Samuel Richardson, Comedic Narrative and the Culture of Domestic Violence

Samuel Richardson, Comedic Narrative and the Culture of Domestic Violence:

Abused Pamela

By

Christopher D. Johnson

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For Christine

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Final thanks must go to my wife Christine, who listens patiently as I ruminate about old novels and is always my first and best reader.

ABBREVIATIONS

Clarissa

Samuel Richardson. *Clarissa. Or, The History of a Young Lady*, edited by Angus Ross. London and New York: Penguin Books, 1985.

Correspondence

The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson, edited by Anna Laetitia Barbauld. 6 vols. London, 1804.

Exalted Condition

Samuel Richardson. *Pamela in Her Exalted Condition,* edited by Albert J. Rivero. *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Samuel Richardson*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Fables

Samuel Richardson. *Aesop's Fables. With Instructive Morals and Reflections*. In *Early Works: "Aesop's Fables," "Letters Written to and For Particular Friends," And Other Words,* edited by Alexander Petttit. *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Samuel Richardson.* Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

"Letter to a Lady"

Samuel Richardson. "Copy of a Letter to a Lady, who was Solicitous for an Additional Volume to the History of Sir Charles Grandison." London, 1754.

Moral and Instructive Sentiments

Samuel Richardson. *A Collection of the Moral and Instructive Sentiments, Maxims, and Reflexions, Contained in the Histories of "Pamela," "Clarissa," and "Sir Charles Grandison."* London, 1755.

Pamela

Samuel Richardson. *Pamela: Or, Virtue Rewarded,* edited by Albert J. Rivero. *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Samuel Richardson.* Cambridge and New York. Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Sir Charles Grandison

Samuel Richardson. *The History of Sir Charles Grandison. In a Series of Letters Published from the Originals, by the Editor of Pamela and Clarissa*. 7 vols. London, 1753.

INTRODUCTION

THE INTERSECTIONS OF COMEDY, THEOLOGY, AND VIOLENCE

Among the many responses to Samuel Richardson's phenomenally successful *Pamela: or, Virtue Rewarded* were racehorses named for the novel's protagonist. The first Pamela ran at Reading in July 1741, eight months after the novel's initial publication. Others followed in 1742, and as Thomas Keymer and Peter Sabor document the equestrian vogue continued until at least 1748.[1] One could easily read too much into the names of animals, but it seems certain that the owners were hoping the horses, like Pamela Andrews, would emerge victorious and achieve a reward analogous to the one promised in the novel's subtitle. In this way, the horses' names recall other reactions to the novel, such as the oft-repeated story of townsfolk ringing church bells when a blacksmith read aloud the account of Pamela's marriage.[2] In each case, Pamela's experiences, however trying, lead to an ending worthy of celebration.

Richardson's understanding of his novel, however, was more complicated than the horses and church bells suggest. At the end of his career, he assembled *A Collection of the Moral and Instructive Sentiments, Maxims, Cautions, and Reflexions, Contained in the Histories of "Pamela" "Clarissa," and "Sir Charles Grandison*." In the work's first pages, the reader learns that Pamela's story corrects "the foolish vanity which some women have in the hopes of reforming a wild young fellow" (2). Such efforts, Richardson continues, have cost women "the happiness of their lives; and given, at the same time, great encouragement to men to continue in their guilt" (2). Richardson extends his point by noting "the wife of a self-admirer must expect a very cold and negligent husband" (5). If these are the lessons contained in the novel, one must question whether Pamela's wedding was truly a joyous occasion.

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[1] Thomas Keymer and Peter Sabor, "*Pamela" and the Marketplace: Literary Controversy and Print Culture in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 3.

[2] The story of the blacksmith is discussed in Chapter 1. See below, 38-39.

As with the racehorses, we should be careful not to over-interpret Richardson's comments in *Moral and Instructive Sentiments.* Richardson started the work in 1754, inspired by the list of aphorisms an anonymous writer had gathered from *Clarissa*.[3] *Moral and Instructive Sentiments* is both an *apologia* to define Richardson as an instructive artist and a commercial product designed to sell Richardson's novels, all of which were in print when he published the collection in March 1755. It may provide insights to Richardson's thinking in the mid-1750s, but it does not offer reliable literary criticism. For scholars, the work will always be problematic. It treats *Pamela: or, Virtue Rewarded* and *Pamela in her Exalted Condition* as a single work, which limits appreciation of Richardson's growth as a novelist. More importantly, its lessons often exceed the content of Richardson's novels. As T. C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel note, Richardson "was not content merely to extract sentiments from his novels." Rather, he added "new ideas," some of which were not actually expressed in the original works.[4]

