

Henry Fielding's *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews* as Counternarratives to Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*

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Abstract

This paper sheds light on the immediate counternarrative response to the publication of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* in 1740. Upon its publication, the female servant Pamela gained popularity among readers for her exemplary chastity, morality and virtue. This paper discusses the writings of Henry Fielding as a leading anti-Pamela approach through two subsequent narratives, *Shamela* (1741) and *Joseph Andrews* (1742). Fielding and others saw in *Pamela* a direct threat to 18th-century normative servant-master and aristocrat-bourgeois relations. In his novels, Fielding uses multiple literary motifs to confront *Pamela*'s readership with their beloved character's hypocrisy and deception. Through his works, Fielding breaks down Richardson's narrative to present *Pamela* as the deceptively structured plot of a hypocritical servant to marry her master and elevate her social status. Fielding bridges his narrative with Richardson's novel to create a mode of skepticism concerning the moral values of *Pamela*'s readers. In *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding extends his criticism, presenting the novel as an offshoot to Richardson's *Pamela* and highlighting an alternative reality to expose *Pamela*'s false images of chastity and virtue.

Keywords: Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, *Pamela*, Anti-Pamela, *Shamela*, *Joseph Andrew*

1. Introduction

In 1740, Samuel Richardson published his landmark work of fiction (and the best-selling of its time), *Pamela; Or, Virtue Rewarded*. Like most successful novels of the era, it prompted 18th-century intellectuals to engage in extended debate over its subject matter. The contemporary criticism of *Pamela* was not universally positive, however. Although many readers praised the didacticism, morals, and virtuous lessons the character of Pamela evoked, others were suspicious of the hidden sociocultural threats suggested by the narrative.

Some of the major writers of the 18th century, including Henry Fielding, Eliza Haywood and John Cleland—who were later known as “anti-Pamela” writers, or anti-Pamelists—launched resistance discourse and counternarrative to defy that of Richardson's *Pamela*. The anti-Pamelists had various reasons and motives for engaging in conversation with Richardson's *Pamela*. For one, they viewed the novel's popularity with a wide audience as a major factor necessitating an immediate response. These writers also engaged in discussion with the *Pamela* discourse to highlight the importance of novels and narratives as interactive modes between writers and their readers. They chose to challenge Richardson's narrative, which itself troubled 18th-century master-servant and aristocrat-bourgeois social relationships. Tracing their counternarratives in this essay illustrates, in detail, how each of these intellectual methods and techniques targeted 18th-century readers.

2. Material Studied

The anti-Pamela discourse is filled with works by many respected 18th-century authors, including Eliza Heywood and John Cleland. However, the focus of this paper is the work of Henry Fielding (1707–1745), as he was the first English writer and novelist to respond to the *Pamela* discourse. Fielding wrote *Shamela* (1741) and *Joseph Andrew* (1742) as immediate responses to Richardson's highly popular novel. In these novels, Fielding uses mockery, irony, and satire as literary motifs and tools through which to counterattack the fame *Pamela* had gained among readers of the era. *Shamela* is a parody of Richardson's *Pamela* and presents the character Shamela Andrews as a fortune-hunting servant who plots to marry her master. *Joseph Andrews* is an offshoot to *Pamela* that follows the life of a faithful servant who encounters sexual advances by his mistress yet maintains a good example of virtue and chastity.

3. Method

This paper analyzes two Henry Fielding novels as counternarratives to *Pamela*. The paper conducts and categorizes the content and the techniques employed by Fielding to defame the character Pamela among her readership. As a writer, Fielding is known for employing mockery and irony as literary devices through which he attacks his opponents. In his study of Henry Fielding's writings, Levine (1967) writes that:

Joseph Andrews provides the best example of how these techniques of verbal irony function collectively as a mode of comedy, for nowhere else in his early works does Fielding employ them as frequently and with as much subtlety. In this novel, Fielding uses verbal irony primarily as a vehicle for satiric characterization, and, to a lesser degree, both as a structural support for the various thematic patterns that are woven into the finely textured fabric of *Joseph Andrews*, and as a means of focusing on the parody that is potentially present in most of the highly stylized scenes. (p. 91)

By comparing the scenes and letters in *Pamela* with those of *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews*, this paper explores the modes of resistance and literary motifs deployed by Fielding to offer counternarratives to the *Pamela* discourse. First is his questioning of the deceptive nature of the epistolary form—the novel told through letters. Next, Fielding moves to highlight hidden moments concerning the hypocritical character, Pamela, following which he expands his story to show how *Pamela* poses a threat to the 18th-century's normative male/female cultural hierarchy and societal aristocrat/bourgeois relationships. Finally, Fielding extends his attack by writing *Joseph Andrews*—the story of Pamela's fictional brother—as an offshoot to Richardson's *Pamela*. Through the latter story, Fielding creates an alternative reality that unfolds the untold stories and the hidden side of Pamela, which she has secretly revealed to her brother. *Joseph Andrews*, the male version of the servant, illustrates the themes of desire and the hypocrisy of Pamela's life. Combined, these motifs form a systemic attack on the sociocultural threat created by Richardson's *Pamela*.

