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Sham Marriages and Proper Plots: Henry Fielding's *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews*

Anaclara Castro-Santana 

This essay explores Henry Fielding's development of the marriage plot in Shamela (1741) and Joseph Andrews (1742). Surveying theatrical echoes in these works, which are particularly apparent in their marriage plots, I make the case that Fielding's first two novels are clearly indebted to his former career as a dramatist in the London stage of the late 1720s and early 1730s. I argue that, in writing Shamela and Joseph Andrews, Fielding was responding to Samuel Richardson's Pamela in a way that corresponded to how his plays were reactions to other popular theatrical entertainments of his time. This complicates the conventional critical view that it was Richardson's first novel, with its outstanding popularity, which drove Fielding to propose a radically opposite model for fiction writing.

Four years after the Licensing Act of 1737 deprived Henry Fielding, the leading English playwright of his time, of his livelihood—which had led him to pursue a career in the law, as well as some ventures in journalism—he returned to the spotlight of controversy with his publication of *An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews* (2 April 1741).¹ This hilarious epistolary narrative of a fraudulently virtuous servant maid who tricks her employer into marriage by manipulating his lust is famous as the first retaliation in print to Samuel Richardson's *Pamela; or Virtue Rewarded* (7 November 1740). More specifically, Fielding's parody was a response to the second edition of *Pamela* (14 February 1741) with Richardson's augmented prefatory encomia, which included a letter by Aaron Hill recommending the book as “the *Soul of Religion*”.²

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¹For a thorough exploration of Fielding's theatrical career see Hume and Rivero. For a detailed biographical account see Battestin and Battestin.

²Richardson, Appendix I, “To the Editor of *Pamela*”, 506.

That Richardson's blatant self-promotion, along with the public craze for the novel, provoked Fielding's antipathy is standard critical opinion.³ The conventional story follows that, enraged by the way influential writers and even clergymen advocated *Pamela* as a major source of moral instruction, the former playwright responded first with a direct parody in *Shamela*, and then with an alternative version of fiction writing in *Joseph Andrews*, where the title character is facetiously introduced as the brother of Richardson's heroine. While these are all valid points, far too much attention has been devoted to studying Fielding's early prose fiction in relation to Richardson's. This tends to obscure the fact that *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews* were written by an already famous author who, for the past several years, had been earning his keep by satirizing his rivals and parodying their works. Many of Fielding's plays, moreover, were marriage comedies orbiting around convoluted courtships and troublesome married lives, to a certain extent like *Pamela*, and very much like *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews*. This essay, therefore, makes the case that Fielding's first two novels responded to Richardson's *Pamela* in a similar way as his plays were reactions to other popular theatrical entertainments of his time. This complicates the ostensibly parodic relationship between *Pamela* and *Shamela*, and provides novel insights about the structure and themes of Fielding's second work of prose fiction.⁴

The *Pamela* Phenomenon, or the New "Pleasure of the Town"

The unprecedented popularity of Richardson's first novel, which modern critics have variously labelled as a "media event",⁵ a "craze",⁶ a "vogue"⁷ and a "controversy",⁸ was an extraordinary cultural phenomenon that doubtlessly had an impact on Fielding, a writer always attentive to current events, and usually at the forefront of literary gossip. His *Shamela* was the first in a long list of prose adaptations, poems, plays, illustrations and translations, variously attacking and commending *Pamela*. Other notable examples that followed Fielding's *Shamela* include *Pamela Censured* (25 April 1741), a fan representing scenes from *Pamela* (advertised on 28 April), John Kelly's *Pamela's Conduct in High Life* (28 May), Eliza Haywood's *Anti-Pamela* (16 June), James Parry's *True Anti-Pamela* (27 June), George Bennett's *Pamela Versified* (24 July), the first authorized French translation (23 October), Henry Giffard's *Pamela, A Comedy* (first performed on 9 November), Charles Povey's *The Virgin in Eden* (23

³For useful discussions of Fielding's response to the second edition of *Pamela* see Keymer and Sabor, *The Pamela Controversy*, xxxix; Keymer and Sabor, *Pamela in the Marketplace*, 31–2.

⁴It has sometimes been suggested that *Jonathan Wild* (published in *Miscellanies* 1743) was in fact Fielding's first attempt at prose fiction writing, which he chose not to publish until the Walpole regime was effectively over. See Battestin and Battestin, 280–2; McKeon, 383. The Wesleyan editors of Fielding's *Miscellanies*, however, persuasively refute this hypothesis. See Goldgar, xxxii–xxxviii.

⁵Warner, chapter five, "The *Pamela* Media Event", 176–230.

⁶Ingrassia, 7.

⁷Eaves and Kimpbel, Chapter VII, "The *Pamela* Vogue and *Pamela* Part II", 119–54; Gooding, 109–30.

⁸Keymer and Sabor, *The Pamela Controversy*.