Still, Richardson's comments about the dangers of reforming a wicked man point toward an under-appreciated dimension of *Pamela*. In marrying Mr. B.–a self-admiring "wild young fellow," if ever there was one–Pamela sacrifices much of her own happiness and becomes an abused and neglected wife, as the reader discovers when Mr. B. descends into a violent rage following Lady Davers's revelation about Sally Godfrey.[5] Mr. B.'s post-nuptial treatment of Pamela provides an important qualification to the novel's subtitle and Richardson's occasional comments about Pamela's happiness.[6] The rewards and exaltation of Pamela's married life are genuine, but limited. After her wedding, Pamela's reputation is preserved, her sexuality can no longer lead to damnation, and she has opportunities to express generosity as both a mother and an aristocratic woman. Mr. B., however, continues to be the same fierce, manipulative person he has always been. His actions, to say nothing of the forty-eight

[3] Those aphorisms were incorporated into the third and fourth editions of *Clarissa.* See T. C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel, *Samuel Richardson, A Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 420.

[4] Ibid., 421.

[5] For a discussion of this scene and its connections to Mr. B.'s patterns of abusive behavior, see below, Chapter 1, 53-55.

[6] Responding to Aaron Hill's 22 December 1746 letter, for example, Richardson notes that *Pamela* "looked principally to Happiness with respect to the Enjoyments of this Life," as oppose to *Clarissa*, which looks "beyond them" to rewards of the afterlife "to which all should aspire." See Eaves and Kimpel, *Samuel Richardson*, 211.

rules of conduct Pamela discovers in his "awful lecture" about wifely compliance (412-414), show that he never embraces the words he heard during his wedding ceremony–the instruction that marriage "was ordained for the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other."[7] Instead, he understands marriage as an institution that promotes only his interests, and he sees Pamela as a subordinate who must remain obedient to his desires and whims. More importantly, he never stops manipulating Pamela with threats of force.

Readers, in Richardson's age and our own, have been slow to recognize the significance of Mr. B.'s actions. They have often overlooked the portion of the novel that follows the wedding and have downplayed Mr. B.'s relentless wrath, choosing instead to read *Pamela* as a courtship narrative with a happy ending. Disregarding the horrific dynamics of the marriage and projecting onto Pamela an earthly bliss the text never provides, readers have fallen in love with a novel Richardson never wrote. This study examines the gaps between *Pamela* and its reception. Building on the admonitions of *Moral and Instructive Sentiments,* it shows that the novel is less hopeful than readers have assumed, that Richardson, always an astute psychological observer, understood the dynamics of abusive relationships, and that he wrote those dynamics into *Pamela* and his other novels as warnings to the vulnerable. The study further argues that comedic expectation, the anticipation of a peaceful resolution as promised in both theological and romantic narrative, has caused readers to overlook, even excuse, Mr. B.'s abusive treatment of Pamela before and after their marriage.

Examining the intersections of theology, comedy, and violence, the study provides an integrated reading of Richardson's fiction. The final three novels, I argue, correct misinterpretations of the first. *Pamela* offers a complicated depiction of a devout woman's struggle to create a life of virtue and vocation, but it is often read as a simple tale in which Providence rewards a deserving young woman with a rich, loving husband. The fissure between the novel and its readers shows both the power of comedic expectation and the extent of Richardson's rhetorical failure. By structuring a story of faithful perseverance around a wedding,

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[7] The words concerning "mutual society, help, and comfort" appear in the 1662 edition of *The Book of Common Prayer* and would have been proclaimed at wedding ceremonies within the Church of England throughout the eighteenth century. See, "The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony," *Book of Common Prayer* (1662), accessed February 14, 2021, https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/book-common-prayer/form-solemnization-matrimony.

Richardson invited his audience to understand *Pamela* as a comedy and created an interpretative space in which readers could understand Mr. B. as a reprobate reborn. The astonishing success of *Pamela* demonstrated the extent of their error. Richardson spent the rest of his career correcting these dangerous readings, insisting again and again that predatory men do not, in fact, become adoring husbands. In this way, the final three novels, like *Moral and Instructive Sentiments,* seek to disabuse innocent readers of faulty assumptions that could lead to a life of mistreatment and pain.

