Constructing Roles in the Early Modern Novel: Contrasting Views on Women and Female Virtue in Richardson's Pamela and Haywood's Fantomina

John Cabot University

Department of English Language and Literature

Bachelor of Arts in English Language and Literature
Minors in Creative Writing and Philosophy

Constructing Roles in the Early Modern Novel: Contrasting Views on Women and Female Virtue in Richardson's *Pamela* and Haywood's *Fantomina*

Federica Murgolo

First Reader
Professor
Livia Sacchetti

Second Reader
Professor
Alessandra Grego

Spring 2025

Abstract

This thesis investigates eighteenth-century novels and their role in shaping social expectations on women, particularly regarding the preservation of premarital chastity, which was widely considered a marker of moral excellence. To contextualize this analysis, primary sources such as conduct books are examined to illuminate the moral framework of the time, providing deeper insight into the cultural significance of the novels under consideration. The thesis also adopts a combined lens of New Historicism and feminist literary criticism to explore the construction of gender, the performative nature of femininity, and broader social concerns of the period. The core of the analysis focuses on two novels: Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* and Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina*. While Richardson reinforces the period's moral expectations and endorses societal pressures placed upon women, Haywood subverts and challenges them. Both novels are examined through the authors' use of metatextual elements, characterization of their heroines, and the outcomes or rewards each heroine receives. Read in contrast, these texts reveal a more complex portrayal of eighteenth-century femininity, exposing the tensions between conformity and resistance. Furthermore, this comparison offers a reflection on contemporary understandings of gender roles and highlights literature's enduring capacity not only to mirror societal norms but also to actively shape and challenge them.

Key words: Pamela, Fantomina, Samuel Richardson, Eliza Haywood, virtue, eighteenth-century novel, performative identity, gender roles, conduct literature, literature and society.

Dedication

To My Beloved Family,

And Dearest Friends,

"If I loved you less, I might be able to talk about it more.

But you know what I am.—You hear nothing but truth from me."

Emma*, Jane Austen*

And, of Course,

To My Lifelong Companion,

Miss Literature

Forevermore,

Your Most Obedient and Devoted Servant

Acknowledgements

Writing a thesis is neither an easy nor a short process; it is a journey that I began last term with extensive research. Along the way, I faced many doubts, spent countless hours reading and writing, and changed my topic more than once. Despite the challenges, it has been an immensely rewarding experience, especially during the research phase when I had the chance to read scans of original eighteenth-century manuscripts. Beyond the enjoyment, the difficulties, and the doubts, I consider myself extremely fortunate to have had the constant support of my university, particularly the Department of English Language and Literature, to whom I am deeply grateful for the faith they have always placed in me.

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Professor Livia Sacchetti for agreeing to be my first reader. Thank you for your patience and availability, for always being willing to meet with me to answer my questions, and for pushing me to better refine and develop my ideas. You were exactly the first reader I needed—your attention to detail and the creativity you encouraged both in academic research and in writing have been deeply inspiring me, just as your classes always were.

I am also profoundly grateful to the Chair of the Department, Professor Alessandra Grego, who agreed to be my second reader. Thank you for helping me shape my initial idea, for guiding me through the development of my project, and for believing in my ability to carry out a thesis on eighteenth-century literature. I was thrilled to have you involved in my thesis because I have always admired your interdisciplinary knowledge, which has consistently enriched my academic journey. I knew that your insight would be invaluable for this work.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to Professor Carlos Dews for his continuous support and encouragement throughout these years. Working with you on your upcoming publication offered me a rare and formative glimpse into the life of a researcher, further motivating me to pursue this path. Thank you for everything you have taught me—academically and personally—for always seeing the best in me. Your belief in my potential is something I will never forget.

A special thanks to Professor Shannon Russell, the first professor I took an English Literature course with and the one who deepened my love for literature, especially eighteenth-century literature during one of her surveys. Thank you for your constant encouragement to persist in the face of setbacks and for teaching me that opportunities often lie just around the corner. Your invaluable writing advice has made me a better student and will stay with me always.

I am also grateful to the professors of my minors. To the Philosophy faculty, especially Professor Brunella Antomarini, and to the Creative Writing faculty, especially Professor Elizabeth Farren—thank you for broadening my perspectives and enriching my studies beyond literature. I also extend my thanks to Professor Carolina De Luca for believing in me, for reading my works with enthusiasm, and for her rare and genuine encouragement; and to Professor Rosa Filardi for rekindling my love for theater and sharing her wonderful books with me.

Lastly, I would like to thank the professors of the Writing Center for their assistance with my essays throughout these years, and the Frohring Library's exceptional staff, especially Nicoletta Romano and Manlio Perugini, for their invaluable help with my thesis formatting, MLA citation, and workshop support, without which I would have been truly lost.

I am profoundly grateful for the opportunity to have studied what I love the most in an international and dynamic environment like John Cabot University. Every class, every lesson has

been a joy, and I am especially thankful to have fulfilled my lifelong dream of studying in New York during my senior year.

Everything I have learned has come together in this project. Every challenge, every effort was worth it—and I truly had fun along the way.

I only wish I had better words to express how grateful I am to all of you.

Table of Content

Introduction: The Role of Eighteenth-Century Fiction in Shaping Gender Roles.....1

Chapter 1: Metatextual Elements in the Shaping of the Novels 12

Chapter 2: Characterizing the Heroines as the Authors' Moral and Social Messengers 26

Chapter 3: The Implications of Marriage and the Heroines' Rewards 41

Conclusions: Shaping and Resisting Feminine Spaces through Novel Writing.....50

Works Cited 53

Introduction: The Role of Eighteenth-Century Fiction in Shaping Gender Roles

In eighteenth-century Britain, industrialization and urbanization not only transformed the physical and economic landscape but also reshaped society, solidifying pre-existing gendered expectations. Marriage, in particular, became the central tool for defining a woman's moral excellence, as society framed it as the ultimate reward a virtuous woman could attain. As a result, women were expected to perform virtuously in order to prove themselves worthy of that reward. To ensure women adhered to this performance, conduct books became a widely popular and influential genre. These texts outlined prescriptive rules that the emerging novel, as a form of fiction writing, sought to illustrate in practice, demonstrating proper conduct through narrative. This connection highlights a strong intersection between femininity—understood in terms of social expectations and behavior—and the structured novel, which authors used as a space where to showcase idealized models of behavior.

The rise of the novel as a new literary genre provided a space to develop and explore the female voice. To impart moral and behavioral lessons, writers needed to center these narratives around heroines. In particular, two novels of the period, *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740) by Samuel Richardson and *Fantomina; or, Love in a Maze* (1725) by Eliza Haywood, respectively uphold and challenge the expectations set by conduct books through metatextual elements, the characterization of their heroines, and the implications of the presence—or, in *Fantomina*'s case, the absence—of marriage. Thus, in Richardson's case, the novel serves to reinforce compliance

with societal rules, while in Haywood's, it becomes a space to portray disobedience—a personal necessity in a society that continually demands women wear a mask to be accepted.

The period in which these novels were written was one of innovation and revolution, marked by significant social and economic concerns. Society was broadly divided into six social classes, which the apothecary James Nelson categorizes in *An Essay on the Government of Children* (1753) as "Nobility, Gentry, Mercantile or Commercial People, Mechanics, and Peasantry" (306). The nobility, composed of wealthy landowners, held the greatest power, especially since the French Revolution had not yet occurred. Below them, the gentry—consisting of gentlemen and merchants—was less wealthy and influential than the aristocracy. The mercantile class, a newly emerging middle class, was further divided into upper and lower middle class based on profession and property ownership. At the lowest ranks of the hierarchy were the mechanics and peasantry, who primarily lived and worked in rural areas and made up the majority of the population. However, as Penelope J. Corfield observes in "Class by Name and Number in Eighteenth-Century England," these class divisions were not rigid, allowing for significant social mobility rather than a strictly fixed hierarchy (109).

Within this context, marriage functioned as a strategic tool, reinforced through contemporary literature, particularly conduct books, that trained women to aspire to wealthy husbands and to adopt the behaviors necessary to secure such matches. In parallel, novels served as both a stage and a rehearsal for this expected performance, providing readers with a space where these behaviors could be observed and then applied in real life; or, conversely, critiqued. As a result, novel reading became instrumental for either reinforcing the rules presented in conduct books or, depending on the novelist's intentions and the reader's interpretation, subverting them.

During this period, women and marriage played a crucial role in securing financial stability and social advancement. As Laura E. Thomason explains in *The Matrimonial Trap: Eighteenth-Century Women Writers Redefine Marriage*, marriage was often seen as a means of improving one's status, particularly for women, who had limited opportunities to become economically independent. As Thomason notes, "These women were generally required to marry in order to secure their futures, yet were hindered from freely choosing a husband. They faced marriage anxiously because they lacked the power to either avoid it or to define it for themselves" (1). Since daughters could not inherit land—which was reserved for sons—and rarely owned property themselves, their primary means of securing financial stability was marrying into a higher social class. However, this dynamic applied only to wealthy women and did not extend to poor families. Wealthier suitors did not pursue marriages with lower-class women, as reflected in the absence of written guidelines, such as conduct books, for women of these social groups. As a result, women from lower-class backgrounds, like servant maids, had greater freedom both in their personal behavior and in their interactions with men, as they were not bound by prescriptive rules and could marry for reasons beyond economic gain.

Marriages were the most significant aspect of a woman's life in the eighteenth century, and women were often expected to secure a suitor of a higher social standing than theirs. To achieve this goal, they were guided by specific social behaviors outlined in conduct books—nonfiction works that served as manuals for proper female conduct, particularly regarding marriage. In "Conduct (Un)Becoming to Ladies of Literature: How-To Guides for Romantic Women Writers," Lucy Morrison explains that "[By following] middle-class conduct books' guidance to the letter, [women readers] would have been demure and competent daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers who sacrificed any personal desires to those of any of their

surrounding dependents" (202). These books instructed women on how to behave before, during, and after marriage, ensuring they adhered to the expectations of society. While marriage was viewed as a religious institution, a distinction existed between economic and religious marriages, often referred to as mercenary, and sentimental marriages. These two types of unions reflected differing values and understanding of virtue. On the one hand, mercenary marriages were arranged for a financial or social gain, with little regard for morality or religion. The term *mercenary* itself refers to "actions [that] are motivated primarily by personal gain, often at the expense of ethics" ("Mercenary, *N*."). On the other hand, sentimental marriages placed greater emphasis on virtue and morality, grounded in emotional and moral considerations.

Ingrid H. Tague explains this distinction more clearly in "Love, Honor, and Obedience: Fashionable Women and the Discourse of Marriage in the Early Eighteenth Century." Mercenary marriages involved individuals who arranged or decided to marry for financial interests. By contrast, sentimental marriage focused instead on 'love.' However, as conduct books explicitly stated, the word 'love' did not carry the modern connotation it has today; rather, it signified that a woman had to be obedient to her husband, who, in turn, was expected to protect her. As Tague observes, "Women were told that they must love the man they married in order to obey him: they would be sure that they indeed love him, conversely by their willingness to obey him" (85). This idea suggests that a woman's love for her husband was equated with her willingness to submit and obey, intertwining love and subjugation to the extent that love could not exist without obedience. This dynamic explains why the husband-wife relationship was often likened to that of master and servant (84-85). While there may have been devotion on both sides, the woman was always expected to serve her husband as her master.

