
Richardson's Pamela: An Interpretation

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Richardson's *Pamela*: An Interpretation

IF THE HALLMARK of a good novel is seemingly endless argument about its meaning, then Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* deserves some kind of accolade. Too often the heroine is seen as either a meretricious young hussy or a paragon of virtue, and the paradox in her character is yet to be resolved, partly because critics affected by the intense emotional atmosphere of the novel have difficulty sorting out their own responses. The problem of interpretation is complicated by an age like ours with its sharp eye for salacity and its tendency to suspect professions of piety, however well meant. Two of the most recent critics of the novel, Robert Donovan and Morris Golden, are well aware that in the long debate between "pamelists" and "antipamelists," passion has too often usurped the place of reasoned critical judgment, and using the approach pioneered by Alan D. McKillop and Ian Watt, both try to examine the novel on its own terms as a fictional construct grounded in respectable esthetic principles.¹ But, despite some acute and sensitive observations, neither reading provides an adequate definition of the total structure: by arguing that the central ambiguity of the novel is social rather than moral, Donovan neglects the fundamental problem of character revelation, while Golden interprets the novel less as an independent entity than as so many clues to the state of Richardson's psyche. However relevant these approaches might be, they are essentially peripheral to the structure that evolves from the developing character of the heroine. *Pamela* is both heroine and narrator; the traumatic experience she undergoes forms the soul of the plot; and as the record of her ordeal unfolds, we witness the development of a carefully designed and formally proportioned work of fiction, one with the unity, balance, and symmetry which are essential to the total form of any work of art.

An argument for the unity of *Pamela* no doubt seems at odds with the oft repeated claim that the novel is bifurcated. Before 1740 the typical comic

plot had become a settled and almost immutable form: the hero regularly overcame all obstacles to obtain his goals, one of which was usually a girl, and the ritual of marriage was the conventional device for solemnizing his success and completing the action. In a radical departure from the tradition, Richardson not only made the heroine his central figure, he also had the marriage occur almost exactly in the middle of the novel so that the succeeding narrative seems to be anticlimactic, superfluous, and dull. This supposed flaw in the structure has long been a commonplace, and recent critics have advanced diverse explanations to account for Richardson's violation of convention. Ian Watt, for example, after noting the "lack of formal proportion in the novel," argues that Richardson's "aim of producing a new model of conduct for the relations between men and women involves paying attention to many matters which we take for granted but on which there was not yet complete public agreement when he wrote" (p. 149). Thus, the second half of the novel is necessary to fulfill one aspect of the didactic purpose. By interpreting internal rather than sociological evidence, Robert Donovan maintains that Pamela's dilemma is less moral than social; after she has "conquered" Mr. B., she must overcome "the rather more formidable obstacles of public opinion and the objections of the family" in order to consolidate her social position; if this is her primary desire, "then there is no need to regard the second half of the novel as anticlimactic at all" (p. 389). While Pamela's desire to reach an accommodation with her new peers is no doubt an important element in the novel, it is misleading to give this issue primacy, because the fundamental conflict is internal, not external; Pamela undergoes a prolonged, intense, and disruptive emotional experience, one that severely affects her psychic balance, and the marriage is only the first step toward a final resolution of the tensions set up in the first half of the novel. At its core is the evolving character of Pamela, and it is obvious that our

first responsibility is to understand her nature, her motives, and her actions.

One reason why we can know Pamela better than Moll Flanders or Roxana arises from the epistolary mode of narration. As Alan McKillop observes, Richardson's technique of "writing to the moment is not indiscriminate expansion of descriptive detail, but a running record of significant circumstance and fluctuating feeling from the point of view of the letter writer. . . . It is not merely that the character's feelings and observations are systematically presented; this in itself might, and sometimes does, lead to a tedious and trivial record. The point is that here we have the close linking of memory and current impression with anticipation of what is to come—a future not merely conceived as ultimate outcome . . . but a future emerging directly from the specious present" (p. 59). In *Clarissa* and *Sir Charles Grandison* the points of view on the action are multiplied by the more or less continuous presence of several correspondents, but in *Pamela*, except for infrequent letters written by the other characters, our only windows to the life of the novel are the eyes of the heroine; her letters and journal to her parents constitute the bulk of the narrative.² And since almost everything in the record is winnowed through her mind, it is obvious that if we are to understand her experience, we must first know Pamela.

Many critics too seldom realize that as the novel begins, Pamela is just approaching the full flower of adolescence. The death of her employer and mentor, Mr. B.'s mother, has left her in the kind of precarious and uncertain situation that mirrors her character, for having just turned fifteen (I, 8) she is neither a child nor a woman; like Janus, she looks both ways, and her paradoxical nature is neither unusual nor difficult to account for. All the evidence suggests that Pamela's early life was simple, uncomplicated, and rudimentary; until she entered service as a waiting maid her experience had been hardly more than cloistered. Her father had once had a place but lost it through no fault of his own, and the family had since been forced to live in humble poverty. Necessity forced Pamela into service, "when I was not Twelve Years old" (I, 21), and there she gets the rudiments of education: "my Lady's Goodness had put me to write and cast Accompts, and made me a little expert at my Needle" (I, 1). She loves reading

(I, 22) and is supplied with books suitable for her age, such as the Bible and Aesop's *Fables*, and some that were unsuitable if we may believe Mr. B.'s comment about idle "Romances" (I, 121). Whatever the scope of her reading might have been, it is evident that Pamela's knowledge of the world is great enough for her to be able to hint of homosexuality in the character of Mrs. Jewkes (I, 142), to recognize "a most wicked Jest . . . about Planting" (I, 179), and to know that Mr. B.'s suggestion that she help Mrs. Jewkes keep a lodging house in London is a "barbarous Joke" (I, 87). At the same time the genuine innocence and simplicity of her nature is manifest in a number of ways. She takes a childlike delight from what the adult world regards as mundane and trivial; the gift of "fine Things" from "my late Lady's Closet" (I, 12) is only the first of many indications of her interest in material commonplaces. There is no reason to believe that her ingenuousness, so often maligned as calculating, is anything other than genuine. To cite only two instances, early in the story she cannot wholly believe her parents' warnings about Mr. B. because "what could he get by ruining such a poor young Creature as me?" (I, 6), and even when his intentions have become obvious, she eases the way for the abduction by telling him guilelessly of all her plans for returning to her parents (I, 114–15). Mr. B.'s accusations notwithstanding, Pamela is not "artful" (I, 26) at the beginning of their relationship, but under the pressure of his advances she learns to be. Her ingenuity and simplicity are confirmed by the fact that though she lacks worldly sophistication, she discovers the native talent to cope with a gentleman rake ten years her senior.

Moreover, it would be difficult to deny the young Pamela the traits of honesty, modesty, and prudence. As Ian Watt has noted, these terms develop sexual connotations, especially in the later novels, but there is more to Pamela's integrity than the mere preservation of chastity, as her relations with her parents and fellow servants demonstrate. To use a dichotomy between intellect and body that is common in Richardson, the influence of "my lady" has improved Pamela's mind to a point where she is "qualified above [her] Degree" (I, 1), and her "person" has developed into a fitting complement of her "mind" (I, 8). If nothing else, Mr. B.'s passionate interest indicates

that Pamela is physically attractive; Mrs. Jervis and other servants repeatedly comment on her beauty, and the visiting gentry call her a "paragon," "the greatest Beauty in the County" (I, 58, 65). All the evidence suggests that Pamela inclines to be precocious in mind and person, one who, even at an early age, would respond normally and naturally to sexual suggestion if it were to occur within the ethos of marriage.

Pamela's artless nature is amply illustrated by the style of her writing. From a rhetorical and grammatical point of view, it is notably uncomplicated, and both its strengths and weaknesses reflect the adolescent skills of the narrator. It is clear, in other words, that in spite of Richardson's lack of formal education, the style of *Pamela* reflects a highly developed sense of decorum, and his ability to suit the style to the character of the correspondent is even more manifest in *Clarissa* and *Grandison*.³ This is not the place to explore the rhetoric of his fiction in depth; for the present purpose, it will suffice to point out some of the more outstanding ways that the story reveals the character of the teller. The standard organizing principle of the letters and journal is simple chronology, and since throughout the first half of the novel Pamela is almost always writing under duress, the very absence of more complex analysis of the situations is highly appropriate. The structure within each letter reveals a similar lack of complication: the sentences tend to be short and concise, often ungrammatical in a formal sense, and if they are linked at all, it is usually by coordination. The diction tends to be familiar, colloquial, disproportionately monosyllabic, especially suited to tense and frightening situations, such as Pamela's after the abduction to Lincolnshire: "Well, here is a sad Thing! I am deny'd by this barbarous Woman to go to Church, as I had built upon I might. And she has huff'd poor Mr. Williams all to pieces, for pleading for me. I find he is to be forbid the House, if she pleases. Poor Gentleman! All his Dependence is upon my Master, who has a very good Living for him, if the Incumbent die; and he has kept his Bed these Four Months, of old Age and Dropsy" (I, 150).

By far the most significant insights into the character of the narrator are provided by the imagery, which is homely, commonplace, and therefore perfectly appropriate to a fifteen-year-old of limited education and with but three years'

experience in writing. Thus we find metaphors drawn from the areas of experience most familiar to a child, the worlds of animals and plants, and from their literary representations most familiar to Pamela in the Bible and Aesop's *Fables*. One of Richardson's favorite metaphors for the beleaguered virgin appears when Pamela compares her heart to "a new-caught Bird in a Cage" (I, 34), a victim of the "Snares" (I, 42) laid by Mr. B. Facing the bleak prospect of poverty, she implies an innocent faith in her ability to survive by living "like a Bird in Winter upon Hips and Haws" (I, 104), and in the same situation, she draws upon Aesop: "I am like the Grasshopper in the Fable, which I have read of in my Lady's Books" (I, 98), and later, "I am as frightened as were the City Mouse and the Country Mouse, in the same Book of Fables, at every thing that stirs" (I, 99). When her plea for mercy has been rebuffed by Mr. B. and Mrs. Jewkes, she replies, "I have done!—I have done! I have a strange Tribunal to plead before. The poor Sheep, in the Fable, had such an one; when it was try'd before the Vultur, on the Accusation of the Wolf!" (I, 251).

The imagery reflects the juvenile mode of thought of the narrator, and nowhere is the process more evident than in the metaphors drawn from the myth of orthodox Christianity. A familiar trait of the adolescent mind is its tendency to think and judge in terms of polar opposites, and Pamela is no exception. Thus, when Mr. B.'s intentions become clear, Pamela sees an analogy between him and Satan: "Lucifer always is ready to promote his own Work and Workmen" (I, 76), and after his fourth and final attempt to rape her almost succeeds, analogy becomes identity: "Why, said I, (struggling from him, and in a great Passion) to be sure, you are *Lucifer* himself in the *Shape* of my Master, or you could not use me thus" (I, 287). And to complete the contrast, others see Pamela as "an Angel of Light" (I, 56, 248). She often views her own trials within the context provided by the mythical struggle between God and Satan, and orthodox Christianity is a pervasive force in the novel's background. It provides the rituals for invocations, supplications, and obeisances, the divine sanction for the prevailing ethical system, and most important, the imagery reflecting the nature of the conflicts predominating in the foreground of the novel's action. The dualistic structure of the myth, with its emphasis

on the antagonism between opposing moral concepts, amplifies and reinforces the essential duality in the central character: goodness for Pamela lies in obedience to the dictates of a conscience often opposed to the natural desires aroused by Mr. B.'s crude approaches. The developing awareness of her own sexuality brings her into severe conflict with a taboo engendered by her parents and cultivated by Mr. B.'s mother, and if we are to understand her reaction to the temptation provided by Mr. B., we must first explain why her conscience forbids what her heart desires.

Throughout the novel Pamela acknowledges her parents and "my Lady" as the two major influences on the development of her character, and they obviously determine her attitudes toward love and marriage. The letters from her parents are characterized by what McKillop has called "the gloomy admonitory style of the *Familiar Letters*."⁴ Thus they belabor the "poor, but honest" theme; poverty seems to make their devotion to moral principle, and to chastity in particular, all the more dogmatic and unyielding. The insistent and recurring emphasis on the preservation of virginity whatever the cost is clearly evident in the first letter Pamela receives from her father: "... we would sooner live upon the Water, and, if possible, the Clay of the Ditches I contentedly dig, than live better at the Price of our dear Child's Ruin." The almost frenzied reaction to the possible loss of their child's chastity culminates with a morbid threat: "... the Loss of our dear Child's Virtue would be a Grief that we could not bear, and would bring our grey Hairs to the Grave at once." The tone of dire foreboding is intensified by the suggestion of a nameless and irrational fear of the most insignificant sexual suggestion: "... and Oh! that frightful Word, that he would be kind to you, if you would do as *you should do*, almost kills us with Fears" (I, 4-6). With parents to whom she is dutiful and obedient pointing the way, it is little wonder that Pamela should become hypersensitive to every action of Mr. B.: her conscious thought makes him an object to be loathed and feared because, if for no other reason, he is simply a man. The parents are aware that there is more to virtue than mere physical chastity—"It is Virtue and Goodness only that make the true Beauty" (I, 15)—but the total effect of what they write is to place an undue emphasis on physical chastity alone. Subsequent letters from them (I, 24, 39)

reiterate the same injunctions. It becomes clear that the only alternative to marriage, which they consider impossible because of the difference in social station, is an absolute prohibition of any kind of attachment, emotional or otherwise, with Mr. B. Pamela accepts the dictates of her parents without question; after her marriage, she tells Lady Davers, "My poor Father and Mother . . . would rather have seen me buried quick in the Earth, than to be seduced by the greatest of Princes . . . and all their Fear was, that I should be wicked, and yield to Temptation, for the sake of worldly Riches: And to God's Grace, and their good Lessons, and those I imbib'd from my dear good Lady, your Ladyship's Mother, it is that I owe the Preservation of my Innocence, and the happy Station I am exalted to" (II, 299-300). But the exaltation does not come until after a severe internal conflict between the moral principles that implicitly forbid any kind of love, whether *eros* or *agape*, and the awakening need of a young girl for emotional and physical affection.

The conflict is developed and resolved on two levels. The first is the primary one within Pamela between her awakening natural instincts and the repressive dictates of her conscience. The second is the secondary level of social conflict brought about by the difference in degree between Pamela and Mr. B. The primary level predominates in the first half of the novel, then it begins to modulate with the secondary level. The two strands are joined by the social ritual of the marriage, which provides the transition marking the resolution of Pamela's internal struggle and the beginning of her reconciliation with Mr. B.'s family and friends. But even though the issue of social acceptance attains greater prominence in the second half of the novel, the focus remains upon Pamela and upon the final resolution of the tensions created during the ordeal before marriage.

The overt social and moral conflict emerges in the first letter. Pamela is the humble and attractive serving girl singled out for attention by her young, handsome, and rich master. She must decide whether to obey him as her master or reject him as a man. Her worst fears are confirmed by her parents: "what a sad Hazard a poor Maiden, of little more than Fifteen Years of Age, stands against the Temptations of this World, and a designing young Gentleman, if he should prove so, who has so much *Power* to oblige, and has a

kind of Authority to command as your Master" (I, 14). A way out of her dilemma is offered by the possibility of a position with Lady Davers (I, 8), but when Mr. B. forbids her to leave, she remains in his service at the Bedfordshire estate. After his first attempt to seduce her (I, 17–20), she has no further doubts about his intentions. It is clear that if her chastity is to remain unviolated, she must return to her parents, and yet she vacillates, ostensibly because she believes she must finish her needlework (I, 43). At this point, critics in the tradition of Fielding conclude that her motive is obvious: she is the scheming moneygrubber who uses all her feminine wiles in order to marry the rich man. Aside from the fact that the text provides no evidence to support this conclusion, her actual motive is much more subtle and complex. Pamela vacillates because her fundamental dilemma is neither moral nor social but emotional. In spite of what appear to be insuperable obstacles, she is attracted unconsciously to what she fears most. As Anna Howe writes to Clarissa, "For a beginning Love is acted by a subtle spirit; and oftentimes discovers itself to a by-stander, when the person possessed (why should I not call it *possessed*?) knows not it has such a demon" (I, 65).

In the first, or Bedfordshire, section of the novel, we can observe the demon gaining possession of Pamela long before she is aware of its presence. Her first favorable reaction to Mr. B. comes as a result of his consideration and generosity. When he encourages her to read and write, she says, "To be sure I did nothing but curts'y and cry, and was all in Confusion, at his Goodness. Indeed he is the best of Gentlemen, I think!" (I, 4). In the summer-house of the garden, the threat he poses to her chastity becomes obvious, and her response indicates that his caresses might have distracted her usually watchful conscience: "You have taught me to forget my self, and what belongs to me" (I, 19). She is left in a quandary symptomatic of the ambivalent feelings he has aroused. The possibility of something more than a merely carnal relationship is first mentioned by Mrs. Jervis (I, 23), and Pamela's ambivalence, suggested by Mr. B. in his charge that she is an "Equivocator" (I, 28), is more apparent after his second attempt to seduce her in the dressing room: "At last he went up to the Closet, which was my good Lady's Dressing-room; a Room I once lov'd, but then as much hated"

(I, 34). We should note here an aspect of Pamela's reaction to stress that becomes more frequent as her anxiety increases; she tends to project her fears externally so that the objects or places with which they are associated take on unique symbolic significance. Repeatedly, we see her try to alleviate her fears by projecting them away from herself.

While Pamela delays her departure, Mrs. Jervis, acting as her confidante and mentor, observes, "My Master . . . has a noble Estate; and yet I believe he loves my good Maiden, tho' his Servant, better than all the Ladies in the Land." Though he has been impressed by Pamela's integrity, Mrs. Jervis suggests that at this point the basis of his interest in her is mainly physical: "'tis no Wonder he should love you, you are so pretty" (I, 46). So long as his desire remained purely carnal, Pamela would reject him, but once she admits the possibility that their love could be consummated in a way that her conscience could approve, she is inclined to be more receptive to his advances. Thus, when Mrs. Jervis reports Mr. B.'s having said that if "he knew a Lady of Birth, just such another as yourself, in Person and Mind, . . . he would marry her Tomorrow" (I, 53), the mention of marriage opens a door to fulfillment that she will not consciously admit, and yet she becomes even more confused and indecisive about returning to her parents, more sensitive to the moods and attitudes of Mr. B. ("I am vex'd his Crossness affects me so"), and more aware of the mingled nature of her own feelings: "Is it not strange, that Love borders so much upon Hate? But this wicked Love is not like the true virtuous Love, to be sure: *That* and *Hatred* must be as far off, as *Light* and *Darkness*" (I, 65).

"This wicked Love" holds a fascination implicit in her inability to shut out the memories of what has happened. As we have seen, she tends to dwell not on the event but on its setting so that the physical place becomes a symbol of her ambivalence. After his second attempt to rape her in the dressing room, the "once lov'd" room becomes "hated" (I, 34); she tries to reconcile "his *first* Offer in the Summer House" (I, 46) and reminds him "That my good Lady did not desire your Care to extend to the *Summer-house* and her *Dressing-room*" (I, 73). She tells Mrs. Jervis, "if he does not love to hear of the *Summer-house* and the *Dressing-room*, why should he not be ashamed to continue in the same Mind?" (I, 77). And after his

third attempt in Mrs. Jervis' chamber, it, too, becomes a symbol of the desires that her conscience tells her she must fear and repress. Henceforth all her energies are bent toward escaping to her parents, away from the presence of Mr. B. and from the feelings he has aroused. Before her departure, she responds to his declaration of love, "I trembled to feel my poor Heart giving way" (I, 109), but her conscious emotions are stilled and he once again becomes a "black, perfidious Creature," "an Implement . . . of Lucifer," when he offers to arrange a marriage for her with his Lincolnshire chaplain, Mr. Williams (I, 113). She recognizes the "Trap" implicit in his proposal and resolves to leave as soon as possible. Thus, when the first section of the novel concludes, Pamela's heart remains divided, his interest in her person seems to preclude the only fulfillment of her desires that her mind can tolerate, and the prospect of returning to her parents seems to offer a release from the tensions of the conflict between conscience and passion which he has stimulated. But when Mr. B. arranges to have her abducted to his Lincolnshire estate, the possibility of release evaporates, and her conflict intensifies to the point where it becomes a severe, traumatic experience.

During her period of bondage, Pamela is forced into a confrontation with her own nature by a series of events that gradually isolate her from those who might provide aid and comfort. The abduction itself, and the discovery that Mr. B. secretly controls her correspondence, effectively end the communication with her parents. As a result of the assistance of Mr. Williams, she receives one letter from them (I, 214-16), a further exhortation never to yield her innocence, but when Mr. B. discovers the Chaplain's complicity, his assistance ends. After this, Pamela retains some hope of aid from the Bedfordshire servants, Mrs. Jervis, Longman, and Jonathan, until she learns that Mr. B. has dismissed them because of their devotion to her (I, 302). Separated from friends who admire and respect her, she is left alone to survive in a world she does not know, a world that seems to be completely controlled and determined by Mr. B. He states that the abduction was necessitated by his "Passion" and her "Obstinacy" and that he will care for her through intermediaries until she invites him to join her (I, 137-38). He continues to profess his love for her and his determination to treat her "honour-

ably" (I, 137, 177-78), but when he discovers her plot to escape with the assistance of Mr. Williams, the ambivalence of his own feelings becomes manifest: though he once believed her to be "as innocent as an Angel of Light" (I, 248), her apparent affection for Williams has made her a "specious Hypocrite" (I, 222); "I think I now hate her perfectly" (I, 220). Thus his jealousy, his reaction to "*injur'd Honour, and slighted Love*" (I, 220), leaves Pamela nothing more to expect from his generosity. She is isolated in an environment that is explicitly and implicitly antagonistic to her principles of chastity. The place itself, one of the few exteriors described by Richardson, has an atmosphere of Gothic horror about it: "About Eight at Night, we enter'd the Court-yard of this handsome, large, old, and lonely Mansion, that looks made for Solitude and Mischief, as I thought, by its Appearance, with all its brown nodding Horrors of lofty Elms and Pines about it: And here, said I to myself, I fear, is to be the Scene of my Ruin, unless God protect me, who is all-sufficient!" (I, 143). Pamela's animism results from a compound of ignorance and fear; she comprehends fully neither the external forces that have brought her to this place nor the enigmatic nature of her own feelings, and her sense of mystery and horror extends to the people she meets here, the servants of Mr. B., who in the imagination of Pamela convert the estate into a house of carnality unloosed.

In the characters of Mrs. Jewkes and Colbrand, Pamela sees two aspects of raw sexuality, one feminine, the other masculine. She recognizes Mrs. Jewkes as "a wicked Procuress," one who "seems to delight in filthiness," and the imagery suggests that her imagination equates illicit promiscuity with bestiality. Mrs. Jewkes is "a broad, squat, pousy, *fat Thing*" who moves with a "waddle" rather than a walk (I, 151, 190). At various times she is a "wicked brute" (I, 174, 202, 226), a "treacherous Brute" (I, 229), an "inhuman Tygress" (I, 240), and a "barbarous Creature" (I, 246). In addition to the beast in Mrs. Jewkes, there is the erotic interest which strikes Pamela as perverse. During their first meeting, "every now-and-then she would be staring in my Face, in the Chariot, and squeezing my Hand, and saying, Why, you are very pretty, my silent Dear! And once she offer'd to kiss me. But I said, I don't like this sort of Carriage, Mrs.

Jewkes; it is not like two Persons of one Sex" (I, 142). Under the constant surveillance and control of such a woman, Pamela must ransack her meager knowledge for epithets adequate to express her fear and detestation of the unrestrained sexuality that Mrs. Jewkes represents. After great provocation, she calls her a "Jezebel" (I, 168) and a "vile London Prostitute" (I, 244). Though clichés in the more sophisticated world, these exempla of feminine promiscuity still represent the ultimate in degradation to a cloistered girl like Pamela. The masculine counterpart to Mrs. Jewkes appears when Mr. B. sends Colbrand to the Lincolnshire estate after he discovers Pamela's conspiracy with Mr. Williams. By this time, Pamela's imagination is so inflamed with terror and apprehension as to distort the character of Colbrand according to her own fears, even though he neither speaks nor acts toward her in any capacity other than that of a stern guard. "He is a Giant of a Man, for Stature . . . and large-bon'd, and scraggy; and has a Hand!—I never saw such an one in my Life." She notes with horror the "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" (I, 225–26). Not only does she magnify and distort his appearance, Pamela also links Colbrand with the sexual ambitions of Mr. B. and thus makes the servant the visible symbol of the absent master: ". . . when I went to bed, I could think of nothing but his hideous Person, and my Master's more hideous actions; and judg'd them too well pair'd; and when I dropp'd asleep, I dream'd they were both coming to my Bed-side with the worst designs" (I, 226).

When the portraits of Mrs. Jewkes and Colbrand are compared, their symbolic function becomes obvious; while Colbrand represents masculine carnality, the threat from outside that Pamela must protect herself against, Mrs. Jewkes for all her coarseness remains a woman whose uninhibited appetites pose a constant challenge to Pamela's rigid principles of self-denial. When she recognizes the cause of her inner turmoil, she tries to escape from them physically, and as the avenues to freedom are blocked one by one, frustration, fear, and an awakening libido combine to produce a harrowing emotional experience.

Immediately after her arrival at the Lincolnshire

estate, Pamela begins to cast about for a means of escape, and she soon discovers an accomplice in the naïve Mr. Williams. Once they begin to conspire, certain objects and places around the estate take on special significance—the house, the garden, the pond, the sunflower, the locked back door of the garden, and the bull in the pasture outside. Pamela's description of the mansion suggests that she looks upon it as a kind of prison-house of the flesh, a place that will at once inhibit and corrupt her character by stimulating forbidden desires. It is not unusual then that she should take every opportunity to "walk out" into the garden where the restraints operating indoors are eased, if only momentarily. The garden in Richardson's novels is typically a symbol of relative freedom from the normal restraints of social convention, a place where the verdant order of nature evokes the fertility and procreation which the characters desire but which they cannot consciously express. In the garden Pamela is freer to speculate about her future, and it is in the garden later that she knows it with certainty. She and Mr. Williams contrive to carry on a secret correspondence by hiding their letters under a sunflower in the garden. Because it suggests her hopes for escape, Pamela soon regards it as "my Sunflower" but her overt attitude toward the plant should not obscure its archetypal meaning as a symbol of the apex of fertility in the plant world. As the sunflower becomes more and more important to her (see I, 173–75, 190, 199), we cannot but also see it as a symbol of her repressed desires for realization of her womanhood, a desire implied by Mr. B. when he exclaims just before their marriage, "*Of all the Flowers in the Garden, the Sunflower is the fairest!*" (II, 112).

The sunflower correspondence becomes the means by which Pamela encounters another member of the natural order that symbolizes fertility. The plant is docile and vegetative, but the bull in the pasture is active and violent; traditionally, it stands as the epitome of sexual capacity in the brute world, and as Pamela broods upon the dangers, she discovers the bull as a symbol of two equally forbidding alternatives: if she leaves for home through the pasture, she risks physical injury from the bull; if she stays on the estate, she risks another kind of injury from what she regards as the brutal lust of Mr. B. Thus, the bull incarnates what she fears most. After much hesita-

tion she ventures into the pasture only to find two bulls instead of one, but after returning inside the protective garden walls, she realizes how hysteria can distort comprehension: the "supposed Bulls" are only "two poor Cows, a grazing in distant Places" (I, 204-06). She soon forgets this experience, however, because when Colbrand first appears, she compares his "great staring Eyes" to "the Bull's that frighten'd me so," and when she links Colbrand with Mr. B. (I, 224), the two men and the animal coalesce to form a composite symbol of the brutal masculinity she abhors. Thus, as two aspects of the same basic drive, Mrs. Jewkes and the bull-Colbrand-Mr. B. not only challenge Pamela's principles, but stimulate her submerged eroticism by their uninhibited sensuality in a way she finds difficult to control.

There are few explicit suggestions of Pamela's growing awareness of her own erotic desires, but the lack of overt statement should not be surprising when we recall that all she writes is addressed to inordinately puritanical parents, who would react violently if she expressed any kind of sexual interest. Here, as elsewhere, we must infer the true situation from the imagery, which suggests the feelings that she cannot bring herself to articulate. We find, for example, that she is not ignorant of the techniques of procreation: after unearthing some horse-beans she has planted, she says to Mrs. Jewkes, "Here, said I, having a Bean in my Hand, is one of them; but it has not stirr'd. No, to be sure, said she, and turn'd upon me a most wicked Jest, unbecoming the mouth of a Woman, about Planting, &c." (I, 179). The jest no doubt turns on the ancient metaphor of coition as an act analogous to the planting of seeds in the womb of Mother Earth. The important thing to note here is that Pamela recognizes the metaphor, and though she terms it "wicked," she is aware that Mrs. Jewkes's remark about the need for an agent of fertilization refers to Mr. B. Even the simple act of planting beans becomes symbolic of what she is trying to avoid, and the irony of her situation in Lincolnshire is intensified by the fact that the more she tries to escape erotic suggestions, the more apparent they become, until a point is reached where the symbols are made flesh in the person of Mr. B.

The image that most clearly reveals the conflict between Pamela's apparent and real desires arises from her search for a way out, for a key that will

release her from the bondage of her fears. Her search for a literal key begins when she learns on the sixth day of her imprisonment that Mr. Williams has one that will unlock the back door of the garden (I, 161). Immediately she writes to him, "You have a Key to the back Garden-door; I have great Hopes from that" (I, 166). As she formulates and dwells upon her plan, the key becomes of crucial importance and she asks him to have a copy made which he could then place under the sunflower (I, 173). Mr. Williams agrees to procure one for her (I, 181) and her hopes increase, "I would wait the happy Event I might hope for from his kind Assistance in the Key and the Horse" (I, 182). But for Williams the key becomes a means of access to her heart; immediately after he passes it to her, he proposes marriage (I, 190-93). As the narrative proceeds the key comes to represent *eros* as well as *agape*. The key in the lock had long been a metaphor for coition, and Richardson clearly viewed it as an appropriate symbol for the act that his verbal sensitivity would not permit him to describe.⁵ Later on, when the company is complimenting Pamela on her playing of the spinet, the incorrigible old rake, Sir Simon Danford, remarks, "And who, that sees her Fingers, believes not that they were made to touch any Key? O, Parson! 'tis well you're by, or I should have had a blush from the Ladies" (II, 78). For Richardson, the ambiguous nature of the symbol made it an effective device for suggesting the conflict between overt and covert desires in his heroine.

When Pamela uses the key to investigate a possible escape route through the back door of the garden into the pasture, she encounters what she thinks is a bull, embodying at once the "Spirit of my Master" (I, 205) and the brute masculinity which the key also represents. The bull and the key combine to suggest the ambivalence of her own feelings: she can escape from the house but not from the desires Mr. B. has aroused, and against her will she is drawn to that which her principles reject. Thus the need for secrecy forces her to concentrate upon the key, and the accumulated repetitions intensify its symbolic power. Despite the indiscretions of Williams, the secret is kept. Then he is arrested for debt, Colbrand arrives to guard her, Mr. B. accuses her of hypocrisy and announces that he is coming soon for what she senses will be a final assault on her

virginity. In the midst of an almost unbearable anxiety, the key seems to offer the only hope. True to her childlike nature, she decides to run from the cause of her fears rather than face it. But after she makes an elaborate plan, which includes throwing some of her clothing in the pond to make her escape appear to be suicide, she is "miserably disappointed; for the wicked Woman had taken off that Lock, and put another on; so that my Key would not open it. I try'd and try'd, and feeling about, I found a Padlock besides, on another Part of the Door. O then how my Heart sunk! I dropp'd down with Grief and Confusion, unable to stir, or to support myself, for a while" (I, 231).

Though the key fails because Mrs. Jewkes changed the lock, the metaphor provides us with the true meaning of the episode: Pamela is actually locked in the prison of an abnormally severe chastity; Mr. Williams offers no help because there can be no release when there is no love; Mr. B. can release her, but at the moment he seems bent only on the satisfaction of his own lust, and when, after the key fails, she hurts herself trying to scale the wall, the injury prefigures the physical pain that he will inflict upon her body. Desolate and helpless, unable to comprehend the real nature of the conflict that tortures her mind and emotions, she succumbs to utter despair and contemplates suicide (I, 233–37). However much the homiletic style of her meditation might lead us to suspect her piety, the fact remains that this display of faith is perfectly consistent with the role of orthodox Christianity throughout the novel. In this situation, which Pamela regards as the last extremity of suffering, the doctrine provides both a rationale and a defense for her actions; by reviewing the divine sanctions for her principles, she is able to accept the fact that since physical escape is impossible and suicide intolerable, she must somehow find a way to resolve the conflict within herself and cope with the man who is its cause. Thus the pondside scene, like the earlier scenes, is invested with significance for Pamela; it becomes a symbol of the spiritual and emotional nadir of her experience, the point at which the girl becoming a woman realizes that she might have to exchange a literal death for a metaphoric one in the arms of Mr. B.

The single most important consequence of the ordeal by the pondside is Pamela's recognition of

her growing affection for her master, in spite of the moral and social difference between them. When she hears that he has almost drowned, she wonders at the concern she feels for him: "O what an Angel would he be in my Eyes yet, if he would cease his Attempts, and reform" (I, 243). Even after he arrives in Lincolnshire and makes formal proposals that she become his concubine, she finds that she cannot wholly reject him: "I look'd after him out of the Window and he was charmingly dress'd: To be sure, he is a handsome fine Gentleman;—What Pity his Heart is not as good as his Appearance! Why can't I hate him? But don't be uneasy, if you should see this; for it is impossible I should love him; for his Vices all *ugly him over*, as I may say" (I, 268–69). The increasing complexity of her own emotions is indicated by the metaphor that discriminates between inside and outside and shows that the pendulum is swinging from total rejection through a period of ambivalence toward complete submission. But for Pamela, submission cannot come without a mutual love solemnized by marriage, and she must first endure her "worst Trial, and . . . fearfullest Danger!" (I, 271).

Pamela's most harrowing emotional experience follows in logical sequence her most severe spiritual experience; on the pondside she found peace with God, she must now find peace with herself and with the man. Soon after he arrives in Lincolnshire, he declares, "I cannot live without you: and, since the thing is gone so far, *I will not!*" (I, 202). With the assistance of Mrs. Jewkes and the maid, Nan, Mr. B. prepares an elaborate plan to insure the success of his final assault on the girl. As the scene unfolds, the histrionics and disguisings strike us as ludicrous in the extreme: why should an experienced raconteur such as Mr. B. stoop to such patently obvious devices? However crude his methods might seem to us, we must not forget that the object of his lust is also the narrator whose view is distorted by her own inner conflicts. She must render his last and most determined attempt to rape her as the outcome of deceitful machinations, but because of her own suppressed desires, she cannot record the episode in such a way as to make it completely repugnant. It should be obvious that Richardson's "warm scenes," the supposed products of his "prurient imagination," have a structural purpose that few of his critics are willing to see: the sensuality they

project is the narrator's own, and though she is writing to parents who would be horrified at such a response, she cannot but show her own passion for Mr. B. His attempt in Mrs. Jewkes's bedroom is the culminating episode in the series that has brought the conflict between Pamela's conscience and libido to a peak of intensity, and her response mirrors the psychological accuracy of the novel as a whole. When her anxiety becomes so great that her mind cannot tolerate it, she reacts like the typical hysteric—she loses consciousness, "With Struggling, Fright, Terror, I fainted away quite, and did not come to myself soon; so that they both, from the cold Sweats that I was in, thought me dying" (I, 279). Unlike so many later heroines of the sentimental novel, Pamela does not faint at will; there is more than adequate motivation for her "dying" at the climax of a severe traumatic experience, an experience whose scars must be completely effaced before she can gain the release into tranquillity that an uninhibited love will provide.

It is at this point in the novel that the long and arduous process of reconciliation begins, the two halves of the "divided heart" must be brought together, and for a sensitive girl like Pamela, the healing of the wounds must be a slow and painful process in which she must at one and the same time purge herself of the fears engendered by the long period of persecution and release the emotions pent up by the experience. After the episode in Mrs. Jewkes's bedroom, her affection for Mr. B. becomes more and more irresistible, but she cannot attain a state of complete emotional unity with him until she is assured that the causes of her former terrors no longer exist. This process of gradual reconciliation is of fundamental importance to the structure of the novel, and it provides the formal unity which *Pamela* is often said to lack. Integral to the process is the symbolism of scene which we have noted from the beginning of the narrative: Pamela invests the setting with her feelings and thus makes it a symbol of whatever transpired within it. These symbols haunt her; she associates them with the horrors of unleashed passion, and the inhibiting memories cannot be removed until she returns to each of the scenes, usually accompanied by Mr. B., there to realize that there is no longer any cause for the racking tension between what her mind forbade and what her heart desired.

The series of returns begins almost immediately after the crisis in Mrs. Jewkes's bedroom, and as Pamela's divided heart came into being in the garden in Bedfordshire, so the closing of the division begins in the garden in Lincolnshire. He invites her down for a walk; the old suspicions are revived by his arm about her waist; but then she no longer tries to hide the fact that he can make her mind lose control over her person: "After walking about, he led me into a little Alcove, on the farther Part of the Garden; and really made me afraid of myself: For he began to be very tiezing [sic] and made me sit on his Knee; and was so often kissing me, that I said, Sir, I don't like to be here at all, I assure you. Indeed you make me afraid!" (I, 285). Though she now fears his attempt to melt "her by Love, instead of Freezing her by Fear," she returns with him to the garden on the evening of the same day, and there takes the first step up the ladder of reconciliation. At the pondside, now a symbol of the most agonizing experience of her life, she realizes that it was "not far from the Place where I had that dreadful Conflict, that my present Hopes, if I am not to be deceiv'd again, began to dawn; which I presume to flatter myself with being an happy Omen for me" (I, 291). In the long colloquy that ensues, Mr. B.'s kindness and obvious love for her provide a discovery that she could not heretofore bring herself to admit, ". . . now I begin to be afraid, I know too well the Reason why all his hard Trials of me, and my black Apprehensions would not let me hate him" (I, 294). It is equally clear that before she can fully recognize the reason, her fears must be quieted one by one, and though she cannot articulate her true feelings, his persistent questioning brings a spontaneous display of affection from her: "Ah, sir! Reply'd I, what can I say?—I have already said too much, if this dreadful *Hereafter* should take place. Don't bid me say how well I can—And then, my Face glowing as the Fire, I, all abash'd, lean'd upon his Shoulder, to hide my Confusion" (I, 299).

From this point onward in the narrative, Pamela no longer has any doubt about her true feelings, and the major effect of Mr. B.'s proposal of marriage is to make her conscious of the love that had been repressed. Since he now offers a way to consummation that her conscience can approve, she can gradually slip the bonds of inhibition and speculate about what has happened to her. Though

it is presumptuous to be in love with her master, she cannot escape the new form of bondage: "For I know not *how* it, nor *when* it began; but crept, crept, it has, like a Thief upon me; and before I knew what was the Matter, it look's like love" (II, 8-9). The image of love as the subtle thief suggests her growing awareness of the genuine affection she had rigorously submerged in the past.

The scene by the pondside also brings to the fore the secondary level of conflict arising from the difference in social station between Pamela and her master; the lovers must somehow get around "the World, and the World's Censure" (I, 300) and it is here that the arguments of Watt and Donovan about the social context of the novel have the most relevance. The transition from an internal to an external area of conflict is neither abrupt nor arbitrary and neither area disappears altogether from the action: as Pamela's conflict between conscience and desire is resolved, it recedes into the background to be replaced by the opposition from Mr. B.'s peers which the lovers must face and resolve together. Though the social problem becomes ascendant, the fundamental issue continues to be Pamela's desire for a restoration of psychic harmony by transforming symbols of terror into their opposites, and in this process she must have the assistance of the man who caused the suffering. An important function of the summaries of Pamela's letters and journal, so often derided as repetitious and unnecessary, is to give her lover the knowledge of her experience which he must have if her reconciliation within herself and with him is to be complete. Thus he returns to the pondside with her, and after reading her account of the episode, his arrogance is replaced by a shared response, "Let us, . . . my *Pamela*, walk from this accursed Piece of Water; for I shall not with Pleasure, look upon it again, to think how near it was to have been fatal to my Fair-one" (I, 330). As the narrative proceeds the garden itself is transformed from a sexual to a social symbol; it becomes the setting wherein a natural rustic beauty gains the admiration and acceptance of the neighboring gentry: "This Alcove fronts the longest Gravel-walk in the Garden, so that they saw me all the Way I came, for a good Way; and my Master told me afterwards, with Pleasure, all they said of me" (II, 58). When her father comes to Lincolnshire, they return together, and it becomes apparent that the earlier negative

symbols have now taken on a positive value. "I arose early in the Morning; but found my Father was up before me, and was gone to walk in the Garden. I went to him: And with what Delight, with what Thankfulness, did we go over every Scene of it, that had before been so dreadful to me! The Fish-pond, the Back-door, and Every place. O what Reason had we for Thankfulness and Gratitude!" (II, 81). It is hackneyed but nonetheless true to Richardson's portrayal that love and the prospect of marriage have given Pamela a new perspective; the scenes which once evoked irrational fears have lost their *raison d'être*.

The marriage occurs in due course and because the novel does not end immediately afterwards, a number of critics with the archetypal plot of comedy in mind have protested against the apparent lack of symmetrical design. The comments of Ian Watt are typical: ". . . even if we exclude Richardson's ill-advised continuation, the narrative does not end with the marriage, but continues for some two hundred pages while every detail of the marriage ceremony and the resulting new conjugal pattern is worked out according to Richardson's exemplary specifications. This particular emphasis is odd to us, and suggests a lack of formal proportion in the novel" (p. 149). Watt goes on to defend the continuation as necessary to Richardson's didactic purpose of presenting a new bourgeois code for the conduct of marriage. More recently, Robert Donovan has argued that the later stages of the narrative are justified by the need to resolve the heroine's social dilemma: "She has conquered Mr. B., but the rather more formidable obstacles of public opinion and the objections of the family have still to be dealt with" (p. 389). Actually, though both of these arguments are relevant, they are essentially peripheral to the fundamental theme of the novel arising from the character of the heroine: she cannot attain the mature composure marriage demands until the last vestige of the traumatic experience she has undergone has been purged from her mind, and to this end the symbolism of scenes remains the primary vehicle by which her gradual restoration to psychic peace is communicated. Thus after the marriage, the Lincolnshire garden loses its suggestion of carnality and becomes a suitable place for alluding to pregnancy (II, 186) because the consummation of the desire once forbidden by conscience has now come to pass. Through the veil of

Pamela's modesty, we can perceive that hysterical rejection of sexuality is giving way to calm acceptance, and the process is accelerated by the moral approval of uninhibited love that marriage has made possible.

By the time the couple decides to return to Bedfordshire, Pamela has become reconciled to Mrs. Jewkes, Colbrand has become a trusted friend and protector, and the scenes in and around the Lincolnshire estate have lost their suggestions of terror. The return to Bedfordshire is itself another move toward reconciliation: ". . . what a delightful Change was this Journey, to that which, so contrary to all my Wishes, and so much to my Apprehensions, carry'd me hence to the Lincolnshire House! And how did I bless God at every Turn, and at every Stage!" (II, 304). When the chariot enters the courtyard, the change in her attitudes is even more pronounced, "I was so strongly impressed with the Favour and Mercies of God Almighty, on remembering how I was sent away the last time I saw this House; the Leave I took; the Dangers I had encountered; a poor cast-off Servant Girl; and now returning a joyful Wife, and the Mistress, thro' his Favour, of the noble House I was turn'd out of; that I was hardly able to support the Joy I felt in my Mind on the Occasion" (II, 304). It is especially significant that upon entering the house, her first act after greeting the servants is to return to the scenes where her traumatic experience began: "We went up; and in every Room, the Chamber I took Refuge in, when my Master pursued me, my Lady's chamber, her dressing-room [sic], Mrs. Jervis's Room, not forgetting her Closet, my own little Bed-chamber, the Green-room, and in each of the others, I . . . bless'd God for my past escapes, and present Happiness" (II, 306). The comparison of past anxieties with present composure leads to a realization that the scenes no longer function as symbols of the time when she was tortured by ambivalent emotions; they are now seen as elements in a divine plan by which Pamela's integrity would be tested. As her composure and sense of reconciliation increase, so does her desire to return to the place where the conflict began: "I stepped into the Library, while he was thus pouring out his Kindness for me to Mrs. *Jervis*; and bless'd God there on my Knees, for the Difference I now found, to what I had once known in it.—And when I have done

the same in the first Scene of my Fears, the once frightful Summer-house, I shall have gone thro' most of my distressful Scenes with Gratitude" (II, 318). She must first return alone. They are walking in the garden, "and, after we had taken a Turn round, I bent toward the little Garden; and when I came near the Summer-house, took the Opportunity to slip from him, and just whipt up the Steps of this once frightful Place, and kneeled down, and said, I bless thee, O God, for my Escapes, and for thy Mercies! . . . And I whipt down again, and join'd him; and he hardly miss'd me" (II, 321). Then, after their return in unity has been solemnized by a visit to church (II, 345–52), they return to the summerhouse together (II, 352–58). In this final scene of the novel, the place which saw the beginning of a tumultuous passion becomes the setting for a solemn discussion of Mr. B.'s will—passion gives way to practicality and the mundane concerns of a secure marriage.

This final scene of psychological, marital, and social tranquillity completes the formal design of the novel; as the point of culmination for imagery and themes established at the beginning of the narrative, it confirms the unity and symmetry of the artistic whole. The serenity of a childhood disrupted by passion has been replaced by the serenity of a marriage in which passion is fulfilled. Between these two points, the novel is unified further by a narrative metaphor based upon an analogy between the changes in the inner condition of the heroine and her external situation. In the first phase of the narrative, the Bedfordshire estate is the setting for the development of Pamela's ambivalent attitudes toward education and experience which rigidly circumscribe her responses to Mr. B. During the second phase, she is imprisoned on the Lincolnshire estate in an atmosphere of carnality that forces her to learn the distinction between love and lust, and between the unyielding resistance to natural desires and the graceful acceptance of them. When she returns to the Bedfordshire estate in the third phase, the cycle is completed; the place where the divided heart came into being becomes the place where all divisions are healed. Thus, the three-phase geographical movement parallels the movement within the heroine from the ignorance of childhood which restricts her actions in the adult world,

through a period of bondage in a world of corrupt adults, toward the sweet bondage of marriage to the man she loves. This narrative metaphor adds one final dimension to the symmetry of the whole. For Pamela, the reward of virtue is not primarily her marriage to a rich patrician but the reconciliation of a character severely tested. For us as

readers the reward lies in Richardson's virtue as a writer who could produce such an esthetically satisfying narrative.

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Notes

¹ Donovan, "The Problem of Pamela, or, Virtue Unrewarded," *SEL*, 3 (1963), 377-95; Golden, *Richardson's Characters* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1963); McKillop, *The Early Masters of English Fiction* (Lawrence: Univ. of Kansas Press, 1956); Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1959).

² This and all subsequent references to the novels are to the Shakespeare Head Edition: *Pamela* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1930); *Clarissa* and *Sir Charles Grandison* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1931).

³ Richardson's strong sense of decorum is confirmed by his reluctance to make changes in subsequent editions. He rarely yielded to those who would have had him elevate and purify the "low" language of his rustic heroine. See T. C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel, "Richardson's Revisions of *Pamela*," *SB*, 20 (1967), 61-88.

⁴ *Samuel Richardson, Printer and Novelist* (Archon, Conn.: Shoe String Press, 1960), p. 23.

⁵ The image might have evolved from the use of the medieval chastity belt; in any case, it appears in the *Roman de la Rose*, Chaucer's Merchant's Tale, Herrick's "Corinna's Going a Maying" ("Many a jest told of the Keyes betraying / This night, and Locks pickt, yet w'are not a Maying"), and Pope's version of the Merchant's Tale, "January and May." During the 18th century, it occurs in such markedly Richardsonian plays as Isaac Bickerstaffe's alteration of Wycherley's *Plain Dealer* (1766). As my colleague Douglas Shepard has pointed out, Henry James uses the figure in *Watch and Ward* in the form of a watch key, and apparently for the same reason as did Richardson, if we are to believe Leon Edel: the imagery "shows us the young James, at his writing desk, finding verbal release for much libidinal feeling that was later to be artfully disciplined," *Watch and Ward*, ed. Edel (New York: Grove Press, 1959), p. 8.