In explicating Richardson's novels, the study makes broader arguments about comedic narrative (both secular and sacred) and its connections to violent relationships. The precis of the argument is that comedy, especially within a Christian culture, encourages readers to understand suffering, whether inflicted or endured, as a precursor to self-awareness. In making this claim, I use the term *comedy* broadly to signify stories in which characters undergo meaningful transformations that allow for happy endings. This understanding exceeds the boundaries set by Richardson's contemporaries. Samuel Johnson, for example, defines comedy as "a dramatic representation of the lighter faults of mankind."[8] Henry Fielding describes it as an authentic depiction of the ridiculous.[9] Johnson limits the term by genre and subject matter, Fielding by contrast with the less subtle burlesque. Both writers associate comedy with humor. My definition, consistent with the *OED*'s emphasis on "a happy or conciliatory ending," focuses primarily on plot: in comedy, characters move from adversity toward resolution.[10]

Several generations ago, C. L. Barber provided a useful template when he described Shakespearean comedy as progressing 'through release to clarification."[11] Characters, Barber argues, release themselves from restrictive identities, often through the chaos of misrule, only to discover their authentic selves. In ironic ways, role playing reveals the true self and turmoil restores order. Northrop Frye, also discussing Shakespearean comedy, offers a broad summary of how confusion and loss (the experience of misrule in Barber's analysis) become central to comedy.

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[8] Samuel Johnson, *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), s.v. "Comedy," accessed March 3, 2021, https://projects.cah.ucf.edu/sjd/views/pageview.php.

[9] Henry Fielding, author's preface to *Joseph Andrews*, ed. Martin C. Battestin, Riverside Editions (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961), 8.

[10] *Oxford English Dictionary,* s.v. "Comedy, n.," 2.b., accessed March 3, 2021, https://www-oed-com.fmarion.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/36848?rskey=iFeZnD&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid.

[11] C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and Its Relation to Social Custom* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), 4.

Comedies, he writes, contain "a first part in which an absurd, unpleasant or irrational situation is set up; a second part of confused identity and personal complications; a third part in which the plot gives a shake and twist and everything comes right in the end."[12] In the classical plays Frye references, an external force, often some variation of the *deus ex machina*, brings about the "shake and twist" of the plot. In novelistic fiction, as in its biographical and autobiographical antecedents, resolution is also internal. Everything comes out right because the characters mature. As Mary-Catherine Harrison notes, in comic novels "conflicts, misunderstandings, and tension threaten to derail the relationship, but ultimately the two characters correctly understand and express their love for each other; their marriage, projected to be a happy one, concludes the story."[13] Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* shows both dynamics and highlights the novel's focus on psychological development. In the end, Tom wins Sophia because he accepts responsibility for his actions. The surprise about his parentage is a conventional plot twist that cleans up the story and preserves social hierarchy. The more important turn, however, occurs when Tom, seemingly having lost everything, proclaims, "but why do I blame Fortune? I am myself the cause of all my misery. All the dreadful mischiefs which have befallen me are the consequences only of my own folly and vice."[14] Transformed and reborn, Tom is now ready for marriage. Through loss, his true self emerges, and he is prepared to accept the responsibilities of adulthood.

Richardson references this understanding of comedy repeatedly, as we see when Lovelace considers writing his experiences with Clarissa into a play entitled *The Quarrelsome Lovers*, which will move from hardship to happiness.[15] Later in the text, he captures the essence of comedic narrative in a rhetorical question he shares with Belford: "Did ever comedy end more happily than this long trial?" (1040). For Lovelace, as for Mr. B., comedy is a journey toward reconciliation. Comedic expectation, the idea that current struggle precedes future joy, allows him to see himself as a romantic hero enduring the challenges of courtship in hopes of future bliss. But neither Lovelace nor Mr. B. is a young man in

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[12] Northrop Frye, *Northrop Frye on Shakespeare* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), 38.
[13] Mary-Catherine Harrison, "Reading the Marriage Plot," *Journal of Family Theory & Review* 6 (March 2014): 113.
[14] Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling,* ed. Fredson Bowers, *The Wesleyan Edition of the Works of Henry Fielding* (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press 1974), 916.
[15] See below, Chapter 3, 186.

love. They are, instead, violent, predators who use comic convention to mask their viciousness. Richardson, as discussed throughout this study, deeply distrusted the idea of comedic resolution, especially in the context of abusive relationships. In each of his novels, he shows how easily comedy becomes a tool of manipulation and self-deception.

The comedic pattern of growth through loss exists well beyond the courtship narratives that Richardson derides and can be found even in a work as removed from romance as *Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey.* The poem describes the young Wordsworth living close to nature, but unable to appreciate its importance. During his "thoughtless youth," he exists "more like a man / Flying from something he dreads, than one / Who sought the thing he loved."[16] Living in cities and "hearing oftentimes the still sad music of humanity," Wordsworth learns to appreciate what he once took for granted. The experience of sorrow brings recognition, and the transformed poet receives "Abundant recompense," as nature becomes the "guardian of [his] heart, and soul."[17] Recounting a process of maturation, Wordsworth writes his experience of despair into a comedic narrative.