During this time, religious values also became more stringent in response to the sexual freedom of the Restoration (1660-1688), while sentimental marriages emerged as a means to counter mercenary marriages, promoting religious ideals of love and obedience over financial motives. Among the rising elite, particularly these deeply religious upper classes, the core social and personal value was virtue, with its preservation being a primary concern for women. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word *virtue* has held multiple meanings over time. Since around 1225, it has referred to "A moral quality regarded (esp. in religious contexts) as good or desirable in a person, such as patience, kindness, etc.; a particular form of moral excellence." Additionally, since 1543, it had also signified "Chastity, esp. on the part of a woman; sexual purity; virginity" ("Virtue, *N.*") Thus, virtue has encompassed both general moral excellence and, more specifically, premarital chastity. In this context, fiction writing served as a means of reinforcing and perpetuating these ideals. In "The Concept of Virginity and Its Representations in Eighteenth-Century English Literature," Kuo-jung Chen states that virginity was perceived as, "[A] merchandise to be preserved or displayed for the highest bid […]. This idea stipulates that the loss of virginity can be compensated materially" (89). This aspect suggests once a woman's virtue was compromised, her entire life was affected, not only in terms of reputation and potential social exile but also financially. The two meanings of virtue, both moral and sexual, were highly interconnected: an unmarried woman could not be considered morally excellent without being a virgin.

Since virtue was essential to a woman's social status, and its loss could have catastrophic consequences, conduct books addressed to young ladies, emphasized its preservation. In fact, being virtuous and reputable was considered more important than the preservation of life itself. More specifically, for a woman, losing her virtue did not literally mean physical death but social

ruin. She would have become an outcast, experiencing a form of social death—rejected by everyone while still alive. In the Introduction of George Savile, Marquis of Halifax's conduct book, *The Lady's New Year's Gift; or, Advice to a Daughter* (1688), it is explicitly noted, "At other times, when my Fears prevail, I shrink as if I were stuck at the prospect of *Danger*, to which a young Woman must be expos'd. […] Want of *Care*, therefore, my dear Child, is never to be excus'd, since, as to this World, it hath the same effect as want of *Vertue*" (2-3). The "fears" and the "danger" the author refers to are not related to a young woman's health or physical safety but rather to the premature loss of virtue, which can never be excused or justified. Preserving virtue was considered more important than physical well-being, and suffering illness was preferable to having one's virtue compromised. This idea is even more explicitly stated by Adam Smith in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759):

> Breach of [female] chastity dishonours irretrievably. No circumstances, no solicitations can ever excuse it; no sorrow, no repentance atone for it. We are so nice [meaning fastidious] in this respect that even a rape dishonours, and the innocence of mind cannot, in our imagination, wash out the *pollution of the body*. (490, my emphasis)

In this passage, Smith reports and supports the extremist view that virtue, once corrupted, leads to dishonor regardless of the circumstances, as even "a rape dishonours." This idea suggests that, even in cases where a woman's moral conduct is entirely blameless, society still perceives her body as permanently "polluted" by such an act. The circulating texts of the time deeply influenced women's psychology, shifting their focus from personal well-being to the preservation of virtue. In Smith's text, the loss of virtue is compared to a physical infection, arguably considered one of the worst forms of illness. This aspect implies that virtue, valued more than life itself, became the driving force behind women's decisions, as every action had to

be weighed against its potential impact on their reputation. This pressure not only applied to their conduct before marriage but also shaped their roles within marriage, defining the birth of new domestic roles.

The emergence of these new roles left little room for error, as their rigid structure made it exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, for a lady to restore her virtue once it was compromised. An example of this mentality is offered by Delarivier Manley in *Secret Memoirs from the New Atalantis* (1709), "Men may regain their Reputation, tho' after a Complication of Vices, *Cowardice*, *Robbery*, *Adultery*, *Bribery*, and *Murder*, but a Woman once departed from the Road of Virtue, is made incapable of a Return: Sorrow and Scorn overtake her" (83-84). The difference between men and women and the double standards in society, where men can commit actual crimes and still have their reputations restored, while for women, losing their virginity before marriage was seen as the worst crime of all (worse even than a physical illness) and utterly unforgivable. This element creates higher expectations for women, as they witness how crimes committed by men can be forgiven, while the loss of virginity before marriage is seen as irredeemable. It is perceived as a transgression not only of morality but of a sacred bond with God, rendering both body and spirit corrupted. In contrast, men's crimes are considered moral failings that can be forgiven, as they are seen as detached from their physical being. This stark difference highlights how the preservation of virtue was central to women's identities, affecting them in their entirety—body, spirit, and reputation—while men's moral lapses were judged solely on their actions.

Another relevant aspect connected to sentimental marriages and the preservation of moral virtue is the case in which women had to deal with a 'bad husband.' As Tague notes, conduct books explicitly stated that in such cases that women were not encouraged to leave their

husbands or exercise any form of agency over the situation. Instead, these circumstances were seen as a "test for true womanhood," and women were expected to submit to their husband's authority (88). According to conduct books like *The Lady's New Year's Gift*, even with an abusive husband, a wife was expected to tolerate his behavior:

> I am tempted to say […] That a *Wife* is to thank God her *Husband* hath *Faults*. […] A *Husbands* without *Faults* is a dangerous Observer; […] and though I will not doubt but that your *Vertue* will disappoint the sharpest Enquiries; yet few Women can bear the having all they say or do *represented* in the clear Glass of an Understanding without *Faults.* (40-41)

Therefore, a woman was often considered better off with a "faulty" husband—a term that went beyond mere imperfection to imply drunkenness or abuse. This expectation was framed as a means of elevating women, allowing them to demonstrate their "true womanhood" through patience and moral excellence. Moreover, a faulty husband was seen as less likely to impose the strict expectations and scrutiny of other men, paradoxically making it "safer" for a woman to preserve her virtue rather than her physical and mental well-being. This aspect underscores the rigid demands placed on women, not only in public but especially in the domestic sphere. Conduct books played a key role in shaping the basis of these emerging domestic roles, instructing women on how to behave in every possible situation, even with a 'bad husband.' These manuals left little room for personal agency, instead reinforcing a rigid, performative ideal of womanhood. Literature of the time, particularly novels, provided a space to enact these prescribed behaviors, transforming them into societal models

Concerns about virtue were widely expressed in literature, not only through nonfiction conduct books, which prescribed moral codes, but also through the emerging novel as a new

genre. While both shaped, justified, and validated societal expectations for men and women—particularly the performative nature of women's behavior in social settings—they did so in distinct ways. Novels became increasingly popular during this period, emerging as a new form of prose writing that depicted realistic events in society. Early novels were often titled after their protagonists, as seen for instance in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749), and Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759), reinforcing their focus on fictional yet believable male characters. By giving these protagonists ordinary names and placing them in familiar social contexts, novels heightened their sense of realism and relatability. As realism became central to fiction, readers also grew invested in how female protagonists would behave, which, in turn, reinforced even more strict domestic roles for women. In terms of gender expectations, this new genre sought to depict and, at times, regulate women's conduct.

Novels thus became a literary space where the principles outlined in conduct books were put into practice. This practice created a liminal space between fiction and nonfiction, in which conduct books *established* the moral code women were expected to follow, while novels *demonstrated* how to perform it. In "The Cult of Womanhood in Eighteenth-Century Thought," Marlene LeGates argues that "This new literature, centering on the encounter between a sexually aggressive male and the innocent, superior female, was the *traditional conduct book fictionalized*; it succeeded in catching the imagination of the reading public" (27; emphasis added). Within this literary space, women found themselves navigating both genres—looking to nonfiction for guidance while seeing their expected behaviors reflected in fiction. Furthermore, since novels were realistic, they were often mistaken for real accounts, granting novelists a unique power: if the story they told could be perceived as true, they could use that realism to convey or reinforce a specific message, especially concerning marriage, virtue, and reputation.

Like conduct books, yet fundamentally different from them, novels could impart lessons in a more engaging and persuasive way.

Unlike conduct books, which dictated strict behavioral guidelines, novels allowed readers to immerse themselves in the narrative, creating an emotional connection with fictional characters. This emotional engagement made moral instruction more impactful, as readers could judge the protagonist's actions and their consequences rather than simply being told what was right or wrong. In particular, novels did not present a list of rules to follow; instead, they depicted realistic situations, subtly guiding the audience through examples rather than explicit instruction. In this way, novels did not impose a single interpretation of morality but encouraged readers to critique or support the hero or heroine. This openness not only allowed for individual interpretation but also created space for debate on morality and behavior. Thus, novels used entertainment as a vehicle for moral instruction, imparting lessons subtly, often without the audience consciously realizing it. Depending on the text, a particular idea or value could be reinforced or challenged based on the actions of the novel's protagonist.

This is particularly the case with two novels written during this period, *Pamela* by Richardson and *Fantomina* by Haywood. Both novels feature a heroine as the protagonist; however, each reacts differently to the world, especially in relation to the preservation of virtue and reputation. Readers can observe two distinct approaches: in Richardson's case, the heroine fully embraces the anxieties surrounding the preservation of virtue, driven by conduct books. In contrast, Haywood acknowledges the concern for virtue, but creates a heroine who challenges the consequences of its loss. Despite this concern, virtue is willingly compromised in her work. Richardson's novel follows a young servant, Pamela Andrews, who documents in letters her relentless struggle against the advances of her master, Mr. B. What begins as a novel of coercion

and resistance ends with Mr. B ultimately marrying Pamela, rewarding her virtue. In stark contrast, Haywood's unnamed aristocratic heroine, Fantomina, is driven by curiosity and desire, defying societal norms by disguising herself through clothing. She assumes different identities to seduce the same man, Beauplaisir. Unlike Pamela, whose virtue 'rewards' her by elevating her social status, Fantomina is disgraced due to an unwanted pregnancy, which leads to her exile in a monastery in France.

By addressing virtue differently, the two novels present contrasting views on sentimental marriages: *Pamela* supports them while *Fantomina* critiques them, without endorsing mercenary marriages. More specifically, in *Pamela*, Richardson reinforces the idea of a heroine in a sentimental marriage who remains subjugated to her husband-master—first due to her social class before marriage and then, after marriage, despite her social elevation. While the justification for her subjugation changes, the nature of her submission has to remain the same. In contrast, in *Fantomina*, Haywood critiques the subjugation of wives in sentimental marriages by redefining virtue as female agency rather than premarital virginity. She also emphasizes the heroine's need to disguise herself as a means of exercising agency within a patriarchal society. The two novels' opposing intents and arcs are reflected in three main aspects: metatextual elements, characterization of the heroines, and the portrayal of marriage and reward. On a broader level, the rise of the novel as a popular genre is entwined with the contrasting purposes and ideas the two authors promote—one reinforcing oppression, the other offering a means of rebellion. This tension is also rooted in the authors' genders, which likely influenced and shaped their opposite views on women's domestic roles.

Chapter 1: Metatextual Elements in the Shaping of the Novels

Pamela is deliberately structured through metatextual elements that shape the protagonist's identity and present her as a moral example for women, particularly in preserving her virtue. Drawing on his awareness of contemporary publishing trends, Richardson employs Pamela's social class, the novel's narrative perspective, preface, and epistemological framework to blur the line between fiction and reality. These elements transform Pamela into a living embodiment of conduct books ideals, making her a familial voice, that feels like a trusted guide or friend rather than a fictional character.

As a debut novelist, Richardson carefully studied market trends before publishing *Pamela*. By the time he released the novel at fifty-one years old, he was already well-versed in the publishing industry and familiar with the evolving landscape of literary trends. William B. Warner suggests, "Richardson hoped, one might venture to say, that *Pamela* would so reform its reader that it would replace all novels, and be the last and only fiction its reader would want to read" (102). Richardson's writing aspirations and immediate success can be attributed to two interconnected factors. First, he gained experience as apprenticed to a printer before establishing his own publishing house, which gave him insight into market trends and an understanding of how to capture readers' attention (Doody 7). Second, Richardson avoided using a traditional narrative arc and instead structured *Pamela* as a series of letters, adding a sense of immediacy and authenticity to the story. These aspects allowed him to explore effectively the themes of marriage, virtue, and class—three central concerns in the lives of both men and women during the period, which he knew people wanted to read about.

