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Annotated bibliography

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Pamela: Or, Virtue Rewarded

Introduction

The publication of Pamela in 1740 was a media “event.” It was characterized by varied responses: unqualified approval, celebration, and caustic mockery. In Pamela’s anxieties, doubts and fears, we see the creation of a new self, one that defines and qualifies itself through the act of writing. In a Descartes-ian twist, we can hear Pamela stating, “I write, therefore I am.” This self-definition takes the novel from a story of virtue under duress to a tale of the self “writing to the moment” and in the process, finding its own identity and a unique voice.

The readings we chose for this presentation form a multifarious cross-section of criticism of the last fifteen years: Pamela’s imprisonment as a metaphor for pre-puerperal confinement (Blackwell); the seduction tale as the voice of the disenfranchised (Bowers); the voice of Richardson the printer and that of Pamela the writer collapsing into one cautionary voice against censorship (Doody); and the epistemological problem of female virginity and its dependence on the woman’s “word” (Harol). New and ever-provocative readings tell us that the novel continues to both enthrall and vex readers two-and-a-half centuries after it was first published: Martin Harris explores the question of media

manipulation through a comparative reading with The Blair-Witch Project; Catherine Ingrassia reads economic history into Pamela's motives; Arlene Wilner analyzes the novel against the framework of a classic fairy-tale; and we end our presentation with Zschirnt's study of fainting, Pamela's secret (and very powerful) weapon. The very diversity of these readings reveal that the text that redefined what reading pleasure should be still continues to do so, and with considerable aplomb.

Annotated Bibliography

Blackwell, Bonnie. "O, Soften Him! or Harden Me!': Childbirth, Torture, and Technology in Richardson's Pamela." Genders 28 (1998): 1-43.

Blackwell's essay focuses on "recovering women's medical history" (1); she sees a parallel between the confinement of pregnant women in the eighteenth-century and Pamela's confinement at Mr. B's Lincolnshire estate. Blackwell's reading of Pamela draws its validity from an understanding of eighteenth-century medical history; she views Pamela's imprisonment as a case of "gender-torture." This imprisonment, Blackwell claims, is analogous to the "extended, involuntary 'stay'" in the birthing room that all pregnant women had to endure, a room that Blackwell calls the "politicized and contested space." The essay's title is inspired by Pamela's concerns about her post-marital life in the future; she sees herself faced with the endless cycle of pregnancy and birthing, a cycle that can only end if Mr. B is emasculated or "softened" or if she is "hardened" to her predicament and to the exigencies of her reproductive role. Blackwell sees condensed in these words, "O, Soften Him! Or Harden Me!," the latent fear of wives of the eighteenth-century aristocracy, of being an instrument of relentless breeding. Blackwell's reading derives from her interest in psychoanalysis and relies heavily on "the dynamic midwifery debates captured in the pamphlets and medical texts printed in Britain between 1670 and 1790" (2). She also states that Goodman Andrews' visit to see his daughter is fraught with the anxiety of discovering that

his daughter is indeed pregnant, thereby making the connection between confinement (imprisonment) and pre-puerperal confinement complete.

Bowers, Toni. "Representing Resistance." A Companion to the Eighteenth-Century English Novel and Culture. Ed. Paula R. Backscheider and Catherine Ingrassia. Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005. 140-64.

Toni Bowers connects the phenomenon of seduction fiction with the notion of disenfranchisement, asserting that seduction stories, of which "a great deal ... [was] produced in Britain between 1660 and 1760," were largely the product of Tory writers (Richardson himself being one of them) who were themselves disenfranchised from politics, especially between 1715 and 1760. Her essay "considers the changing ideological and partisan functions of seduction fiction across the eighteenth century" (142) and is especially interesting because of her reading that seduction fiction focuses on the condition of the "other," – be these women, religious and ethnic minorities like the Scots, disenfranchised groups like the Tories, or political radicals – and the notion of human agency within the conditions of subordination and dominance. Bowers labels Richardson "the ideological heir of his Tory predecessors L'Estrange, Behn, Manley, and Haywood" (148). The central argument of her essay is that in Richardson's seduction fiction, both in Pamela and in Clarissa, "besieged heroines enact resistance by means of paradoxically virtuous collusions" (148). Bowers claims

that Pamela is desirous to remain in her subordinate position; her resistance emerges from “a delight in submission” and because of a “distress” of the “disruption of traditional order” that results when Mr. B flaunts his designs on her.