For Tom Jones, as for Joseph Andrews and Smollett's Roderick Random, the journey home includes marriage and the promise of a family. Wordsworth's resolution, in contrast, leaves him in solitary communion with the British countryside. In place of companionship, Wordsworth finds enlightenment, and the poet's biography becomes a progression toward mystical fulfillment. In this way, *Tintern Abbey* gestures toward spiritual biography, an iteration of the comic pattern that remains independent of courtship and marriage. Frye suggests the connections between the comedic and the spiritual when he notes that the same three-part comic pattern of Shakespearean comedy can also be found "in the central story of Christianity, with its Friday of death, Saturday of disappearance and Sunday of return."[18] Like Wordsworth's transition from thoughtless youth to reflective adult, Jesus's resurrection occurs through pain and loss, as does Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus. The literary *locus classicus* for this understanding of comedy is Dante's *Divine Comedy.* As Jefferson B. Fletcher explains, Dante's magnificent creation is "the most perfect of all comedies in that its curve of amelioration rises from the

[16] William Wordsworth, "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey," in *Selected Poems and Prefaces by William Wordsworth*, ed. Jack Stillinger, Riverside Editions (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Co., 1965), 108-110, lines 90, 73, 70-72.
[17] Ibid., lines 89-90, 109.
[18] Frye, *Northrop Frye on Shakespeare,* 43.

absolute zero of damnation . . . to the maximum of blessedness attainable in this life."[19] Fletcher's "curve of amelioration," a movement toward salvation, captures the essence of comedic narrative and shows its connections to Christian allegory and spiritual biography. The pilgrim endures hardship, confusion, and terror in preparation for magnificent rebirth.

If Richardson found the premise of romantic comedy dangerous, he embraced the possibility of spiritual comedy and the promise that earthly distress leads to eternal redemption. In *Moral and Instructive Sentiments*, he asks, "How do I know but the Almighty may have permitted these sufferings, as trials of my fortitude, and to make me wholly rely on his grace and assistance?" (74). Within this rhetorical question, pain is significant only in so far as it leads one toward the divine. It is, like all finite experience, both fleeting and inconsequential. Similar to the time of misrule in Shakespearean comedy, its importance rests not in itself, but in how it prepares one for what comes next. "This world," Richardson writes, "is designed but for a transitory state of probation," and a "good person, considering herself as travelling thro' it to a better, will put up with all the hardships of the journey, in hopes of ample reward at the end of it" (103).

Richardson's simultaneous rejection and celebration of comedic transformation informs the thematic complexity of his fiction. The theological lessons of Richardson's fiction define life as a comic progress toward eternal redemption, but the novels also present practical lessons intended to make the "fatiguing journey" of life less arduous (*Moral and Instructive Sentiments,*109). These teachings, such as Richardson's repeated warnings that reformed rakes do not make the best husbands, resist comedic hopefulness and guide readers toward prudent decisions that will allow a measure of happiness.[20] *Pamela*'s readers, as discussed in Chapter 1, conflated the theological and the practical, making entirely comic a story that should be spiritually hopeful and experientially somber.

Readers' inability to grasp Richardson's nuanced themes is understandable. It is simply hard to comprehend that Pamela becomes exalted, but remains abused, and doing so robs the novel of satisfying closure. Equally important, comedic narratives are pervasive, as is the corresponding hope that hardship will be meaningful and beneficial. To

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[19] Jefferson B. Fletcher, "The Comedy of Dante,'" *Studies in Philology* 18 (1921): 401.

[20] In his letters, novels, and didactic writings, Richardson repeatedly warns his readers against assuming that "reformed rakes make the best husbands." See below, 76, 77n164, 89, 129, 147, 157, 220.

some degree, we all write our experiences into stories of loss and growth, as Alexander Pope expressed with characteristic precision: "Hope springs eternal in the human breast: / Man never Is, but always To be blest."[21] The church signs in my part of rural South Carolina create miniature divine comedies when they proclaim, "God does not promise a smooth flight, only a safe landing." My students provide a secular equivalent when they give voice to the clichéd mantra "That which doesn't kill me makes me stronger." We find the contours of comedic narrative in the stories of every aspiring athlete who learns a valuable lesson after being cut from the team, every prodigal son who discovers the beauty of what he once abandoned, every survivor of tragedy who finds compassion through grief, every addict who realizes unrecognized strength after hitting rock bottom. Viewed in its broadest terms, comedic narrative is the ur-template for organizing experience and discovering value in hardship. But it is also an imaginative construction, and as such it has the power to deceive as well as reveal.

