
Pamela's Clothes

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PAMELA'S CLOTHES

BY CAREY MCINTOSH

"I will take care of you all, my good Maidens," says Mr. B., as recounted in the opening letter of Richardson's novel; "and for you, *Pamela*, for my dear Mother's sake, I will be a Friend to you, and you shall take care of my Linen."¹ By annexing Pamela to help with his wardrobe, Mr. B. rewards her for past fidelity, and, at the same time, initiates a considerable series of allusions to clothing in *Pamela*, allusions which constitute a unifying leitmotif in Part I of the novel and yoke together a number of otherwise unrelated incidents and themes.

Mr. B.'s first gift to Pamela is a generous assortment of his deceased mother's wearing apparel. In Letter VI, when Pamela records her receipt of "a Suit of my late Lady's Cloaths, and half a Dozen of her Shifts, and Six fine Handkerchiefs, and Three of her Cambrick Aprons, and Four Holland ones," she also registers her opinion that "the Cloaths are fine Silk, and too rich and too good for me, to be sure."² Pamela has apparently not yet anticipated her own elevation to a rank commensurate with such costly garments, but she accepts them gratefully, conscious of the disparity between their elegance and her simplicity.

Clothes in *Pamela* function first of all as the visible emblem of social standing. The circumstantiality in Pamela's various lists of various pieces of apparel is entirely appropriate to her self-consciousness about her social position (as well as to her femininity). As formal notice of her resolution not to proceed along the particular avenue of social advancement Mr. B. initially intends for her, she sews for herself a homely rural outfit, a "Dress that will become my Condition," of "good sad-colour'd Stuff" homespun by the local farmer's wife, calico, flannel, and "some pretty good *Scots* Cloth." She pictures to herself the

¹ Samuel Richardson, *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (Shakespeare Head Press, Oxford, 1929), 4 vols., I, 2. All references to Richardson's novels will be to this edition, by volume and page. Note that in this context "Linen" often meant "undergarments" (OED, def. 3).

² I, 11.

"tawdry Figure" she would make at home in her lady's cast-off silken petticoats, and decides to reclothe herself in a costume which "Goody *Andrews's* Daughter" need not be ashamed of and can put to use when milking neighbors' cows on cold mornings; nor does she omit appropriate rustic ornament, "two pretty enough round-ear'd Caps," "two Pair of ordinary blue Worsted Hose, that make a smartish Appearance, with white Clocks, I'll assure you!" (Pamela's shrewdness and realistic outlook express themselves even here, in the qualifiers she attaches to her list of finery, "pretty enough," "smartish.")³

To this thrust Mr. B. opposes a suitable riposte, in Letter XXVII, by sending for Pamela "when nobody else was in the Parlour with him" and showing off the new "rich Suit of Cloaths" he has brought home from London in readiness for the next Birth-day at court: "His Waistcoat stood on End with Gold Lace, and he look'd very grand." After he has vented his wit on her, Pamela wistfully, tearfully asks "if this becomes your fine Cloaths, and a Master's Station?"⁴ 'Fine clothes' in her mind are so nearly equivalent to 'a master's station' as to make this compound direct object almost a tautology.

In Letter XXIX, shortly before the abduction, when Pamela is counting on a prompt reunion with her parents, she sorts her clothes into three bundles, in the presence of Mrs. Jervis (and of course the lurking Mr. B.): the first parcel contains what her Lady gave her, the legitimate fruits of service; the second is made up of Mr. B.'s gifts ("they were to be the Price of my Shame"); and finally "poor *Pamela's* Bundle, and a little one it is, to the others," "the Companion of my Poverty, and the Witness of my Honesty." The object of this little pantomime is to demonstrate her resolution to return to her parents uncontaminated by "Riches and Pomp" in any form.⁵ In fact Pamela does not succeed in leaving the expensive clothes behind, any more than she succeeds in resigning her attraction to high life and Mr. B.; the two larger bundles follow her to Lincolnshire, and the costly garments they contain become pawns in the struggle between her and Mrs. Jewkes.⁶ When Mr. B. in a huff sends Pamela back to her parents, the said bundles accompany her on the

³ I, 50 and 49. See I, 70 for Mr. B.'s dexterous manipulation of the message this costume conveys with regard to social rank, as a pretext for snatching a kiss.

⁴ I, 86, 88.