November), Richardson's own sequel *Pamela in Her Exalted Condition* (7 December) and Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* (22 February 1742). The *Pamela* rage did not abate quickly. As Thomas Keymer and Peter Sabor note, by 1750 "*Pamela* was everywhere and still selling", and as late as the 1790s, the *Pamela* debate was still alive in France in the aftermath of the Revolution, with stage adaptations that played on the ambiguity of a text that could be invoked both for the subversion and preservation of class hierarchies.⁹

As a writer who had recently experienced the devastating effects of censorship on the stage, Fielding must have been outraged that a novel like *Pamela*—which had several potentially erotic passages—could be deemed so worthy of encomium, while plays had to be verbally and situationally tame to be judged fit for performance.¹⁰ That a morally objectionable novel written by an uneducated printer should receive such lavish praise must have seemed to Fielding a proof of the decadence of the cultural standards of modern society. This, however, was not an isolated example of popular acclaim for works that did not conform to the author's standards of artistic merit. From Fielding's perspective, the widespread acclaim for Richardson's novel was probably comparable to the craze of theatrical audiences for the pantomimes of John Rich—which he parodied in plays such as *Tumble Down Dick* (1736)—or the much-admired Italian operas he mocked in *The Welsh Opera* (1731), *Eurydice; or the Devil Henpecked* (1736) and *The Historical Register for the Year 1736* (1737).

At a personal level, moreover, the storyline of *Pamela* was particularly irksome to Fielding at that time, since a month earlier his prodigal father had married one of his servants, which rendered the whole family an object of mockery for malicious scandalmongers.¹¹ His sneers at the foolish Squire Booby in *Shamela* may have been motivated, at least to an extent, by his father's latest indiscretion. It is hardly surprising, then, that Fielding felt the need to state his objections to *Pamela* in print. On the other hand, given that the theatre was no longer an option for a playwright of scandalous reputation like himself, pragmatic as he was, and in serious financial trouble, the commercial success of *Pamela* offered a convenient venture upon which Fielding could capitalize.¹² This he did by means of parody.

Fielding's involvement in the *Pamela* controversy, however, was not an isolated event. I believe it is virtually analogous to his participation in what has been described as "the theatrical renaissance of the 1730s".¹³ As Peter Lewis, Robert Hume and Albert Rivero point out, the perceived stagnation of the early eighteenth-century London stage, contrasted with the unprecedented popularity of operas, musical numbers

⁹Keymer and Sabor, *Pamela in the Marketplace*, 49 and 210–11.

¹⁰For a detailed account of censorial practices on the London stage in the aftermath of the Licensing Act of 1737 see Kinservik, esp. chapter 3.

¹¹On this episode of Fielding's life see Battestin and Battestin, 300–1.

¹²According to Fielding's biographers, he wrote *Shamela* from a sponging house where he was confined for a fortnight while settling a suit for debt. *Ibid.*, 301–8.

¹³Hunter, *Occasional Form*, 50.

and pantomimes, prompted Fielding to write experimental burlesques and parodies, which he interspersed with his own alternative models of more serious comedy.¹⁴ Similarly, in *Shamela* Fielding saw fit to tap into the *Pamela* craze, and the vogue of prose writing that derived from it, to condense a collection of complaints against what he considered as erroneous elements of his contemporary society. As we will see later in this paper, just as in his time as playwright, Fielding's parodic exercise was eventually followed by his own version of the literary mode he had adopted.

That parody and burlesque could bring him fame and money was a lesson Fielding learned first-hand in his days as a dramatist, when he made it his business to look after the intellectual and moral wellbeing of audiences. It was a good business indeed, for he found he could simultaneously ridicule, profit from and rise above debased cultural manifestations by means of parody. As Luckless, Fielding's alter ego in his first theatrical hit *The Author's Farce* (1730), asked rhetorically: "who would not rather Eat by his Nonsense, than Starve by his Wit?".¹⁵ It was in this play that Fielding first succeeded in cashing in from his mockery of fashionable forms of amusement. He did this by means of a human puppet show introduced abruptly in the second act, which he called "The Pleasures of the Town". The "pleasures" were what Fielding and other social commentators of the day considered artistically inane and morally dubious forms of entertainment, whose authors and promoters sacrificed quality to make a profit, pandering to and perpetuating the bad taste of audiences. They were the formulaic sentimental comedies and tragedies that the managers of the patented theatres staged over and over again, the dancing numbers they introduced between performances, operas in foreign languages, nonsensical pantomimes, the wordy sermons of pompous clergymen, amatory novels charged with sexual innuendo, public lotteries and auctions. After the box-office success of *The Author's Farce* with its "Pleasures of the Town", Fielding continued to ridicule these forms of popular entertainment in several other plays, including *The Tragedy of Tragedies* (1731), *The Lottery* (1732), *Pasquin* (1736), *Tumble-Down Dick* (1736), *Eurydice* (1736), *The Historical Register for the Year 1736* (1737) and *Eurydice Hiss'd* (1737). In 1741, *Shamela* would do for Fielding what his satirical plays had done for him before the Licensing Act: furnish his pockets, while helping to position him as a guardian of cultural and moral standards.

Richardson's *Pamela* was, in many respects, very much akin to the fashionable diversions that Fielding ostensibly condemned, but which also clearly excited a compulsive fascination. A telling example can be found in a number of *The Gentleman's Magazine* from 1741, where Edward Cave promoted Richardson's novel assuring his readers that it was "as great a Sign of Want of Curiosity not to have read *Pamela* as not to have seen the French and Italian Dancers".¹⁶ As Cave's comment

¹⁴See Lewis; Hume; Rivero.

¹⁵Fielding, *Plays*, Vol. I, 3.1.256. Hereafter abbreviated as *Plays* I and cited parenthetically within the text.

