

# The power of example: fantomina and pamela



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To act as an 'example' is to influence another's actions. If the effects are, as Johnson claims, 'powerful', a responsibility of care accompanies the role of example. This responsibility may seem unnecessary, as the example seizes the 'memory', and exists only as a mental influence. However, this influence only temporarily exists in the mind. The 'effects' are realised in actions, capable of affecting individuals in a surrounding environment. A responsibility is therefore present in the conscious effort to exhibit one's behaviour as a positive moral example, in order for these 'effects' that are realised in others to also be positive. Johnson specifies that these effects are produced 'without the intervention of will'. Perhaps this suggests that the responsibility of example is present in all action, not simply the conscious activity of moulding oneself in to a positive influence. If the 'intervention of will' is removed, neither the example, nor the individual affected by the example have a choice as to which of their actions act as the example. Both Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina* and Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* engage with this concept of all action as 'example'. Even seemingly arbitrary actions have powerful effects, suggesting that all action is inescapable from a moral responsibility.

Throughout the eighteenth century novel, the characters are often categorized by social class. Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina* challenges the concept that the powerful effect of 'example' is restricted to social class, and its associated customs. The effects of example are so powerful that they disregard social hierarchy, and are able to affect individuals across class boundaries. *Fantomina*'s original example, the prostitute in the opening scene, is unnamed but central as the influence that 'excited a Curiosity in

her to know in what Manner these Creatures were addressed.’[1] Physically restricted by social class, Fantomina resides in a box, whilst the prostitute remains in the ‘ Pit’. Interaction with her example therefore does not occur, suggesting that the power of example can be active through gaze alone. However, her ‘ curiosity’ is ‘ excited’, not created. This suggests a generalized dissatisfaction with her experience of class restrictions that has remained dormant, but is still deeply established within a history of female repression. Fantomina is only able to act upon this frustration now through the introduction of an example she can imitate; the prostitute offers an approach that will bypasses the restrictions of female tradition. The power of example is arguably lessened by this argument, as the ‘ curiosity’ already exists within Fantomina. Furthermore, the gaze provokes her ‘ curiosity’ to a ‘ kind of violence’, so that the prostitute’s influence almost completely surpasses the process of taking ‘ possession of the memory’. As soon as Fantomina witnesses the ‘ Manner’ the prostitutes act, she begins to enact her ‘ resolutions’ (Haywood, p. 227). For this ‘ Frolic’ to be possible, Fantomina must lower herself to below human form, to a ‘ Creature’, in order to consciously neglect the burden of responsibility associated with the status of a Lady. [2] Haywood therefore refuses to align Fantomina with a class-specific, restrictive example. If the power of example were so influential as to affect Fantomina through sight alone, even the interaction with an upper class example would be arguably ineffectual.

Instead of a freedom to cross social boundaries, Richardson’s Pamela displays an expectation that example should be restricted by social class. Margaret Anne Doody suggests that none of Richardson’s female characters

are 'absolute', and need a constant positive example to make them so. [1]. Richardson thus presents Lady Davers as the character who should exist as this upper class example to make Pamela 'absolute'. Yet, her vocabulary rejects this expectation: 'the Wench could not talk thus, if she had not been her Master's Bed-fellow' (Richardson, p. 384). A lower class terminology, that includes 'wench', creates a parallel between the two women – Pamela regularly calls Mrs Jewkes a 'pursy, fat Thing' – that suggests both require a polite example to become 'absolute', regardless of their ancestry (Richardson, p. 114). Lady Davers is therefore identified as a bad example, and her influential 'power' is lessened. Unlike Fantomina, Pamela can choose to refuse both the sight of, and interaction with her expected 'example'. Additionally, this interplay of characters occurs in private, suggesting a difference between this and public discourse. Lady Davers freely engages with the subject of desire, an emotion expected to be neither felt nor discussed by women. This presents the role of an upper class example as perhaps exclusive to a public construction of behavior, that exists only to fulfill social expectations. In private, Richardson inverts these public expectations of example. Pamela is able to refuse Lady Davers' negative influence by recognizing her own morality as a better example. Ironically, the girl accused of acting as her 'Master's Bed-fellow' acts as the positive example that will make the Lady 'absolute'. 'Power' of example can therefore vary according to recipient. Pamela commits this scene to memory, as she recounts it to Mr B. later, yet does not allow this influence to 'take possession' of her. In Pamela, the power of example is restricted to the socially superior, a concept condemned by Richardson through Pamela's refusal of Lady Davers' influence.