⁵ I, 100-103.

coach;⁷ consequently they return with her to the final reconciliation and are available as the source of finery more suitable to her new dignity as Mr. B.'s fiancée.⁸

What to wear in her affianced condition is a question of some delicacy and importance to Pamela:

So I'll get ready. But I won't, I think, change my Garb. Should I do it, it would look as if I would be nearer on a Level with him: And yet, should I not, it may be thought a Disgrace to him? but I will, I think, open the Portmanteau, and, for the first time, since I came hither, put on my best Silk Night-gown. But then, that will be making myself a sort of Right to the Cloaths I had renounc'd; and I am not quite sure I shall have no other Crosses to encounter. So I will go as I am; for tho' ordinary, I am as clean as a Penny, tho' I say it. So I'll e'en go as I am, except he orders otherwise.⁹

Mrs. Jewkes casts several votes for finery, but Mr. B. approves of the milk-maid outfit,¹⁰ and later commands her to wear it for the first encounter with the local gentry of Lincolnshire, as sartorial acknowledgment of her lower-class origins and to remind them (and her) of her "story."¹¹ In effect Pamela plays the whole central part of the drama in costume,¹² in the rustic grab so carefully described in Letter XX of Volume I, homespun and calico and round-eared cap; it is not until five days before her marriage that her Master requests that she "begin to dress as you used to do,"¹³ i. e., as the personal servant of a wealthy member of the country gentry. *After* the wedding, which is private and so calls for only a modest gown of white satin,¹⁴ after her easy triumph over the neighbours, when she has despite bitter resistance conquered Lady Davers, *then* "we must have new Cloaths"¹⁵ and new liveries¹⁶ and diamonds and laces and silks.¹⁷ Much of the last part of Part I is devoted to general celebration, 'sharing the loot,' which includes not only Pamela's

⁶ I, 159, 176, 247.

⁷ II, 5.

⁸ II, 83-85, 103.

⁹ II, 24. For further anxiety over suitable clothes, see II, 2, 31, 42.

¹⁰ II, 24, 25, 58.

¹¹ II, 42, 61.

¹² Intentionally: "I had all this Time worn my own bought Cloaths, tho' my Master would have had it otherwise often" (II, 2).

¹³ II, 83.

¹⁴ II, 140.

¹⁵ II, 266.

¹⁶ II, 311, 345.

¹⁷ II, 319-22, 345.

reinvestiture but also fresh drapery for her father, borrowed, at least on the first occasion, from Mr. B.¹⁸

The second major symbolic role which clothes play in *Pamela* is of course sexual. Mr. B., having honored Pamela with some of his mother's belongings in Letter VI, supplements them in Letter VII with fine stockings and "rich Stays"; and his point comes across:

I was quite astonished, and unable to speak for a while; but yet I was inwardly ashamed to take the Stockens; for Mrs. *Jervis* was not there: If she had, it would have been nothing. I believe I receiv'd them very awkwardly; for he smil'd at my Aukwardness, and said, Don't blush, *Pamela*: Dost think I don't know pretty Maids wear Shoes and Stockens? ¹⁹

For what Mr. B. wishes to say here, clothes are language enough to raise a blush. Pamela's sensitivity to the nuances of costume permits her to notice clothes even in a sexual emergency: she is just going to look into the closet, "slip-shod, when, O dreadful! out rushed my Master, in a rich Silk and Silver Morning Gown."²⁰ In *Pamela* Part I as a whole there is a good deal of disrobing, most of which we watch like peeping-toms.²¹ Mr. B. tells his friends that the beauties of Pamela's person "first attracted my Admiration, and made me her *Lover*: But they were the Beauties of her Mind, that made me her *Husband*"; presumably it is when he is poised half-way between these two roles, sexual and social, that he threatens to undress Pamela in search of her letters.²² After the wedding, with appreciation, "He was pleased to take Notice of my *Dress*; and, spanning my Waist with his Hands, said, What a sweet Shape is here!"²³

Almost every crucial event in *Pamela* is accompanied either by dressing or by undressing. Strong feelings are expressed, and major actions performed, by means of wearing apparel. As the

¹⁸ II, 98-100. Pamela is conscious that all her best clothes are borrowed from Mr. B., too (II, 132).

¹⁹ I, 13.

²⁰ I, 79.

²¹ I, 75, 241, 247, 254 (Pamela 'won't undress for bed for fear of Mr. B.), 265, 266, 267, 273, 276, 277, 301 (Pamela tries to dress to protect herself from Mr. B.), 322; II, 85, 99 (Mr. B. here rather coy over men dressing and undressing in general), 140, 183, 243, 246.