¹⁶"Advertisement", *The Gentleman's Magazine*.

implied, part of the appeal of reading *Pamela* was seeing what the fuss was all about. Stimulating the “curiosity” of audiences was not the only feature *Pamela* had in common with spectacles of this kind. As Fielding’s *Shamela* and other anti-Pamelist tracts such as *Pamela Censured* evidenced, some scenes in Richardson’s novel were heavily charged with sexual overtones. In this sense, *Pamela* recalled the passion-inflaming fictions of earlier writers, such as Eliza Haywood, whom Fielding had rendered as “Mrs. Novel” in his “Pleasures of the Town”. At the same time, Pamela’s sanctimonious insistence on adhering to strict religious principles hinted at a link with Methodism, a religious movement that Fielding deeply mistrusted, and which, on account of its rapid growth, he must have interpreted as yet another pleasure of the town.¹⁷

As critics have often noted, Fielding took *Pamela* to be “an index of the woeful credulity of the times”,¹⁸ which he felt obliged to correct by exposing the intimate link he saw between all forms of degeneration: cultural, spiritual and political.¹⁹ This is evidenced in his artful merging of Colley Cibber and Conyers Middleton’s name into “Conny Keyber”, the alleged author of *Shamela*, as well as his dedication of the text to “Miss Fanny”.²⁰ Later in the story *Shamela*’s religiosity is shown to be grounded upon Parson Williams’s Methodists teachings, which provide her with a convenient justification for her morally reprehensible actions. In combination with the novel’s paratexts, this worked to suggest that Methodist leaders, such as the celebrated George Whitefield, were representatives of spiritual decadence, just like Cibber was a representative of bad literary taste and Lord Hervey of debased politics and sexual mores. As in “The Pleasures of the Town”, Fielding’s inclusion of seemingly unrelated satirical targets in *Shamela* implied that, deep inside, all of them were virtually interchangeable, and that their extraordinary popularity was symptomatic of the hazard they posed to society.

To Fielding, *Pamela* itself was probably a “pleasure of the town”. For one, the marketing strategies of Richardson, which Keymer and Sabor aptly gloss in *Pamela in the Marketplace*, certainly recalled Colley Cibber’s entrepreneurial management of Drury Lane in the 1720s and early 1730s. Moreover, in Fielding’s eyes, both Cibber and Richardson were flamboyant social upstarts carelessly engaging in the commodification of culture. From this perspective, the simultaneous attack on Richardson, Cibber, Middleton, Hervey and George Whitefield in *Shamela* paralleled the implication in *The Author’s Farce* that all the silly, supercilious and ideologically dangerous

¹⁷On the expansion of the Methodist movement at mid-century see Hempton, *Methodism and Politics*; Hempton, *Religion and Political Culture*; Mack; Anderson, *Imagining Methodism*.

¹⁸Bell, 65.

¹⁹Rothstein, 381–402; Amory, 239–53.

²⁰Conyers Middleton (1683–1750) had recently dedicated his major work, *Life of Cicero* (1741) to Lord Hervey (1696–1743), a prominent aristocrat favoured by Robert Walpole, whose ambiguous political loyalties and sexuality rendered him a favourite satirical target for authors like Pope and Fielding. Hervey’s satirical appellation from his enemies was “Miss Fanny”.

popular amusements attracted each other and should be discarded together.²¹ Significantly *Shamela's* little library, described halfway through the story, consists of:

*A full Answer to a plain and true Account, &c. The Whole Duty of Man, with only the Duty to one's Neighbour, torn out. The Third volume of the Atlantis. Venus in the Cloyster: Or, the Nun in her Smock. God's Dealings with Mr. Whitefield. Orfus [sic] and Eurydice. Some Sermon-Books; and two or three Plays, with their Titles, and Part of the first Act torn off.*²²

The protagonist's readings—which range from a response to a controversial piece of theology,²³ a respectable conduct book with a crucial passage missing, a couple of erotic novels, a Methodist spiritual biography, one of the pantomimes Fielding hated the most, scattered sermons and plays with titles and beginnings violently removed—signal not only her bad taste and utter contempt for literature and morality, but also her undiscerning consumerism of fashionable cultural products, that is, her mindless indulgence in the pleasures of the town. Evidently, many of the concerns that fuelled Fielding's theatrical experiments were transposed to prose fiction when he set out to write *Shamela*.

Theatrical Echoes and the Sham-Marriage Plot of *Shamela*

At the turn of the 1740s, novel writing offered itself as an attractive prospect, particularly for Fielding. After the Licensing Act of 1737, the heavily censored stage was of little appeal for an outspoken and frequently confrontational author like himself. Prose fiction, on the other hand, was a freer medium. Until *Pamela*, however, it was not a very prestigious vehicle for exerting the type of moral and aesthetic instruction of which Fielding was so fond. Although novel writing had been a lucrative venture long before Richardson—as evidenced by the numerous reprints of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Moll Flanders* (1722), or Eliza Haywood's amorous novels of the 1720s²⁴—it was around mid-century that the novel as a genre started to develop into a more legitimate way for writers to earn a living.²⁵

Fielding was an ambitious writer, whose expectations of fame and money had been thwarted abruptly in 1737, and who, in 1741, had not yet recovered from that blow. The fact that Richardson's first novel received such widespread acclamation as a

²¹Some critics have argued that Fielding was not aware that Richardson was the author of *Pamela*, and that he may have even attributed it to Colley Cibber. See Battestin and Battestin, 304; Bell, 72. Keymer and Sabor, however, persuasively challenge this in *The Pamela Controversy*, Vol. 1, liii.

²²Fielding, *The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon*, 181. Subsequent quotations from *Shamela* come from this edition and are provided in brackets within the main text.