Richardson purposefully structured *Pamela* using various elements and narrative techniques to maximize his moral influence, ensuring that his message would resonate strongly with his audience. He opposed mercenary marriages and strongly advocated for sentimental marriages, as exemplified by Pamela and Mr. B's relationship. As Tague notes, "By the 1740s, readers all across England were weeping over Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, with its triumph of love over considerations of rank and wealth" (77). The novel's extended title, *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* further underscores its central message: a woman must remain virtuous even when faced with a man attempting to seduce her. By preserving her virtue, she will ultimately reform the man, leading to marriage based on 'love,' as true virtue is always rewarded. The novel's happy ending reinforces this ideal, making Pamela an appealing and inspirational figure for readers, who embraced her as the flawless, female role model.

The creation of a new domestic role for women in sentimental marriages makes the heroine a servant rather than a lady. Richardson's purpose was to convey a behavioral code familiar to readers through conduct books, but he elevated its significance by framing the content not merely as a social guide to proper behavior, but as a manifestation of faith in God, closely tied to the concept of virtue rather than social status. This distinction is crucial, as it highlights one of the key differences between sentimental and mercenary marriages: sentimental marriages were driven not only by 'love' but also by a strong sense of religion, while mercenary marriages were primarily motivated by material concerns. By choosing Pamela, a servant, as his protagonist, Richardson emphasizes that her virtue is not the result of social imposition but comes from a genuine faith in God. This distinction means that social expectations placed on her were markedly different, if not entirely absent, compared to women of higher classes. Thus, Pamela represents women who were largely ignored by conduct books and not expected to be

virtuous. For example, the title of the conduct book *The Lady's New Year's Gift* already reveals its targeted audience, one that excluded servants, who likely could not even read. The book even includes a section titled "Servants," which outlines how young ladies should behave towards them—further confirming that servants were not the intended readers, but rather subjects of instruction. Virtue was not typically expected of servants, who were often regarded as sexually free, with many engaging in relations with their masters—sometimes under coercion or through acts of rape. This dynamic is the one Richardson attempts to recreate in *Pamela*, though Mr. B fails to seduce or assault her. In "Composing Purpose in Richardson's *Pamela*," Jane Blanchard states, "Richardson intended his work to be an engaging source of education and edification, and the enthusiastic response that he received indicates that he achieved his goal" (93). Richardson understood the significance of using a humble and virtuous servant girl as the heroine, knowing how extraordinary it would be to convey his message through someone who was not a young lady bound by specific social expectations.

Richardson constructs Pamela's social class, combined with her strong personal convictions, to reinforce the imposition on women to preserve their virtue, and how once lost, it is considered impossible to restore it. Beyond merely embodying these ideals, Pamela actively supports and internalizes them, articulating their significance through the epistemological framework Richardson constructs. For instance, at the beginning of the novel, in Volume I, Letter III, she confesses to her father, "I will die a thousand deaths, rather than be dishonest any way" (Richardson 47). This extreme declaration reflects Pamela's prioritization of her virtue above all else, as "a thousand deaths" are more bearable to her than losing her virtue. The hyperbole here can have a dual effect, as it may initially seem absurd and ironic. However, this should not be the case for a reader who has finished *Pamela* and recognizes that she constantly

makes such claims and, more importantly, believes them. Thus, the exaggeration can work either against Pamela, reinforcing skepticism toward her intentions, or in her favor for those who share her mindset and understand that she is not being ironic. This attitude is reinforced by the structural relationship between letters. In the previous letter, her father writes, "[F]or what signify all the riches in the world, with a bad conscience, and to be dishonest?" (45). By placing these letters in conversation with each other, Richardson emphasizes, and indeed magnifies, the idea that preserving virtue is the highest moral imperative, portraying it as a matter of life and death.

To establish the credibility of these letters, Richardson strategically structures the novel's introduction. He begins with a Preface in which he deliberately distances himself from the narrative, "[T]he *Editor* of the following Letters, which have their foundation both in *Truth* and *Nature*, ventures to assert, that all these ends are obtained here, together" (31). He explicitly denies any involvement in the creation of Pamela's letters, presenting them as authentic and unaltered, "At first Richardson was so secretive about his authorship of this work that not even his closest friends knew the truth" (Dussinger 28). This manipulation of authorial identity contributed to a heightened sense of realism in the narrative, allowing Pamela to emerge as a role model for women to emulate. In the final lines of the Preface, Richardson further emphasizes the separation by stating, "[A]n *Editor* can judge with an impartiality which is rarely to be found in an *Author*" (31). He establishes a distinction between the editor, who supposedly presents letters impartially, and the author, implying a lack of intervention in the story. Moreover, by asserting that "impartiality" is "rarely to be found in an *Author*" and aligning himself with the editor rather than the author, Richardson positions himself in a superior role. This move allows him to present Pamela's letters as an unmediated account, disguising his own influence and moral agenda. As

Blanchard points out, "[T]his unnamed Editor is being deceptive as well as manipulative by distinguishing himself from the unnamed Author, when Richardson actually served in both capacities regarding the publication of his book" (94). Thus, through this false preface he avoids explicitly signaling bias or didactic intent, even though the novel is fundamentally shaped by both. The false preface is an example of literary forgery, a well-established trope in novel writing that predates Richardson and can be defined as "a piece of work created or modified with the intention to deceive" (Metzger 4). This technique involves manipulating a text to enhance its credibility, either by altering historical details or presenting fiction as nonfiction—as it is the case with *Pamela*.

By presenting the letters as if they were written by Pamela herself, and by distancing himself from the narrative in the Preface, Richardson creates an illusion of authenticity that enhances the credibility of the story and its didactic purpose. Rather than directly instructing women on how they must behave, he presents Pamela as an extraordinary example to be observed and emulated. As Christine Roulston observes, "The educational model for the woman is noticeably different; it is not a model of inner development by means of pedagogical interaction with the text, but one of education by imitation and practical example" (4). Richardson constructs the novel as a reflective space, serving as a mirror that every woman should aspire to imitate. The perceived truthfulness of the story, reinforced by its positive ending, strengthens the message he aims to convey. In particular, by depicting Pamela's eventual marriage to her master and subsequent social elevation, Richardson reinforces the ideal that virtue is always rewarded, making it both a moral and pragmatic model for women to follow. This portrayal not only reinforces the idea of virtue but also subtly shapes the audience's perception of sentimental marriages as being born out of 'love' rather than financial gain,

suggesting that such marriages have the power to elevate even the most morally dubious person, as seen with Mr. B.

Richardson's decision to present the story through an epistolary structure, rather than traditional prose, further amplifies the realism established in the Preface, providing readers with an illusion of authenticity and giving Pamela an intimate voice. Letters are inherently intimate, yet they still have a certain boundary compared to a journal, where the only intended audience is the author themselves. This performative nature of letter writing reflects a concern for how one is perceived by others, much like conduct books, where the focus is on crafting an image of social acceptability. By opting for letters, Richardson strikes a balance between personal expression and outward communication, allowing Pamela to appear as a role model through her strong values on virtue and marriage, while still sharing these ideals with her parents. This is particularly evident throughout the novel in Pamela's self-referential language, where she frequently refers to herself in the third person and uses adjectives that serve dual purposes, denoting not only her virtue but also her social class. One such example is her frequent use of the phrase "your poor Pamela." This phrasing is significant because, in personal letters—especially those to parents—one would typically employ a more direct, first-person tone. Pamela's use of these expressions subtly reveals her self-awareness in portraying her virtuous performance for others, emphasizing her humility as a servant, a social class from which such performances were not socially expected. This strategic portrayal reinforces the perception of her character as a role model of virtue rather than an authentic individual.

The self-referential language in letters serves both a structural and a linguistic purpose, designed to position Pamela as a tangible model for female readers to follow. More specifically, self-referential expressions suggest that Pamela's identity is constantly defined by others, as seen

with the frequent use of "*your* Pamela" (my emphasis). Moreover, she often diminishes herself by referring to herself in the third person with repetitive adjectives, with "poor" being the most common. In particular, according to AntConc, this word appears 534 times in the novel, often preceded by "my" (77 times) or "your" (54 times), and followed most frequently by "Pamela" (37 times), "daughter" (19 times), or "servant" (18 times), all associated with the heroine (Murgolo). This linguistic pattern reinforces the notion that Pamela is not just a character but an ideal to aspire to, as she consistently humbles herself and refers to her own persona in a detached, almost externalized manner.

Therefore, *Pamela* is structured in a way that blurs the distinction between what claims to be real and what is actually real. The novel serves as a space where conduct books principles are put into practice, presenting itself as a fictionalized conduct book that offers Pamela as a moral guide for readers to emulate. Had the same content been presented in a different form, the novel would not have had the same impact. It is through the false preface and the novel's epistemological structure that *Pamela* creates a sense of intimacy between the heroine and the reader. Richardson wanted readers to trust the heroine's intimate letter writing, drawing them into her experiences so that they might be inspired by her behavior.

In contrast, the metatextual elements of *Fantomina* introduce a new way of shaping the novel as a feminine genre, one that grants agency to the heroine. This aspect stands in stark opposition to Richardson's ideals and purposeful narrative of *Pamela*, a contrast that is further emphasized by Haywood's later works. Specifically, Haywood innovates novel writing by manipulating amatory fiction's conventions and omitting the protagonist's real name. This omission not only allows the heroine to manipulate identities within the story but also enables a meta-textual interaction between author and reader, inviting female readers to identify with

Fantomina's curiosity. Her anonymity becomes a mask that readers can figuratively wear, just as the heroine herself adopts different disguises. Haywood's broader body of work and the literary context in which she wrote are crucial to understanding the implications of *Fantomina*'s ending. While traditionally perceived as a punishment, the conclusion can instead be interpreted as an escape—one that offers the heroine the possibility of sexual life outside parental control.

Richardson was not the only author whose work functioned as conduct literature; Haywood also used fiction in a similar way, yet with different purposes. Likely in response to *Pamela*, she wrote *A Present for a Servant Maid* (1743), a conduct book addressed to young servant women. However, given that many servants were illiterate, the book can be read as a critique of *Pamela* as it directly engages with situations present in Richardson's novel. Notably, Haywood warns servant maids to be cautious of their masters at night, alluding to the threat of sexual violence even in seemingly respectable households, "There are some houses which appear well by *day*, that it would be little safe for a modest maid to sleep at *night*" ("In Context" 647). This pointed advice echoes *Pamela*, where Mr. B, a supposed gentleman, tries to compromise Pamela's virtue through attempted assault, exposing his moral lacks. Further reinforcing her critique of Richardson, Haywood wrote *The Anti-Pamela* (1741), a direct response to *Pamela* that reconfigures the plot to underline its contradictions. Instead of portraying a genuinely virtuous heroine who passively ascends the social ladder, Haywood's protagonist is a calculating woman who deliberately performs different roles to manipulate her way into wealth and status. In the novel, Haywood unmasks what *Pamela* hides, namely that social mobility through marriage is often a matter of strategy rather than innate virtue, especially considering Pamela's social class.

