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Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the first paragraph of the paper.

One might say that Samuel Richardson's 18th century novel Pamela is essentially a love story that, like the chick lit of today, appeals mostly to a female audience. Contrary to the stereotype that women were the only ones who liked reading such works is the fact that males were also avid novelreaders. Admittedly, male readership is often a barely-trodden segment in the pathway of the study of novels - particularly novels such as Pamela, Frances Burney's Evelina, and Thomas Hardy's Tess of the D'Urbervilles. Considering Richardson's emphasis on virtue, submissiveness, and obedience, it's fairly straightforward to determine the messages that female readers are supposed to get from reading Pamela. The message intended for male readers, however, may be a bit more complicated. Young women know what they're supposed to get from Richardson's text, but male readers don't, which means that multiple messages can be acquired from reading Pamela from a male perspective

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Richardson's Pamela***
Maria Zahid

One might say that Samuel Richardson's 18th century novel *Pamela* is essentially a love story that, like the chick lit of today, appeals mostly to a female audience. Contrary to the stereotype that women were the only ones who liked reading such works is the fact that males were also avid novel-readers. Admittedly, male readership is often a barely-trodden segment in the pathway of the study of novels – particularly novels such as *Pamela*, Frances Burney's *Evelina*, and Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Considering Richardson's emphasis on virtue, submissiveness, and obedience, it's fairly straightforward to determine the messages that female readers are supposed to get from reading *Pamela*. The message intended for male readers, however, may be a bit more complicated. Young women know what they're supposed to get from Richardson's text, but male readers don't, which means that multiple messages can be acquired from reading *Pamela* from a male perspective.

One must first establish that *Pamela* isn't just a "girl's novel." In "Richardson's Characterization of Mr. B. and Double Purpose in *Pamela*," Gwendolyn B. Needham states that Richardson's "own masculinity has often been questioned" (433). Few question his masterful psychological depiction of young, faint-hearted Pamela. In fact, since the word "romance" had a "far more pejorative" meaning by the end of the 17th century, *Pamela* was first passed off as a work of non-fiction (McKeon 385). Early readers would have thought that they were reading a female's writing. As Needham puts it, Richardson is "a novelist whose power of psychological analysis is universally acknowledged but whose knowledge of his own sex is generally disparaged" (433). This ties into the idea that Richardson didn't know what he was doing and stumbled into *Pamela*, creating unified and inconsistent work. Contrary to such ideas, Needham argues that:

Richardson gives us a thorough and realistic characterization of Mr. B., in whose successful creation he demonstrates his knowledge of the male psyche and his powers of conscious artistry, both of which are effectively displayed in the author's careful integration of the villain-hero's consistent

psychological motivation with his protagonist's role in the plot. (435)

After all, when one considers that Mr. B.'s "importance to the plot, purpose, and total effect of the novel is obvious, one wonders why such casual treatment has been so long accorded him" by critics and scholars (436). Those evaluating *Pamela* may have largely ignored Mr. B., but Richardson certainly didn't skim over the fashioning of this pivotal character.

For example, in the preface, among the objectives Richardson lists are "to teach the Man of Fortune how to use it; the Man of Passion how to subdue it; and the Man of Intrigue, how, gracefully, and with Honour to himself, to reclaim" (3). Right after that he writes, "If to give practical Examples, worthy to be followed in the most critical and affecting Cases, by the modest Virgin, the chaste Bride, and the obliging Wife." Richardson references both characters – Mr. B. and Pamela. As Needham explains, "note that although the heroine-narrator gets her name in title lights, the villain-hero receives in the preface equal importance and space plus precedence in the listing" (440). It is evident that Richardson pays attention to both male and female characters and readers, and no one can fairly claim that male readers weren't supposed to read *Pamela* or that they didn't derive anything from reading it.

Needham suggests that the spotlight has remained too long on morality and virtue; in essence, "the fatal words *Virtue Rewarded* have served too often as either a lily-white standard or a red flag to the critics, who thereupon debate the utilitarian Puritan code of morality, neglecting the novel itself" (436). Robert A. Donovan echoes this sentiment in "The Problem of *Pamela*, or, *Virtue Unrewarded*," proposing to inspect the novel by shifting the "emphasis away from those moral questions which have too long monopolized discussion" (380). Clearly, taking a step away from moral elements and focusing on other factors can offer a new vantage point, a passageway, from which to explore this novel. Since it can be more difficult to ascertain a message about morality for males, no one can argue that Mr. B., with his sexual advances and less than kind treatment towards innocent Pamela, wouldn't easily serve as a role model creating distance from morality is helpful when examining the novel from a male reader's point of view.