For our purposes, comedic narrative is built on four problematic premises. First, it posits that endings are more important than preceding experiences. Turf accountants know that races are interesting in how they unfold, but significant only in how they end. In romantic comedy, anxious giggles at the mishaps of courtship resolve into joyous laughter with the promise of marriage. Character and viewer alike forget past pain. In saints' lives, the horrors of dejection, torture, and death recede with the martyr's salvation. In each genre, lived experience yields to resolution. Second, comedic narrative promises that change is improvement. Although a bit older and perhaps somewhat traumatized, Joseph Andrews, Fanny Goodwill, Tom Jones, and Sophia Western are all better off when their stories end than when they begin. Third, comedy holds that transformation allows for the emergence of a genuine identity. The mature Wordsworth, no longer running as if "fleeing something he dreads," finds peace and purpose in the quiet stillness of reflection.[22] Suffering brings anagnorisis, which brings the birth of the authentic self. Having reached a moment of existential crisis and heeding the call of *tolle lege,* Augustine becomes the man, and later saint, he was meant to be.[23] Saul, dead on the roadside, can

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[21] Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man,* in *The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope*. Vol. 3, *The Essay on Man*, ed. Maynard Mack (London: Methuen; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1950), 1.94-95.

[22] Wordsworth, "Tinturn Abbey," line 72.

[23] For an accessible summary of the Augustine's conversion as depicted in *The Confessions* 8.12, see *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, accessed February 21, 2021, www.newadvent.org. https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02084a.htm.

never interrupt Paul's work. Jesus, after suffering betrayal and the agony of crucifixion, becomes humanity's eternal redemption.

Lastly, comedic narratives present change as permanent. Tom Jones pays a high price for his wisdom and will never forsake it. Even in fairy tales, the prince is here to stay, while the beast is gone for good. Life, as we all know, is less predictable. Personality traits are resilient, and patterns of behavior durable. In her 1978 poem "From the Journals of the Frog Prince," Susan Mitchell captures this idea as she challenges the notion of enduring regeneration. Now living a comfortable middle-class life, the fabled prince misses the mud and smells of the swamp and no longer feels at home among his wife's *directoire* furnishings. His voice concludes the poem: "How can I tell her / I am thinking that transformations are not forever?"[24] The fairy tale of the princess and the frog is, of course, a perfect comedic narrative of death and rebirth, one that like countless novels and films shows the domestication of the masculine and the creation of a romantic couple. In this way, it resembles the story readers found in *Pamela.* Mitchell, rejecting comedic convention, shows the distance between the actual and the imaginative. Her prince becomes a surprisingly believable character who cannot escape his past and longs for what he has given up. In the final lines, the poem's humor gives way to a sadness that extends from the prince to the princess, who has been deceived by a promise that cannot be kept. In the final pages of *Pamela* and throughout *Exalted Condition,* Richardson explores similar ground when Mr. B.'s apparent awakening proves superficial, and he continues to exert coercive control over Pamela. The significance of this understanding lies in Richardson's recognition that transformations, at least those of earthly life, may not be complete, sincere, nor abiding. An apparent cycle of loss and renewal may simply be part of a persistent pattern of abuse, a story without promise that teaches the hard lesson that lives can never be fairy tales. This is the lesson Richardson's readers missed in *Pamela.*

Comedy and Violence

In large part, this study is the product of my experiences as both a professor of literature and volunteer law enforcement officer. The connections between these two worlds at first seemed insignificant curiosities. I noticed that the pattern of abusive behavior identified in the Cycle of Violence theory (discussed below) overlaps with the structures of

[24] Susan Mitchell, "From the Journals of the Frog Prince," *The New Yorker,* May 8, 1978, 40.

comedic narrative. Just as violent relationships move through cycles of tension, battery, and superficial repentance, comic narratives–whether Shakespeare's drama, Austen's novels, or Hollywood's endless stream of love stories–advance through tension, loss, and reconciliation. The fact that the Cycle of Violence includes the "honeymoon phase" recalls the promise of marriage that concludes many comedies.

Viewed in isolation, these parallels show the differences between fiction and reality. Novels promise a "happily-ever-after," while abusive relationships degenerate into misery and pain. Connected to the Cycle of Violence theory is the Continuum of Violence theory, which shows that violent actors become increasingly dangerous.[25] Over time, tensions escalate more quickly, batteries become more severe, and "honeymoons" briefer. What appears in fiction to be orderly progress toward maturity and reconciliation is in actuality a vicious gyre that grows more deadly with each repetition.

During my years as a South Carolina State Constable, I saw the awful dynamics of domestic violence frequently enough to appreciate the accuracy of the theories taught by the South Carolina Criminal Justice Academy. Although the perpetrators and victims represented a wide cross section of society, there was an unsettling consistency to their experiences. In addition to expressions of fear, frustration, and anger, there was often blame shifting. More surprising were the tendencies of some victims to downplay the significance of the assaults they had received and to connect their lives to narratives that end happily. Often, they placed these comments in theological contexts that defined abusive behavior as part of a divine plan: "The Lord never gives you more than you can handle"; "He has a good soul,"; "I'm waiting for the scales to fall from his eyes." For unwed couples, marriage itself promised irreversible change that would end abuse forever. Understanding their own experiences within the frameworks of fictional stories and faith traditions, these victims believed that better days awaited. Although it is unlikely that many of them had read Richardson, they saw themselves as Richardson's readers often see

[25] See, for example, *South Carolina Basic Constable Training Manual* (Columbia, SC: South Carolina Criminal Justice Academy, 2012), 318: "The Continuum of Violence Theory maintains that relationships that contain violence will continue to become more violent over time. Unless there is some early intervention, the violence moves up a continuum until death occurs and removes either the victim or the perpetrator from the relationship. The end of the continuum marks the complete disappearance of the honeymoon phase in the Cycle of Violence theory. As time increases, violence also increases."

