her final reflections on the dead Clarissa: "If you mention the beauties and graces of her pen, you may take notice that it was always matter of surprise to her, that the sex are generally so averse as they are to writing; since the pen, next to the needle, of all employments is the most proper and best adapted to their geniuses; and this as well for improvement as amusement: 'Who sees not, would she say, that those women who take delight in writing excel the men in all the graces of the familiar style?' " See *Clarissa, Or the History of a Young Lady*, ed. Angus Ross (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1985), 1467.

¹⁰ Doris Lessing, *The Golden Notebook* (New York: Bantam Books, 1962), x.

¹¹ Margaret Doody, *A Natural Passion: A Study of the Novels of Samuel Richardson* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1974), 64–66. Doody states: "The battle of tempers is presented as a staged scene, with careful indications of actions and business, and a counterpoint of dialogue in which feminine temper and sheer bitchery are marvelously called into play" (65).

¹² Nancy K. Miller, *The Heroine's Text: Readings in the French and English Novel, 1722–1782* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1980), x.

¹³ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1978), 69.

¹⁴ The pastoral-comic ending which Pamela enjoys is qualified in later women's novels. *Jane Eyre* (which obviously depends on the Pamela plot), affirms an androgynous vision of union at Ferndean, but cannot move the union from that edenic isolation into society. Neither in *Jane Eyre* nor in other women's novels of the 19th century is such unqualified optimism apparent.