Doody, Margaret Anne. “Samuel Richardson: Fiction and Knowledge.” The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel. Ed. John Richetti. Cambridge Companions to Literature. Cambridge, Eng: Cambridge UP, 1996. 90-119.

Margaret Doody’s anthologized essay places Pamela within the context of press censorship in the eighteenth century. Richardson the printer, experienced and observed closely the consequences of government interference on the free exchange of opinion. Despite his subsequent rise to affluence, Doody claims that he “never forgot that the poor should have a voice and that an unquestioned oligarchy that is all-rich (and all male) is unlikely to produce a model society” (96). All his novels reveal glimpses of his profession; his protagonists are all, as Doody correctly observes, writers. Mr. B’s attempts to control and monitor Pamela’s letters is an examination of censorship; the very fact that, as novel’s locus of authority, he is “overthrown” (in one sense) at the novel’s end is the author’s *sotto voce* celebration of freedom of expression. As Doody asserts, “Richardson in his novels recognizes no right invested in any person to control the ideas of another” (98). Pamela’s is compared to printers during the Civil War and in Richardson’s own time, “reduced to hiding her writing materials and

shifting that which has been written into hiding” (97). Doody examines also the Enlightenment idea of knowledge, that it is always a work-in-progress, never completely knowable. This is likened to the work of the printer with his belief that human authority is not absolute and that censorship is to be both abhorred and opposed; and at another level to Pamela’s own epistolary endeavors, characterized (like printing) by “new commentaries, corrections, and amplified editions” (98). As Doody astutely observes, Pamela is a “printer’s novel.”

Harol, Corinne. “Faking It: Female Virginitv and Pamela’s Virtue.” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*. 16.2 (2004): 197-216.

This article discusses the problem that arose in the eighteenth century about the hymen and the obsession, confusion, and anxiety that came with its representation. Thus, men were reliant on a woman’s “word” of her virginitv rather than any physical sign and visual evidence. Harol argues that Richardson’s *Pamela* reroutes this anxiety by placing Pamela as the figure who is ultimately unsure about her own virginitv. Mr. B- at first has no care if she is a virgin, but Pamela, after her fainting spells, only has the words of Mrs. Jervis and Mr. B- that she is indeed still a virgin. The male editor finally must enter the text and convince the audience that Pamela indeed is still a virgin. After this moment in the narrative, Harol sites the shift from the obsession with Pamela’s virginitv to a concentration on the “inner” Pamela, and her virtue. This is echoed in her shift from writing letters to writing a journal. Harol writes that, “in shifting the object

of investigation from virginity to virtue, *Pamela* asserts greater epistemological authority over female virtue, and thus over femininity, than contemporary scientific text had.” (209) Mr. B-’s interest in her also shifts from her body (raping) to her mind (reading). Ultimately, the novel becomes a story much more concerned with a woman’s thoughts and mind than it is with the purity of her body, but with this shift Harol argues that, “Pamela, rather than resolving the epistemological crisis of virginity, transfers that crisis onto women and virtue, making virtue...an entity concerning which woman’s word is inherently suspect.” (210)

Harris, Martin. “The 'Witchcraft' of Media Manipulation: *Pamela* and *The Blair Witch Project*.” Journal of Popular Culture. 34.4 (2001): 75-107

Harris’s article interestingly finds similarities between the Media responses of the eighteenth century *Pamela* and the late twentieth century *The Blair Witch Project*. He argues that by manipulating the various media through which the narratives are presented, the initial audience is encouraged to experience the fictional story as if it were non-fiction. (76) Harris concentrates on how both of these works, in their time, were a new style of entertainment in each perspective form, and that both the directors of *Blair Witch* and Richardson were looking to reinvent the genre in which they were working. Harris sets his argument up in three stages: *Pre-publication*, *Production*, and *Reception*. In his section on *Pre-Publication*, Harris find similarities in these works by how the

author and directors both used “strategies [that] helped foster speculation about the ‘truth’ of their fictional stories.” (76) In the *Production* section of his article, Harris looks at the similar ways in which these stories manipulate audience identification with the characters and how the creators were “motivated both by commercial interests and what can be describe as aesthetic objectives”. (84) He also looks at some of the similarities in which the texts are purposefully “amateurish.” The section on *Reception* compares the reception of both these works and comments that the extreme and positive reactions helped to fuel the popularity of the works themselves. Harris explains that both of these works were trying “to provide a conservative corrective to the genre of popular entertainment”. (86)

Ingrassia, Catherine. "I Am Become a Mere Usurer': Pamela and Domestic Stock-Jobbing." Studies in the Novel 30.3 (1998): 303-323.