²³According to Ingrassia, *A full Answer to a plain and true Account, &c.* probably alludes to the many retorts to Benjamin Hoadley's *A Plain Account of the Nature and End of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper* (1735). See Ingrassia, *Anti-Pamela and Shamela*, note 2, 260.

²⁴For a perspective on the popularity of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders* see Scanlon. For a thorough discussion of early-eighteenth-century fiction see Richetti, *Popular Fiction before Richardson*.

²⁵See Warner and, more recently, Stewart.

didactic work suggested that fiction could be a promising medium for a writer in search of fame, money and respectability. Clearly, Richardson's ingenious concoction of romance and high-minded morality had hit the mark as what the mid-century reading public wanted. Fielding saw the potential inherent in a novel of that kind for influencing the morals and literary standards of his time, as he had done from the stage.

More important, perhaps, was the fact that *Pamela* comprised a narrative that was particularly appealing for Fielding, a storyline with which he had familiarized himself and experimented for almost a decade: the courtship plot. This was a key thematic link between the theatre of his time and the novel, which Fielding saw and exploited immediately. The promise of at least one happy marriage was the expected ending of stage comedies in Fielding's day. Although weddings had signalled the finale of plays in different historic periods, by the early eighteenth century the marriage ending had become something of a tacit rule for comic plays.²⁶ This was so pervasive an attribute of comedies that authors commented upon it for satirical purposes. Mr Lyric, a character in George Farquhar's *Love and a Bottle* (1698), for instance, remarks that "as the Catastrophe of all Tragedies is Death, so the end of Comedies is Marriage".²⁷ Similarly, John Gay hinged the key incident of his *The What D'Ye Call It?* (1714) on the customariness of the comic finale, by having a character absurdly insist on performing a wedding on stage, because "what's a Play without a Marriage?", which in the end leads him to accept a match against which he had been resolutely set throughout the play.²⁸ Fielding had also mocked the commonplace of the marriage finale in his own plays. In the comedy rehearsed within *Pasquin*, for instance, when Fustian the tragedian demands to know "the Action of this play [...] the Fable, the Design?" Trapwit the comedian answers: "Oh! You ask who is to be married! Why, Sir, I have a Marriage; I hope you think I understand the Laws of Comedy better than to write without marrying somebody".²⁹ Similarly, *The Fathers* (published posthumously in 1778) closes with an ironic comment about "the strange events of the day" breaking "a constant rule, that comedies should end in a marriage" (*Plays* III, 5.5.617–18).

Despite his mockery of the marriage ending, Fielding resorted to this finale in fourteen of his dramatic pieces, including all of his regular five-act comedies.³⁰ In early plays such as *Love in Several Masques* (1728) and *The Temple Beau* (1730), he

²⁶On this see Anderson, *Female Playwrights*, especially 9–11.

²⁷Farquhar, 4.2.42.

²⁸Gay, 2.9.32–3.

²⁹Fielding, *Plays*, Vol. III, Act I, no scene number, p. 263. Hereafter abbreviated as *Plays* III and cited parenthetically within the main text.

³⁰*Love in Several Masques* (1728), *The Temple Beau* (1730), *The Author's Farce* (1730), *The Coffee-House Politician* (1730), *The Welsh Opera* (1731), *The Modern Husband* (1732), *The Old Debauchees* (1732), *The Mock Doctor* (1732), *The Miser* (1732), *The Intriguing Chambermaid* (1734), *Don Quixote in England* (1734), *An Old Man Taught Wisdom* (1735), *The Universal Gallant* (1735) and *The Wedding Day* (probably written in 1729, performed and published in 1743).

unquestioningly reproduced this convention. In later productions, such as *The Author's Farce*, he assumed a more sceptical stance, indulging his audiences in the marriage finale, while evidencing and questioning the artificiality of the well-endowed matches that were routinely presented as the only logical happy ending. Fielding's romantic farces invited the theatrical public to realize that, if closely considered, most of the ostensibly affectionate marriages of the sentimental comedies of his time were as much inspired by convenience as the mercenary matches they seemingly condemned. After ten years of working for the stage, Fielding was well versed in the conventions of marriage plots, and had developed his own preferences.

The plot of Richardson's *Pamela* fitted the former playwright like a glove. It was a novel orbiting around marriage, with a predictable finale. The central element of its plot, the "reward" alluded to in the complete title, was the marriage between the protagonist and her master, offered as the perfect happy ending. Richardson's text, however, did not exactly follow the conventional structure of theatrical courtship plots, as the narrative of the heroine's distresses was prolonged after the wedding for around one-third of the total length of the book, showing some instances of domestic conflict between the couple and the groom's family. The author of *Pamela* was, of course, not attempting to emulate a dramatic formula. In fact, it has been argued that Richardson's work of confined spaces and immersive reading was deliberately anti-theatrical,³¹ and that the author's "personal attitude to the stage was at best unenthusiastic".³² From Fielding's perspective, nonetheless, the romantic plot of Richardson's first novel must have suggested itself as a prose reformulation, or rather a perversion, of the theatrical convention with which he had worked for so many years. It was sufficiently close to what he knew and different enough as to allow him to speedily write a very efficient parody in *Shamela*.