Pamela–as pilgrims enduring today's hardship to earn tomorrow's triumph.

Experts know the difficulty and danger of ending abusive relationships. People sometimes live with violence because doing so appears to be the least bad option. Abusers isolate victims from family and friends. Victims often have rational fears that attempts to leave will endanger children, loved ones, and pets. Hearing the words of victims and their family members convinced me that seemingly innocent stories also played a role in perpetuating cycles of violence. Victims write themselves into narratives–most often those from faith traditions and popular culture–that provide unrealistic hope. Narrative, like their intimate partners and the social institutions designed to protect the vulnerable, becomes another system of betrayal.

Richardson certainly understood literature's power to encourage violent behavior. As discussed in Chapter 4, he attacks classic poetry for exactly that reason, arguing that Homer inspired Alexander's violence.[26] Moreover, he recognized that what epics do on the national level, comedy does on the domestic. Both Mr. B. and Lovelace use literary texts, especially those with reconciling lovers, to justify their cruelty. Most importantly, Richardson shows that literature can not only empower bad actors, but also deceive victims, who mistake mistreatment for love.

Modern sociological studies largely support Richardson's claims. In their recent discussion of the gender narratives of abused women, Karin Jarnkvist and Lotta Brännström examine the degree to which victims of intimate-partner violence define their experiences according to the narratives of their cultures. Like previous researchers, they find links between "master narratives relating to femininity and romance that describe women as passive and that portray relationships in unrealistic terms" and women's willingness to "accept the blame for . . . abuse and deny or minimize their partner's abusive behavior."[27] Other researchers

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[26] See below, Chapter 4, 210, 211, 216.

[27] Karin Jarnkvist and Lotta Brännström, "Stories of Victimization: Self-Positioning and the Construction of Gender in Narratives of Abused Women," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 34, Nos. 21-22 (2019): 4691. Scholars, particularly those applying cultivation theory to popular culture, have recognized the connections between imaginative fiction, perception, and behavior. Joan Shapiro and Lee Kroeger, for example, argue that exposure to romantic narratives creates unobtainable expectations and that "married women who watched more romantic media were less satisfied with their own marriages." See "Is Life Just a Romantic Novel? The Relationship between attitudes about Intimate Relationships," *American Journal of Family Therapy* 19, No. 3 (1991): 226-236; quoted in Harrison,

have found that master narratives not only encourage abused women to make themselves responsible for the treatment they receive; they also present unrealistic constructions of masculinity. Andrew R. Baley, for example, demonstrates that "romantic discourse," itself a master narrative, enables victims of domestic violence "to construct men as beings with a dual identity of the kind exemplified in the fairy-tale 'beast/prince' depictions, where hard masculinity hides a softer side that is uncovered with the help of the heroine."[28] These stories, Baley concludes, provide cultural discourses that explain why the abused separate a "partner's violent behavior from their 'true' nature" and blame the victim for "failing to provide sufficient love to uncover that true nature."[29] Baley's research articulates the double-bind of master narratives. Outwardly innocent stories cause victims to see themselves simultaneously as passive objects and as *potentially* powerful actors who *should* be able to transform their abuser's bad behavior. In a nightmarish paradox, abusive behavior becomes both a sign of powerlessness and a shameful reminder that one has not used one's power effectively.

On a superficial level, the victims' words reminded me of the differences between reality and the imaginative representations of literature. More significantly, they underscored the power of narrative to shape perception, including perceptions of the self. Those of us who teach literature sometimes imagine that reading, especially the "important" works we assign, must be an unalloyed good. Stories, we tell our students, expand our creative and moral imaginations, allowing us to understand truths beyond our experience. Multicultural literature, for example, becomes an instrument of social justice when it promotes tolerance, limits chauvinism, and challenges xenophobia. At core, many of us view the study of literature as Matthew Arnold understood culture: it makes current "the best that has been thought and said," sometimes through the texts

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"Reading the Marriage Plot," 128. More recently, Chris Segrin and Robin L. Nabi have documented that romantic television programming, including soap operas, has a similar impact on undergraduate college students. See "Does Television Viewing Cultivate Unrealistic Expectations About Marriage," *Journal of Communications* 52, No. 2 (2002): 247-263.

