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## **Pamela: Domestic Servitude, Marriage, and the Novel**

Robert Folkenflik

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### **In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:**

Pamela: Domestic Servitude, Marriage, and the Novel Robert Folkenflik Ian Watt has analysed Pamela in highly persuasive terms as a "courtship" plot which has for its substructure such realities of eighteenth-century marriage as the difficulties of spinsterhood following the breakdown of the extended family, the numerical surplus of marriagable women to men, and so forth.<sup>1</sup> I see the book rather from the perspective of "social and relative duties," centring on the relation of self to others and the tensions between social and religious roles. For this purpose, the major point of the novel is not that Pamela is nubile and will finally marry her employer-tormenter, but that she is a servant and is effectively "incarcerated" in her employer's household. Interestingly, even those critical of Watt's position, such as Nancy K. Miller and Nancy Armstrong, tend to ignore this fact: for example, Miller says "Pamela ... can be divided the matically into two parts: the first dominated by a daughter's confrontation with (aggressive) male sexuality, the second by her

transformation from daughter to wife and the testing of marriage as an integrator of sexuality."<sup>2</sup> 1 Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1964), pp. 188-89. This essay is meant to extend some of the lines of thought in my "A Room of Pamela's Own," *ELH* 39 (1972), 585-96. I hope to bring some of the elements of Richardson's ideology into sharper focus here. Together the essays will form a chapter in a book on the eighteenth-century novel which I am completing. References are to the Riverside Edition of *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*, ed. T.C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971).

2 Nancy K. Miller, *The Heroine's Text: Readings in the French and English Novel, 1722-1782* *EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FICTION*, Volume 5, Number 3, April 1993 254 *EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FICTION* Pamela's incarceration shares certain of the elements described by Erving Goffman in his essay "Characteristics of Total Institutions." In ordinary life, at least in modern society, "the individual tends to sleep, play, and work in different places, with different co-participants, under different authorities, and without an overall rational plan. The central feature of total institutions can be described as a breakdown of the barriers ordinarily separating these three spheres of life."<sup>3</sup> Such institutions may be voluntarily or involuntarily entered, and would include monasteries and mental hospitals as well as prisons. The primary feature of the total institution, then, is that "all aspects of life are conducted in the same place and under the same single authority." Pamela does not share her experience with a large number of other people acting the same way at the same time; her solitary confinement is one of the things that make her plight more moving. From the perspective of the total institution, we should first observe that Pamela's imprisonment, while she is enduring Mr B.'s prolonged attempt to triumph over her virginity, begins when she is already, in Goffman's terms, an inmate of a total institution: that of domestic servitude in the eighteenth century. Goffman does not give such servitude as one of his examples, and the actual conditions of the domestic servant in the eighteenth century were probably not quite regimented enough to qualify in most households. And J. Jean Hecht suggests that the locale of servants' recreations was not always on the master's estate.<sup>4</sup> Yet certainly the theoretical existence of the ser-

(New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 46; cf. also p. 165n2; Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). In his chapter on Pamela, "Richardson and the Domestication of Service," Michael McKeon puts the role of the servant into the perspective of the *longue durée* from feudalism to capitalism. See *The Origins of the English Novel 1600-1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), pp. 357-81. Bruce Robbins comments on Pamela only in passing in his highly suggestive *The Servant's Hand: English Fiction from Below* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968). He makes the important general point, however, that the servant...

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