4. Discussion

4.1 Structure of Fielding's Counternarrative

Henry Fielding chooses to mirror Richardson's narrative, beginning with the title: *Pamela* becomes *Shamela*. Further echoes are found in both the epistolary form and in the characters and plot. Fielding's *Shamela* is a portrayal of a seemingly moral yet deceptive female servant, through which Fielding inverts the falsely virtuous servant model promoted by *Pamela*. In this regard, Bowen (1999) points out that the

Anti-Pamela fictional representation of servant women as mercenary also functions to depict negatively their economic agency...Fielding... in presenting servant women whose goals is to entice a wealthy man into marriage, seeks to disavow and divert attention away from this economic self-sufficiency. (pp. 265–266)

For the elites of the 18th century, the possibilities for social mobility among the lower classes suggested by *Pamela* were deeply troubling. The social success of Pamela's character was feared to lead to the denial of the existing social order and outrageous and rebellious behavior of the lower classes towards the aristocrats in power. According to Bowen (1999), the character of *Shamela* “[defies] aristocratic authority in order to turn the social order topsy-turvy and gain money and power” (pp. 265–266). Examining the anti-Pamelists' counternarratives to the *Pamela* discourse reveals the potential motives and reason behind their opposing positions.

The upward social mobility of female servants was a key issue in the anti-Pamela discourse. As Bowen (1999) states, “the newer possibilities of social, status and rank mobility caused such a stir because it gave a positive portrayal of a rebellious servant who not only got her way but who also was rewarded with social advancement” (p. 261). This socially disruptive narrative immediately prompted subversions and counterportrayals of the same core concept, particularly among the anti-Pamelists, whose discourse aimed to reverse the possibilities of upward mobility that *Pamela* created.

Fielding's parody is an attempt to uncover and counter the deceptive nature of Richardson's *Pamela*. The full-length title of Fielding's novel is *An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews*. The character of *Shamela* directs readers' attention to the strong, direct relationship between herself and her predecessor, Richardson's *Pamela Andrews*. The word choice in the title is significant, as “*Shamela*” is intended to sound like “*Pamela*,” yet Fielding's parody emphasizes the “sham” nature of Richardson's heroine. Fielding's central discomfort with Richardson's *Pamela* is its portrayal of Pamela the virtuous maid, whom Fielding strongly attacks as nothing but a fake, or sham, representation of a virtuous woman. As a reviewer for *Time* magazine noted in an unsigned December 1953 review of *Shamela*:

In Fielding's view, Richardson's *Pamela* was a sham, not so much the valiant defender of her virtue as its coy auctioneer, shrewdly holding out for the highest bid. Fielding's *Shamela* is an honest doxie who blats about her “Vartue” [sic] from time to time, but belongs essentially to the long line of fiction's profiteering amorists reaching to Scarlett O'Hara and Amber. (n. pag.)

Fielding utilizes a detective's magnifying lens to reveal the false sides of the virtuous Pamela. By imitating Richardson's structure, the epistolary form, Fielding questions the reliability of the letters in Richardson's novel. In *Pamela*, the letters are personal and unfold only one side of the truth. In *Shamela*, Fielding wants his readers to realize that Pamela has deceived her audience by presenting to them only the letters that create a positive, virtuous narrative about her life. From the perspective offered in *Shamela*, readers realize that Pamela is not as virtuous as she is presented to them in Richardson's novel. In *Shamela*, the heroine is not a kind and softhearted innocent girl but a wicked former prostitute who plans to trap and marry her master. In characterizing his own heroine thusly, Fielding reminds readers that the life of Pamela contradicts the fundamental fact that “real” life is rarely so perfect. In their real lives, people sin and repent, commit wrongs and do good, going back and forth on the scale of virtue, yet they still seek to reveal to the public only their virtuous sides. Because such selectiveness happens in real settings, it should also have happened in Pamela's life. Her letters, which all reveal only her perfection in the novel, must thus present an incomplete picture of her virtue.