This aspect already establishes a clear resistance to Richardson's ideas regarding the birth of the novel and the domestication of women. The fact that the author challenging these imposed gender roles is a woman herself symbolizes the rise of the female voice in response to male-dominated novel. Haywood begins to advocate for her own experiences, expressing herself on the role that has been imposed upon her as a woman. This contrast also highlights the limitations of a male author's perspective—not only in depicting women and their societal roles but, more importantly, in understanding how women actually feel about these expectations. In *Pamela*, written by a man, the heroine fully conforms to domestic ideals, and her happiness stems from her ability to perform her role perfectly. Richardson presents this aspect as natural and fulfilling. Haywood, however, challenges this portrayal, exposing its unrealistic nature and offering a more authentic response from a female perspective. She resists not only the roles imposed on women but also the male authority that dictates how women should feel about themselves. This aspect explains why, Haywood's *Fantomina*, published nearly twenty years before *Pamela*, stands in contrast to it, actively rejecting the values Richardson seeks to promote.

Haywood's alteration of amatory codes reclaims the novel as a feminine space and aids in manipulation of the reader, mirroring the heroine's manipulation of the male protagonist of the novel, Beauplaisir. In narrative terms, *Fantomina* belongs to the genre of amatory fiction, a subgenre of the novel that centers on romance and sexual love. However, Haywood subverts the conventional amatory code and its expectations. Just as Richardson 'manipulates' readers into endorsing specific values related to virtue and sentimental marriage, Haywood 'manipulates' readers by disrupting their typical expectations—not only in terms of content but also in structure, by withholding narrative closure. Rather than providing a conventional climax, she reclaims the genre as a feminine space, one that prioritizes female reader's perspective by

showcasing Fantomina's deceptive strategies rather than worrying about male gratification. In "Masquing Desire: The Politics of Passion in Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina*," Margaret Case Croskery observes that, "After carefully preparing the reader for the erotic union between 'Widow Bloomer' and Beauplaisir, the narrator interrupts abruptly and refuses to provide the promised climax" (85). By withholding the anticipated climax and disrupting the conventional structuring of events, Haywood reflects the nature of unsatisfied desire itself. *Fantomina* becomes metatextual in this way: just as the heroine manipulates Beauplaisir for her own pleasure and obsession, the narrator manipulates the reader, who expects a certain narrative resolution. Haywood denies this fulfillment which would have been typical in amatory fiction written by men. In doing so, she not only subverts reader expectations but also disrupts conventional structural and literary models, presenting an alternative framework to her readership. This type of narrative leaves readers longing for what the text withholds, much like Fantomina herself continues to long for Beauplaisir. Ultimately, just as Fantomina is caught and loses control over her pursuit, the reader is left suspended in an unresolved desire.

Haywood also reclaims the novel as a female space in opposition to the traditional novel dominated by male authors. She does this by keeping the protagonist nameless, structuring the novel with a length similar to conduct books, and redefining the convent as symbol of escape rather than punishment. The author employs a traditional third-person prose narration; however, the narrator never reveals the real name of the protagonist. This omission is significant and can be interpreted in two ways: either the narrator genuinely does not know it and functions as a detached observer, merely recording Fantomina's actions like a camera, or the omission serves as a deliberate narrative strategy in direct contrast to *Pamela*. In Richardson's novel, the protagonist's name is consistently reinforced alongside adjectives that emphasize virtue (*pure*,

dutiful, *honest*, *virtuous*,) because she is meant to serve as a moral model for women. Haywood does the opposite: by withholding Fantomina's real name and instead emphasizing her disguises, the author signals that Fantomina is not meant to be a model for women in the conventional sense. The character is not truly nameless: she adopts multiple fictional identities that have names, yet none reflect her real one. This deliberate absence of an identity blurs the line between fiction and reality, a technique Haywood uses to mock the artificiality of social performances. In *Fantomina*, this layering of deception creates a sense of falsity within the fiction itself, contrasting with *Pamela*, where the blurring between fiction and reality is intentional, serving Richardson's purpose of making the novel feel authentic. Instead, she takes to an extreme the only form of agency available to women in a patriarchal society, which is manipulation through disguise. Furthermore, among the heroine's various identities (Celia, Mrs. Bloomer, Incognita), it is Fantomina that holds the most significance, as evidenced by the novel's title. The name likely derives from *phantom*, emphasizing her lack of a fixed identity as she exists only through disguises. Through this, Haywood argues that all women experience the same kind of sexual oppression as Fantomina, regardless of their social status. Although the heroine is an elite woman expected to be satisfied with her privileged life, she must constantly wear a mask, suggesting that any woman, aristocratic or not, could be hiding behind Fantomina's mask, sharing her same suppressed sexual desires.

Fantomina is often classified as a novella due to its brevity. This element further mirrors the structure of conduct books, which were typically short yet incisive. In Haywood's work, the narrative is tightly constructed, with a well-defined and linear progression through exposition, climax, denouement. However, it is the ending—where Fantomina experiences an unwanted pregnancy, is rejected by her mother (who sides with Beauplaisir), and is sent to a convent in

France—that likely would not have been interpreted as a punishment by contemporary readers. Haywood frequently includes monastic reclusion in her works, yet these spaces are never depicted as prisons. Examples include *The Force of Nature: or, The Lucky Disappointment, The Agreeable Caledonian; or Memoirs of Signiora de Morella, Idalia: or The Unfortunate Mistress* (Croskery 92). Given the novel's brevity—reminiscent of conduct books aimed at instructing women—and its inclusion of convents, traditionally seen as places of religious reformation, Haywood subverts both elements. She reconfigures the structural purpose of the conduct book by presenting the convent not as a place of punishment but of potential renewal. Thus, readers familiar with her writing would recognize this sentiment. Additionally, monasteries were common settings in contemporary literature, often associated with sexual transgression rather than moral reformation. Jean Barrin's *Venus dans le cloitre, ou la Religieuse en chemise* (translated as *Venus in the Cloister; or, The Nun in Her Smock*, (1725), originally written in French and set in a monastery, exemplifies this trope ("In Context" 649). Because of this widespread association between convents, France (or foreign exile more broadly), and sexual freedom, Fantomina's fate is not a punishment but rather an open-ended conclusion, possibly even a suggestion of a sequel.

In terms of literary form, the novel becomes a space where the female figure can reclaim her agency, functioning as a direct opposition to conduct books and the restricted behavioral norms they sought to impose on women. In *Fantomina*, Haywood constructs an alternative, imagined reality that exposes the absurdity of a world in which a woman can only reclaim her agency by disguising herself and adopting new identities. The author illustrates how remaining fixed in one single identity and in the domestic role imposed on women equates to imprisonment, a condition enforced both by conduct books and novels like *Pamela*. Haywood is not the only

woman who reshapes the novel as a feminine space. Other female authors like Charlotte Lennox with *The Female Quixote* (1752), Frances Burney with *Evelina* (1778) and *Cecilia* (1782), and Maria Edgeworth with *Belinda* (1801), similarly carve out a literary space for women. This aspect is evident even in the titles of some of these works, such as Burney and Edgeworth's, which foreground their heroines' names, or Lennox's, which highlights that it is a *female* Quixote, marking women as central figures in the narratives that explore female experience and are written by women themselves. However, Haywood centers her narrative around a mask rather than a fictional character, even highlighting it in the title. By doing so, she invites women to metaphorically wear this mask through reading Fantomina's story, granting them a sense of freedom and agency within the text.

When examining Haywood's works alongside those of her female contemporaries, it becomes clear that reclaiming the novel as a feminine genre is essential—especially in the ways women writers depict heroines. In contrast, Richardson's *Pamela* constructs a space where the heroine's virtue is validated by male authority and upheld through her adherence to moral values and sexual restrictions. Felicity A. Nussbaum states, "Some critics have suggested that Eliza Haywood's parodic repetition of the characters, plots and language of the major male novelists actually highlighted women's ability to create innovative plots that circumvented the regnant double standard" (746). Therefore, it seems that female authors—Haywood in particular—started to reclaim the novel as a genre that shifted from being dominated by women (in early amatory fiction) to being defined by male moralists, and now back to a feminine literary form, one that resists rather than reinforces the limitations imposed on women both as authors and fictional heroines.

Within the context of the emergence of the novel as a new genre, metatextual elements become powerful tools in both *Pamela* and *Fantomina*. In particular, in *Pamela*, the novel presents itself, through a false preface, as a true narrative composed of letters, giving readers the impression that they are reading Pamela's actual correspondence. The epistemological framework is instrumental in fostering intimacy with the heroine, who is introduced as a moral guide. In *Fantomina*, the novel itself functions as a metaphorical mask, particularly for female readers, allowing them to experience the heroine's curiosity. The novel reclaims a feminine space not by entirely adhering to the conventions of amatory fictions but by re-establishing some of its key elements—such as the progression toward a climax, the heroine's namelessness, and its brevity, which mirrors that of conduct books—ultimately subverting the same conventions. These elements thus become part of the narrative itself, highly influencing the authors' intentions and shaping how the content is perceived by its audience.

.

Chapter 2: Characterizing the Heroines as the Authors' Moral and Social Messengers

The characterization of Pamela serves as a vehicle to reinforce Richardson's ideals of virtue and sentimental marriage. As the novel functions as a conduct book in fictional form, Pamela is depicted less as a servant and more as a lady, both in the moral values instilled by her parents and in her refined education and literacy. To present her as the ideal woman to emulate, Richardson ensures that her virtuous behavior is ultimately rewarded through social elevation when Mr. B chooses to marry her. However, Pamela's characterization is not without ambiguity. While she is meant to embody moral perfection, she is also shown to lie and to provide biased descriptions of others, suggesting that she is not entirely flawless. Additionally, her physical imprisonment aligns her with the archetype of the persecuted maiden, reinforcing her role as a virtuous sufferer.

These complexities create an ambiguous portrayal that allows for two contrasting interpretations: either Pamela is genuinely virtuous, forced to employ deception as a means of survival, or her virtue is a carefully constructed performance. Ultimately, her role as a moral exemplar remains intact, but the extent to which she truly embodies virtue depends on the reader's interpretation. The characterization of Pamela's virtue and obedience is hyperbolic from the very beginning of the novel. This aspect is evident from her very first letter, where she refers to herself as "your poor Pamela" (Richardson 43). Her use of formal signatures, such as closing her first letter with "Your dutiful daughter" (44), along with explicit declarations like "I am sure

it is my duty, and it shall be my care to love and cherish you both" (44), repeatedly reinforce her unwavering commitment to honoring her parents' will.

Furthermore, within the content of her letters, Pamela immediately reveals a rigid mindset shaped by her religious beliefs and her view of virtue, which holds that a woman cannot truly possess strong faith in God unless she is virtuous. Readers learn early on, from the very first letter from her parents, that Pamela's strong beliefs are deeply rooted in her upbringing by devout parents who insist that a girl is nothing without her honor:

> If, then, you love *us*, if you wish for *God*'s blessing, and *your own* future happiness, we charge you to stand upon your guard; and, if you find the least thing that looks like a design upon your virtue, be sure you leave every thing behind you, and come away to us; for we rather see you all covered with rags, and even follow you to the church-yard, than have it said, a child of our's preferred any wordly conveniences to her virtue. (46)

The passage shows that, as a servant, Pamela is technically outside the intended audience of conduct books, but her parents effectively serve as her own personal conduct guides. However, even within this framework, Pamela's parents, other than not being illiterate, are as concerned with virtue and reputation in the same way that those of higher classes might be. The concept of educating the servant class was an emerging idea in the eighteenth century—one that Richardson explored in his novel, reflecting a time when servants were beginning to have access to books and the leisure to read them:

> The evidence of this servants' library also reinforces contemporary servants' accounts about their active reading habits, as well as the significance that access to libraries had on their future careers. Indeed, according to Fergus, of all the lower classes, servants were most likely to have leisure time and to be more literate. (qtd. in Bigold 302)

However, even for educated lower-class families, the concern with preserving a woman's virtue often held little social relevance when weighed against the opportunity to marry a gentleman and gain financial security and social elevation. Moreover, servants all married people with their same social standing and had no need to adopt behaviors designed to attract a person of higher status, as no one from a higher class would have married a servant. Therefore, Pamela's parents behave as though they are the parents of a lady, willing to see her dead rather than destroyed by the loss of reputation.

