

to match the man's vow. The modernized version of the BCP was voted down by British Parliament, but later alternative texts, including a separate book.

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Theme: A young Englishwoman's expected behaviors, obligations, and rights in eighteenth-century marriage

As I read Pamela, I was struck by Richardson's often heavy-handed didacticism. While a great deal has been made of Pamela's intention to instruct virgins on retaining their virtue, I noticed that much of the second volume provides detailed instruction on how to be an obliging and dutiful wife. I re-read the novel looking specifically for those places where Richardson seemed to encroach into Pamela's or Mr. B's words to provide covert, and sometimes even overt, instruction to young female readers on how to be suitable marriage material. I searched our assigned texts and the web for other similarly didactic materials and articles that discussed eighteenth-century manners and mores and quickly realized that my theme could be turned into a thesis or even a dissertation at some point. Ultimately, I believe these annotations will provide readers with a brief but intriguing picture of how Pamela treats the expectations and obligations of young brides and brides-to-be in eighteenth century England. All annotations are to the 2001 Oxford University Press edition of Pamela.

Abbreviations:

BCP Book of Common Prayer

COE Church of England

- 3.21 “If to give practical Examples, worthy to be followed in the most critical and affecting Cases, by the modest Virgin, the chaste Bride, and the obliging Wife.” This fragment is from the editor’s preface, which outlines all the “worthy recommendations” of the novel. In this line, Richardson is highlighting the novel’s intent to school young women on remaining virgins until they get married and to be “obliging” to their husbands once they are married. Richardson, who published Pamela anonymously, wrote this equally anonymous editor’s preface to position the editor as an impartial judge of the value of the “author’s” work. In Shamela, Fielding highlights the irony of Richardson writing an “impartial” recommendation to his own novel by including a letter from “The Editor to Himself” (309) in which the editor glorifies Shamela and then signs the letter, “I am, Sir, Sincerely your Well-wisher, Yourself.”
- 18.28 “Mrs. Jervis says, he ask’d her, If I kept the Men at a Distance; for he said, I was very pretty, and to be drawn in to have any of them, might be my Ruin, and make me poor and miserable betimes.” Mr. B asks Mrs. Jervis whether Pamela has been able to resist the men who are attracted to her since having sex with any of them would “ruin” her. Ruin, as used here, is defined in the OED as the “dishonor of a woman; degradation resulting from this.” The term specifically refers to the degradation and dishonor of a woman through the loss of virginity. In Pamela’s situation, the implication is that a loss of virginity would lead to a life of poverty and misery since no

respectable man would want to marry her.

41.17 “He may condescend, may-hap, to think I may be good enough for his Harlot; and those Things don’t disgrace Men, that ruin poor Women, as the World goes....Well then, poor Pamela must be turn’d off, and look’d upon as a vile abandon’d Creature, and every body would despise her; ay, and justly too, Mrs. Jervis; for she that can’t keep her Virtue, ought to live in Disgrace.” Pamela is expressing concern that Mr. B’s desire to use her for sex would harm her much more than it would him. Her fears are not unrealistic. In The Whole Duty of a Woman, a conduct guide published in 1695, the anonymous author lays it out clearly:

Chastity, above all, is so essential and Natural to our Sex, that every declination from it, is a proportionable receding from Womanhood; but the total abandoning it, ranks you among Brutes, and sets you as far beneath those as an acquired vileness is below a native. An Unchaste Woman is look’d upon as a kind of a Monster; a thing divided and distorted from its proper form, especially by Chaste and Virtuous persons. (15)

While Richardson’s treatment of Pamela’s obsessive desire to retain her virginity may seem heavy-handed to twenty-first century readers, it realistically reflects eighteenth-century standards and expectations for a woman’s behavior.

263.3 “But how will you bestow your Time, when you will have no Visits to receive or pay? No Parties of Pleasure to join in? No Card-tables to employ your Winter Evenings...I shall not desire you to live without such Amusements, as any Wife might expect, were I to marry a Lady of the first Quality.” Mr. B is expressing concern that high-born

ladies would view Pamela as below them and refuse to socialize with her. He is concerned that Pamela will, as his wife, have nothing to fill her time without the card games and pleasure outings that were the expected entertainments of the wives of British aristocrats and landowners in the eighteenth century. Alexander Pope satirizes these “amusements” in The Rape of the Lock, which describes the trivial daily activities of the wealthy in a heroic format. In the poem, Pope uses bathos to recount conversations (“In various talk th’ instructive hours they passed,/Who gave the ball, or paid the visit last” [2640]) and turns an ordinary card game into an epic battle that descends into a free-for-all fist fight. Both Pamela and The Rape of the Lock highlight the growing awareness in the eighteenth-century that the lives of the leisure class were filled with trivial and unproductive employments, especially for women.

263.12 “But do you think, Sir, in such a Family as yours, a Person, whom you shall honour with the Name of Mistress of it, will not find useful Employments for her Time, without looking abroad for any others?” Pamela responds to Mr. B’s concerns about how she would spend her time as his wife with a litany of daily activities she would take on. (For someone who insists she never planned to marry, she has a definite and detailed idea of how she would occupy her time as Mrs. B.) The list reads as if it comes from a conduct manual and is so comprehensive that it could serve as a “practical example” (3) for young brides on how to properly manage an estate. Among the “useful employments” covered are household management, accounting, tending to the sick, assisting the staff with some of the cooking and sewing, spending quality time with the husband,

entertaining, playing music, reading, writing, and praying, all while wearing appropriately modest clothing.

344.37 “Then follow’d the sweet Words, Wilt thou have this Woman to thy wedded Wife, &c. and I began to take Heart a little, when my dearest Master answer’d, audibly, to this Question, I will. But I could only make a Curchee, when they asked me; tho’, I am sure, my Heart was readier than my Speech, and answer’d to every Article of obey, serve, love, and honour.” In this passage, and those before and after it, Pamela gives a play-by-play of the wedding ceremony from the Book of Common Prayer (BCP), the official book of prayers, rites, and ceremonies of the Church of England. The BCP was first published in 1549, and the spoken portions of the marriage ceremony have not been changed since the 1662 edition (Society). In the 1662 BCP, the woman is asked:

Wilt thou have this man to thy wedded husband, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of Matrimony? Wilt thou obey him, and serve him, love, honour, and keep him in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all other, keep thee only unto him, so long as ye both shall live?

In 1928, a modern version of the 1662 BCP was proposed. It included an alternate version of the woman’s vow, replacing the words “obey” and “serve” with “comfort,” to match the man’s vow. The modernized version of the BCP was voted down by British Parliament, but later “alternative” texts, including a separate book, Common Worship (COE), have modernized the overall language and include this change to the bride’s pledge.

367.1 “I lay up Money every Year, and have besides, large Sums in

Government and other Securities; so that you will find, what I have hitherto promised, is very short of that Proportion of my Substance, which, as my dearest Wife, you have a Right to.” Mr. B has promised to give Pamela two hundred pounds a year to use at her own discretion. In this passage, he is explaining to her that he has a lot of money and the allowance he is giving her is reasonable. He implies that, as his wife, she has a right to his money. However, until the British Married Women’s Property Act of 1870 was passed, a wife had no legal right to own or control property and, in fact, the husband gained control of any property a woman owned before the marriage (Combs). Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, who lost control of her own income and property when she eloped without a prenuptial agreement, was reflecting on the inequity of British property rights for women when she told her sister that “Upon the whole, I look upon the Turkish women as the only free people in the Empire” (2711). While it is honorable that Mr. B shares his wealth with Pamela, she has no legal right to his money or property.

