

# Richardson's *Pamela*: Predicaments to Handle in Pamela's Marriage

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**Abstract**— In this presentation, I will tackle some social elements that we can learn from Richardson's *Pamela*. Well, many things in this masterpiece are promising that Pamela and Mr. B—'s marriage will be successful; e.g. the change of Mr. B—'s behavior towards Pamela. Yet, we have to consider the social backgrounds of this couple, the marriage across class-line and age-line, as well as Mr. B—'s jealousy.

Indeed, both Pamela and Mr. B— have many good virtues that will enable them to have a happy marriage life. At the same time, we shouldn't ignore those enigmatic barriers that they have to handle and be aware of. These obstacles will be of different natures; social, educational, psychological, etc. These barriers may take place in any marriage case; hence I will tackle these barriers as presented in the novel, hoping that this way will shed light on lessons readers may extract from *Pamela*.

**Keywords**— Richardson, *Pamela*; or, *Virtue Rewarded*, marriage, Mr. B—, *Pamela*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Samuel Richardson wrote the masterpiece *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* in the form of letters to let us explore the hidden aspects Pamela Andrews, the main character, faces while staying and serving Mr. B—. This novel is about "the feelings of an English girl, Pamela Andrews. It is a simple story of a good girl who receives the rewards of virtue" (Thronley 86).

As a matter of fact, Pamela is another Cinderella, who waits her gentleman to take her from the lower level she is in and elevate her to a higher one. This step of elevation may take place if she marries Mr. B—. Indeed they get married. But this is not enough, and in order to continue her marriage, there are some barriers that encounter the success of their marriage. These expected predicaments are what will be addressed in this paper. I will trace these expected difficulties as they are introduced or referred to in the novel. As readers of literature, we can learn from literary texts what may help us in our life, and we can benefit from.

## II. TEXT AND ARGUMENT

[The novel, in] the form of a series of letters, deals with the fortunes of Pamela, a poor and virtuous maid, who

resists, then finally marries and afterwards reforms her wicked master. (Edward Abert 256)

Samuel Richardson's *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* addresses some aspects that comply its readers to presume that the marriage between Mr. B and Pamela can indeed be successful, e.g. Mr. B's change of behavior towards Pamela. Unfortunately, some important factors are neglected, ignored, or let me say not taken into consideration in this general scenario such as, the social class. This paper will discuss the barriers that encumber the success of Pamela and Mr. B—'s marriage.

Many indicators in the novel contribute to the success of Mr. B— and Pamela's marriage, such as that changed attitude displayed by Mr. B— towards Pamela. But they have to face serious challenges due to their different backgrounds, their marriage across class-lines and age-range, and Mr. B—'s jealousy. These challenges may take place in some of current marriages and shouldn't be overlooked. Such differences will enhance both social and psychological consequences that may deteriorate the future of the continuity of their marriage.

At the end of the novel, we are gratified by the following quotation:

*As for the excellent Pamela, she enjoy'd, for many years, the reward of her virtue, piety and charity, exceedingly beloved by both sexes and by all degrees. She made her*

*beloved spouse happy in a numerous and hopeful progeny. And he made her the best and fondest of husbands (409).*

The above passage indicates that they have lived happily. Such qualities as “the purity and constancy of his affection, after his change; his polite behavior to his Pamela” (409) show us that Mr. B— appreciates and emblazons his wife. As for Pamela, we do not forget her parental, conjugal, and maternal duty, her social virtues, and her trust in God; all these characteristics should enable her to have a happy and successful marriage.

However, readers may see in Pamela at the beginning of the novel another Cinderella, who awaits her “prince” to take her from her lower social level and elevate her to a higher one. On the other hand, Mr. B— is proud of his class and social position, and marrying her will demean him; it is not accepted that a gentleman with his upper social status should marry a servant. Thus, before marrying Pamela, Mr. B— tries to seduce her and then leave her. Resisting his sexual behavior, she becomes more appealing to him. Furthermore, his position as a master enables him to read her letters to her parents. The letters show Pamela’s pure, innocent, and fine character. They are the keys to her personality because through these letters, he can explore what she thinks about.

On the other hand, and after Mr. B— learns about her character, he eventually finds it hard to hide more, and tells Pamela about his personality; regarding his class, for example, he says, “We [with this plural pronoun he means Pamela and himself] are usually so headstrong, so violent in our wills that we very little bear control” (366). His frankness emerges from his respect of the servant in front of him, and his realization to put an end for what each of them struggles for. He also submits, “Yet am I not perfect myself: No, I am greatly imperfect” (368). Here, he admits and recognizes his reality as a human being. In addition, readers may notice how he brings closer the gap between Pamela and himself when he addresses her, “Now my dear . . . be so kind to find fault with me, and tell me what you would wish me to do, to appear more agreeable to you” (311). These quotations from Pamela’s letters to her parents show that the couple is able to communicate because each knows the psychological attitude of the other. Also, this proximity in the way they are communicating indicates how they start understanding each other.

Nor do we forget that Pamela has been brought up in Lady B—’s house; thus she knows how to handle responsibilities and meet expectations in the family’s house. In one of his statements, Mr. B— points out, “And you have often play’d with my mother too, and so know

how to perform a part there, as well as the other diversions” (226). Hence, it is clear she is familiar of what is taking place in such a milieu.

In addition, the couple’s devotion, love and courage to forgive and accept one another suggest the strength of their marriage relations. What has been mentioned above is promising and might construct a basis upon which the future could rely.

However, to insure that Pamela and Mr. B— have a successful and lasting marriage, they must overcome certain impediments; I will shed light on them as referred to in the novel:

First of all, they have to triumph over the class difference. At the beginning, we meet Mr. B— as a proud man who is well known in society as a gentleman with a high social status. For him, marrying a servant will not do him justice or serve him and his position in anyway. Therefore, he attempts to lure Pamela and use her beforehand. In fact, he has been a master and she a servant, but now they are husband and wife.

This relation-change requires mutual respect and understanding. Mr. B— says to Pamela after their marriage, “Let us talk of nothing henceforth but Equality” (294). Her marriage elevates her social status, yet at the same time it eventually results in the loss of her independence and original voice. Her marriage requires submission to the upper-class norms of her husband. In order to meet the new demands, she has to embrace his husband’s social rules. Such a change requires a large amount of commitment and patience.

Second, this couple is subject to social reaction. They are part of their society; they cannot isolate themselves from it, and they cannot ignore the society’s reaction to their marriage. For example, Lady Davers becomes mad at their union, and they become under an external pressure and have to resolve the conflict. Later, Mr. B—’s uncle pays his nephew a visit; indeed, he wants to detest the “inferior creature” Mr. B— has married. Both Lady Davers and Mr. B—’s uncle represent upper class society. They object to the marriage that has raised Pamela’s social rank. If the new couple, as indicated in the novel, manages to win these two people’s approval of their marriage, then are they able to convince the whole society of the plausibility of their marriage? They have to be at least psychologically in a position where they can absorb the rage of the society who despises this step.

Third, Pamela has to treat Mr. B— in accordance with his upbringing; she knows that “his poor mother spoil’d him at first. Nobody must speak to him or contradict him” (210). Thus, she promises, “it will be my pleasure, as well as

duty, to obey you in every thing" (296). Pamela knows that whenever he becomes angry, he does not want her to interfere with his affairs. Thus, he dictates the 48 rules for Pamela to follow. Submitting to his rules at that time gives their marriage a chance to continue. Here, she has two choices: either submit to the rules or work on changing them. If she accepts and obeys those rules as they are, then her submission is a natural result of her absorption into the upper class as expected in a patriarchal system. For the sake of submission, she has to give up her preceding resistance; this will cost her her dependence. What is bothering here is the number of the dictated rules; forty eight. All this is set in order to control her. Anyhow, if she wants to change any of her husband's rules, then she must be patient because the change will not happen all at once. Telling her parents about the rules, she writes, "after all, you'll see I have not the easiest Task in the World" (372). Here, she knows it is not an easy job.

Fourth, they have to face their age difference. Mr. B— is about twenty-six years old and she is sixteen years old. When she talks about Mr. B—'s sister's nephew, she says, "But for one of 25 or 26 years of age, much about the age of my dear master" (322). Pamela is "sixteen" (329). From the quotation, it seems that age means a lot to Pamela. I do not think the age issue will be a big issue, but I mention it here because Pamela brings it up in her letters.

Fifth, they are to establish a "Rule to regulate [their] Conduct by to one another" (263). As a husband and wife, their conduct toward each other should be based on many values including: mutual respect, responsibility, love and equality. Such values are necessary for any husband and wife. The way any pair treat each other will ultimately reflect on whether or not they have a healthy relationship where the focus will depend on respect, responsibility, love and equality; values human beings should emphasize at all times.

Sixth, both Mr. B— and Pamela are to assure their principles through practice. Pamela stresses in a letter that her parents taught her lessons "and they confirm'd their lessons by their own practice" (173). The new couple must practice the lessons they learned in their relationship, and develop a way to understand each other as a husband and a wife, not as a master and his servant. A mutual understanding may require some attention to be paid to the dictated forty-eight rules compiled for Pamela to follow in her life as a wife.

Seventh, psychologically speaking, they must face the inner enemy. After deciding not to drown herself in the pond, Pamela praises God and says, "I have been deliver'd from a worse enemy, myself" (154). And while he is

trying to decide whether to marry her or not, Mr. B— admits, "For my pride struggles hard within me" (185). Recognizing this inner challenge is an important step to surmount in their future.

Eighth, both have to trust in Providence; Pamela says, "Will I trust in Providence, who knows what is best for us and frequently turns the evils we most dread, to be the causes of our happiness" (235)? I mentioned earlier when she praises God and says, "I have been deliver'd from a worse enemy, myself" (154). As the text indicates, both have a religious tendency that will help them to fulfill their spiritual needs. Spirituality will enhance their marital life and provide them with some insights to confront their daily problems.

Ninth, jealousy is another barrier. Just before marriage, Mr. B— becomes jealous of Mr. Williams, the village minister. He confronts Pamela, "Here are several love-letters between you and Williams" (200). Furthermore, his interception of her letters, which he kept for himself, will affect their marriage unless he gets rid of them. He does not want Pamela to marry Mr. Williams, and at the end of the novel, he says, "If it please God, for my sins, to separate me from dearest Pamela, that you will only resolve not to marry one person" (404). Later, he adds, "this person is Mr. Williams" (405). Mr. B—'s excessive jealousy may lead to further consequences that neither partner wants in their life.

Tenth, Pamela has to avoid excessive pride as well; she says, "For fear I should grow too proud" (234), that is, after their marriage. She manages to deal with all the troubles she has faced; this victory will lead to feel proud. She displays her concern of becoming too proud, and does not want pride to devastate what she has planned for a long time.

Finally, they have to explore, admit and correct their faults. Pamela knows that she is long-winded and inclined to flattery. Mr. B—, on the other hand, regrets his cruelty against her and asks her to forgive him. These are good signs, but they have to remain frank with each other.

### III. CONCLUSION

In brief, if Pamela and Mr. B— take each of these barriers into consideration and try to deal with them, their marriage will prosper and work out according to the norms of the social system both are bound to uphold. Socially speaking, any couple should pay attention to these predicaments if they want for their marriage to succeed. Hence, literature does address social problems as explored above in this article and gives hints of guidance to its readers who may

get exposed to such obstacles in their actual lives.

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