Richardson and Haywood also present their protagonists as the example, and explore how 'powerful' their effects are upon others. Tassie Gwilliam comments 'it is easy to see how the line separating the woman who performs for an audience without knowing it from the woman who consciously performs for that male audience can blur'. [1] This concept separates Pamela and Fantomina as characters. The effects of example are arguably more powerful when they derive naturally within an individual, as opposed to a performance. Pamela possesses, and emanates, the attributes of a good example naturally: For Beauty, Virtue, Prudence, and Generosity [...] she has more than any Lady [...] she has all these naturally; they are born with her (Richardson, p. 423). Authenticity seems to influence how powerful an example is. Pamela is defined a truer example than 'any Lady', as morally positive attributes are 'born with her'. This suggests that the occurrence of these qualities naturally is more influential than a conscious performance, a mere imitation of a natural example. Through being 'born' with 'Beauty, Virtue' and 'Prudence', Richardson implies it be almost hereditary, rejecting the association of a refined sensibility with the upper class. Pamela's parents are classed as socially inferior due to their poverty, yet morally they are such powerful examples that it appears to be inherent in their DNA. Perhaps Pamela has only maintained this existence as a natural example through her original position in the social hierarchy. In comparison, Lady Davers' privileged upbringing has taught her a proper, public conduct, suggesting that any virtue she exhibits is a performance. Whilst this praise is spoken by Mr B., Pamela reports them to the reader through the epistolary form. This secondary layer of narrative distances the reader from the reality Pamela experiences, defining her narrative as, however close to realism, a

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performance. As Gwilliam suggests, the 'line' between an unconscious and conscious performance is blurred. However, this performative epistolary form is irrelevant when considering Pamela as an example. She is identified as a natural positive example, and this aligns her Gwilliam's more positive definition of the 'unconscious' performer.

The woman who consciously performs is thus condemned as almost incapable of existing as a positive moral example. After acting as Fantomina, Haywood's protagonist constructs a number of different identities –the widow, the servant, Incognita –who each consciously perform a public, virtuous behavior. Pamela maintains this virtue in private, whilst Fantomina submits to both her own and Beauplaisir's desire: 'by these Arts of passing on him as a new Mistress [...] I have him always raving, wild, impatient' (Haywood, p. 243). Haywood almost encourages a condemnation of Fantomina as a bad example. She actively performs as the woman who unconsciously performs, each character feigning a virginal status and ignorance of Beauplaisir's true nature. However, to Beauplaisir, this performance is reality; she is an 'unconscious' performer to him, 'passing' as a new Mistress each time. In order to sustain this pretense in private also, Fantomina must change her identity constantly to match the requirements of Beauplaisir's desire. Therefore, she claims 'I have him', implying a female, dominant possession, yet is also as 'wild' and 'impatient' as him. Fantomina's virtue is a public performance, and cannot exist as a positive moral example through a lack of consistency. Her identity and virtue changes in private, suggesting Fantomina does not possess the natural attributes of a virtuous example that Richardson's Pamela does. Refusing

this moral example is perhaps self-conscious. She consistently labels her affairs as an 'Art', suggesting a submergence so far in to her reality based on performance that she cannot return to a reality to fulfill social expectations of this morally positive example. According to Gwilliam, Fantomina is categorized as the woman who 'consciously performs', and thus she cannot emanate the power of example naturally. Haywood acknowledges Fantomina's actions as a bad example of virtue, and instead presents her as a positive example of female independence. Fantomina's effects of example are therefore powerful, however not in the expected, or same, context as Pamela's.