Fielding drew attention to and ridiculed the courtship plot of *Pamela* in two significant ways. First, he cleverly transformed the name of the protagonist so that it was at once amusingly ironic and strongly reminiscent of the marriage episode in the original. Calling his protagonist "Shamela", Fielding not only implied that she was a trickster, but he also ingeniously turned around Pamela's fear about being deceived by a "sham-marriage". Memorably in Richardson's novel, just before Mr B's rapacious behaviour is finally transformed into sincere love for Pamela, the protagonist has an encounter with a character in disguise who informs her of the squire's plan to hire someone to impersonate a parson to perform a "sham-marriage", so that, believing herself to be actually married, she finally yields her virginity to him. The ever suffering Pamela is rightly outraged and frightened to hear about this "sham, wicked marriage", and from this point, until the very moment of her wedding, she is continuously mistrustful of Mr B's resolution to make her his wife.³³ The fact that the word "sham" is

³¹Warner, 192–203 and 224–6.

³²Keymer, "Shakespeare in the Novel", 126.

³³Richardson, 223–5 and 226.

used by Pamela more than a dozen times in the episodes immediately preceding the actual marriage must have resonated in Fielding's mind, suggesting an adroit pun.

Secondly, Fielding chose to omit the wedding ceremony in *Shamela* altogether. The deliberate omission of this episode, I believe, paradoxically highlights the relevance of the marriage plot, and what Fielding deemed Richardson's inept use of it. Claiming that the letter "which contained an Account of all the Proceedings previous to her marriage" is now "unhappily lost", Parson Oliver finishes the story of *Shamela* with another epistle that "seems to have been written about a Week after the Ceremony was perform'd" (183). From a practical point of view, this prolepsis saved Fielding time while allowing him to preserve the mockery. By skipping the wedding, moreover, the author of *Shamela* implied that, though ostensibly crucial, Christian matrimony was in fact irrelevant in works like *Pamela*. It was merely the formalization, the contract signing, in a commercial transaction. At the same time, by moving on directly to the domestic quarrels in *Shamela* Fielding suggested that *Pamela*—like earlier novels with amatory content such as Delarivière Manley's *New Atalantis* (1709), or Eliza Haywood's *Love in Excess* (1719), *Idalia* (1723) and *Fantomina* (1724)—did not follow the conventions of traditional courtship plots because their authors were merely interested in portraying romantic and domestic intrigues as means of amusement. Hence, by suppressing the details of the story that had gained *Pamela* its famous accolade, Fielding cunningly distorted its moral, and tried to dismiss the work as one among a host of disreputable romances.

By changing *Pamela* into *Shamela*, then, Fielding implied that both the protagonist and the original novel were a sham. Because form and content were intimately related for Fielding, and he was fascinated by double-entendre, the title of his novel probably played on the notion that there were two sham-marriage plots in the original work: a diegetic one—that is, the scheme Mr B devised to seduce Pamela without having to marry her—and a structural one, namely a storyline that did not comply with the traditional configuration of a comic plot orbiting around courtship and ending, neatly, in marriage. The word "sham" in *Shamela*, was a versatile metonymy that signified Pamela's latent duplicity, ironically obscuring the fact that it recalled her justified fear of deception; while foregrounding what Fielding regarded as the defective framework of the original novel. As the author fully subscribed to the notion that all forms of corruption were related, it was only logical that morally erroneous courtship plots were also structurally wrong. This is what he suggested as a farcical playwright, when he parodied what he saw as the artistic deficiencies of theatrical pieces that featured morally uncritical depictions of rich marriages as happy endings. *Pamela*, in Fielding's view, was just as flawed in its moral instruction as it was in its aesthetic design. Following the story very closely, making some minor alterations to key passages, Fielding laid bare what he considered to be the feeble scaffolding of the original text. He showed how easily the innocently virtuous protagonist could be transformed into a scheming seducer, completely reversing the moral of the story, or rather, disclosing what he believed were the hidden motivations of its author.

That Fielding drew heavily from his experience as spectator and author of marriage comedies when writing *Shamela* is evidenced in other aspects of this work as well. For instance, the idea that a woman with too strict a regard for her virtue is really a latent coquette—that coquettes and prudes are “Nusances [*sic*], just a-like; tho’ they seem very different: The first are always plaguing the Men; and the other are always abusing the Women”—was a theatrical cliché of the early eighteenth-century stage, which Fielding straightforwardly transposed into his first novel.³⁴ Characters like the buoyant Lady Townley and the prudish Lady Grace from Colley Cibber’s widely applauded *Provok’d Husband* (1728) cited above, provided much comic fuel to marriage plays. Well aware of its potential, Fielding also resorted to the prude–coquette dichotomy in his own comedies. In *The Temple Beau*, for example, he characterized Bellaria as the golden mean between the flirtatious Lady Lucy and the priggish Lady Gravely. In a song from that play, these feminine stereotypes are compared to politicians from opposite parties, neither to be trusted:

Like the Whig and the Tory,
Are Prude and Coquette;
From Love these seek Glory,
As those do from State.
No Prude or Coquette
My Vows shall attend,
No Tory I’ll get,
No Whig for a Friend (*Plays* I, 2.7.182).

The juxtaposition of hypocritical prudes and cynical coquettes with unreliable politicians clearly anticipates Fielding’s offer, in the title page of *Shamela*, of exposing “all the matchless Arts of that young Politician”.

Similarly, Fielding’s famous transformation of Pamela’s pious “virtue” into *Shamela*’s naughty and marketable “vartue”, which testifies to the close link he saw between moral and linguistic corruption, was another self-loan from the drama. A decade before *Pamela*, in the epilogue to the original version of *Rape Upon Rape* (1730), the playwright altered the spelling of that word for comic purposes, ridiculing the affected diction of his contemporaries, while calling attention to the pervasive but ultimately vacuous use of high-minded terms:

Our modern Beaus in Vigour are so hearty,
And modern Dames so very full of Vartue,
So scarce immodest Women, Men so urging,
A Rape’s almost as common as a—— Virgin.³⁵

³⁴Cibber, 3.1.p.42.