368.3 “I have often observed, in marry’d Folks, that, in a little while, the Lady grows careless in her Dress; which, to me, looks as if she would take no Pains to secure the Affection she had gained, and shews a Slight to her Husband, that she had not to her Lover.” This paragraph begins several pages of instructions to Pamela (and, presumably, Richardson’s young readers) on the behaviors Mr. B expects in a wife. Mr. B covers wearing the appropriate clothing for different activities throughout the day, observing regular meal times, always having a sweet and cheerful temperament, never acting annoyed when unannounced company shows up, and never embarrassing

him in public. Throughout this lesson, Pamela encourages Mr. B to continue, saying things like, “Have you no more of your sweet Injunctions to honour me with? They oblige and improve me at the same time!” (370). Similar instruction for appropriate wifely behavior continued well into the twentieth century in conduct and manners guides like Amy Vanderbilt’s Complete Book of Etiquette. In an edition of the guide published in the United States in 1958, Vanderbilt cautions wives to always look presentable and be agreeable, even when picking up husbands at the train station:

A man’s last glimpse of his wife in the morning and his first view of her at night should be pleasant experiences. At the station he likes her to compare favorably with the other wives bound on the same errand, and he likes his children to be attractive too. (494)

Throughout the rest of Pamela, Pamela cheerfully and gratefully observes Mr. B’s injunctions for her behavior.

444.31 “So great is the Difference, between what they both expect from one another, and what they both find in each other, that no wonder Misunderstandings happen; that these ripen to Quarrels; that Acts of Unkindness pass, which, even had the first Motive to their Union been Affection, as usually it is not, would have effaced all manner of tender Impressions on both sides.” Mr. B is explaining to Pamela that the children of the wealthy are spoiled so badly that they expect to be indulged and pampered by everyone they encounter. When they finally reach adulthood, they are usually matched with a spouse who has been chosen for them based on status or fortune. They both expect the other to defer to and oblige them as their parents, nurses,

and teachers always did. The resultant fighting and unkindness in these marriages leads to separate beds, indifference, and even aversion. This cynical characterization of marriage was common in eighteenth-century literature (as well as in popular culture today). Earlier in Pamela, Mr. B asks Pamela if she showed Lady Davers the “kind Epithets” he wrote to her as proof of their marriage. Pamela responds that “For that very reason, [Lady Davers] was sure I was not marry’d” (407). In John Gay’s play “The Beggar’s Opera,” in a scene where Polly and Lucy are fighting over which one of them is really Macheath’s wife, Polly argues, “Am I not thy wife? Thy neglect of me, thy aversion to me too severely proves it” (2746). And in Shamela, the heroine says of her new husband, simply, “I hate the Sight of him” (339). Mr. B believes this marital aversion is the result of unrealistic expectations on both sides. He believes he and Pamela won’t have these problems because she was not raised “to have her Will in every thing” (445).

448.17 “Let me see: What are the Rules I am to observe from this awful Lecture? Why, these.” (In this passage, awful means “solemnly impressive” [OED].) Mr. B has just given Pamela another lengthy list of “most agreeable injunctions” for her behavior. As she’s writing, she looks through her journal and compiles a list of forty-eight “rules” that she has been given during the first seven days of her marriage to Mr. B. Prior to writing Pamela, Richardson was commissioned to write a book of letters that less literate people could use in various situations. Richardson purposely used some of the letters to “instruct handsome girls...how to avoid the snares that might be laid against their virtue” (qtd. in Sherman 3100). This

didactic intention was common among eighteenth-century writers, from Steele (whose Tatler offered something “whereby such worthy and well-affected members of the commonwealth may be instructed, after their reading, what to think” [2463]) to Haywood (who thought it might be in her power to “be in some measure both useful and entertaining to the public” [2469]) to Dryden (who believed that “the true end of satire is the amendment of vices by correction” [2213]) to Pope (who cautioned that “A little learning is a dang’rous thing” [2606]). Pamela’s explicit list of rules provides a compilation and review of the instructions for a new wife’s behavior in a marriage (in case the reader missed them the first time).

Conclusion

When I started this annotation project, my theme was “eighteenth-century marriage.” As I got going, I started to see more and more explicit expectations for a young woman’s behavior and how proper behavior would make her suitable marriage material. I started to research articles to learn more about women’s rights in marriage in the eighteenth century as well as societal norms for behavior. I only scratched the surface, but I found some great materials and plan to dig deeper and incorporate what I’ve uncovered here in future projects. I hope that readers of these annotations will be able to connect the novel with societal mores and the pressures on women in the eighteenth century (and trace them to current customs and mores) and that they will be inspired to do their own research and learn more about this fascinating period.

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The novel, the electron, without going into details, traditionally neutralizes the payment pickup.

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