

# Pamela or virtue rewarded

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Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded This novel by Samuel Richardson was a source of great instruction for those who read it around the time of its publication. Society was always interested in good morals, however, hard they were to actualize. The novel details the travails of a young maidservant called Pamela. She has to fight off attempts by her master, Mr. B, to take advantage of her for the whole length of the novel. He finally manages to convince her to marry him but this novel is not in any way concerned with the happy ending. Instead, what lies in between is of greatest interest. These two people from different classes have to narrow their differences and come to an agreement. Pamela pays the greater price for this however. She is branded a prostitute. This paper shall seek to explain the reason behind these.

The women of Pamela's age are from a past time. She seems very modern, cultivated and reasoning in contrast. She is considered a prostitute first because she prefers to do things in her own way (Richardson, 2000). Her independence of mind stands out almost as much as prostitutes also stand out in any moral society. She is looked down upon, just like prostitutes are looked down upon, because they are different from the rest. Independence of mind at a time when women were expected to be at the beck and call of men was something to be looked down upon.

This independence of mind is revealed in the way that she repulses her master (Mr. B). He makes advances but to no avail. Any lady living in this age would have been expected to oblige. There was everything to gain in associating with a man of a superior class. However, she was not so inclined because her morals and innocence could not allow it. Mr B. uses all the tricks up his sleeve to get her to bend to his will but does not succeed.

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The squire uses all manner of persuasion. He hands her some clothes that belonged to his dead mother. He hides in the closet and shows up when she is getting undressed but all this does not sway her. He resorts to attempting to rape her (Richardson, 2000). He even bribes her to keep the secret but she goes ahead to disclose this incident to Mrs. Jervis, her best friend. She is the housekeeper too. To rub salt into an already deep wound, she accepts to have a relationship with Mr., William. He is of a more similar class to her. In light of these facts, what better thing to resort to for the unsuccessful suitors than to brand her, a prostitute? But it is all sour grapes of course.

Her social position is also to blame for her bearing such a disgraceful tag. It is easy, even common place for people in the superior classes to denigrate the lowly. Even the tags they bear themselves put them above any criticism. They are called; nobleman, master, gentry, among others. This is also an age when it was believed that leadership and good fortune came from God. It was thus easy for the ‘ holy’ classes to condemn the ‘ evil’ majority. Such hierarchy demanded that the lower classes were answerable to the classes either directly or further above them. Pamela sought to be an exception to this rule.

The third reason why Pamela was so branded is because she was uniquely intelligent. We witness how she keeps a diary dutifully and religiously. For a lady of her age, this was exceptional discipline (Richardson, 2000). To add on to that, she wrote letters regularly to her parents. She even sought for their opinion on issues she had no ready answer for. The case of Mr. B was a good example of such. However, Mr. B proceeded to intercept her letters. In their place, he forged correspondence to suggest that Pamela was having an affair with a poor clergy man. The father, however, knowing his daughters fidelity

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towards good morals, decided to distrust them.

Finally, her bad branding had to do with submission or the lack of it in this case. As a woman she was expected to give in to the urges of a man, let alone a nobleman. When she fails to do so, she is branded so as to drag her name in the mud. However, it is interesting to note that Mr. B later manages to marry her (Richardson, 2000). Who would want to be married to a prostitute? This indeed gives away the fact that the negative tag was perhaps used conveniently to lure her in the first place. The gentry also accept her as one of their own. Even her tormentors, Lady Davers and Mrs. Jewkes also accept her.

By and large, Pamela was a lady living ahead of her time. Her values were far more sophisticated for the times she found herself living in. Because of this reason she was looked at as a prostitute. She had to bear this unsavory burden not because of any fault of her own. She had to carry it for the society in which she existed (Richardson, 2000). The reasons as set out above mostly have to do with a gendered society. They include her low social class, society's perception of women as being under men and even her own uncharacteristic intelligence. Such times are long gone but its still interesting to note that those same prejudices remain. The hope is that a time will come when virtue, as the title suggests, gets to be rewarded.

#### References

Richardson, S 2000, *Pamela: Or Virtue Rewarded*. New York: Oxford University Press