[28] Andrew R. Baley, "Leaving Abusive Relationships: Constructions of Self and Situation by Abused Women," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 25, No.12 (2010): 2303.

[29] Ibid., 2304.

themselves, sometimes through the application of critical theories.[30] Our sensibilities have grown more inclusive since the Victorian age, as has our appreciation of diverse peoples and cultures, but our discipline continues to reiterate Arnold's culture/anarchy dichotomy, with literature on the "good side" of culture, however goodness might be defined.

Critical theory has taught us to be wary of binaries, such as culture/anarchy. They create arbitrary hierarchies that are both difficult to identify and horrifically powerful. A cultural studies specialist, for example, might argue that Arnold's binary obscures the fact that a culture built around capitalism comprises and hides the anarchy of the free market. Others might point out that fears of sexual anarchy sustain traditional gender roles, which are themselves arbitrary constructions that marginalize not only women, but also members of LGBTQ+ communities. To the degree that this study is theoretical, it engages in similar work. It challenges the sometimes unacknowledged assumption that literature is by nature beneficial, or at least harmless. Using Richardson's works as a foundation, the study examines what Richardson repeatedly acknowledged, that literature may be empowering in some contexts and entrapping in others. Texts that show us new worlds might also blind us to the realities of daily life. Comedic narratives encourage readers to understand their experiences as the kind of story that always ends happily on the page and screen, even as those stories turn deadly in living rooms. Exploring these ideas, the study complicates, Lynn Hunt's assertion that "novel reading spurred on the development of human rights by forcing readers to sympathize with vulnerable female characters."[31] There is often a dark, misogynistic potential even in novels that celebrate female experience, especially when those texts define mistreatment and abuse as part of courtship.

Advances in literary theory have already shown us how seemingly innocuous texts can advance oppressive ideologies related to economics, class, race, gender, sexuality, and disability. To this important work, we should add intimate-partner violence. Doing so could to some small degree enable readers to guard against real-world threats. Just as gender theory can counter the hegemony of hetero-normality, a critical theory of domestic violence could help readers recognize how cultural productions legitimize the dynamics of abusive relationships, even in texts that do not present overt depictions of violence. Such a critical framework

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[30] Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism*, in *The Works of Matthew Arnold*, 15 vols. (London: MacMillan, 1903), 6. xi.

[31] Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 57.

would expand our scope of interpretation and help us understand why readers often ignore the same interpersonal dynamics on the page that would send up red flags if shared by a friend. Richardson provides a good starting point for such work. All four of his novels present abusive relationships, though not all are consensual. His masterpiece, *Clarissa*, provides compelling psychological portraits of both perpetrator and victim. As is true for other early novelists, he seeks at times to blur the lines between fiction and nonfiction and presents characters that are at once reiterations of literary types and plausible representations of realistic people. This blending of the credible and the imaginary, the heart of Ian Watt's formal realism, made his works seem as much like guides for practical living as fantasies.[32] Equally important, he wrote for an expansive readership that included women, many of whom communicated with him extensively. As his letters demonstrate, Richardson, however paternalistic, cared deeply about the women he knew. He valued their intelligence and respected their claims to happiness. He was also a socially conservative, devout member of the Church of England, who believed his writings should be morally instructive. He was, in other words, exactly the sort of writer to create a comic narrative that depicts interpersonal relationships within a theological context, all for the purpose of guiding readers toward happiness and salvation.

Pamela's narrative works within this framework. Her virtue saves her from temptation and allows her to become an instrument of charity. At the same time, her story provides a warning against marrying a man like Mr. B. Richardson's readers, however, missed the second lesson and extended Pamela's reward to the satisfactions and safety of a stable marriage. Imagining that Mr. B. experiences an enduring transformation from abuser to protector, they overlooked his threatening qualities and made him into a better character than he could ever be. Richardson, I argue, recognized his readers' errors and sought to correct them first through less-hopeful novels that more clearly separated earthly and eternal rewards, and finally through a comedic narrative that functions without sudden transformation and offers an alternative masculinity founded on altruism, responsibility and nonviolence. Exploring these ideas, I both extend and challenge Toni Bower's claim that "Richardson pursued a

[32] Ian Watt, *Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957), 31. Richardson certainly viewed his novels as practical guides for daily life. In his 21 February 1755 letter to the Rev. Mr. Hildesley, he notes that in his first three novels "there are not many of the material articles that may be of use for the conduct of life and manners unattended to in one or other of them." See *Correspondence*, 5.132.

quixotic (and apparently indefatigable) effort to eliminate readerly misunderstandings of *Pamela."*[33] Those misunderstandings, the following chapters demonstrate, exceed the issues of class, gender and partisan politics that Bowers usefully discusses and include matters related to intimate-partner violence. Richardson's efforts, however, were not quixotic, but rather clearly focused, reasonable, and inextricably tied to his commitment to practical instruction.