Pamela's moral and religious beliefs do not change throughout the novel, which contribute to her characterization as a relatively static figure. This lack of transformation solidifies her role as a fixed societal model for women to follow, embodying virtue with no significant change in behavior, making her the fixed societal model to follow for women, with no particular change in behavior. Even when Mr. B decides to marry her, she is ready to forgive him from his previous mistreatment and offers him a second chance for personal growth. Near the end of the novel she states, "What I value myself upon, is, that God has raised me to a condition to be useful to better persons than myself. This is my pride: and I hope this will be *all* my pride." (Richardson 515). She acknowledges that her pride lies in her ability to improve others by exemplifying her own virtue, a lesson directed both at female readers and, more concretely, at the fictional Mr. B. In this sense, Pamela embodies the archetype of a woman whose role is to redeem her flawed husband, "a condition to be useful," through her unwavering virtue. By maintaining her own moral integrity, she becomes a conduit through which her husband can find his way to God. Thus, her static nature not only upholds societal expectations for women but also fulfills her husband's desire for her to embody an idealized moral standard who can also improve the man's behavior.

Despite being a young servant with no formal education, Pamela is able to write long, eloquent letters that even her master admires, calling her "a mighty letter-writer" (125). This aspect further reinforces Pamela as an ideal model, not only in terms of morality and behavior but also in her actions, particularly her mastery of letter writing. Blanchard notes, "Mr. B. has found himself paradoxically dependent upon it. He has become as obsessed with Pamela's script as he is with Pamela's self" (99). This aspect suggests that Pamela's letter writing is not merely a narrative device but a crucial factor in Mr. B's moral and religious transformation. Her writing thus becomes an influential tool, contributing to his reformation. In addition to her letters, Pamela composes poetry, such as "Verses On My Going Away" (Richardson 121) and "When sad I sat in Brandon-hall" (179), and she also mentions a passion for reading other than writing, "These books and my pen will be all my amusement" (150). These factors imply that Pamela's letter writing extends beyond merely informing her parents; it reflects a genuine passion for reading and writing. She is not only committed to moral excellence but also deeply invested in education. Richardson thus presents her as an ideal model who embodies the pursuit of knowledge and virtue over worldly pleasures.

More specifically, Pamela's literary engagement is not confined to prose alone but also includes poetry, a more intricate and structured form of expression. She also demonstrates knowledge of classical authors, as evidenced by her reference to the story of Lucretia when her master mentions her:

> "Who ever blamed Lucretia? The shame lay on the ravisher only: and I am content to take all the blame upon myself; as I have already borne too great a share for what I deserved."
>
> "May I," said I, "Lucretia like, justify myself by my death, if I am used barbarously?" (63)

Her prompt response to her master's reference to Lucretia's story demonstrates her fine education. This sophisticated literary knowledge, especially for a servant of her time, is unrealistic. Since Richardson's audience could not have been other servants—who could have countered or questioned the knowledge and education the author gives a servant—Pamela becomes a role-model for young-ladies. She thus embodies the qualities of a lady, aligning with the book's intended readership.

Pamela's virtue, however, is primarily tied to her chastity rather than broader moral excellence, as her letters throughout the novel reveal moments of judgement and spite that contradict the ideals of a morally exemplary character. Regardless of one's moral excellence, Richardson reinforces the idea that chastity outweighs moral virtue and can, in fact, serve as its substitute, ultimately justifying any moral shortcomings. For instance, she writes, "*God forgive me, my dear father! But how do I hate this vile hypocritical master!*" (139), yet she ultimately marries him, revealing her own hypocrisy in condemning his behavior while later forgiving Mr. B. Similarly, her harsh descriptions of Mrs. Jewkes, such as "Now I will give you a picture of this wretch! She is a broad, squat, pursy, fat thing, quite ugly, if any thing human can be so called" (152) or "Ugly creature! She only laughed—You cannot imagine how ugly she is when she laughs. How must she look when she cries? (176), expose a cruelty that contradicts the virtue she is meant to embody. These remarks suggest that Pamela maintains a carefully constructed performance of virtue in the presence of others, while her letters reveal her true thoughts. This discrepancy complicates the notion of her moral excellence, which should extend beyond chastity, ultimately rendering her ambiguous. Richardson implies that as long as virtue is preserved and obedience to the master is maintained, moral shortcomings can be overlooked, further reinforcing the primacy of premarital chastity over broader moral excellence.

Pamela also shows that she can lie to her master through her letters, particularly when she claims that she is not writing to her parents, despite doing so. This aspect further complicates her portrayal as virtuous, as her moral ambiguity is revealed not only through spiteful thoughts but also through deceptive actions—both of which are ultimately excused by her preserved chastity. This factor further underscores how premarital virginity is treated as the defining measure of a woman's values and moral worth. When Mr. B later finds and reads one of her letters, he exposes her and the way she had depicted him, revealing a contradiction between her public performance of virtue and her private actions, "'[S]he has written letters (for I find she is a mighty writer!) to her father and mother, and to *others*, as far as I know; in which, representing herself as an angel of light, she makes her kind master and benefactor a devil incarnated'" (68). By creating a stark contrast between her virtuous performance and her master's characterization as "a devil incarnated," Richardson further elevates Pamela as "an angel of light." Aspects like these along with the hyperbolic portrayal of virtue in the novel led to a divided response from the audience, with some viewing Pamela as a morally perfect character, while others saw her as strategically performing virtue to secure a marriage with her master, "*Pamela*'s readers 'read through' the words and ideas of the novel's eponymous heroine in order to assess her character with the view of discovering whether "Pamela is what the text's subtitle declares – a personification of virtue – or its reverse, a mere sham" (Warner 103). Both conduct books and novels shape thus the audience's perception of the character, just as the character influences them in return. The novel serves as a space where the conduct book is enacted, reinforcing the audience's belief that Pamela's behavior is rather a structured and deliberate performance.

Pamela's performative behavior is further highlighted when she literally uses clothing to disguise herself, reinforcing the idea of moral excellence as a constructed performance. Her

disguise is so effective that Mr. B initially mistakes Pamela for her sister, "'O sir,' said I, as much surprized as vexed, 'I am Pamela. Indeed I am Pamela, *her own self!*'" (89). Later, when Mr. B realizes it is truly Pamela, he accuses her, "'[Y]ou *little villain*!" (I thought men only could be called villains); "who is it you put tricks upon? I was resolved never again to honour you with my notice; and so you must disguise yourself, to attract me, and yet pretend, like an hypocrite as you are—'" (Richardson 90). However, Pamela herself earlier confesses "[she] tricked [herself] up" (87), indicating that she was aware of the disguise, yet seems unaware of the potential consequences on her master. This aspect portrays her as a more naïve version of Fantomina, who, in contrast uses clothes strategically to reclaim her agency, whereas for Pamela, it is merely an accident that leads to miscommunication.

Pamela embodies the classic trope of the persecuted maiden, both literally and figuratively, as she is a servant who is persecuted by her master, who attempts to rape her. Her physical entrapment and attempt to escape from her master's estate in Lincolnshire further solidify her role within this archetype, as she laments, "[N]o escape for poor Pamela!" (210). Although she manages to escape, this act does not grant her agency or control over her own narrative. The point of the story is not for the woman to possess agency, but rather to suffer, and to demonstrate to the reader how her suffering is ultimately rewarded. Pamela represents a typical trope of the time, where the woman is not only persecuted but also depicted as innocent and morally superior to the sexually aggressive man, "Mr B's desire is triggered and he develops his plot to remove Pamela to his Lincolnshire estate, and expose her virtue to erotic attack" (Warner 101). She endures Mr. B's relentless pursuit, only to eventually reform him through her virtue, ultimately leading to Mr. B's decision to marry her. Her suffering is thus purposeful, as it

not only converts Mr. B but also serves to instruct readers, particularly female ones, who are meant to take her story as a moral lesson.

Richardson's views on sentimental marriages are also conveyed through the characterization of the heroine as being uninterested in marriage, focusing instead on preserving her virtue and supporting her parents. This element shapes her role as the ideal virtuous lady, whose virtuous will inevitably be rewarded. Pamela thus becomes a model that encourages women to preserve their chastity, as it influences how they are perceived by society, positioning them as morally superior even when they are not. Richardson's emphasis on chastity over broader moral excellence can be seen as more convenient for women, as avoiding physical intimacy is easier than cultivating virtues like kindness, empathy, or introspection. This contrast highlights the difference between outward actions and internal self-work, suggesting that abstaining from certain behaviors is simpler than engaging self-reflection and personal growth. As a result, Pamela represents a more attainable model, one based on external conduct rather than an ideal moral excellence, which might resemble a saint or religious figure dictating both how to act and behave.

In contrast, Fantomina's characterization sharply contrasts with the ideals of virtue and obedience, as amatory fiction typically focus on love and sexual encounters. Fantomina is portrayed as a curious young aristocrat who, through the use of disguise, reclaims her agency by satisfying her curiosity, which later develops into an obsession with the same man, Beauplaisir. Her pattern of disguising herself and her lack of clear remorse at the end stands in direct contrast to the social expectations of the time, illustrating that Fantomina does not share these concerns. She only worries about her virtue because, conventionally and socially, she is compelled to do so. By creating various roles to continue seducing Beauplaisir, particularly in the role of Celia,

Fantomina reverses the archetype of the persecuted maiden seen in *Pamela*. Here, the woman is the one pursuing the man, through the encounters remain consensual. This characterization is vital for Haywood as it critiques the rigid notions of virtue and the limited sexual freedom available to women, presenting Fantomina as a controversial figure whose agency is reclaimed through sartorial power.

Already exhibiting behavior that should not be encouraged in women of the time, Fantomina is immediately characterized by Haywood as a woman eager to explore sexual freedom. Unlike Pamela's virtuous performance, the challenge of the heroine Haywood constructs goes beyond simply navigating different and more demading societal expectations tied to virtue and reputation, exposing her significant limitations compared to men. What complicates Fantomina's situation even further is her aristocratic status, as she is introduced in the first line of the novel as "A young lady of distinguished birth" (Haywood 632). Sexual freedom for women was typically reserved for lower classes, like servants and prostitutes, whose social positions came with fewer expectations and less scrutiny. Therefore, the heroine's struggle is not only a matter of gender, but also of class, highlighting a complex intersection that contrasts with Pamela's social and financial ascent—an ascent rewarded precisely because she adheres to the societal norms that Fantomina dares to break.

At the beginning of the novel, Haywood makes Fantomina openly express her curiosity, failing to conform to the moral ideal that women are expected to embody. She immediately introduces a heroine who is imperfect in the prioritization of virtue, setting her apart from Richardson's more virtuous models of womanhood. Early on, Fantomina comments on the sexual freedom of prostitutes:

> [S]he perceived several gentlemen extremely pleased themselves with entertaining a woman who sat in a corner of the pit and, by her air and manner of receiving them, might easily be known to be one of those who come there for no other purpose than to create acquaintance with as many as seem desirous of it. (632)

The allusion to prostitutes is evident when Fantomina refers to the "pit," a common area in theaters where prostitutes were often found, standing. A conservative reader might initially expect her analysis to serve as a critique of such behavior; however, Fantomina's comment exposes her own curiosity about men's sexual interests, defying such expectations, "[T]he longer she reflected on it, the greater was her wonder that men, some of whom she knew were accounted to have wit, should have tastes so very depraved. This excited a curiosity in her to know in what manner these creatures were addressed" (632). The thought that, regardless of their "wit," men could have "tastes so very depraved" begins to obsess her, leading her to conduct a social experiment on Beauplaisir by seeing how "depraved" his tastes could be if she assumes different personalities. This idea also alludes to Fantomina's own tastes, as she is introduced in the first line of the novel as a woman of "distinguished […] wit" (632), and Haywood wants to prove that, like witty men, her heroine too can have the same sexual freedom. Fantomina, therefore, is a heroine who seeks not only to meet but to surpass male standards in the realm of sexuality—not merely through physicality, but above all through her intelligence, as she continually performs roles Beauplaisir fails to recognize.