The letters between *Shamela* and her mother reveal how the mother creates the entire plot to marry off her daughter to the squire, Mr. Booby. For this plan to work, *Shamela* must follow her advice and play hard to get, as described in one of the mother's letters to *Shamela*:

“When I advised you not to be guilty of following, I meant no more than that you should take care to be well paid beforehand, and not to trust to Promises, which a man seldom keeps, after he hath had his wicked Will. And seeing you have a rich fool to deal with, your not making a good market will be the more inexcusable” (Fielding, 1741/2004, p. 245). This letter reminds Fielding’s readers that what seems to be a moral lesson of virtue can, in truth, be part of a larger plan to gain social mobility.

As a well-known dramatist of his time, Henry Fielding favored this epistolary form to deliver his counter to Richardson’s novel. Discussing Fielding’s parodies of Richardson, Orange (1991) claims that

Fielding found his distinctive voice as a novelist from the beginning, although his forced retirement from playwriting made him value the novel as a form precisely because it gave him a direct presence as narrator not possible to him in the theatre, while still allowing theatrical presentations of a variety of selves. (p. 46)

The same epistolary form used by Richardson in *Pamela* is the gate through which Fielding was able to enter the anti-Pamela discourse, utilizing the form itself as a detective that reveals the other, imperfect side of Pamela.

4.2 Deceptive Form

Fielding’s imitation of Richardson’s epistolary form and the recreation of the same scenes serve two purposes. First, it bridges his novel with Richardson’s *Pamela*. Second, it functions as a literary tool of adaptation through which Fielding can comment on Richardson’s novel. Fielding’s imitation of the epistolary form invites *Shamela*’s readers to recall the sensations of their experience reading Richardson’s *Pamela*. These similarities function at the pragmatic level, through which the readers experience the continuation of and the retelling of the Pamela discourse.

Moreover, from an adaptation and appropriation standpoint, the imitation of the epistolary form allows Fielding to comment, alter, and present his oppositions to Richardson’s novel within the realm of the original text. Adaptation “is frequently involved in offering commentary on a source text. This is achieved most often by offering a revised point of view from the original, adding hypothetical motivation, or voicing the silenced and marginalized” (Sanders, 2007, pp. 18–19). Through adopting and adapting the form of Richardson’s *Pamela*, Fielding situates himself in a position from which he can critique and provide alternatives to the Pamela discourse by highlighting what he argues are the hidden portions of Richardson’s heroine.

4.3 Hypocritical Character

Fielding’s representation of Shamela as a hypocritical, deceptive character aims to affect *Pamela*’s readership. According to Gooding, “the Pamela-as-hypocrite interpretation arose with *Shamela* and was adopted by almost all subsequent anti-Pamela works” (1995, p. 122). The question of why a fictional character like Pamela was as annoying and troublesome to so many other authors is answered by the popularity of Richardson’s *Pamela* after its publication. Wider readership leads to greater social influence, which, in turn, could lead the novel’s readers to adopt the heroine’s behaviors and goals themselves. As critics have shown, most of *Pamela*’s influence lies in its didacticism regarding morality and virtue. Thus, as this didactic narrative gained in popularity, intellectuals began to question its morals more closely. Fielding was among the first to respond, with *Shamela*, followed by several other anti-Pamelist writers.

An example of Fielding’s use of the epistolary form as both a bridge to Richardson’s novel and as an adaptation through which to attack Pamela’s reliability can be seen in the contrasting scenes Fielding presents. Fielding tracks the moments in which Pamela enjoys voyeurism, Mr. B’s numerous sexual advances, and even his attempts at sexual assault. Richardson received considerable criticism for these scenes, as their voyeurism and sexually titillating narrative presentation—even in what is recognized in modern times as attempted sexual assault—contradicts the moral values on which the Pamela discourse supposedly focuses. Orange (1991) points out that Richardson’s attempts to alter this voyeurism in later editions confirms this concern: “in subsequent editions, [Richardson] responded to charges of impropriety by de-emphasizing Pamela’s nakedness and by limiting the number of times that Mr. B. succeeds in putting his hand in her bosom (before their marriage)” (p. 49).