²² II, 228; I, 319-21. Her letters, of course, are the primary medium by which Pamela conveys to Mr. B. "the Beauties of her Mind" (the only case I know in early fiction where the novel [Pamela's letters] becomes an active agent in the novel [Pamela]).

²³ II, 186 (my italics).

term of Pamela's servitude in Bedfordshire is prolonged by the embroidery of a waistcoat for Mr. B.,²⁴ so the security of her imprisonment in Lincolnshire is reinforced by the removal of her shoes.²⁵ She fakes suicide by tossing an outer-petticoat and cap into the pond.²⁶ She hides letters for the time being 'in her bosom,'²⁷ more permanently 'in her under-coat next her linen.'²⁸ It is no more a surprise to find Mr. B. offering "Four complete Suits of rich Cloaths," as well as "Two Diamond Rings," if she will be his mistress, than it is to read that Pamela prefers "the Rags" of poverty²⁹ to such wicked splendor, and vows that "to lose the best Jewel, my Virtue, would be poorly recompens'd by those you propose to give me."³⁰ The first of numerous injunctions issued to Pamela the bride pertains to "carelessness" in dress "in marry'd Folks,"³¹ and the first crisis of her marriage, the surprise attack by her husband's sister, is aggravated by the gentility of Pamela's costume—to Lady Davers, an insult; to Pamela, a duty.³²

* * * * *

The peculiar aptness of this symbolic leitmotif in *Pamela* is a consequence of intrinsic and functional relationships between clothing and, on the one hand, sex, on the other, social position. On some occasions we take clothes off with special relish; for others we put them on with special care.³³ These facts are worth laboring because it is not always recognised that the nature of any symbolism depends not only on its aesthetic organisation but also on

²⁴ I, 17, 18, 43, 48, 53, 54, 55, 104.

²⁵ I, 151, 168, 246.

²⁶ I, 228, 230-231.

²⁷ I, 3, 28, 170, 174, 182, 306, 333.

²⁸ I, 174, 311, 326.

²⁹ I, 7, 45, 102, 103, 259.

³⁰ I, 259. If Jewels have no extra significance in this context than as exceptionally valuable and portable clothes, Pamela has here made even her Virtue into a kind of garment. It is associations of this sort that Fielding is mocking when he has Shamela reject the money her "person" can earn in favour of the "fortune" she will make by her "virtue." Fielding's burlesque makes special fun of *Pamela's* clothes: see Letters I, VI, VII X, XII, and the last (unnumbered) letter by Shamela.

³¹ II, 177.

³² II, 196, 204, 213.

³³ Of course clothing metaphors make reference often to areas of experience unrelated to sex or social position. Their contexts may include ornament in general ("proud-pied April, dress'd in all his trim"), protection in general (Clarissa, escaped, wishes to "wrap" herself "in her own Innocence"), and even 'customary behavior' (the word *habit* means both "dress" and "accustomed action," in Johnson's Dictionary as well as the OED).

the intrinsic qualities of the object chosen to carry symbolic weight.³⁴ One cannot expect commonplace artifacts like clothes to have high metaphysical meanings, except in a religious context.³⁵

On the other hand, the ubiquity and significance of various garments in *Pamela*, in combination with the sensational role they play in the attack on Pamela's chastity, give them a generalised intensity of interest³⁶ different in kind from our concern for more obviously labeled symbolic objects like Sophia's muff. That muff is commonplace enough, but it is, unlike Pamela's clothes, a unique object, and by its fourth appearance (*Tom Jones*, X, vi) has entirely stopped warming hands and given itself over to the communication of a specific message of fidelity, affection, and reproach. It calls attention to its own meaningfulness—so do other symbolic objects in eighteenth-century fiction, Robinson Crusoe's husks of corn, and Yorick's caged starling, which speaks not only literally ("I can't get out—I can't get out") but also figuratively, of French tyranny, of British liberty. By contrast, clothing plays so natural and normal a role in *Pamela*, it has so little meaning apart from what adheres to the event it is part of, that it might better be thought of as 'leitmotif' than as symbol.

E. M. Forster discusses innocent patterns of allusion like this as "rhythm." Badly done, he feels, rhythm "hardens into a symbol."³⁷ The distinction is however hard to maintain, in practice

³⁴ See "The Two Meanings of Symbolism: A Grammatical Exercise," in *Hateful Contraries*, William K. Wimsatt, Jr. (U. of Kentucky Press, 1965), pp. 58-67.