Throughout the novel, Haywood gradually shapes a heroine driven by sexual desire, which is explicit and integral to the plot. Fantomina becomes concerned with her own virtue, but this concern is presented as an unconscious reaction to the roles imposed on women, especially through conduct books. Her fear about losing her virtue arises only after her first sexual

encounter with Beauplaisir, when she realizes the consequences of her actions and the deeply ingrained notions from conduct books that tell her she is now beyond redemption, both religiously and socially. She exclaims, "'Can all the wealth you are possessed of make reparation for my loss of honour? Oh no, I am undone beyond the power of heaven itself to help me'" (635). However, even before the act, Fantomina plays naïve, seemingly unaware that the mask she creates would inevitably lead Beauplaisir to initiate the sexual encounter, "[N]ever having been addressed by him as a Lady, was resolved to receive his devoirs as a townmistress" (634), meaning that she knows he sees her as a prostitute but realizes the implications too late when Beaupliasir rapes her. Haywood deliberately constructs her character to maintain an air of innocence, as a defense against the possible accusation of immorality. Fantomina does not immediately express concern about her virtue, continuing her actions without hesitation, and only after the doubt emerges, as if her subconscious, influenced by society's values, suddenly reminds her of the social consequences she must face. This tension highlights the conflict between personal desire and societal expectations, forcing her to evaluate how she perceives her own actions. However, rather than leading her to stop, her doubt instead triggers her obsession with Beauplaisir, as she believes that her virtue is irrevocably lost, making any attempt at restoration futile. Fantomina's continuity and obsession emphasize Haywood's intention to create a heroine who, despite moral and societal constraints, persistently reclaims her agency.

The heroine's lack of 'morality' is never met with regret, not even at the novel's conclusion when she faces disgrace—challenging societal and gendered expectations of female repentance. She must accept her punishment not as a criminal guilty of a "crime" (647) expecting imprisonment, but because she has defied societal norms she neither understands nor accepts. Her refusal to conform to these expectations explains why, at the end of the novel, Fantomina is

left voiceless. The reader is given no insight into her reaction to being sent to a monastery in France. Haywood withholds her voice precisely because Fantomina cannot serve as a moral example for readers—granting her an ending that might suggest she would continue pursuing her adventures. This idea is reinforced by her lack of remorse upon Beauplaisir's discovery of her identity as she expresses no desire to have acted differently. Although she is ashamed, "I cannot live and bear this shame!" (646), her shame is more about the immediate consequences of the conversation with her mother and Beauplaisir, and her pregnancy, rather than remorse for her actions. Her silence underscores her refusal to participate in a system of remorse that she neither shares nor accepts, reinforcing her resistance to societal and moral expectations. She does not take responsibility for what she has done; instead, it is her mother who declares, "The blame is wholly hers" (646). This factor showcases how Fantomina's mother, fully aligned with societal values, serves as the moral judge of her actions, while Fantomina's lack of guilt comes from her rejection of these values, causing her to not view herself as guilty in the same way. In this way, Haywood illustrates how societal judgment often comes from external forces—especially other women—who use the misfortunes of disgraced women to elevate their own moral status, alongside the internalized self-judgement disgraced women may already face.

In her refusal to conform, Haywood's heroine also becomes instrumental in subverting the archetype of the persecuted maiden. By adopting the persona of Celia—a servant whose name evokes the bucolic lyric tradition—Fantomina transforms this figure into one who actively pursues and succumbs to desire, thereby challenging the stereotype of the innocent, virtuous woman. Through this contrast, Haywood underscores how women's intentions are often shaped by men, particularly in the ideal of continuous innocence. When Haywood writes "[He] swore he must enjoy her though death were to be the consequence" (638), it highlights how the archetypal

innocent girl, Celia, is overtaken by the man's sexual aggression. The narrative continues, describing how he would have "devoured her lips, her breasts with greedy kisses; held to his burning bosom her half-yielding, half-reluctant body" (638). The phrase "half-yielding, half-reluctant body" is significant because it illustrates Fantomina's internal conflict—her curiosity about sex (as Fantomina) and her embodiment of the innocent, passive servant (as Celia). By showing that Celia willingly engages with Beauplaisir, whom refers to Celia as a "little angel" and "cherubim" (638)—terms that emphasize her purity and innocence—the author returns agency to the archetypal innocent woman. In doing so, Haywood demonstrates that the idealized image of the innocent woman is ultimately only a literary construct.

To emphasize the idea Fantomina must wear a mask to subvert societal expectations and follow her own agency—even if dictated by obsession—Haywood gives her sartorial power. In "Dress as Deceptive Visual Rhetoric in Eliza Haywood's Fantomina," Kathryn S. Hansen asserts, "Despite the fact that the protagonist's garments do not actually correspond to her real identity, her clothing takes power from viewers' acceptance of it as real rather than as fiction" (4). This idea suggests that in the patriarchal society she lives in, Fantomina's ability to manipulate her identity can only lie in her clothing and the masks she wears—echoing the theatrical performance that sparks her curiosity about prostitutes' sexual freedom. The act of changing clothes is not merely superficial; it is a full transformation, a shift in personality, voice, and narrative. The sartorial power Haywood grants Fantomina reinforces her agency, allowing her to transcend the limitations imposed by the patriarchal society in which she lives. Through her wit and intelligence, Fantomina constructs entirely new personas, using sartorial power to effectively create new storylines with each disguise, thereby subverting patriarchal expectations. As a result, Beauplaisir remains unaware that the woman he encounters repeatedly, in various

guises, is the same person, positioning Fantomina as the one in control, outsmarting him at every turn.

Through this depiction, Haywood demonstrates that women, too, can exercise agency, particularly sexual agency, a domain that was traditionally restricted to men due to societal notions of female virtue, subverting the trope of the persecuted maiden. Although the author presents a scenario where the woman is the one "persecuting" the man through her obsessive pursuit, she makes an important distinction: Fantomina never forces Beauplaisir to do anything. Instead, it is through seduction—embodied in her various disguises and personalities—that Beauplaisir is repeatedly drawn to her, leading to consensual encounters. While Fantomina's agency is more evident in relation to Beauplaisir, it is not a general form of agency, but rather a specifically sexual one—an area from which women were historically excluded and punished for even attempting to claim. Fantomina's ability to navigate this forbidden territory makes her agency not only powerful but significant, as it challenges the strict boundaries placed on women's sexual autonomy, highlighting the tension between societal expectations and individual desires.

Pamela and *Fantomina* are characterized in ways that make them appear as complementary figures. Pamela is virtuous and deeply concerned with fulfilling her role as a dutiful daughter; however, she is also portrayed as a complex flawed individual. Her occasional negative remarks about other characters reveal human emotions with which the reader sympathizes. In contrast, *Fantomina* shows little concern or guilt over the loss of her virtue. Her shame only surfaces in response to her mother's reaction and Beauplaisir's discovery of her deception. Nonetheless, she does not entirely dismiss the importance of virtue. Initially, she expresses concern about it, not out of personal conviction, but because of the social pressures

surrounding female chastity. This tension illustrates how virtue still influences her, despite her attempts to subvert this dynamic through the use of costume and disguise. By serving as foils to one another, the two heroines embody contrasting models of the archetypal persecuted maiden. Pamela is a servant in reality, while Fantomina only pretends to be one (Celia); Pamela is the object of persecution, whereas Fantomina, in a reversal of roles, actively pursues and manipulates the man. However, her pursuit is distinct from the tactics employed by Mr. B in *Pamela*. Despite their contrasting behaviors and characterizations, the two heroines can be viewed as the two sides of the same coin: Pamela is not entirely innocent, and Fantomina is not entirely lacking in virtue.

Chapter 3: The Implications of Marriage and the Heroines' Rewards

In *Pamela*, marriage functions as both a narrative and moral culmination. As the expected conclusion to the novel, it satisfies the conventions Richardson sets up—particularly the reward of virtue and the overcoming of class boundaries through the improbable union between Pamela and Mr. B. However, marriage also carries metatextual significance: it becomes the author's way of delivering a didactic message to readers, emphasizing that virtue is ultimately rewarded. Importantly, Richardson underscores that Pamela is not initially interested in marriage for its own sake; thus, the union itself is not the reward, but rather the social and material benefits it brings, which she herself acknowledges will be envied by other women. Notably, the marriage takes place relatively early, which allows Richardson to shift the novel's focus from a conventional romantic resolution to a deeper exploration of Pamela's continued moral development within marriage. By doing so, he subtly subverts narrative expectations, suggesting that the true aim of the novel lies not in the marriage itself, but in its benefits.

In the novel, marriage is portrayed as a sentimental union based on love rather than a mercenary arrangement—particularly on Mr. B's side, since he gains no financial advantage in marrying a servant. However, this dynamic is reversed in Pamela's case: through marriage, she is socially and economically elevated. This outcome underscores the novel's subtitle, *Virtue Rewarded*, suggesting that Pamela's moral integrity leads to tangible rewards, including wealth and status. Although Richardson appears to champion sentimental marriage, the novel simultaneously ties virtue to material gain rather than emotional fulfillment or mutual moral

development. Pamela's virtue is not just acknowledged—it is commodified, becoming the reason for her transformation in class. Mr. B. explicitly affirms this when he claims, "'I was more an admirer of her virtue, than even of her beauty'" (Richardson 379), reinforcing that her reward stems from her chastity and obedience, not romantic love. The promise of this reward is foreshadowed Letter XXXII, when Mr. Longman tells Pamela, "'Providence will find you out: remember I tell you so; and *one* day, though I may not live to see it, you *will* be rewarded'" (131). Here, Providence acts as a narrative force ensuring that virtue triumphs—yet ironically, Pamela's "reward" is marriage to the very man who endangered her virtue, implying that marriage serves more to be safe than to validate emotional intimacy.

Richardson depicts marriage as the ultimate reward for Pamela, but not in the conventional sense of a romantic aspiration. Throughout the novel, she presents herself as uninterested in financial gain or social elevation, upholding virtue above all else—just as her parents taught her. Richardson writes, "'There is not a man living that I desire to marry. To keep myself honest, and to be a comfort and assistance to my poor parents, is the very top of my ambition'" (181). Pamela's actions are thus not motivated by a desire to marry but by a moral commitment to her parents' values. Indeed, Pamela not only rejects the idea of marriage but also the role of the wife itself, "I cannot, methinks, young as I am, bear the thoughts of being a wife" (183). Her aversion to marriage underscores her understanding of its responsibilities, suggesting that the marriage itself cannot be the true reward—rather, it is the implications of marriage that carry meaning.

These implications, however, are instrumental in securing Pamela's true reward and fulfilling the "very top of [her] ambition" which is to "be a comfort and assistance to [her] poor parents" (181). Here, *comfort* and *assistance* are not solely expressions of filial duty but also

carry practical, financial implications—though Pamela never states this explicitly. From the very beginning of the novel, she shows this financial concern. In Letter I, she writes, "And so you may pay some old debt with part; and keep the other part to comfort you both. If I get more, I am sure it is my duty, and it shall be my care to love and cherish you both" (44). The idea of *comfort*, then, becomes closely tied to economic support. Pamela shares her modest earnings with her parents to ease their burdens, even though the wages of a young servant are unlikely to be sufficient to support a family. This is where Richardson intervenes, rewarding his heroine by lifting the financial pressures she faces.