Catherine Ingrassia’s essay is a brilliant economic reading of the novel; she sees Pamela’s actions as akin to that of a stock-jobber, an unscrupulous stockbroker. Drawing from a rich tapestry of references to the economic history of the eighteenth-century, Ingrassia astutely argues that like a stock-jobber, “Money, property, and capital, in any form, are, to Pamela’s mind, designed to be put to use, to be invested to bear some form of interest” (303). Evidence of this is found in her familiarity with accounting practices, her ability to assess other characters especially in pecuniary terms, and her awareness of the importance of

money in social ascent. As Ingrassia claims, “Like a stock-jobber in Exchange Alley, Pamela speculatively deals in symbolic instruments of exchange on her own account” (304). She argues that the novel draws on the growing importance of the concept of credit in eighteenth-century society, a concept that was arcane and perceived as socially-disruptive, dealing as it does with the notion of intangible profit. Pamela, says Ingrassia, shows a deep cognizance of the notion of intangibility and of the importance of perceived versus actual value. For example, at the start of the novel, she has already risen within the hierarchy of servants and “like a trader in stocks, ... scrupulously guards her reputation” (308). Pamela, Ingrassia claims, “changed the possibilities for a novel’s influence, established new cultural narratives for women, and manifested the anxieties, possibilities, and instabilities encountered by an eighteenth-century culture grappling with multiple notions of economy” (304).

Wilner, Arlene Fish. “Thou Hast Made a Rake a Preacher’: Beauty and the Beast in Richardson’s *Pamela*.” Eighteenth-Century Fiction. 13.4 (2001): 529-60.

Wilner’s article does a fine job in defending *Pamela* by comparing it to the traditional story of Beauty and the Beast and comparing it to Mme Leprince du Beaumont’s version of the tale. She argues that the transformations that occur in the characters of the fairy tale are like that in Richardson’s novel (Mr. B is the beast and Pamela is Beauty), but also that the social environment in the time of *Pamela* and Mme Beaumont’s story make way for a change in the classical vision

of 'Beauty'. She says that "Richardson is reworking themes popularized in seventeenth and eighteenth centuries adaptation of ancient folktale." (532-3) No longer is the heroine required to be only beautiful and virtuous, but now her wit and intellect are also important to the plot of the story. With the change in the social conscious, Wilner argues that it is also the change of value system which allows for the interesting contradiction in the novel between "bourgeois and elitist, feminist and patriarchal, conservative and subversive" (560) The contradiction in society also mirrored the contradictions in the text of the battle between submissiveness and control between Pamela and Mr. B-. This, she argues, ultimately brings out the morality of middle class virtue. Wilner also argues that like Beaumont's story, the identity of these characters is completely dependent on the reactions and actions of the other. At the end of her article, Wilner defends *Pamela* and its importance in the development in the genre of the novel and the reflection it had on the social and cultural values of the mid 1700s. She ends her argument comparing this to the way in which Disney changed the fairy tale to support familial values of the late twentieth century, but declares that Disney's version is much more "clichéd and commodified" where as Richardson's *Pamela* "dissects the complex social and psychological dynamics of the fledgling modern world." (560)

Zschirnt, Christiane. "Fainting and Latency in the Eighteenth Century's Romantic Novel of Courtship." Germanic Review 74.1 (1999): 48-66.

Zschirnt's essay examines the notion of female agency in the act of fainting and studies this phenomenon in the context of the eighteenth-century sentimental novel. Fainting, she argues, "indicated physical fragility, vulnerability, and infirmity, but of equal importance, it referred to a mental state and hence epitomized sensibility's notion of a heightened perceptibility and emotionality in women" (48). Zschirnt studies the phenomenon of fainting from the systems theoretical point of view. She argues that in this act, the heroine paradoxically assumed agency in her goal of marriage. It mimics the woman's role in the courtship ritual: she is "expected to remain unconscious of her willingness to fall in love and marry until her lover had committed himself to a proposal of marriage" (52). Zschirnt's essay also draws from conduct book literature which predicated that the model young lady would abjure "even the conscious reflection of her own femininity" (53). Pamela adheres to this maxim: "[her] sight is blurred by a slight dizziness when Mr. B has the boldness to mention a pair of stockings in her presence" (53). Even the mildest of allusions to female eroticism, argues Zschirnt, "is enough to bring the heroine to the verge of a fainting fit" (53). The act of being rendered unconscious itself allows her to play a conscious role in her destiny.