³⁵ Swift, in *A Tale of a Tub*, exploits for satirical purposes the disparity between traditional religious meanings of the seamless robe of Christianity and the absurdities to which even symbolic robes can be subjected in the name of high fashion and low vanity.

³⁶ *Pamela's* critics not infrequently single out passages concerned with Pamela's clothes for special notice, often as examples of Richardson's 'minuteness' or use of detail: e.g., *Critical Remarks on Sir Charles Grandison, Clarissa, & Pamela* (1754) (Augustan Reprint Society Publication No. 21, Los Angeles, 1950), p. 22; Hazlitt, "Lectures on the English Comic Writers," in *Works*, ed. P. P. Howe, 21 vols., VI (London, 1931), pp. 118-19; Austin Dobson, *Samuel Richardson* (New York and London, 1902), p. 37; David Daiches, *Literary Essays* (London, 1956), pp. 38-9; A. D. McKillop, *The Early Masters of English Fiction* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1956), pp. 59 and 60; Douglas Brooks, "Richardson's *Pamela* and Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*," *Essays in Criticism*, XVII (1967), pp. 159-60; Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley, 1957), pp. 153, 162.

³⁷ *Aspects of the Novel* (New York, 1927), p. 239. E. K. Brown in *Rhythm in the Novel* (U. of Toronto, 1950), pp. 46-51, expands and illustrates Forster's remarks usefully.

as well as in theory: the unobtrusive artifice with which Forster in *Howard's End* manipulates wisps and fields of hay cannot wholly divest them of symbolic overtones. It is precisely this artifice that Pamela's clothes lack. Figurative patterns can, however, be exploited even more unobtrusively, as in the commercial metaphors which govern the language of ordinary statement in Jane Austen.³⁸ What distinguishes the behavior of clothing in *Pamela* from similar imagery elsewhere, and from ordinary clothes-consciousness,³⁹ is its eloquence as a series of signs and its functional potency in the plot or action of the novel.

We can gain further perspective on the problem at issue by looking at what wearing apparel does in Richardson's other novels. In general, it seems to loom large only when he is dealing with sex or social class; hence it is far more important in *Clarissa* than in *Grandison*, but in neither book does it occupy center stage as it seems to in *Pamela*. Clarissa's clothes are the outworks of the defense of her virtue. She vexes Lovelace by being "dressed for the day, before she appears even to her servant,"⁴⁰ and when, by manufacturing a terrific commotion about a pre-arranged fire, he catches her more than half-undressed, she is hard-pressed indeed, in the most erotic-pathetic scene in the novel.⁴¹ Once raped, she refuses to take off her clothes again in Mrs. Sinclair's house, nor will she disrobe during her stay at the house of detention.⁴²

Garments of various kinds play more than a casual role in the plot of *Clarissa*, and in Lovelace's plots. When our well-bred heroine has been lured outside the walls of her father's estate, she is embarrassed by her lack of suitable clothes, and humiliated by the protracted negotiations she must engage in to retrieve them.⁴³ Having escaped from the brothel, she sells her clothes to get money to subsist, and later to pay the doctor, an act which badly hurts her family's pride when they are informed of it.⁴⁴

³⁸ Mark Schorer, "Fiction and the 'Analogical Matrix,'" *Kenyon Review* XI (1949), pp. 540-44.

³⁹ Natural, in fact almost inevitable, in stories about girls: e. g., *Moll Flanders*, pp. 7, 9, 13, 14, 24, 121 (Everyman Library ed.); *Evelina* (Norton Library, 1965), pp. 15, 16, 17, 18, 27.

⁴⁰ IV, 46.

⁴¹ IV, 389 ff.

⁴² V, 357, VI, 278.

⁴³ III, 4, 8, 9, 17, 19, 43, 46, 51, 52, 57, 62, 99, 125, 258, 282-3, 290, 306, 382.

⁴⁴ VI, 334, 437, VIII, 129.

One of the most interesting of Lovelace's talents is his skill in disguise: he is by his own boast a "master of metamorphoses,"⁴⁵ and doles out costumes to his servants also, to implement more complicated intrigues.⁴⁶ Here, clothes are the instrument of Lovelace's deceitfulness and fraudulence (but the acrobatics they perform have a melodramatic cast; the false surfaces presented to Clarissa are merely false, and there is no meaningful depth behind them as there is behind the various costumes in *Pamela*).