Pamela thus initially resists any romantic interest in Mr. B, whose repeated attempts at sexual assault render him unworthy in her eyes. For this reason, she asserts that if she were ever to marry, her husband must be someone who does not "endanger [her] honesty" (183), affirming her commitment to virtue and her desire to honor her parents. However, Pamela is conscious of the benefits associated with marrying Mr.B. She reflects, "I have before me prospect of happiness that may be envied by women of high rank" (324), recognizing that her new social status is exceptional for someone of her background, comparing her condition to other women. She even admits, "[N]othing so much excites the envy of my own sex, as seeing a person set above them in appearance" (301), further acknowledging that the true reward lies in financial stability and class elevation. Despite the romanticization of sentimental marriage, financial gain and social status are ultimately presented as the real reward for her virtue in the novel.

Another significant element is the structural placement of the marriage. Rather than concluding the novel with the wedding—typically the narrative resolution and symbolic reward—Richardson positions the marriage around midpoint, allowing further development afterward. Early on, Pamela begins to suspect Mr. B's feelings toward her:

> [L]ove, I imagine, is not a voluntary thing—*Love*, did I say! But come, I hope not: at least it is not, I hope, gone so far, as to make me very uneasy: for I know *how* it came, nor *when* it began, but it has crept, crept, like a thief, upon me; and before I knew what was the matter, it looked *like* love. (283)

This doubt highlights her reluctance to fall in love with a man who has previously threatened her virtue, "But come, I hope not". Despite her reservations, the prospect of marriage becomes more concrete when Mr. B acknowledges her suitability: "[T]here is not a lady in the kingdom who will better support the condition to which she will be raised, if I should marry her" (297). Yet, the novel continues for over 200 more pages, ending at page 516. By placing marriage in the middle rather than the end, Richardson subtly shifts the focus from a romantic resolution to a moral and social transformation. While Pamela is already morally excellent, marriage becomes the moment when her virtue is publicly recognized as materially rewarded. It marks her elevation into a higher social class—a reward she acknowledges more than once by noting the envy it provokes in women of higher rank.

Contrastingly, Haywood subverts the traditional narrative arc by eliminating the prospect of marriage entirely in *Fantomina*, reversing the conventions commonly suggested by conduct books and reinforced in novels like *Pamela*. The dynamics are starkly different: unlike Pamela, Fantomina is not portrayed as morally virtuous, and as a result, she cannot be rewarded in the conventional sense. However, Haywood redefines what a 'reward' might look like for a heroine who defies societal expectations. Fantomina's refusal to marry is itself a form of resistance against a system that equates female virtue with chastity and marriage. Her upbringing, free from the moral constrains enforced by a mother figure, allows her to explore her desires without the constant internalized surveillance imposed by society.

The absence of marriage also highlights class dynamics: while mercenary marriages were acceptable when the woman was of lower status, the inverse—a wealthy woman marrying a man of lesser means—was socially problematic. As an aristocrat, Fantomina is ineligible for the type of reward Pamela receives. Yet, her final punishment—being sent to a French monastery—ironically functions as a subtle form of liberation. Removed from British societal expectations and moral judgement, she gains a space where she may experience more autonomy. Haywood cleverly disguises this exile as a punishment, offering her transgressive heroine a discreet form of reward in a way that would still satisfy the moral expectations of her readership.

Because Fantomina engages in multiple sexual encounters with Beauplaisir and ultimately becomes pregnant, one potential societal solution to avoid her complete social and physical exclusion would have been marriage. However, such outcome was not always possible or desirable. As Frost explains:

> If the mother survived the crisis, her child's existence remained a bar to respectability; younger women feared their loss of marriageability, while older women might lose pensions, charitable help, or out-relief. Moreover, the child was a constant reminder of a woman's 'fall'." (49)

In other words, remaining within the bounds of respectable society while raising a child alone would have been nearly impossible, both for Fantomina's public image and her social survival. Moreover, the class difference between her and Beauplaisir further complicates the possibility of marriage. A union between them would not have resolved the scandal bur rather deepened it. When Fantomina's identity is finally revealed, Beauplaisir quickly distances himself from the situation, "[He] reassured [her mother] that the young lady her daughter was a person whom he had never more than at a distance admired, that he had indeed spoke to her in public company,

but that he never had a thought which tended to her dishonour" (Haywood 646). His reaction implies that, as an aristocratic lady, Fantomina was someone to be admired from afar but never seriously pursued, particularly by someone of inferior social standing. His disavowal underscores how deeply class expectations intersect with sexual propriety, reinforcing Fantomina's impossibility to be redeemed through marriage.

The marriage could have served as the final resolution of the novel, replacing the ending in which her mother sends her away. However, Haywood deliberately avoids this choice, knowing that marriage was traditionally viewed as the ultimate reward for a woman—and Fantomina, unlike Pamela, is not the kind of virtuous heroine deemed worthy of such a reward. Granting her a marriage would have undermined the moral expectations of Haywood's readership. In contrast to Pamela, whose moral education is deeply rooted in her parents' teachings, Fantomina is notably detached from her only mentioned parental figure, her mother, who is described as "severely virtuous, [and] did not approve of many things she had been told of the conduct of her daughter" (645). Fantomina's lack of moral indoctrination allows her to resist not only the expectations of society but also those of her own family. She defines the values traditionally passed down within the domestic sphere, rejecting both societal norms and the internalized pressures of the household.

This aspect explains why Haywood rewards her heroine in an unconventional way—precisely because Fantomina is an unconventional heroine who challenges the moral norms and behavioral expectations of society. When she is sent to a convent, this may not be intended as a punishment but rather as a form of liberation. Considering Haywood's earlier and later works, it can be argued that the convent offers Fantomina a space removed from social scrutiny—a retreat that grants her independence rather than shame. In this way, Haywood offers the heroine a

resolution more satisfying than a conventional marriage to Beauplaisir. What Fantomina truly desires is not marital union, but control over the dynamics of desire. As she herself reveals, "…[T]o be sweetly forced to what she wished with equal ardour was what she wanted and what she had formed a stratagem to obtain, in which she promised herself success" (637). Her aim has never been to become Beauplaisir's wife, but to control his passions on her own terms. In a society that defines marriage as a woman's submission to a man—an institution that, as outlined in conduct books, demands obedience—Fantomina's escape from these constraints is her true reward.

The monastery in France also represents an entirely separate dimension—unreachable not only because it is another country, but also because it exists within a different linguistic and cultural framework. France, long perceived in British imagination as the stereotyped 'other,' functions as a symbolic elsewhere. As Moores notes, "The French may have drawn the greatest degree of attention from eighteenth century and early nineteenth century English graphic satirists, but they were by no means the only foreigner to have been consistently caricatured" (258). Even Beauplaisir's French name, meaning "good pleasure," emphasizes this foreignness. It is he, apart from Fantomina's own obsessive desire, who introduces chaos into the narrative through his repeated failure to recognize her various disguises, "domestic anxieties were projected onto images of the French" (1). This projection is reflected in the narrative's own tension: whether Beauplaisir was truly deceived or whether Fantomina was too skilled in her performance, "he should have been blinded so often by her artifices, or she, that so young a creature should have the skill to make use of them" (Haywood 646). The adjective "young" here subtly diminishes Fantomina's agency, as her mother prefers to believe in Beauplaisir's blindness rather than her daughter's mastery of performance. In this way, the French setting and

Beauplaisir himself become stand-ins for moral and sexual threat, with the real danger located not in Fantomina's deceit but in the failure to recognize it. Yet the convent is also a space of transformation. It operates as a microcosm, a contained society of women governed by different rules, where Fantomina—now wearing both a physical and metaphorical veil—can assume a new identity. The veil becomes an extension of the sartorial power she has already wielded throughout the narrative, symbolizing her ability to reconstruct herself and reclaim agency. In the absence of male authority, the convent becomes a female-dominated space that offers Fantomina a form of autonomy and perhaps even freedom from the oppressive norms of patriarchal society.

The absence of marriage in *Fantomina* is significant both for commercial and ideological reasons. Commercially, Haywood had to cater the expectations of her audience, who—steeped in the values of conduct literature—would not have accepted the open reward of a morally transgressive woman. This factor explains why *Pamela*, with its virtuous heroine and clear reward structure, achieved such great success twenty years later. At the same time, Haywood uses the lack of marriage to resist societal norms and to question the idea that marriage is the ultimate privilege or reward a woman could attain. By positioning Fantomina outside of this system, Haywood grants her heroine the very freedom she desires. Fantomina's behavior is described by her mother as a "crime" for which she "'cannot justly hope forgiveness'" (646). Within the logic of conduct books, losing one's virtue is a crime that demands punishment. Haywood appears to conform to this logic by having Fantomina sent away. Yet in doing so, she cleverly conceals the fact that this exile is, in fact, a form of liberation. In the convent in France, Fantomina is freed from the restrictive norms of British society and allowed to rebuild her identity. Like her heroine, Haywood disguises the subversive nature of the ending: the so-called

punishment becomes a hidden reward, challenging the very values her readers might expect her to uphold.

Marriage is present only in one novel, yet the theme of reward remains central in both. In *Pamela*, Richardson outwardly conforms to the traditional narrative of a virtuous woman being rewarded through marriage. However, he also inadvertently undermines the ideal of sentimental marriage by suggesting that Pamela's true reward is financial security, not emotional fulfillment. Pamela does not undergo a moral transformation: she is depicted morally perfect from the start. Marriage is not something she explicitly desires for its own sake; rather, it becomes a means to achieve her deeper goal: to better support her parents. Similarly, Fantomina maintains her core desires throughout the novel. Despite the experiences she undergoes and the eventual exposure of her pregnancy, she shows no clear moral transformation. Her primary aim is to maintain sexual control over Beauplaisir, and she successfully achieves this for a time. However, unlike Pamela's enduring reward through marriage, Fantomina's success is temporary as her body ultimately betrays her. Even so, she is not punished in the conventional moral sense. Instead, her final 'reward' lies in her escape from British society's judgement, as she is sent away to live under a new identity, free from public shame.

Conclusions: Shaping and Resisting Feminine Spaces through Novel Writing

The form of the novel is instrumental within the eighteenth-century framework, particularly in relation to *Pamela* and *Fantomina*. It this context, the novel becomes a contested space for the struggle to reclaim it as a feminine genre—a challenge resisted by Richardson, who drew upon the strong literary nonfiction tradition, especially the influence of conduct books, and his keen awareness of the market to consolidate the genre's authority under male control, alongside other male writers of his time. In contrast, Haywood's *Fantomina* exemplifies an early and powerful reclamation of the novel as a feminine space: as a woman author, Haywood presents a rebellious female character who openly defies the societal expectations that Richardson's work often reinforces. Haywood was not alone in this effort; throughout the nineteenth century, early women writers would continue to reclaim the novel as a space for feminine voices, pushing back against a literary tradition long dominated by men.

Both Richardson and Haywood illustrate how the novel can either crystallize or challenge social roles, especially for women, who in real life were subjected to pervasive social impositions and expectations and treated as 'the other.' Within the fictional space of the novel, the female character often performs the gender roles taught to her in various physical and literary spaces—conduct books being only one example. The novel thus becomes just another such space: one where female performance can either be further constrained, as in *Pamela*, or where the heroine can remove her mask and resist social expectations, as seen in *Fantomina*.