Although a male reader might not finish the novel by looking up to and admiring Mr. B. in the same way that a female might idealize Pamela,

Needham makes it apparent that Mr. B. is a fully dimensional, lifelike creation that males will be able to relate to. She states that the epistolary form that Richardson uses "so rivets attention on the heroine-narrator that the hero's true characterization may escape the average reader" (436). Readers may forget that they're viewing Mr. B. through Pamela's eyes and thus perhaps glossing over his character. "He doesn't stop to consider," writes Needham, "that the adolescent narrator's reactions and interpretations may well have been exaggerated" (437). It's evident that Mr. B. isn't a flat character; it is just Pamela's writing that may be portraying him in such a way. One might wonder: doesn't this defeat the purpose of having a male character if readers, especially males, might not take the time to consider the true nature of Mr. B. as separate and perhaps different from what Pamela's writing depicts? Not so, says Needham. "The plot calls for a villain-hero who, to be plausible, must exhibit an involved motivation naturally produced by conflicting traits and impulses. The form requires the hero to be viewed through the eyes of Pamela, the character least able to see him objectively" (439). This is the only way to make the eventual marriage seem legitimate, and so the novel "must highlight in the first half his bad qualities, in the second half his better, but at the same time in each half give enough mixed qualities, enough shading, so that the 'villain' is gradually submerged in the hero." Thus the character of Mr. B. is a realistic one. Furthermore, Richardson wrote that "Pamela was entirely the Creature of my Fancy" but the character of Mr. B. was influenced by one of his real-life acquaintances (440). Based off of a real person and warped only through Pamela's perception, Mr. B. is a genuine, multifaceted character that males will feel connected to.

The mind of Pamela may unconsciously enlarge her significance and clout, Mr. B. is the one who has power and control over Pamela. In "Generic Transformation and Social Change: Rethinking the Rise of the Novel," Michael McKeon mentions category instability, the idea that young women are the center of novels because they are about to "become;" their lives have possibility whereas young men have fairly clear-cut, predetermined lives. Ironically, while it is Pamela's life that can take different directions (she could end up back home with her parents and work for much of her life, she could be doomed by rape and considered a "damaged good," or she could end up with Mr. B. and live happily ever after), it is Mr. B. who's in

charge. Needham explains that the novel depends "far more on the divided mind of the hero than that of the heroine" (447). Readers may subconsciously be lulled into feeling that it is Pamela's moral dilemma that they are reading about, but in truth it is Mr. B.'s predicament and his actions that determine everything. Needham asserts that "Pamela, despite ambivalence, temptations, doubt, despair, never wavers in her heart-and-soul belief in the righteousness of defending her virtue, and therein lies her strength; her suspense is due to Mr. B.'s indecision, not to her own" (447). This is why young women who read the novel can understand that if they too guard their virginity and remain modest, they will be rewarded, perhaps with marriage to a man above their social class. Pamela's joy highlights this as she tells her parents that their "happy, happy, thrice happy *Pamela*, at last, marry'd; and to who?— Why, to her beloved, gracious Master! The Lord of her Wishes!" (Richardson 345). It is the hero, not the heroine, who decides Pamela's fate. Acknowledging Mr. B.'s active role and participation in the plot indicates that male readers were also involved with and engrossed by *Pamela*.

Consequently, when males read *Pamela*, ideas of male dominance are strengthened. John A. Dussinger discusses the concepts of male authority in "Love and Consanguinity in Richardson's Novels." Dussinger shows that:

Mr. B.'s invoking his bride's parents to alleviate sexual guilt after the nuptial defloration introduced the motif of surrogate family relationships, reverting here to the father's paternal authority to ease the transition to the husband's (518).

Most everyone would agree that *Pamela* reinforces gender stereotypes and gender relations. Pamela is the obedient, bashful, timid young girl while Mr. B. is the powerful, dominating man. It's very logical to assume that male readers will recognize and idealize Mr. B.'s personality; it's not a new, radical presentation. They will identify with the handing down of male authority since they will experience it with their future wives and daughters.