4.4 Social Class Mobility

Fielding uses Richardson’s own narrative to attack Pamela as a role model of virtue and expose her intentions to gain upward social mobility. In *Shamela*, Fielding echoes the scene in which Pamela tells her mother about Mr. B’s sexual advances, yet in his novel, this action fits well within Shamela and her mother’s plot. As Richardson’s Pamela writes to her mother:

What words shall I find, my dear mother, (for my father should not see this shocking part) to describe the rest, and my confusion, when the guilty wretch took my left arm, and laid it under his neck as the vile procuress held my right; and then he clasped me round the waist!...He kissed me with frightful vehemence; and then his voice broke upon me like a clap of thunder: “Now Pamela”, said he, “is the time of reckoning come, that I have threatened!” I screamed out for help; but there was nobody to help me: and both my hands were secured, as I said. (Richardson, 1740/2008, p. 241)

In contrast to the allegedly pure intentions of Pamela’s letter, Shamela’s letter highlights the machinations of the lower classes to entrap the aristocratic Mr. Booby:

To hear him, and Mrs. Jewkes laid hold of one Arm, and he pulled down the Bed cloths and came into Bed on the other Side, and took my other Arm and laid it under him, and fell a kissing one my Breasts as if he would have devoured it; I was then forced to awake, and began to struggle with him, Mrs. Jewkes crying why don’t you do it? I have one Arm secure, if you can’t

deal with the rest, I am sorry for you. He was as rude as possible to me; but I remembered, Mamma, the Instructions you gave me to avoid being ravished, and followed them, which soon brought him to Terms, and he promised on quitting my hold, that he would leave the Bed. (Fielding, 1741/2004, pp. 258–259)

Here, Fielding directly attacks Pamela's intentions and reminds the reader of the lower-class eagerness for social mobility at any cost. Shamela's mother's instructions on how to manipulate her aristocratic assailant prompt the readership to reconsider Pamela's narrative with greater skepticism about her intentions.

Gooding (1995) confirms this reading of *Shamela*, indicating that 18th-century class traditions and social relations posed a major issue for the anti-Pamelists. *Pamela* threatens and challenges the normative regulation of male/female and aristocrat/bourgeois relationships:

Anti-Pamela distrust rests at least partly on the belief that social relations are based on competition and deception. This premise in turn provides the grounds for the charge that Richardson's novel is politically heterodox, partly because it provides a model for education that effaces social distinctions, and partly because it challenges assumptions about innate class characteristics. (p. 123)

Gooding here confirms that the skepticism of Pamela evinced by Fielding and other anti-Pamelist writers arises from their belief that Pamela is a deceptive model of a character, not a truly virtuous woman. Hence, their concern is that the novel's fame and popularity might prompt such behaviors challenging the master/maid relationship among other lower-class people, particularly women. In other words, the anti-Pamelist writers feared that *Pamela*'s audience and supporters would see only the positive didactic moral value of her story, while they saw the danger beneath this apparent moral virtue—that *Pamela* teaches lower-class maids how to marry their masters and dissolve the established social hierarchies.

4.5 *Joseph Andrews: An Offshoot*

In an extension of his anti-Pamela attack, Fielding wrote *Joseph Andrews* (1742) the following year, in which he continues his criticism of the Pamela discourse and the social hypocrisy it presents. This novel can be seen as an offshoot of Richardson's *Pamela* since it traces the life of Pamela Andrews's fictional brother, Joseph. In the beginning of the novel, Fielding (1742/2001) directly ties his novel to Richardson's, writing: "Mr. Joseph Andrews, the hero of our ensuing history, was esteemed to be the only son of Gaffar and Gammer Andrews, and brother to the illustrious Pamela, whose virtue is at present so famous" (p. 59). *Joseph Andrews* continues Fielding's mockery of the hypocritical virtue theme in Richardson's *Pamela*.

4.5.1 Alternative Reality

While *Shamela* challenges the character of Pamela and exposes her deceitful nature through the epistolary form, *Joseph Andrews* chases the other pillar of virtue in *Pamela* to counter Richardson's themes of chastity and desire. Fielding creates in *Joseph Andrews* an alternative reality that reverses the roles in *Pamela*. Joseph Andrews, as the story goes, works as a servant and a footman at the house of Mrs. Booby. In this novel, it is Mrs. Booby who finds herself attracted to her servant and makes sexual advances towards him. These sexual advances increase after the death of Mr. Booby; in one scene, Mrs. Booby calls Joseph Andrews to her chamber, where he finds her naked in an attempt to seduce him. However, he imitates his fictional sister Pamela's virtue and writes a letter to her revealing what has just happened.