Pamela and *Fantomina*, despite their success and influence in eighteenth-century British society, represent two clearly opposing ways of constructing and shaping women's roles. The

tension between these novels exposes a broader cultural issue: on one side, the expectations men imposed on women; on the other, the agency women sought to reclaim. Patriarchal norms, exemplified by Richardson, appear to have won this ideological battle—but not without resistance. Haywood's work poses a significant challenge to the defenders of female premarital chastity. Furthermore, analyzing the construction of gender roles in early modern fiction—and the contrasting views on how they are shaped—is pivotal to understanding contemporary gender norms. It also provides a foundation for reflecting on the power of literature to either support or resist the societal expectations imposed by a patriarchal system.

Richardson understood the power of literary form and societal trends. By presenting his moral lesson through the popular epistolary structure, he turned the story of virtuous servant who marries her master—and elevates him morally—into a model for eighteenth-century readers. Pamela's status as a servant naturalizes the power dynamic in their sentimental marriage, where obedience and submission are not just expected, but socially justified. Her public performance of virtue is already so refined that marriage does not enhance her moral standing; instead, it improves her economic condition, allowing her to financially support her parents. Weather intentionally or not, Richardson suggests that virtue is ultimately rewarded with money, serving the woman's own purpose of supporting her family rather than providing emotional fulfillment within the marriage.

Haywood had the opposite aim of Richardson, as she constructs a narrative not only against sentimental marriages but also without endorsing mercenary ones. She challenges, instead, the very notion that a woman's life purpose is to marry. Fantomina is both a literal and symbolic mask—one that allows both readers and the protagonist herself to explore desire and sexuality in a male-dominated society where chastity defines a woman's virtue. Haywood

reclaims the novel as a space for female expression, where fiction becomes a tool to challenge real-world constrains. In this framework, Fantomina's shifting identities allow her to assert both mental and physical control over the man she desires. She does not dwell on consequences, and when she becomes pregnant, she seizes the chance to escape British patriarchy by being sent to a French convent—a space of matriarchal authority.

Reading *Pamela* and *Fantomina* together is especially valuable because they present two opposing perspectives: one authored by a man, reinforcing patriarchal ideals; the other by a woman, resisting them. Both texts invite readers to look beyond the surface of their narratives. Regardless of authorial intention, a deeper reading reveals what these writers could not—or dared not—say outright. Thus, their novels—though written nearly three centuries ago—remain a valuable tool for better understanding the historical and gendered clash of ideologies that still shapes today's society.

Although the eighteenth century may seem distant, it marked a key moment in the construction of gender roles, many of which continue to shape societal expectations in the twenty-first century. Female morality became increasingly linked to virginity—a notion that, though less rigid today, still carries weight. Women's 'virtue' is often judged not only by their values or actions, but by the perceived sexual dimensions of their behavior. More importantly, the comparative analysis of *Pamela* and *Fantomina* also illustrates literature's power not only to reflect or respond to societal norms but also to actively shape or challenge them. Literature and language thus become foundational tools through which societal values are constructed and disseminated—tools whose influence remains palpable even in contemporary society.

Works Cited

Bigold, Melanie. "Sex Education, Songs, and Spiritual Guidance: An Eighteenth-Century Servant's Library." *The Library*, vol. 23, no. 3, 2022, pp. 301-322. *Oxford Academic*, https://academic.oup.com/library/article/23/3/301/6712736.

Blanchard, Jane. "Composing Purpose in Richardson's *Pamela*." *South Atlantic Review*, vol. 76, no. 2, 2011, pp. 93-107. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/43050924.

Chen, Kuo-jung. "The Concept of Virginity and Its Representations in Eighteenth-Century English Literature." *The Wenshan Review*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2010, pp. 75-96. PDF file.

Corfield, Penelope J. "Class by Name and Number in Eighteenth-Century England," *Language, History, and Class*, edited by Penelope J. Corfield, Blackwell, 1991, pp. 101-130. *Internet Archive*, https://archive.org/details/languagehistoryc0000unse/mode/2up.

Croskery, Margaret Case. "Masquing Desire: The Politics of Passion in Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina*." *The Passionate Fictions of Eliza Haywood: Essays on Her Life and Work*, edited by Kristen T. Saxton and Rebecca P. Bocchicchio, University Press of Kentucky, 2000, pp. 68-94. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt130j57m.8.

Doody, Margaret A. "Introduction." *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded*, edited by Peter Sabor, Penguin Books, 2003, pp. 7-24.

Dussinger, John A. "'*Ciceronian* Eloquence:' The Politics of Virtue in Richardson's *Pamela*. *Passion and Virtue: Essays on the Novels of Samuel Richardson*, edited by David Blewett, University of Toronto Press, 2001. *ProQuest Ebook Central*,

https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.jcu.idm.oclc.org/lib/johncabot/detail.action?docID=4671813.

Frost, Ginger S. *Illegitimacy in English Law and Society, 1860–1930*. Manchester University Press, 2016. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvnb7kpr.6.

Halifax, George Savile. *The Lady's New Year's Gift, or, Advice to a Daughter*. London, 1688. *Internet Archive*, https://archive.org/details/ladysnewyearsgif00hali/page/2/mode/1up.

Hansen, Kathryn S. "Dress as Deceptive Visual Rhetoric in Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina*." *ABO: Interactive Journal for Women in the Arts, 1640-1830*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2021, art. 6. *Digital Commons @ University of South Florida*, https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/abo/vol11/iss2/6.

Haywood, Eliza. "Fantomina." *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature: The Age of Romanticism*, edited by Joseph Laurence Black, 2nd ed., Broadview Press, 2006, pp. 632-647.

"In Context: The Eighteenth-Century Sexual Imagination." *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature: The Age of Romanticism*, edited by Joseph Laurence Black, 2nd ed., Broadview Press, 2006, pp. 647-650.

LeGates, Marlene. "The Cult of Womanhood in Eighteenth-Century Thought." *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1976, pp. 21–39. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/2737815.

Manley, Delarivier, *Secret Memoirs and Manners of Several Persons of Quality, of Both Sexes, From the New Atalantis*. London, 1709. *Internet Archive*, https://archive.org/details/secretmemoirsman00manl/page/83/mode/1up.

"Mercenary, N., Sense 1." *Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford UP, June 2024, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/5653314111.

Metzger, Bruce M. "Literary Forgeries and Canonical Pseudepigrapha." *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 91, no. 1, 1972, pp. 3–24. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/3262916.

Moores, John Richard. *Representations of France and the French in English Satirical Prints, c. 1740-1832*. 2011. University of York, PhD Dissertation, https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/2347/1/johnrichardmooresphdvol1FINAL.pdf.

Morrison, Lucy. "Conduct (Un)Becoming to Ladies of Literature: How-to Guides for Romantic Women Writers." *Studies in Philology*, vol. 99, no. 2, 2002, pp. 202–28. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4174727.

Murgolo, Federica. [The Word "Poor" in *Pamela*: Frequency and Rhetorical Positioning]. AntConc (Version 4.3.1) [Computer Software]. February 2025.

Nelson, James. *An Essay on the Government of Children*. London, *Internet Archive*, 1753, https://archive.org/details/b30521191_0001/page/306/mode/2up.

Nussbaum, Felicity. "Women Novelists 1740s–1780s." *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660–1780*, edited by John Richetti, Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 745–767.

Richardson, Samuel. *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded.* Edited by Peter Sabor, Penguin Books, 2003.

Roulston, Christine. *Virtue, Gender, and the Authentic Self in Eighteenth-Century Fiction: Richardson, Rousseau and Laclos*. University Press of Florida, 1998.

Smith, Adam. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments.* Philadelphia, *Internet Archive*, 1817, https://archive.org/details/theorymoralsent03smitgoog/page/347/mode/1up.

Tague, Ingrid H. “Love, Honor, and Obedience: Fashionable Women and the Discourse of Marriage in the Early Eighteenth Century.” *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2001, pp. 76–106. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3070770.

Thomason, Laura E. *The Matrimonial Trap: Eighteenth-Century Women Writers Redefine Marriage*, Bucknell University Press, 2013. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.jcu.idm.oclc.org/lib/johncabot/detail.action?docID=1577415.

“Virtue, *N*.” Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford UP, March 2025, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/9519354683.

Warner, William. “Novels on the Market.” *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660–1780*, edited by John Richetti, Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 87–106.

Afterward

Writing this thesis has meant more than simply completing a bachelor's degree or closing a significant chapter of my life. It has also been a way to reflect on every step of my journey so far. For this reason, I've chosen to take a moment to thank all the people that have shaped the person I am today. Before I begin, I must confess that I often find it difficult to express what I truly feel through words. Language can feel limiting (and that's coming from an English Literature student—so trust me!). Still, I'll do my best.

Thank you, Mom and Dad—Debora and Vincenzo—for all the opportunities you gave me, for letting me live my experiences fully, even when the distance from home hurt you. Thank you for teaching me how to face challenges with strength, and for supporting me throughout it all. Thank you, Zia Gessjca and Zia Rossella—for your love, always and forever. Thank you for the way you've always made me feel not alone, and for showing me that even if we're part of a small family, it's one with a huge heart. Of course, I could not forget my grandfather, Nonno Mario, and my grandmother, Nonna Tina. Nonno, thank you for showing me your love in quiet, yet beautiful ways. I always saw it and felt it. Nonna, I know I haven't always been the most expressive person, but I hope you always knew—and still now, wherever you are now—just how much I love you.

To Elena, one of my closest friends. Although we met in high school, it feels like you've always been part of my life. I can't think of a happy memory that doesn't include you. Even when we don't talk every day, I know you're there—and I know you *really* listen to me. To Giulia, I owe you so many thanks. You may not always express your feelings with words, but you show them through gestures—through your presence, your warmth, and your hugs that feel

like home. I am incredibly lucky to have someone with a soul as gentle as yours in my life. Every day, I see that. I see *you*.

To Pia, thank you for always being there for me, for listening, for our endless video calls when I was in the US. I'm so grateful for every time you offered your unique and insightful perspective. You know I wouldn't be who I am without you. To Shakira, thank you for your constant love and support for what I do—what you call 'the rims'—even though it's so far from your own interests. I truly believe that's one of the purest forms of love: respect and admiration without needing to fully understand. Thanks to Martina, the strong one—inside and out! Thank you for always making me laugh until I cry. I can't remember a day when you weren't encouraging me to keep going. I confess I've always felt a sense of protection just knowing you were in my life.

To Simona ('T'), thank you for your incredible attention to detail and your ability to remember even the smallest things in my life. To Giada, for showing me the beauty in observing the world with curiosity, even when it didn't offer clear answers. To Michela, thank you for your quiet way of noticing things and always being there, no matter how much I annoy you! To Simona ('G'), for your maturity in teaching me the importance of trying to stay on your feet, even in the middle of the storm. To Girolamo, Simone, Pierangelo, Renato, Vincenzo, Claudio, Francesco, Salvatore, and Gianmichele, thank you for all the times we played together—whether kicking a ball or hunting down *i lupi* among us—I truly can't put into words how much joy I feel every time we're all together.

To the people I met when I started university, thank you for making this experience unforgettable and for being my source of comfort and happiness during these wonderful years. To Elena, or as I always call you, 'Sestri'—we've literally become like sisters. Despite the many

differences between us, we've always found a way to listen, accept those differences, and be there for one another. Sara, the one who understands me without a single word. Thank you for always reminding me that not only it is possible to stand back up after a fall, but that it's even possible to run and win the race. Many thanks to Marina, my big sister. Thank you for always speaking freely and openly; I'm pretty sure we've talked about every possible topic two people can discuss. And yet, every time I am with you, there's always so much I want to talk to you about.

To all these people, I am endlessly grateful to have you in my life. You have been my strength and my inspiration. If I manage to become even a fraction of the extraordinary human beings you are, I will consider myself lucky.

I love you, forevermore.