³⁵Fielding, *Rape upon Rape*, 4.

Fielding's *Shamela* was clearly fuelled by a number of theatrical anxieties, for which the *Pamela* phenomenon provided a timely igniting spark.³⁶ Above all, its matrimonial theme offered the former playwright an apposite opportunity to return to his first literary passion while looking forward to what would be remembered as his most successful venture: novel writing.

The (Proper) Marriage (Plot) of *Joseph Andrews*

Fielding's role in shaping the marriage plot of the eighteenth-century English novel is an important subject that has received surprisingly little attention.³⁷ Even less has been written on the influence that Fielding's nine-year career as a dramatist had on his development of the courtship plot that characterizes his two most famous novels, *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. That the writer of *Joseph Andrews* was a man of the theatre, however, is hinted at throughout this text, and more conspicuously so, as I will show next, in its marriage plot.

I want to start by looking at the preface to *Joseph Andrews*, where Fielding famously endeavoured to define his work as a new type of writing that was, paradoxically, modelled on recognizable literary patterns and classical conventions.³⁸ The preface begins with a disquisition on the generic affiliations of the text:

As it is possible the mere *English Reader* may have a different Idea of Romance with the Author of these little Volumes; and may consequently expect a kind of Entertainment, not to be found, nor which was even intended, in the following Pages; it may not be improper to premise a few Words concerning this kind of Writing, which I do not remember to have seen hitherto attempted in our Language. The EPIC as well as the DRAMA is divided into Tragedy and Comedy. *Homer*, who was the Father of this Species of Poetry, gave us a Pattern for both of these, tho' that of the latter kind is entirely lost; which *Aristotle* tells us, bore the same relation to Comedy which his *Iliad* bears to Tragedy.³⁹

There is little further commentary on this respect, for Fielding moves on to offer a dissertation on the difference between burlesque mode and burlesque diction, and a definition of the ridiculous. However, the implicit argument of this paragraph—one

³⁶Self-borrowings of this kind abound in *Shamela*. See, for instance the bawdy connotations of "etcetera" that Fielding uses in *The Coffee-House Politician* (*Plays* I, 1.2.432), which he uses again in *Shamela* mocking Richardson's incautious use of the term in his first preface to *Pamela*.

³⁷One recent exception to this neglect is O'Connell, 383–402, who examines the religious and political discrepancies between Richardson and Fielding as determining factors in their development of two contrasting models of marriage novels. However, partly because the main focus of her article is *Pamela*, and partly because her article relies excessively on the conventional Richardson–Fielding dichotomy, crucial aspects of Fielding's contributions to the marriage plot as well as of his motivations are overlooked.

³⁸For an illuminating discussion of the tensions between originality and familiarity upon which Fielding's "new species of writing" was founded see Hunter, *Before Novels*, 18–22.

³⁹Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, Preface, 3. References to this novel come from this edition and are hereafter included parenthetically in the text.

which has consistently been overlooked—is that in the absence of an epic model for comedy, drama would supply a chief generic foundation for his “comic Epic-poem in Prose” (4). As Fielding sought to elevate the cultural status of prose fiction—while also being caught in the paradoxical reverence for the classics and an enthusiasm for novelty characteristic of his time—his ostensible sources should be respectable and familiar, but also new and exciting. From this point of view, the established conventions of comic theatre suggested a suitable compromise. By embedding a number of dramatic formulas into the novel he could seek to reaffirm and renew the tradition.

Fielding's quest for respectability and originality helps us to understand his ostensible detachment from “those voluminous Works commonly called *Romances*, namely, *Celia*, *Cleopatra*, *Astrea*, *Cassandra*, the *Grand Cyrus*, and innumerable others which contain, as I apprehend, very little Instruction or Entertainment” (4), which were usually cast off as silly diversions for well-meaning but amateurish women, and which *Joseph Andrews* could very well resemble on account of its form and subject matter.⁴⁰ Midway through the novel, a similar claim is repeated. While he concedes that “the Authors of immense romances, or the modern Novel and *Atalantis* writers” are commendable in their exercise of imagination and as an “Example of the wonderful Extent of human Genius”, Fielding carefully indicates that his work is of an entirely different kind (187). With a standard eighteenth-century patronizing attitude, the narrator groups together and then discards French romances, modern novels and Delarivière Manley's famous collection of politically scandalous stories of seduction and lust, ironically effacing the distinctions that some of their authors strived to make.⁴¹ Although their titles are not directly referenced, Fielding's allusion to the “modern Novel” implicitly invokes the works of Eliza Haywood, who was the most prolific writer of amorous novels in the 1720s and 1730s, and probably those of Penelope Aubin and Mary Davys, who were also very popular in their time. Significantly for the purposes of my argument, although such works sometimes concluded with one or more weddings, a happy marriage ending was not their norm.

As their writers were less interested in the legitimation of a genre than in examining the various outcomes of unrestrained passion, seduction and intrigue, in these texts there was little sense of conforming to recognizable generic boundaries, and there was no agreement about a conventional finale. In the passages of Manley's *New Atalantis* women are usually left in despair and disgrace after being seduced and abandoned by their suitors; sometimes death follows, sometimes they are wedded to men they do not love, and occasionally the narrative is abruptly interrupted in the climactic moment with the heroine imploring the aid of goddesses Astrea and Virtue, and of Lady Intelligence. The endings of Haywood's novels are similarly diverse. In *Love in Excess*, D'Elmont marries Alovisa towards the end of volume one,

⁴⁰The titles Fielding mentions here reproduce the list of books found in the library of “Leonora”, a lady of fashion, in *Spectator* 37 (12 April 1711). See Addison and Steele, 152–9.