Clothes in *Clarissa* are both more diversified and more conventional than in the earlier novel, used as they generally are for the expression and evaluation of character. Thus, Clarissa is distinguished by effortless sartorial elegance; she sets the fashion unawares.⁴⁷ Lovelace dresses very well when not in disguise, and is hypersensitive to what outward garb can do for a man, or a woman.⁴⁸ Fops and whores overdress, but their deshabelle is proportionately slovenly and disgusting.⁴⁹ Hickman, though not technically a fop, is "as starched as his Ruffles," and very conservatively outfitted.⁵⁰ Clarissa's portrait is drawn formally by Belford on two occasions; she is dressed in "virgin white" for both, under arrest and on her death-bed. The drapery of both pictures, which fall into roughly the same category of figure as Yorick's caged starling, is emblematic not symbolic; it helps to register with the reader Clarissa's new identity as martyr not belle.⁵¹

In each of these instances, clothing gives us a reliable signal for a moral evaluation which is frequently but not necessarily related to social class. It does pretty much the same in *The History of Sir Charles Grandison*: neither Harriet nor any one else here reaches even the initial stages of the protracted striptease of the first few hundred pages of *Pamela*; no one loses caste like Clarissa or gains it like Pamela. Miss Byron thrusts one trembling toe into the swirling currents of fashionable fun in London—a masquerade ball!—and blushes forever after; it is her costume as "Arcadian Princess" ("A kind of waistcoat of blue

⁴⁵ III, 52, 154, 333, V, 74.

⁴⁶ IV, 270, 299; V, 298, 307; VI, 9.

⁴⁷ IV, 78; VII, 101; VIII, 218, 228, 229.

⁴⁸ I, 277; III, 27-8, 159; VI, 394-5, 452.

⁴⁹ III, 367; IV, 47; VIII, 286, 55-6.

⁵⁰ VI, 357, 358.

⁵¹ VI, 298; VII, 449-50. An emblem is of course a conventional, static, and arbitrary kind of symbol often rooted in an ideology of some sort.

satten trimmed with silver Point d'Espagne, the skirts edged with silver fringe," designed to compliment her "shape") which subsequently reminds her of the frivolity of the affair, since it is all she has of her own to wear while recuperating at the house of her rescuer.⁵² Apart from this incident, clothes don't do anything in *Grandison*. Sir Charles dresses richly but not gaudily;⁵³ Harriet's wedding dress is self-consciously simple ("We want not glare: We are *known* to be able to afford rich dresses").⁵⁴ All this is quite 'normal,' but it helps us to recognise both the startling originality of *Pamela* and the important differences between "Pamela's daughters," of whom Harriet Byron is one, and Pamela herself. They have in most cases already arrived, socially, and have been unsexed, so that clothes cannot mean as much to them as to Pamela.⁵⁵

The first part of *Pamela* was written quickly, without the benefit of careful revision, and in 1739 Richardson had no established body of generic conventions or models to guide him towards the "novel." *Pamela* is in this respect more naïve ('unsophisticated,' 'artless,' even 'primitive') than any but a very few other literary productions of the last three hundred years. A probable consequence of naïveté in this sense is aesthetic clumsiness, of which *Pamela* has been frequently accused: A. D. McKillop notices its "crudity," and calls it "a lucky hit."⁵⁶ The indictment is just, but it does not close the case: compared to *Clarissa*, *Pamela* is ungainly; compared to *Lindamira* (1702) or *Luck at Last* (1723), it is adroit and compelling. The elegant manner in which various narrative and thematic aspects of *Pamela* are linked by means of clothes, then, constitutes a good example of formal artistry in naïve fiction, and helps to explain why *Pamela* stood out from the crowd in 1740, why it is read with intense interest today.

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⁵² I, 172-3, 199, 200, 203, 255.

⁵³ I, 278, 352-3.

⁵⁴ V, 295.

⁵⁵ Clothes were at least superficially important in descriptions of the genteel heroine after 1740 because aside from face, hands, and a fraction of "neck," little else of her was permitted to be seen. See R. P. Utter and G. B. Needham, *Pamela's Daughters* (New York, 1936), pp. 49, 158-64, 175.

⁵⁶ *Samuel Richardson: Printer and Novelist* (Chapel Hill, 1936), pp. 92, 107. See also, among many others, Walter Allen, *The English Novel* (London, 1954), p. 43.