Those who challenge my argument might note that *Pamela* was published in multiple lifetime editions, each of which Richardson carefully revised and corrected, often in response to readers' comments.[34] Why, then, did he not simply address the deficiencies? Pride and money, no doubt, guided his actions, at least partially. More importantly, to fix the problem would have been to reimagine the entire novel, to give it a different ending, leaving Pamela and Mr. B. unmarried. That sort of revision would betray his loyal readers and destroy a profitable commodity. The fact that Richardson had already sold two-thirds of the novel's copyright to Charles Rivington and John Osborn would have made him even more reluctant to compromise *Pamela*'s marketability.[35] Instead, Richardson created counter-narratives that are comparable to a professor's choice to pair a misogynistic text (say Swift's "The Lady's Dressing Room,") with a feminist response (say Montagu's "The Reasons that Induced Dr S. to write a Poem call'd the Lady's Dressing Room"). Richardson would let his readers have *Pamela*, but he would use his subsequent novels to teach them how to read it properly. The interpretative lessons are contained within the pages of *Exalted Condition, Clarissa,* and *Sir Charles Grandison.*

Domestic Violence in Richardson's Age and Our Own

Historical records provide only a partial understanding of domestic violence in the eighteenth century. For an abused woman, there were few legal protections and even fewer remedies. During Richardson's lifetime,

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[33] Toni Bowers, *Force or Fraud: British Seduction Stories and the Problem of Resistance: 1660-1760* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 261.

[34] For a useful and comprehensive assessment of Richardson's revisions to *Pamela,* see T. C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel, "Richardson's Revisions of Pamela," *Studies in Bibliography* 20 (1967): 61-88; and Phillip Gaskell, "Richardson, *Pamela*, 1741," in *From Writer to Reader: Studies in Editorial Method*, ed. Phillip Gaskell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978): 63-79.

[35] Keymer and Sabor, "*Pamela" in the Marketplace*, 19.

authorities did not usually consider physical violence within marriage criminal unless it resulted in murder.[36] In her 1735 legal treatise, *The Hardships of the English Laws in Relation to Wives,* Sarah Chapone reveals the extent of an abusive husband's legal impunity. A Mr. Veezy beat his wife with a horsewhip and confined her to a garret without proper heat, food, or clothing. When his wife committed suicide, the court acquitted Mr. Veezy of all charges because it found he provided sufficient bread, "though hard and mouldy," to "sustain life," and he probably did not actually push her out of the window from which she fell to her death.[37]

In extreme cases of abuse, victims could petition the courts, but the process was cumbersome and expensive. Thanks to the exhaustive work of Jennine Hurl-Eamon, we know that between 1685 and 1720, 176 husbands were bound over at Westminster Quarter sessions for assaulting their wives, an average of only five per year.[38] From these numbers, one might conclude that domestic violence was rare. Unfortunately, the opposite is almost certainly true. The records are scant because victims remained voiceless and had few avenues of redress. Women could seek remedy through the church courts, but those institutions had strong ideological and economic motivations to force reconciliation, since liberated women might become parish dependents.[39] Prior to 1857, only Parliament could grant divorce in England. The process could be both expensive and humiliating, as Paula Backscheider has shown through the records of the countess of Anglesey. Household servants provided testimony that the countess's "arms were black and blue from pinching . . . that they often heard her scream, and that she had been locked up, even when pregnant, without a light."[40] Still, the countess was subjected to rigorous interrogation, and printed accounts of the proceedings reported

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[36] Elizabeth Foyster. *Marital Violence: An English Family History, 1660-1857* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 35.

[37] Sarah Chapone, *The Hardships of the English Laws in Relation to Wives, With an Explanation of the Original Curse of Subjection Passed Upon the Woman* (London, 1735), 10-11.

[38] Jennine Hurl-Eamon, "Domestic Violence Prosecuted: Women Binding Over Their Husbands for Assault at Westminster Quarter Sessions, 1685-1720," *Journal of Family History* 26, No. 4 (2001): 435-54. See also Foyster, *Marital Violence,* 23.

[39] Foyster, *Marital Violence*, 47.

[40] Paula Backscheider, "'Endless Aversion Rooted in the Soul': Divorce in the 1690-1730 Theater," *The Eighteenth Century* 37, No. 2 (Summer 1996): 121. Backscheider convincingly speculates that violent pinching was a "common form of spousal abuse," and is reflected in the character name "Pinchwife" in William Wycherley's *The Country-Wife* (1675). See 134, n. 80.