⁴¹For a useful account of these novelists see Ballaster, 32–4.

an event that does not conclude the story but signifies, as the narrator ironically puts it, a “Glorious beginning”.⁴² In the second volume, the protagonist falls in love with—and repeatedly attempts to rape—Melliora, whom he marries in the third volume, after the death of his first wife and of two other women who fall victim to his charms. In spite of the marriage finale, the succession of love intrigues to which Haywood treats her readers in the previous volumes casts doubt on its definitiveness as a plausible closure. In *Fantomina* (1724), when the heroine ends up pregnant after having proved unable to keep the love of Beauplaisir in her multiple disguises, she is sent to a convent in France to expiate her guilt. In *Anti-Pamela* (1741) after the increasingly merciless schemes of Syrena Tricky are discovered, she is sent to a distant estate in Wales. As evidenced by these examples, the focus of these stories was not marriage as an idealized goal, but the operations of transgressive sexual relations within the social prescriptions of a culture rife with double standards, usually concentrating on the emotional and physical vulnerability of women, which allowed for their seduction and betrayal.⁴³

Although, as we have seen, Fielding denied any influence of that sort, *Joseph Andrews* shares major themes with this type of fiction. It also taps into some of their favourite motifs. For instance, Lady Booby’s famous attempt at the seduction of her footman Joseph in Book I to a great extent recalls a crucial turning point at the beginning of Mary Davys’s *The Accomplish’d Rake* (1727). In that text, the recently widowed Lady Galliard entangles herself in a sordid sexual adventure with her handsome footman, activating the misogynistic attitudes of her son, who, after the discovery of what he interprets as an irrefutable proof of female inconstancy, devotes his life to earthly pleasures and causes the ruin of several women.⁴⁴ In this episode, then, Fielding may not only have been ironically commenting on *Pamela*, but also recycling material from other famous stories, tinting such references with biblical overtones, in order to produce his own version of masculine chastity, which was simultaneously comic and serious, similar to yet ultimately different from these hypertexts.

While amorous novels dealt with many of the domestic topics that interested Fielding, they lacked respectability. Conversely, theatrical comedy had a pedigree that stretched as far back as the classical stage, and a structure with which Fielding—and his readers—were well acquainted. Not surprisingly, for the ending of *Joseph Andrews* he devised an extended version of the happy conclusion he used in his theatrical courtship plots. In the last chapter of his novel, then, Joseph and Fanny are finally married; Mr Booby provides a dowry for Fanny, with which money Joseph buys a little estate in his father’s Parish, and an annuity for Mr Adams that reinstates the dignity proper to his profession; while the unrepentant Lady Booby forgets Joseph with “a young Captain of Dragoons” and her “eternal Parties at Cards” (343–4). In

⁴²Haywood, 53.

⁴³For illuminating discussions of amatory fiction see Richetti, *The English Novel in History*, 18–48; Backscheider and Richetti, ix–xxiii.

⁴⁴Davys, 193 and 196.

a manner clearly reminiscent of his regular comedies, and also common to other plays in the early eighteenth-century repertoire, Fielding restores social order through a blissful match that, though much anticipated, is possible only after obstacles have been sorted, identities have been clarified, and virtue and love have triumphed over worldly interests.⁴⁵ Veromil's final reflection in *The Temple Beau* that "after so many Tempests, our Fortune once more puts on a serene Aspect; once more we have that Happiness in view, which crowns the Success of Virtue, Constancy and Love" can very well be applied to *Joseph Andrews* (*Plays* I, 5.20.179). Like *Merital* and *Helena* in *Love in Several Masques*, *Veromil* and *Bellaria* in *The Temple Beau*, *Constant* and *Hilaret* in *The Coffee-House Politician* (1731) and *Fairlove* and *Dorothea* in *Don Quixote in England* (1734), *Joseph* and *Fanny* have to negotiate a number of adverse circumstances before arriving at the ultimate state of felicity promised in a marriage founded on love. Also, like the comic antagonists of those plays, *Lady Booby* continues in her selfish pursuit of pleasure, largely unmoved by the events and reversals of the story.

At the same time, the marriage at the end of *Joseph Andrews* is an important indication of Fielding's sustained attention to the social and moral implications of marriage, and a development of the ideas that he had begun to sketch in his theatrical pieces. In *Shamela*, he exposed the mercenary motivations behind the alleged virtue of a woman who weds her would-be rapist, only because he has the means to elevate her social condition. In *Joseph Andrews* he sought to present an idealized match, whose sole incentive was love, and in which Anglican principles and rituals were properly followed. One of the ways he accomplished that was by shifting the moral and religious centre of his narrative away from the participants of the love-plot, placing it in the figure of the country clergyman.⁴⁶ It is *Adams*, therefore, who insists on the importance of a proper marriage service, in which banns are read and the community is involved. Ultimately this event develops into a symbolic trial for all the characters, an illustration of the practical importance of religious tenets, and a display of Fielding's careful architecture of the text.