Thus far, the power of example has been assumed to be undeniable in influence. Yet, both novels also challenge how 'great' the external influence of example is compared to one's own conscious, internalized desires. In Haywood's *Fantomina*, Beauplaisir refuses to act as a morally positive example, and instead chooses to sate his own desire. This is emphasized by Fantomina's expectations of how women should be 'addressed' by men, even when she identifies herself as a prostitute: she told him, that she was a Virgin, [...] [it was] far from obliging him to desist –nay, in the present burning Eagerness of Desire (Haywood, p. 30). Gentlemanly conduct is an '[obligation]' for Fantomina, and she especially expects this after revealing her virginal status. Yet, Beauplaisir's conduct is perhaps immune to the power of a gentleman's example, especially in this moment. With example, it's influence is committed to memory, and then a period of time passes before it affects the subject. This 'burning Eagerness of Desire' is instead identified as existing in the 'present', where spontaneous emotion

overpowers any influences that may exist in the memory. An insistence is reflected also in syntax. The dash not only adds a breath, as if to imitate physical pleasure, but creates a momentum in the sentence that mirrors the increasing progression of action that Fantomina struggles to slow. As an experience of the moment, desire seizes the person without the 'intervention of will', similarly to the effects of example that Johnson establishes. If desire produces the same effects, but originates instead from internal influence, it suggests that the power of external example is not as 'great' as Johnson suggests. Arguably, the power of example could be seen as greater as desire exists as an emotion. Yet, as soon as this emotion is felt in the 'burning' 'present', it demands to be physically sated also. Desire therefore induces as much action as the power of example influences. Therefore, the 'power' of example is temporarily overpowered as 'great', as desire forces imminent action, whilst example can be rejected when it still exists as a mental influence. This allows Beauplaisir to ignore the morally positive example exhibited by gentleman, and choose to sate his desire instead.

Throughout *Fantomina*, Beauplaisir is immune to the power of positive example. In *Pamela*, Mr B. only adheres temporarily to the eighteenth century 'rake' stereotype. His initial refusal to accept the responsibility of example transitions from Beauplaisir's insistent moment of desire to a consistent, genuine love. His original choice that favors desire over either following or exhibiting a respectable example, is recounted by Pamela in Letter XI. It is addressed to her Mother alone, despite almost every other letter being addressed to both parents. This suggests that male desire, and



it's consequences for women, was a subject to be addressed by women alone: ' I found myself in his Arms, quite void of Strength, and he kissed me two or three times, as if he would have eaten me' (Richardson, p. 23). In her nervous state, Pamela is void of ' Strength' physically. Yet she also actively refuses any emotional agency, subsequently denying any desires felt. She ' found' herself draped on him, and ' he kissed [her]', emphasizing his dominance over her through the order of pronoun. Only through presenting this experience as undesired can Pamela preserve her virginity wholly, as she refuses even lustful thought. Her lack of agency is further suggested in Mr B.'s almost animalistic strength, becoming primal in his desire to '[eat]' her. This emphasizes the physical ' violence' that desire can inadvertently cause in the urge to be sated, provoking Mr B. to actions almost ' without the intervention of [his] will'. As the novel progresses, the powerful effects of Pamela's morally good example reform Mr B. Richardson suggests this is only possible through marriage. The sacrament forces Mr B.'s relationship with Pamela to the public sphere. She is, by law, now a Lady, and is considered an equal and able to inflict her example upon her husband. Therefore, the effects of Pamela's virtuous example are consistently more powerful than the ' rake' stereotype. However, it is only when Pamela ascends the social hierarchy, is she given the opportunity to inflict it.

Each novel explores the ' power' of example. In exploring the success of an example, it must be considered if the example presented is identical to what the author intended. Richardson and Haywood both display protagonists that exhibit an example, respectively good and bad. However, each character cannot, and does not maintain this example constantly throughout each

novel. Fantomina and Pamela must diverge from their expected behavior for each author to engage with a certain sense of realism. Therefore neither exist as a wholly good, or wholly bad example: Fantomina is seemingly an example of the consequences of female desire, yet refuses to submit to shame or repentance; and Pamela is seemingly an example of perfect virtue, yet eventually submits to her desire. The characters may only exist as true examples when exhibiting these flaws that distance them from their assumed example. The true example is in how each protagonist overcomes the stereotype that society forces upon them. Both Fantomina and Pamela, to different extents, do not exhibit the example they are supposed to. Yet, the examples they do display, of independence and consistence of virtue, are made more 'powerful' in effect, as they must steadily struggle against social expectation. Without these flaws that differ from their expected example, the characters would be in a conduct book, and not a romance.

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