Even though males were regarded as superior to females, those in the upper class were still above those in the lower class. For male readers who aren't rich, the wealthy Mr. B. might not be as relatable as poor Pamela. Donovan argues that Pamela's goal in the early part of the book is either attracting Mr. B. or preserving her chastity. If her objective "is to maintain and consolidate her social

status, then to withdraw would be a confession of defeat; it would not only annihilate everything she has gained . . . it would deprive her of her very class identity" (Donovan 386). He contends that this is why Pamela stays in the house despite the grave fear of losing her virginity. This idea is certainly supported by the text. For instance, when Pamela mentions Mr. B.'s ill treatment of her and equates it to how one would be treated after robbing another, Mr. B. replies that she has robbed him. Pamela is terrified at this statement, wondering "what will this come to at last, if poor *Pamela* is thought a Thief! Then I thought, in an Instant, how I should shew my Face to my honest poor Parents, if I was but suspected" (Richardson 58). She must not go to her parents' house until she has established and proven her honor. McKeon also supports this idea. "For progressive ideology," he explains, "elevated birth is an arbitrary accident which should not be taken to signify worth. . . . *Real* honor, honor of *character*, attaches to personal virtue" (391). Though Pamela was a maid to Mr. B.'s mother, her adherence to piety elevates her and makes her, on some level, his equal or higher – and this is why he is able to marry her. As a genre, the novel "raised anxious questions about reference and identity, female sexuality and class mobility, even though the answers to these questions cannot be predict mechanically" (Turner 91). Unchained to the moral implications of *Pamela*, male readers are more likely to contemplate the social insinuations of the work.

Similarly, for males who are closer to Pamela's social status than Mr. B.'s, *Pamela* could be seen as a source of hope and buoyancy; maybe they too could climb the social ladder. Whereas masculinity was the focus of the novel for well-off males, social mobility also factors into manly duties for those of humbler means. After all, the underprivileged can hope that their goodness might reap some rewards in this lifetime, but even if the rare marriage between a poor male and an affluent female occurs, the man still returns to his role of protecting and caring for the woman. As Donovan puts it:

We have become so used to reading this novel exclusively as a moral fable or exemplum that it is easy to miss the fact that its appeal is grounded not so much in the triumph of modest virtue as in the successful application of social formulas to a practical problem. (394)

The undercurrent of attraction between Mr. B. and Pamela flows through the novel subtly until the

two are able to come together in marriage. At the end of the novel, Richardson declares that "the *Rich*, and those who are *exalted* from a *low* to a *high* Estate" should learn that "they should dispense to all within their Reach, the Blessings [wealth] has heaped upon them" (502). Likewise, Richardson openly states that children should feel no disgrace "at all to be poor." Could his stance be any clearer? While male readers may concentrate less on the moral aspects of *Pamela*, the societal implications will be harder to ignore as Richardson raises everyone to a level playing-field.

If overthrowing social conventions doesn't draw in male readers, then sex will. The descriptions of Mr. B. spying on, kissing, and touching Pamela will serve to arouse males. As James Grantham Turner explains in "Novel Panic: Picture and Performance in the Reception of Richardson's *Pamela*," "only the elderly could read that scene without wishing to assume the master's privileged (and self-evidently erotic) viewing position" (Turner 79). For a novel that so hinges on the idea of chastity, it's easy to understand why such thoughts would enter the minds of readers.

Heightening this intensity is the obvious cat-and-mouse game between Pamela and Mr. B. Admittedly, early readers of Richardson's novel may not have anticipated what has now been established as the cliché love story formula (in which the audience knows from the start that two characters will end up together) that is a mainstay of novels, movies, and TV shows. However, as Turner asserts, since males later "automatically read novels as instruction manuals in sexual assault" they would read *Pamela* and "identify with B. only as rampant male and boast that they would have scored in the same position" (80). While this is a somewhat shallow and stereotypical claim, there's no doubt that readers would have been stimulated by the actions depicted in Richardson's novel. Moreover, Turner contends that Richardson was fully aware of what he was doing:

He himself recognizes that readers *do* things with texts rather than passively consuming them, and admits that he bears this interaction in mind as he composes. When Richardson justifies the detail of his own 'warm' scenes, he assumes . . . that male and male-identified readers will project themselves into the 'room' created by the scene and then rewrite it more pornographically. (82)

This is important as it further demonstrates Richardson's careful construction of the text. Comparing the instructive purpose of the work for females to the apparent design of an arena of fantasy and diversion for males makes it abundantly clear that, unlike female readers, males were to ascertain different (and multiple) messages from *Pamela*.

While female readers of *Pamela* know what they are to obtain from reading Richardson's novel, male readers are presented with no clear ethical message. As a result, they can ascertain several different uses from the work. There is a bolstering of traditional values where males – fathers and husbands – exercise power over females. For those belonging to the lower classes, there is the innovative idea that social classes don't have to be as rigid as they might be. Males are also provided a freer, less restricted form of entertainment and diversion, for they are far less bound to the restrictions that abound in piety than their female counterparts.

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