After the adventurous journey from London, the much-anticipated wedding of *Joseph* and *Fanny* is further delayed by *Adams*'s resolution to follow Church proceedings to the letter, that is, publishing banns for three religious services instead of purchasing a licence. Having characterized *Adams* as the epitome of a good clergyman, Fielding aims to show that he not only practices good Christian principles, but also complies with the regulations of the Church of England. By having *Adams* insist on the publication of the banns, he endeavours to differentiate his ideal parson from "surrogates"—that is, "beneficed clergy scattered over the countryside who were authorized to issue marriage licenses", which they sold to the intending spouses—and also

⁴⁵See, for instance William Congreve, *Love for Love* (1695); William Congreve, *The Way of the World* (1700); Susanna Centlivre, *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* (1718); Richard Steele, *The Conscious Lovers* (1722).

⁴⁶On this see O'Connell, 397.

from some impoverished rural priests who were willing to risk the three-year suspension stipulated by ecclesiastical law and performed clandestine weddings for a small fee.⁴⁷ By having Adams persist in his adherence to this convention, then, Fielding emphasizes that his parson, poor though he is, does not make a trade out of marriage.

The first reading of the banns alerts Lady Booby to the impending loss of her beloved Joseph. She attempts to coerce Adams into obedience to her capricious will with threats of dismissal (280). However, as Fielding wants to emphasize that this man is a worthy keeper of the moral authority that his job entails, he persists in his resolution of marrying them. Accordingly, “to [Lady Booby’s] surprize, Mr. *Adams* published the Banns again with as audible Voice as before” (287). This second reading of banns becomes an act of rebellion against the unreasonable and selfish whims of the powerful. Yet, far from calling for insurrection, Fielding simply replaces one source of authority with another, although he immediately labours to rationalize the practical motivations behind the set of rules that Adams vehemently enforces and to which Joseph reluctantly acquiesces. Between the second and third reading of the banns one of the most memorable passages of the novel takes place. To the couple’s horror (and to the morbid joy of Lady Booby), Joseph and Fanny are feared to be brother and sister (325). As in *The Coffee-House Politician*, where he took the dangers inherent in an elopement to the extreme for comic and didactic purposes, here Fielding hyperbolizes a possible consequence of marrying without the participation of the community. In the end, because the affair is made public, identities are clarified to the protagonist’s advantage, as Joseph is finally revealed to be the heir of Squire Wilson (337). This passage cleverly criticizes and exploits the inconsistency of contemporary marital regulations, suggesting that formal rituals of the established Church, such as the calling of banns, were crucial for the prevention of irretrievable mistakes. Fielding thus strived to provide another practical justification for the apparent stubbornness of Adams’s avowal of Church protocols.

Plot twists produced by timely clarifications of mistaken identities were also a favourite theatrical formula, which Fielding had ridiculed in his farfetched recognition scene at the end of *The Author’s Farce*, but which he also had used without irony in *The Coffee-House Politician* and *The Wedding Day*. With the final disclosure of identities at the end of *Joseph Andrews* Fielding set out to demonstrate that, if carefully contrived, such narrative devices could be rendered into plausible and useful plot props. Thus, he invited readers to see that, on close perusal, the retrieved identity of Joseph was not arbitrary, for signals had been provided throughout. For example, with a casual tone aimed to conceal his meticulousness, at the beginning of the novel the narrator informs readers that Joseph “was *esteemed* to be the only Son of Gaffar and Gammer Andrews” (20, emphasis mine), and upon leaving Wilson readers are warned about that character’s return for a crucial part at the end (233). The ending of *Joseph Andrews*, then, artfully brings together all the loose strands of plot and

⁴⁷Stone, 102–6, quotation from 102.

characters. Characteristically, Fielding merges social and literary concerns into his narrative, through a detailed analysis of contemporary marital practices and regulations designed for simultaneous diagnosis and remedy.

Lastly, Fielding's implementation of the theatrical marriage plot in *Joseph Andrews* brought about a detailed expansion of an idea that came from the plays. In *The Author's Farce*, after ridiculing the customary presentation of love marriages as financially prosperous, Fielding pandered to the taste of the town by ending the piece precisely with such a match—with the caveat that the leading couple was actually in love, regardless of financial considerations. In *Joseph Andrews* he decided to be more explicit in his disengagement of matrimony from materiality. While Joseph and Fanny are ultimately rewarded with the financial means necessary for a leisured happiness, this occurs strictly after the wedding. The dowry Mr Booby provides for Fanny (now his sister-in-law), which allows Joseph to purchase a small estate in his father's parish, is never mentioned until the bride and groom are literally wedded and bedded (344). Fielding thus aimed to separate the domains of love and money, while also indulging the readers' (and his own) taste for financially prosperous matches more plausibly than he had done before. The theatrical convention of having a marriage as the obvious finale was perhaps worn out, but it could be transformed by, for instance, inserting it into a new genre.

As I hope I have shown in this essay, in the marriage plot Fielding found an expedient bridge between the theatre and the novel. While the wedding is conspicuous by its absence in *Shamela*, it is the carefully contrived, slowly developed climax of *Joseph Andrews*. In the explicitly disinterested marriage presented as the neat happy ending of this novel we see a more mature version of his offering of marriage as the expected happy ending of a play. The finale of *Joseph Andrews* is one in which social and poetic justice meet, and Fielding's aesthetic and moral outlooks converge. As we have seen, the thematic and structural continuities between Fielding's plays and his first two novels are important; acknowledging them should lead us to a reassessment of Fielding's early prose fiction as more autonomous from Richardson and the *Pamela* phenomenon than they are usually considered to be.

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