In *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding evokes his view of a good example of a lower-class servant through a direct analogy of the master/servant sexual advances in Richardson's work. While Pamela's letters to her mother explain what happened with Mr. B in emotional language that reveals the degree to which she is drawn to her master, Joseph's letters to his sister are written in purely descriptive language that shows his obedience to his mistress. For example, when Joseph describes the erotic scene with Mrs. B, he feels guilty for exposing what transpired in his mistress's house, thereby presenting a good example of lower-class morals and virtue that respect the superior social position of Mrs. Booby and her ilk. In his letter, readers can see the struggle between the urgent need to tell his sister about the seduction and the morals of the good servant who ought not expose the secrets of his master's house:

To Mrs. Pamela Andrews, living with Squire Booby...Don't tell anybody what I write, because I should not care to have folks say I discover what passes in our family; but if it had not been so great a lady, I should have thought she had had a mind to me.... Dear Pamela, don't tell anybody; but she ordered me to sit down by her bedside, when she was naked in bed; and she held my hand, and talked exactly as a lady does to her sweetheart in a stage-play, which I have seen in Covent Garden, while she wanted him to be no better than he should be. (Fielding, 1742/2001, p. 71)

Joseph's purity, chastity, and virtue are seen in his innocence. He cares about being an honest footman to his employer, Mrs. Booby. This letter encourages the reader to place the two letters—the one written by Pamela to her mother and the one by Joseph to his sister—in conversation. Both are writing to their mentors and their role models of virtue and chastity. Yet, through such comparison, it becomes clear that Pamela appears to enjoy her master's sexual advances, as if she is pleased that her plot for social mobility is working. In contrast, Joseph, while pouring his heart out to his sister, remains conservative about the details, hoping that his sister can inspire him to continue to pursue greater moral power, virtue, and chastity.

In his comment on the themes of chastity and virtue in these scenes, Toise (1996) states that, "Pamela, in Fielding's view, cries chastity but hypocritically ends up giving in to desire nonetheless. In *Joseph Andrews*, the narrative voice serves as an important vehicle for Fielding's attack on Richardson's articulation of the passions" (p. 410). Toise suggests that Joseph Andrews's naïve qualities reflect the true image of purity and chastity, in contrast to the purported chastity of Pamela who nonetheless desires and ultimately marries her master. This portrayal of a truly pure servant who does not enjoy his mistress's sexual desire for him is another indirect critique of

Pamela's hypocritical depiction of virtue.

4.5.2 False Image of Chastity

One last example of Fielding's indirect critique of *Pamela*'s hypocrisy is seen in Joseph's repeated wishes to imitate his sister's moral example. In another letter, Joseph says to *Pamela*:

Dear Sister *Pamela*, hoping you are well, what news have I to tell you! O *Pamela*! my mistress is fallen in love with me — that is, what great folks call falling in love — she has a mind to ruin me; but I hope I shall have more resolution and more grace than to part with my virtue to any lady upon earth...I hope I shall copy your example, and that of Joseph my namesake, and maintain my virtue against all temptations. (Fielding, 1742/2001, p. 89)

In this quote, Joseph confesses to his sister that he is tortured by his mistress's sexual advances. Fielding here conjures an image of a penitent Joseph confessing his guilt to the priestlike *Pamela*. Joseph feels content as he confesses to his sister his mistress's sexual harassment in the name of "love". In the sacrament of repentance in Christianity, the priest absolves the penitent's sins through the authority granted to them by God. In Fielding's novel, however, the woman who should be absolving Joseph's sins is, ironically, guilty of the same sins herself.

5. Conclusion

Through his novels *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews*, Henry Fielding launched a complex yet systemic counternarrative to the *Pamela* discourse. This counterdiscourse mocks the widely praised image of the supposedly virtuous *Pamela* and exposes its fallacies. In doing so, Fielding acts as the protector of the normative sociocultural upper-lower class relations of the 18th century. As Lodge (1967) points out, "*Shamela* [and] *Joseph Andrews* are satirically allusive rather than imitative; they are meant primarily to recall the technical and intellectual inadequacies of *Pamela*" (p. 317). The wide readership and fame of Richardson's *Pamela* upon its publication prompted numerous public intellectuals and writers to counterattack this novel in the hopes of maintaining traditional aristocrat-bourgeois social relationships.

This paper has demonstrated how Fielding, through his known style of mockery, irony and satire, sought to defame Richardson's *Pamela*. It explains that Fielding's counternarrative is systemic, beginning with the novel's structure, which mirrors while mocking Richardson's work, form, character and themes. Fielding presents examples that shows how the epistolary form can be far from faithful to the truth and even deceptive. He also highlights examples in which the character *Pamela* is seen as hypocrite for enjoying the voyeurism and the sexual advances of her master, which challenges her portrayal as a virtuous, chaste servant. In *Joseph Andrews*, an offshoot to *Pamela*, Fielding presents an alternative reality of what he believes to be a good example of the virtuous, honest 18th-century servant, who stands in stark contrast to his fictional sister.

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