

Samuel Richardson: *Pamela* – Summary

<https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pamela/summary>

Fifteen-year-old Pamela Andrews is a virtuous but poor maid working for the wealthy Lady B at her **Bedfordshire home**. On her deathbed, Lady B recommends that Pamela should work for her son, Mr. B. Pamela excels in her new role, and so Mr. B gives her four guineas and some silver from his mother's pocket. Pamela sends the four guineas home to her father and mother to help with their many debts, describing her new situation in a letter, and she continues to write letters to her parents throughout the novel. He then gives her many other presents (silk clothes and pettycoats, shoes, caps and other accessories that belonged to his mother).

At first Pamela is overjoyed to accept her new position with Mr. B. She takes a liking to the other servants in the house, particularly the housekeeper **Mrs. Jervis**, who watches over Pamela and gives her advice. But as Pamela spends more and more time at the house, Mr. B makes increasingly aggressive advances toward Pamela, since she is extremely beautiful. He kisses her many times without her permission (Letter XI: he locks the door of the summer house not to let her out; Letter XV: he comes back from a journey without any warning and gets into her dressing-room). Finally, he hides in the closet of Mrs Jervis's room (where Pamela sleeps together with the housekeeper, for security reason) to spy on her. And although Mr. B keeps promising Pamela a new role working **for his sister Lady Davers** at her estate, Pamela's departure date never seems to come. Moreover, Mr B intercepts the letter in which she had expressed her concern and dismay about his behavior and becomes suspicious of her. He is afraid she might ruin his reputation.

Eventually, Pamela decides she must go back to her parents (to get away from the aggressive Mr. B and preserve her "virtue" (virginity)). Mr. B claims to want to marry Pamela off to his chaplain, Mr. Williams, and so he finally allows Pamela to take a coach back to her parents so she can ask for their permission to marry Mr. Williams. But what Pamela doesn't know is that John, the man who carries her letters to her parents, has been following Mr. B's orders, secretly showing him some of Pamela's letters and leaving a few of them undelivered. Also, Mr. B has no intention of sending Pamela home. When Pamela gets in the coach to go home, it takes her instead to Mr. B's **Lincolnshire estate** in the country, trapping her there as Mr. B's prisoner.

At Lincolnshire, Pamela must endure the cruel Mrs. **Jewkes**, who always watches Pamela, even forcing her to sleep in the same bed and locking the door at night. Pamela wants to escape and see her parents, but she can't even send letters to them, so she begins keeping **a journal** instead.

While at Lincolnshire, Pamela meets the chaplain Mr. Williams, who, despite depending on Mr. B to make a living, is nevertheless willing to do what he can to help Pamela escape. They exchange letters in secret using a hiding place in the garden that Mrs. Jewkes doesn't know about.

Eventually, Mr. B gets jealous about Mr. Williams's close relationship with Pamela, so he arranges to have Mr. Williams robbed on the road and later jailed. With the cooperation of Mrs. Jewkes, Mr. B secretly comes back to his Lincolnshire house and impersonates a maid named Nan who normally sleeps in bed with Pamela. He then assaults Pamela one night, causing her to faint.

Mr. B leaves later that night, but he continues to spy on Pamela. At one point he discovers some of Pamela's writing and then demands to see all of it. To Pamela's surprise, Mr. B doesn't seem too

angry about the journal pages, many of which are very critical of him—in fact, they may even move him. **Eventually, he relents and allows Pamela to leave his Lincolnshire estate to go back to see her parents.**

Pamela takes a coach that begins taking her back to her parents. Along the way, she receives a letter from a seemingly repentant **Mr. B who says that he's feeling physically sick with love for her. Surprisingly, Pamela realizes that she doesn't hate Mr. B** and might even find him handsome, so she goes back to see him.

When Pamela gets back, she finds that Mr. B is much kinder to her and even seems earnest about marrying her. Still, Pamela fears that Mr. B might only be trying to trick her into a sham-marriage. Mr. B does several things to try to prove himself to Pamela, including bailing Mr. Williams out of prison and **hosting Pamela's father at the estate.** Eventually, the two of them agree to marry, with Pamela suggesting **that Mr. B clean out his family's cluttered chapel so that they can use it for the wedding.**

Pamela and Mr. B have a small wedding that they keep secret for a while. Mr. B treats Pamela better than he did before, but some of the other local gentry, particularly Lady Davers, have a hard time accepting that Mr. B has truly married the lower-class Pamela. Despite some initial reluctance, however, **Pamela eventually uses her virtue and beauty to win over the gentry—even Lady Davers—and become a respected member of society.**

After marrying Mr. B, Pamela obtains a lot of money and **uses most of it for charity, paying back the servants who helped her, giving some to the local poor, and arranging for her parents to get an annual income.** Her happy marriage faces a challenge when she learns that Mr. B previously had a child (Miss Goodwin) with a woman named Sally Godfrey, but Pamela accepts this new development and even proposes adopting the child as their own (since Sally now lives a new married life in Jamaica). In an epilogue, the Editor summarizes some of the moral lessons of the book and says that **Pamela is a role model for all to follow.**

Letter 1 - Summary

In a letter to her father and mother, the **15-year-old** household servant Pamela writes about how the lady she was working for (Lady B) has recently died. Pamela regrets her death because the woman was kind to her and the other servants. **On her deathbed, however, the woman gave her son (Mr. B) the highest recommendation for Pamela. Because of this, Pamela doesn't have to go home to live with her parents.** She sends her parents **four guineas with John (the footman who delivers her letters), part of her wages from her new master,** so that her parents can pay off some old debts.

In the postscript, Pamela writes to her mother and father that her new master (Mr. B) scared her by coming up to her while she was writing the letter. He asked to see what she had written, and she reluctantly let him. She feared he might be angry that she was writing about him, but he said it was good that she is kind to her mother and father. He just asked that she be careful about the stories she tells her family. Finally, he noted that she is good at writing and spelling, which Pamela appreciated hearing.

Analysis

The opening lines of the book introduce Pamela and her virtuous nature. Lady B gives a favorable opinion of Pamela to her son Mr. B, and then Pamela proves her generosity by giving almost all the money she receives from her new employer to her parents. **Richardson never reveals Mr. B or Lady B's full names, acting as if they're real people whose identity he's trying to protect.** But this doesn't mean that Mr. B was a real person—this technique of dashes in names was common in 18th- and 19th-century fiction and contributed to their realism.

Letter 2

Summary

Pamela's father and mother (John and Elizabeth Andrews) write a reply to their daughter's letter. They are sad to learn of Lady B's death, and they worry that now Pamela might do something disreputable. In particular, they fear that now that because Mr. B has given Pamela so much money and praise, he might have some "design" on her.

In the letter, Pamela's father describes going to the Widow Mumford to ask advice. Widow Mumford eases some of his concerns by suggesting that maybe Mr. B feels grateful to Pamela for taking care of Lady B during her illness. Still, Pamela's father feels that Mr. B's attention to Pamela earlier was excessive. Pamela's parents end the letter saying that if Pamela really loves them, she will protect her "virtue" at all costs. Until they are sure Pamela will do so, they decide to keep the four guineas in a safe place instead of spending them.

Analysis

Whereas Pamela's previous letter was hopeful, her parents' reply is much more cautious. This helps establish that perhaps Pamela is naïve, but it could also suggest that Pamela is able to see the best in people.

Letter 3 -Summary

Pamela writes a letter to her father. She says his previous letter scared her a little bit and made her suspicious of Mr. B's motives, but she also scolds her father for doubting her honesty. She reassures her father that everyone in her new house, including the housekeeper (Mrs. Jervis), treats her very kindly.

Analysis

Despite being naïve in some ways, Pamela also understands why her parents are worried. She understands that because of his gender and his class, Mr. B is less likely to suffer the consequences if anything were to develop between Mr. B and Pamela.

Letter 4 - Summary

Pamela writes a letter to her mother, but she fears that she doesn't have much to write about and will sound vain repeating praise others have given her. