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Pamela's Textual Authority

Abstract
Removed from her parents, harassed and imprisoned by her employer, nearly driven to suicide, Richardson's Pamela attempts to forge a personal identity that balances conflicting claims of authority. As the novel proceeds, Pamela tries to embody her parents' injunctions and to correct the abuses of aristocratic privilege by Mr B. Her maturing process culminates in a struggle between Mr B.'s will to power over Pamela and her will to profess and practise virtue. Unfortunately, the authority of Pamela's appeals to truth and virtue is threatened by her subordinated roles as adolescent, woman, and servant, roles which pose contradicting claims against a mature male aristocrat. Thus even though her moral stance may be justified by her belief in the correspondence between inward virtue and outward honesty, it is supported by little that is tangible in terms of age, sex, or social status. The only identity, the only authority, and the greatest degree of power she bas are manifest in her writing, a textuality giving voice to an identity Mr B. would willingly debase and silence. A closer examination of the manner in which Pamela invokes different texts--in particular, her own and those of scripture and fable--to strengthen her claims to truth and authority reveals the complexity of the character's and novel's textuality. Mr B.'s charges that she is fabricating a "romance" would take on some merit if she did not write truth, and she would become a temptress, a Lucretia, or a Shamela, manipulating a frustrated lover out of self-interest and caprice. Essentially, Pamela's text as a discourse of authority, as a virtually sacred record of events, manifests personal identity supplemented by sacred and secular texts, and reinforces her personalized claims to textual authority.

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Removed from her parents, harassed and imprisoned by her employer, nearly driven to suicide, Richardson's Pamela attempts to forge a personal identity that balances conflicting claims of authority.[1] As the novel proceeds, Pamela tries to embody her parents' injunctions and to correct the abuses of aristocratic privilege by Mr B.[2] Her maturing process culminates in a struggle between Mr B.'s will to power over Pamela and her will to profess and practise virtue. Unfortunately, the authority of Pamela's appeals to truth and virtue is threatened by her subordinated roles as adolescent, woman, and servant, roles which pose contradicting claims against a mature male aristocrat.[3] Thus even though her moral stance may be justified by her belief in the correspondence between inward virtue and outward honesty, it is supported by little that is tangible in terms of age, sex, or social status. The only identity, the only authority, and the greatest degree of power she has are manifest in her writing, a textuality giving voice to an identity Mr B. would willingly debase and silence. A closer examination of the manner in which Pamela

1 John A. Dussinger, "What Pamela Knew: An Interpretation," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 69 (1970), 379.

2 Dussinger (p. 381) and Nancy K. Miller, *The Heroine's Text: Readings in the French and English Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980) pp. 39–40, discuss the parents' role in shaping Pamela. See also Christopher Flint, "The Anxiety of Affluence: Family and Class (Dis)order in *Pamela: or, Virtue Rewarded*," *SEL* 29 (1989), 497.

3 Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Adolescent Idea: Myths of Youth and the Adult Imagination* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), discusses Pamela's identity as part of the three subordinated groups of the adolescent, woman, and servant (p. 26).

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invokes different texts—in particular, her own and those of scripture and fable—to strengthen her claims to truth and authority reveals the complexity of the character's and novel's textuality. Mr B.'s charges that she is fabricating a "romance"[4] would take on some merit if she did not write truth, and she would become a temptress, a Lucretia, or a Shamela, manipulating a frustrated lover out of self-interest and caprice.[5] Essentially, Pamela's text as a discourse of authority, as a virtually sacred record of events, manifests personal identity supplemented by sacred and secular texts, and reinforces her personalized claims to textual authority.

Pamela's "Text"

In an off-hand remark addressed to Mrs Jewkes during her imprisonment at Lincolnshire, Pamela talks in a "prattling Vein," offering what she calls "a little History of myself" (p. 173). Pamela's claim that she creates a history follows in the tradition of eighteenth-century writers who seek to obtain a greater degree of credibility for their narratives by invoking an empirical bias to set against the idealizing impulse of romance. As Michael McKeon has pointed out, the generic and epistemological claims of the term "history" are intertwined with, and set in opposition to, those of "romance." Romance emerges in the period "as not only a distinct generic, but also as a broadly epistemological, category whose meaning is overwhelmingly trivialized or pejorative." History, on the other hand, becomes increasingly connected to empirical truth, "exploiting especially the techniques of authentication by first-hand and documentary witness." In McKeon's terms, Pamela is a "naïve empiricist," a character refuting the fabrications of romance compiled by Mr B. in favour of "an empirical epistemology that derives from many sources." Pamela's sources include her first-hand observations, which are fixed, verified, and verifiable when she records them in written form. Borrowing from Elizabeth Eisenstein, McKeon outlines the argument that writing, but more particularly print, is connected to the development of the idea of objective history.[6]

Pamela's assertion that her story is a "history" gives authority to her account. What might seem personal and subjective becomes more general and objective when set against the structures of history. The possibility that her reports are distorted by emotionalism or unreliability is

4 Samuel Richardson, *Pamela or, Virtue Rewarded*, ed. T.C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), p. 201. References are to this edition.

5 For discussions of Mr B. as romance writer, see Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel 1600–1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), pp. 357–64 and Sheila C. Conboy, "Fabric and Fabrication in Richardson's *Pamela*," *ELH* 54 (1987), 85–86.

6 See McKeon, pp. 27, 46–47, 21, and 43.

somewhat circumscribed, and the reader's sympathy and judgment are simultaneously engaged. More important, the move to historicity, by fixing experience in written form, creates a text which is the arbiter of truth in the dispute between Mr B. and Pamela. It can be reviewed and revisited for confirmation or refutation of the "facts" of Pamela's imprisonment and her treatment. Indeed, when Mr B. disputes Pamela's assertion that she has no serious intention of marrying Parson Williams, she refers him to "the Text" of her journal:

> Why, said he, you discourage his [Parson Williams's] Address in Appearance; but no otherwise than all your cunning Sex do to ours, to make us eager in pursuing you.
>
> Well, Sir, said I, that is your comment; but it does not appear so in the Text. (p. 200)

The force of this argument is direct and far reaching. Mr B. argues for a form of authority that reads codes of "appearance" and that is invariably tied to false seemings hiding manipulative interests. Pamela's appeal to authority resides in the mediated form of the "text." She bypasses questions of subjectivity perhaps because it is her own subjectivity that is at stake. The "text" acts as an objectified form for Pamela, having a reflective security and stability produced from but outside the constant threats to her virtue. She tells Mr B. that her sincerity and honesty are clearly evident in her letter, thereby raising it to the status of a work having a self-evident truth. By confining the flow and swirl of experience to letters, Pamela gives reported experience a truth that is tangible, fixed, examinable, and therefore confirmed as truth. Ultimately, reference to "the text" reinforces her own sense of empirical truth and encourages a certain degree of sympathy in the reader for such views. Moreover, Pamela's absolute reference to "the Text" suggests she believes it is a full and authentic report of her actions and a reflection of her intentions. She thereby grants a certainty to language that a modern writer is not likely to give and that a contemporary such as Sterne would easily ridicule. She sees words as directly connected to truth, arguing quite flatly, "I have only writ Truth" (p. 206). The schisms between signifier and signified, intention and meaning, are denied or glossed over; the expressive and referential values of language also have equal value in this empirically based textuality. The text as arbiter, authority, and object thus delivers power to Pamela that transcends the limitations of sex, class, and circumstance.

Difficulties arise, however, in as much as Pamela's truth is rather mal-

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leable, a truth that one critic has called "iffy."[7] Pamela's notion of truth may be more sharply defined in light of Patricia Meyer Spacks's distinction between truths of representation and those of doctrine.[8] Truth of representation is the claim of the practitioner of realism or verisimilitude, and in literature it purports to record faithfully actual events and people in written form with a verifiable referential accuracy. Truth of doctrine is a "moral or ethical" one constituted from the framework of social thought.[9] Pamela's claim to an authoritative truth, like that of many authors, is problematic, since she does not differentiate between the truths of representation and doctrine, the facts of the referential and the estimates of the ethical. Moreover, such claims to truth and authority are complicated by the strong emotive or expressive dimension of her observations and writing.

The resulting truth may seem "iffy," but it is inclusive. Her central concern is "to establish her sincerity: her letters faithfully express her feelings at the time of her suffering."[10] With disarming honesty she argues, "tho' I don't remember all I wrote, yet I know I wrote my Heart; and that is not deceit" (p. 200). The sincere heart as a measure of truth opens the way to the novel and heroine of sentiment[11] and, additionally, sets referential and expressive modes of discourse on an equal footing. The bull Pamela thinks she sees outside the gates in Lincolnshire, for instance, may later be understood to have been only a cow (p. 137), but her early view of it as a bull accurately expresses her sexual fear of Mr B. and reflects a more personal truth than a verifiable description of the actual object would.[12] While Pamela tends to subsume representational and doctrinal truths within the framework of personal observation and felt experience, what seems crucial to the heartfelt truth of her text is that this mix supports rather than diminishes her authority. This form of truth and

7 Patricia McKee, "Corresponding Freedoms: Language and the Self in *Pamela*," *ELH* 52 (1985), 632.

8 Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Desire and Truth: Functions of Plot in Eighteenth-Century English Novels* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 1–2.

9 Spacks, *Desire and Truth*, p. 2.

10 Lars Harveit, *The Art of Persuasion: A Study of Six Novels* (Bergen: Universititsforlaget, 1977), p. 18.

11 For more on Pamela's journal as embodying her "heart," see Roy Roussel, "Reflections on the Letter: The Reconciliation of Distance and Presence in *Pamela*," *ELH* 41 (1974), 387–88.

12 Conboy comments on the way in which Pamela's "imagination subsumes the 'facts,' and she projects them onto the world in new ways" during her imprisonment (p. 87). Her sight of the bull illustrates how "her fear of phallic attack has impaired her vision, rendering her unable to effect the escape she desires" (p. 88). Yet this "impaired ... vision" offers the most accurate view of Pamela's experience of the moment. See also Stuart Wilson, "Richardson's *Pamela*: An Interpretation," *PMLA* 88 (1973), 85–86, for a commentary on the bull as an incarnation of Pamela's sexual fears.

authority is bolstered by the adaptation of other textual forms, specifically those of scripture and fable.

Sacred Texts: The Bible

Pamela's status as a Christian heroine has been suggested by Roger Sharrock,[13] but her use of the Bible has not adequately been commented on. Pamela's use of the Bible places her in a Judeo-Christian heritage strongly modified by the Puritan tradition of the spiritual biography. As J. Paul Hunter points out, spiritual autobiographies "could formulate causes and effects to exhibit the purposeful nature of God's plan for an individual, and they could portray 'examples' for the imitation or evitation of the reader, so that, like providence books, their function was not only polemical but moral." For Pamela, the effect of participating in this tradition is to validate her experience and align "even ... seemingly trivial happenings" with profound events containing a divine shape.[14] Thus her actions and, more particularly, the records of them take on an even greater significance as her text inscribes the empirical concerns of history within the spiritual contexts of divinity. References to scripture go beyond acts of simple piety, complementing the empirical truths of secular history with the spiritual truth of sacred revelation, and her mandate as recording angel for her own book of fate shifts from passive recording to active interpretation. As part of a Puritan tradition she reinterprets her subjective experience as part of a larger struggle of spiritual endurance elevating both her role and her record.

Her direct references to the Bible during her imprisonment in Lincolnshire identify her state with that of the dispossessed and enslaved Israelites. Despondent over her imprisonment and prohibition from going to church on Sunday (p. 127), Pamela constructs her own updated version of Psalm 137. The importance of this psalm is revealed just before her wedding when Pamela's version is compared, stanza by stanza, with a traditional version contained in Mr Williams's "little Pocket Common-prayer Book."[15] In this case, the reader is given conscious clues about how the text is to be read and the kind of agreed-upon authority it has

13 Roger Sharrock, "Richardson's *Pamela*: The Gospel and the Novel," *Durham University Journal* 58 (1966), 67–74. Margaret Anne Doody, *A Natural Passion: A Study of the Novels of Samuel Richardson* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), also describes *Pamela* as "a Christian fable" (p. 34).

14 J. Paul Hunter, *The Reluctant Pilgrim: Defoe's Emblematic Method and Quest for Form in "Robinson Crusoe"* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966), pp. 76–77.

15 In the following discussion, I will quote from the version in Williams's "Common-prayer Book" (pp. 26–31).

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within the fictional world of the novel. Close discussion of Pamela's version of the psalm seems purposely delayed so that its public appearance coincides with her entrance into the social sphere of aristocratic privilege. Although Mr B. controls the text at this point—it comes from his pocket—in the course of the scene it moves into the public domain and passes from a private text of personal suffering to a public account of heroic action. Comments by the ladies suggesting that it is "very pretty" and by Lady Jones declaring the psalm "a new Instance of [Pamela's] ... Genius and Accomplishments" (pp. 268, 269) bolster Pamela's confidence at this precarious juncture and reinforce the sense that the products of her personal sufferings are congruent with norms of larger aristocratic society. The censure of the ladies directed against Mr B. and his own admission that he "should get no Credit by shewing" the psalm are a recognition and an admission of guilt on Mr B.'s part and recommend the great forbearance and fortitude on Pamela's. The general approval of Pamela's rendering of the psalm in such a public forum and in conjunction with the public ritual of the wedding reinforces the authority of her account as filtered through the psalm. This social acknowledgment reconstructs the earlier, isolated act of creation in personal suffering, removing any lingering sense of self-pity, solipsism, or manipulative purpose.

Psalm 137 records the constancy in sorrow of a dispossessed Israelite community and their curse against their imprisoners. Pamela describes it as "a little touching" (p. 127), meaning, of course, that it touches or reflects her current emotional state; the tactile image, however, is fitting in a perspective based on sensibility. She writes that she "turn'd to it, and took the Liberty to alter it to my Case more; I hope I did not sin in it; But thus I turn'd it" (p. 127). The key word here is "liberty"; textual revisionism seems the only certain evidence of freedom she has. The empowerment experienced in turning to the psalm and turning it to her case shows a consciousness self-determined within Christian ideology. The self determined is limited by the fear of sin—"I hope I did not sin in it"—but at least the attempted freedom is possible. Pamela's turning of the psalm to reflect her "case more" shows the expressive potentiality of this Puritan tradition. In adapting and transforming biblical events to her own life, she makes herself, as a figure of virtue, part of a pattern of faith in an oppressive landscape and portrays herself as one of the chosen people.

In revising the psalm, Pamela also echoes the authorial function of Richardson and other eighteenth-century novelists. The transformation of "Babylon" to "B—n–hall" and "Harp" to "Spinnet" involves Pamela in a process of literary displacement in which mythic and archetypal im-

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ages are translated into the objects of formal realism.[16] This hermeneutic action, reflecting the process and claims made by the novel itself, reinforces Pamela's claims to authoritative representation. In addition, the temporal displacement involved in fusing Pamela's contemporary experience with that of the ancient Hebrews extends a certain degree of novelistic authority over the modulation of time. At the very least, the manipulation of place, objects, and time offers a surrogate liberty, a mental freedom, that counterbalances her physical imprisonment. Like the novel writer, she may be constrained by the room she writes from, but seeks her liberty in the transformation of the literary sources within it. The eradication of temporal difference emphasizes the similarity of human experience, making Pamela's individual drama more universal, lifting her out of the prison of self-enclosure.

Pamela's revision of the psalm thus has a self-reflexive quality that mingles realistic sentimental vision with the ability to adapt ancient tradition to modern experience. Beyond the simple displacement of "Babylon" to "B—n" and "Harp" to "Spinnet," Pamela replaces the theme of faith in Jerusalem and Jehovah of the original psalm with a concern for "innocence" and "chastity," and introduces the implied metaphor that chastity itself is the walled city of Jerusalem.

Mrs Jewkes, not Mr B., is depicted as the central assailant of this jewelled city:

> Remember, Lord, this Mrs. Jewkes,
> When with a mighty Sound
> She cries, Down with her Chastity,
> Down to the very Ground
>
> Ev'n so shalt thou, O wicked One,
> At length to Shame be brought;
> And happy shall all those be call'd
> That my Deliv'rance wrought.

The Old Testament version contains imprecations against the Edomites, heirs of Esau and therefore exiled from the immediate grace of God. But in the curse against Mrs Jewkes, Pamela, not surprisingly, moderates the tone of vindictiveness against the oppressor, replacing the famous image of dashing out babies' brains with "Even so shalt thou, O wicked One, / At length to Shame be brought." The outlines of Pamela's mythic universe become clearer even as she engages in an act of literary displacement. Equal to the destruction of infants is the bringing of shame

16 See Northrop Frye, "Myth, Fiction and Displacement," *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1963), p. 36.

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on the persecutors. Shame involves a destruction of the outward fortifications of the self, of honour, honesty, and truth, to reveal outward appearances as false, the self as a negation of value. Pamela, obsessed with building a self of larger significance, obviously feels that this loss of self is as abhorrent as infanticide. Her emphasis on Mrs Jewkes perhaps suggests the deep fear of a female anti-Pamela, one whose false chastity can lead only to shame. Yet, in addition, the localizing of blame in Mrs Jewkes serves as a method of psychological damage control; by limiting Mr B.'s involvement, she possibly reveals the degree of her attachment to him. Indeed her final stanza suggests the desire for a male deliverer:

> Yea, blessed shall the Man be call'd
> That shames thee of thy Evil
> And saves me from thy vile Attempts,
> And thee, too, from the D—l—

At this point in the novel Pamela may consciously believe Williams the deliverer, but she subconsciously hopes it is Mr B. himself. Later in the novel Pamela's restraint on this point will strike Mr B., if not the reader, as another sign of the generosity of her soul and the appropriateness of her social elevation. The moment is well prepared for by the dialogue between Pamela, Mr B., Williams, and a silent Mrs Jewkes:

> Now, good Sir, said I, oblige me; don't read any further: Pray don't! O pray, Madam, said Mr. *Williams*, let me beg to have the rest read; for I long to know who you make the Sons of *Edom*, and how you turn the Psalmist's Execrations against the insulting *Babylonians*.
>
> Well, Mr. *Williams*, reply'd I, you should not have said so. O, said my Master, that is one of the best things of all. Poor Mrs. Jewkes stands for *Edom's* Sons; and we must not lose this, because I think it one of my *Pamela's* Excellencies, that tho' thus oppress'd, she prays for no Harm upon the Oppressor. (pp. 269–70)

Interestingly, Williams's sycophancy is set off against Mr B.'s authoritarianism here, and only Pamela's virtue seems to emerge unscathed.

Pamela's other references to the Bible emphasize servitude. In the degree of certainty Pamela arrogates to her writing as history, she comes close to usurping divine omniscience. As we have seen, the errors of emotionalism humanize the scope of her observations for the reader but are overlooked by her and are not seen in conflict with the authority of her version of truth. McKeon notes that while she nears the "sin of sufficiency," "she is consistently on her guard against the temptation to arrogate to her own ingenuity the praise for 'Contrivances' that are

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truly due only to 'the Author of all my Happiness.'"[17] The concern that she not "sin" in transforming biblical texts offers a check against the presumptuous and hubristic. While struggling against the "Kindness" (p. 180) of Mr B., she speaks in a biblical cadence derived directly from David as he is about to face Goliath:

> But I trust, that that God, who has deliver'd me from the Paw of the Lion and the Bear; that is, his and Mrs. *Jewkes's* Violences; will also deliver me from this *Philistine*, myself, and my own Infirmities, that I may not defy the Commands of the Living God!

The heroic stature gained is moderated by the limitation of the self before a divine source of power and authority. And much later, in a debate over the text for her wedding, Pamela chooses one that reinforces her role as servant: "I am sure ... if anybody ever had Reason, I have, to say, with the blessed Virgin, *My Soul doth magnify the Lord; for he hath regarded the low Estate of his Handmaiden,—and exalted one of low Degree*" (p. 263). The social victory is replaced by subjection to the divine.[18]

Spiritual servitude supplants the physical servitude she faces under Mr B. and within the structures of social and gender-based identity. She plays out the paradoxical ideal of liberation in the idea that she is never entirely free until enslaved to God.[19]

Secular Texts: The Fable

In his Preface to *Pamela*, Richardson indicates his indebtedness to the tradition of the fable when he notes that the work is designed "*to* Divert *and* Entertain, *and at the same time to* Instruct, *and* Improve *the Minds of the* YOUTH *of both Sexes* ... as well as ... persons of maturer Years and Understandings" (p. 3). Such indebtedness is not surprising considering the moral import of the work and the fable's importance in the eighteenth century. In addition, the fact that he published a revised version of Sir Roger L'Estrange's *Aesop* barely a year before *Pamela* and referred to this edition in the novel (p. 77) indicates more than a casual influence.[20]

17 McKeon, p. 362.

18 McKeon, pp. 378–80.

19 Compare John Donne's Sonnet XIV, *The Divine Poems*, ed. Helen Gardner (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1952), p. 11.

20 For a discussion of the importance of the fable in this period see Thomas Noel, *Theories of the Fable in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), pp. 1–13. On the background of Richardson's publication of *Aesop's Fables* see T.C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel, *Samuel Richardson: A Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), pp. 76–80; Katherine Hornbeak, "Richardson's Aesop," *Smith College Studies in Modern Languages* 19 (1939), 39–50; and Doody, pp. 22–28.

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Particularly appropriate for use in the novel, the fable frames instruction and delight within a form that bridges barriers of age and social class. Locke, for instance, argues that Aesop's *Fables* are unique in their suitability for all ages; the *Fables*, while "apt to delight and entertain a Child, may yet afford useful Reflections to a grown Man."[21] In his own preface to L'Estrange's *Fables*, Richardson writes that the fables are "fit for the instruction of the youth of both sexes, at the same time that we hope it [the book] will not be found unworthy of the perusal of persons of riper years and understandings."[22] As the fable is also a didactic form that functions outside the divisions of social class,[23] it is a credible form for Pamela, a young girl of low social status, to learn from and to adapt to her own personal station, that of her parents, and Richardson's audience, a broad mixture of social classes. The wide appeal of the fable does not necessarily make it apolitical, however. Margaret Anne Doody, one of the few critics to comment directly on Richardson's use of the fable, has noted that "Like a fable, the story [of *Pamela*] has an indirect bearing on a broader political and social situation." She goes on to offer a concise summary of the story in terms of fable morality: "The holder of rank and power over-extends his authority treacherously, until taught a lesson, and those in the pay of the powerful are haughty-minded and foolish counsellors."[24] The fable as adopted in *Pamela* offers a moral truth and common-sense wisdom compatible with the sacred truth of scripture and the empirical truth of history.

In invoking the fable of the "Grasshopper and the Ants," for instance, Pamela presents herself and her reader with an object lesson that admonishes any tendency to sloth through the enjoyments of luxury and illustrates the rather precarious nature of her social and economic status. She sees herself as the grasshopper, making a "fine Figure with my Singing and Dancing" when she returns to her parents, drawing attention to the fact that Lady B. has educated her far beyond the social station of her birth. She hopes, upon her return, to become like one of the ants and "get a little Plain-work, or any thing to do" (p. 77), yet this regressive social move is conveyed as a form of self-mortification and clearly runs counter to Pamela's desires and the direction of the fiction towards self-definition and self-fulfilment. She follows the fable with the story "of a good Bishop that was to be burnt for his Religion and he try'd

21 John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education, The Educational Writings of John Locke: A Critical Edition with Introduction and Notes*, ed. James L. Axtell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 259.

22 Samuel Richardson, ed., *Aesop's Fables* (1940; New York: Garland, 1975), p. xii.

23 Noel, p. 10.

24 Doody, p. 33.

how he could bear it, by putting his Fingers into the lighted Candle" (p. 77). Her equation of this mortification of the self to the scouring of "Pewter Plate" (p. 78) and the getting of "Needle-work" (p. 78) borders on excessive self-pity, luckily interrupted by the appearance of "our *Hannah* with a message from Mrs. *Jervis*" (p. 78). Pamela's self-indulgence emerges not just as a sign of her egotistic immaturity but also as an indicator that she already participates in the expectations of a higher social class.

The use of the fable dramatizes Pamela's circumspection when facing an impending change in which her singing and dancing at Brandon Hall will be exchanged for scrubbing and sewing in the house of her parents. In the choice of such an apt fable, Pamela demonstrates a sharpness of mind capable of accurately evaluating present circumstances, yet the choice of a fable—rather than, say, a biblical text, philosophical axiom, or learned allusion—illustrates the common sense of a simple country girl. Pamela's statement that she has of her own accord read this fable "in my Lady's Books" (p. 77) is designed to impress the reader by showing that her mind is capable of educating itself, and evaluating her personal situation through the application of learned generalizations. The fable, when applied to human experience, demonstrates learning as an applied part of human life; the emphasis on Pamela's mental acuity prepares the reader for an acceptance of her individual merit that justifies her social elevation at the end of the novel. Moreover, the speculation that her singing and dancing at Brandon Hall shall make her "unfit for a May-day Holiday-time, for these Minuets, Rigadoons, and *French* Dances, that I have been practicing will make me but ill Company for my rural Milkmaid Companions that are to be" (p. 77) explicitly suggests that Pamela, knowingly or not, is constitutionally suited to a genteel life. Her innate intelligence coupled and her constitution adapted to the life of a gentlewoman perhaps compensate for her low birth. Yet the cautionary impact of the tale is not lost on Pamela; she demonstrates "an humble, and a teachable Mind" in her willingness to forego the personal inclination to retain the attributes of her genteel lifestyle in favour of that which is "honest."

Immediately following these speculations, Pamela has further opportunity to illustrate her acuity through another fable. After abruptly breaking off from speculation about what she will do when she returns home, she characterizes her nervousness in terms of the fable of the city mouse and the country mouse: "'Twas only our *Hannah* with a Message from Mrs. *Jervis!*—But, good Sirs, there is some body else!—Well, it is only *Rachel*. I am as much frighted as were the City Mouse and the Country Mouse in the same Book of Fables; at everything that stirs" (p. 78).

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In the fable, a country mouse visits her sister in the city. Despite the plenty of the city, the country mouse comes to see that she would "much rather lie knobbing of crusts, without fear or hazard, in my own hole, than be mistress of all the delicacies in the world, and subject to such terrifying alarms and dangers."[25] The use of the fable to comment on the immediate interruption of her writing shows her spontaneous response controlled by an automatic intellectual and moral framework. The fable gives articulate form to innate character, a character refined through education.

A later fable illustrates Pamela's ability to rework and revise the basic elements of the fable narrative. As Mr B. supports Mrs Jewkes in a series of accusations against her, Pamela blurts out, "I have a strange Tribunal to plead before. The poor Sheep, in the Fable, had such an one; when it was try'd before the Vulture on the Accusations of the Wolf" (p. 162). The allusion is to fable 29 in Richardson's *Aesop's Fables* in which a dog, not a wolf, brings legal action for some hay long overdue. A kite, wolf, and vulture stand as biased witnesses against the sheep and no judge is mentioned. Pamela's revision of the fable seems intentional here, bringing it closer to her situation and highlighting her isolation in a community of three. The reactions to Pamela of Mr B. and Mrs Jewkes also illustrate the "Moral" Richardson attaches to this fable in his *Aesop*: "It is not a straw matter, whether the main cause be right or wrong, or the charge be true or false, where the bench, jury and witnesses are in a conspiracy against the prisoner." The "Reflection" upon the fable also fits Mr B. and Mrs Jewkes with a surprising allegorical suggestiveness: "No innocence can be safe where power and malice are in confederacy against it."[26]

Pamela's transformation of the basic components of a pre-existing narrative into a more expressive form illustrates her creative autonomy; she rewrites Aesop within the didactic boundaries of conventional morality but at the same time adapts the literary dimensions of the fable to express more accurately her own experience. The constancy of her didactic truth, evident in the appropriateness of Richardson's Moral and Reflection to Pamela's revised narrative, stabilizes the protean shifts of literary embellishment. The literary components chosen are not random but derive from a confluence of Aesop's *Fables* and the literal and figurative aspects of her own experience. The literal conflict between Pamela, on one side, and Mr B. and Mrs Jewkes, on the other, works clearly as a moral tale of innocence in conflict with corrupt authority, and the figurative equation of Pamela with the sheep, Mrs Jewkes with the wolf,

25 Richardson, *Aesop's Fables*, p. 9.
26 Richardson, *Aesop's Fables*, p. 23.

has a source within the imagery created by the characters in the novel. The raw materials for such figuralism are provided in an earlier dialogue between Pamela and Mrs Jewkes:

> And now I have not five Shillings left to support me, if I *can* get away!— Was ever such a Fool as I! I must be priding myself in my Contrivances indeed! Said I, was this in your Instructions, *Wolfkin?* for she called me *Lambkin. Jezebel,* you mean, Child, said she!—Well, I now forgive you heartily; let's buss and be Friends!—Out upon you, said I! I cannot bear you. But I durst not call her Names again; for I dread her huge Paw most sadly. (p. 121)

The initial comparison of Pamela to a "lambkin" and Mrs Jewkes to a "wolfkin" offers a static representation of the ongoing conflict between them, but it becomes dynamic when adapted to fable form in her argument with Mr B. and Mrs Jewkes. Pamela expands the conflict of simple opposition between the lamb and wolf into a more wide-ranging scenario of a sheep outnumbered and outranked by two representative antagonists. The background of Aesop's *Fable* hints at the fate of innocence when social and political structures are abused, especially when to the advantage of a wanton aristocracy. The conflict of predator and victim is enlarged into a commentary on an exploitive social hierarchy and an abusive political structure. Richardson's Reflection for this Aesop's *Fable*—"There is no living ... without law" (p. 23)—underlines the urgency of proper governance in the social and political body.

The responses of the other two characters are revealing. Mr B. comments:

> So, Mrs *Jewkes*, said he, you are the Wolf, I the Vultur, and this the poor innocent Lamb on her Trial before us.—Oh! you don't know how well this Innocent is read in Reflection. She has Wit at Will, when she has a mind to display her own romantick Innocence, at the Price of other People's Characters.
>
> Well, said the aggravating Creature, this is nothing to what she has called me; I have been a *Jezebel*, a *London* Prostitute, and what not?—But I am contented with her ill Names, now I see it is her Fashion and she can call your Honour a Vultur. (p. 162)

These responses demonstrate the presence of an interpretive community within which there is common understanding of the basic outline of morality, even if it is not adhered to or applied to everyday existence out of rampant self-interest (as with Mr B.). One of the central struggles in the novel is for control over the nature of the hermeneutic for this community. Pamela has the natural advantage, since she is the source of information about this world, but Mr B. and Mrs Jewkes constantly

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attempt to discredit her claims to honest and authoritative representation. Despite the social and political superiority of Mr B., Pamela derives additional authority by fabricating or transforming a literary form—the fable—to reflect her expressive response and the descriptively based facts of the moral battle that rages around and within her. Mr B. attempts a similar process by citing romance tales such as those of Lucrece, but his transformations are more properly distortions born out of immorality and self-interest. The obvious corruption in Mr B. and Mrs Jewkes in the first half of the novel also undermines their claims to authority, literary or personal, and shifts possession of an authoritative fiction to Pamela. Indeed, Pamela's implicit claims to authority seem validated by the recognition brought to Mr B. (and others) when he reads and is transformed by Pamela's journal as a whole. Distance from his own anger allows calmer recognition of his own failures. While the fable may be reductive in its portrait of human manners, it seems an appropriate educational tool, illuminating the most obvious abuses in a complex network of personal, social, and political relationships.

Pamela shows additional felicity with the fable form by creating one of her own. While fishing with Mrs Jewkes, she stumbles upon an object lesson for herself. At this moment she has no external writings to draw on but develops her own text of life. The transformation of experience into fable comes in a moment of self-discovery:

> She baited the Hook, and I held it, and soon hooked a lovely Carp. Play it, play it, said she; I did, and brought it to the Bank. A sad Thought just then came into my Head; and I took it, and threw it in again; and O the Pleasure it seem'd to have, to flounce in, when at Liberty!—Why this? says she. O Mrs. *Jewkes*! said I, I was thinking this poor Carp was the unhappy *Pamela*. I was likening you and myself to my naughty Master. As we hooked and deceived the poor Carp, so was I betrayed by false Baits; and when you said Play it, play it, it went to my Heart, to think I should sport with the Destruction of the poor fish I had betray'd; and I could not but fling it in again: And did you not see the Joy with which the happy Carp flounced from us! O! said I, may some good merciful Body procure me my Liberty in the same manner; for, to be sure, I think my Danger equal! (p. 120)

The "sad thought" demonstrates a literary self-consciousness born out of self-recognition. Such understanding portrays her relationship as one of betrayal and the destruction of "liberty"; her recognition of this and refusal to be manipulated by Mrs Jewkes into participating in the same kind of "play," even with a fish, demonstrates her refusal to be an accomplice in her own moral or physical "destruction." In the following paragraph, Pamela creates an alternate fable, telling Mrs Jewkes, "I will

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plant Life then, if I can, while you are destroying it. I have some Horse-beans here, and I'll go stick them into one of the Borders, to see how long they will be coming up: and I will call them my Garden" (p. 120). As an alternate activity, the planting of life stands in opposition to the carp-playing of Mr B. and Mrs Jewkes, setting seeds and letters side by side under the earth to foster a new existence Pamela hopes will be outside the gates of Lincolnshire. By creating her own fables, Pamela demonstrates her total assimilation of a moral universe ready for application to everyday experience. Outside the sphere of her parents' influence, she begins to replicate an authoritative text in accord with their beliefs but modified and personalized in terms of her own individual experience.

The ability to recognize and frame such a fable suggests a degree of detachment necessary to Pamela if she is to surmount the potentially paralysing force of the abduction, captivity, and threat of rape. Detachment and analysis are a necessary adjunct to the developing identity of Pamela and signal a maturing consciousness. The self-created fable registers the consciousness of her victimized status and illustrates the potential hopelessness and hopefulness of her situation. It also reflexively illustrates Pamela's spontaneous creativity. Through her reworking of the materials of human experience into a form blending the literary and didactic, she illustrates definitively her role as artist. As A.M. Kearney points out, "Pamela's role ... is that of the novelist himself: by bringing literary ability and sufficient reflection to bear upon the crude stuff of personal experience, he shapes it as didactic art."[27] As in her use of biblical texts, the relative truths of her everyday experience are united to long-standing traditions of interpreting and viewing the world. The fable is used as a nodal point that alerts the reader and the character to larger thematic concerns set forth in the whole of the novel or experience. By crystallizing the main themes of hundreds of pages of text in one paragraph, the fable gives the truths of a single utterance greater validation.

Conclusion: The Composite Text

The composite text wrought of empirical discourse modified by emotive value, biblical allusiveness, and moral didacticism combines to form the autonomous creative personality at the heart of Richardson's novel. As ingredients in what Richardson called "a new species of writing,"[28]

27 A.M. Kearney, "Richardson's *Pamela*: The Aesthetic Case," *Review of English Literature* 7:3 (1966), 89.

28 Letter to Aaron Hill (1741), *Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson*, ed. John Carroll (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), p. 41.

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the combination of texts enhances the character of Pamela's complexity, reinforcing her solid grounding in the Bible and Aesop's *Fables* while linking her to an intellectual acuity that suits her rise to a privileged social position. These textual structures create a difficult balance between the radical relativism of individual perception and the oppressive authoritarianism of imposed texts, received commandments, and repressive moralities. Pamela's free manipulation of a variety of textual forms is at the centre of her liberty, as it is of the privileged status accorded her character. Ultimately, the balancing of conflicting claims to authority is achieved by the assimilation of all received influences and by their realignment in terms of individual human experience. Pamela's letters and journals demonstrate that an authoritative account containing a truthful representation of human experience is not reducible either to the exactness of referential truth or the subjectivism of entirely personal truth. The former is the truth of a tyrant; the latter, that of an egoist. Pamela's authority, instead, derives from the assimilation of universal forms to the honesty of human sentiment.

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