

Womanhood and its implications in richardson's pamela



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Pamela: or Virtue Rewarded is an epistolary novel by Samuel Richardson, published in 1740 and set in the first half of the eighteenth century. It is said that this novel went against the aristocratic dimension of the typical romantic themes that the majority of readers were used to (Virtue, Gender, and the Authentic Self in Eighteenth-Century Fiction, 1, Christine Roulston, 1998). It is of every significance that the lead character in this novel is the blossoming and beautiful Pamela. Her gender and her social ranking in society play key roles in the unfolding of this story and are precisely the factors that led her to become the sexual target of her employer. We witness this controversial tale of seduction and virtue through the thoughts and words of a young woman who was preyed upon by someone who had great power over her. Gender is one of the main themes in this novel, and Pamela's own gender in particular plays a key role in this tale.

Pamela's gender was not as significant when her master had been a woman, Mr. B's mother. Although they were placed differently on the social ladder, they were equally female. However, after her passing, Mr B had control over Pamela. Not only was he seen as more valuable in society's eyes, but he was also a man. At this time, in the early eighteenth century and arguably even in the present day, men were seen as the more dominant gender.

Disregarding his position as her employer, if they had been of the same social class, people probably would of seen him as having the upper hand regardless, simply because of his gender. Gender also plays a key role not only because Pamela is female, but because of the incident when Mr. B took it upon himself to dress as a woman similar to Pamela. After his many failed attempts to seduce his beautiful, young servant, he decided to lower himself

to the position of his workers and disguise himself as one of Pamela's colleagues, Nan. After the rejection that he had received previously, this act showed how desperate this man was to be with this young girl. In this scene of disguise, Pamela not only undresses her body but she also speaks emotionally which is in fact undressing her mind in front of Mr. B, her employer (Virtue, Gender, and the Authentic Self in Eighteenth-Century Fiction, 14, Christine Roulston, 1998). Because Pamela is a female, it is perfectly okay in this novel to be undressing and reflecting truthfully on her thoughts in front of other female colleagues including Mrs. Jewkes but not in front of Mr. B or any other man. In order for Mr. B to get a closer look at Pamela's body and a more intimate understanding of her mind, it was necessary for him to become a 'woman', even if it was just for a short period of time, it worked.

Pamela's whole identity displays her as an easy target, Her undeniable youthful beauty attracts her sexual predator. If the protagonist had not been a character of such a young age, she would not have looked like such a naive and vulnerable aim for Mr. B. Her youth is a clear reason why she is so strongly maintaining her chastity, in honour of her poor parents. The fact that Pamela comes from a family that are severely less fortunate than Mr. B's family, is very important in this play. This immediately places Mr. B above Pamela in the reader's mind, even if we don't realise it. Pamela herself even places Mr. B above her, because of his wealth and her lack of it. She is shocked that he would even consider a girl like her: " Well, but, Mrs. Jervis, said I, let me ask you, if he can stoop to like such a poor girl as me, as perhaps he may, (for I have read of things almost as strange, from great

men to poor damsels,) What can it be for?—He may condescend, perhaps, to think I may be good enough for his harlot; and those things don't disgrace men that ruin poor women, as the world goes" (Pamela: Or Virtue Rewarded, Letter XIX Samuel Richardson, 1740). We learn through the letters that Pamela's parents send to her that their family was once very much above the poverty that they are experiencing at the time this story took place. " We are, 'tis true, very poor, and find it hard enough to live; tho' once, as you know, it was better with us" (Pamela: Or Virtue Rewarded, Letter II, Samuel Richardson, 1740). As his servant, Pamela's job description is to serve him. This gives Mr. B intense power over his worker. Pamela is aware that Mr. B has complete control over her, particularly when he was keeping her in captivity. " And pray, said I, walking on, how came I to be his Property? What right has he in me, but such as a Thief may plead to stolen Goods? Why, was ever the like heard, says she! This is downright Rebellion, I protest!" (Pamela: Or Virtue Rewarded, Samuel Richardson, 1740). This seems to be one of the main reasons that Mr. B made physical advances towards Pamela. Because he was in charge of her and was the one providing her with almost everything in her life, he may have thought that he was entitled to whatever he wanted from her. Undeniably, this was far from the truth.

In a sense, Mr. B was a villainous person who seemed to look down on the people who were not as entitled as him. He was used to getting what he desired, however he was unable to receive Pamela and her body in the way that he wanted. He tried forcing himself on her, raping her and even directly asking her to be his mistress. Perhaps he did look down on Pamela, but he also seemed to be fascinated by her and the fact that she would not accept

his flirtatious offers and advances. Her role as a servant was very important to the story of Pamela, because despite what he thought, Mr. B's wealth and the fact that his occupation was ranked above Pamela's, did not mean that he was entitled to her in a sexual nor an emotional way. After reading this shocking yet entertaining novel, I feel quite sorry for Pamela's character. Although this is a fictional novel, it indicates that there were countless young women in Pamela's position. She was a young fifteen year old girl, full of youth, virtue and innocence. She was also living in such poverty that she desperately took the position of a slave to provide for her family. This character is full of kindness and goodwill, but yet she was the one who was targeted and manipulated by a man as unpleasant and controlling as Mr. B. At the end of the novel, when the couple are 'happily' married, the title *Virtue Rewarded* can be contemplated. It suggests that because of the kind of person she was, she was lucky to have ended up with her master, Mr. B. In my opinion, being married to a man who was willing to compromise her virtue was not a great enough reward for refusing to compromise her virtue all along; perhaps it was indeed her youth and social ranking that caused her naivety.

Throughout the novel, Pamela was strong minded and brave, maintaining her pride and virtue in honour of herself and her poverty stricken parents. However, we as readers may have overestimated her independence, as she proves when she eventually falls for a man who has treated her in the past with such disrespect. It is every reader's delight to see that the lovely character of Pamela who was once so poor is no longer struggling financially, nor are her family. But it is still disheartening to read that she has settled

and found her ' happy' life with Mr. B. Although the ending is unexpected and hard to comprehend, it is a very intriguing piece of socially-minded literature. In a letter to his friend Aaron Hill penned after he had written this novel, Richardson himself claimed that it was " a new species of writing" (Virtue, Gender, and the Authentic Self in Eighteenth-Century Fiction, (Christine Roulston, 1998).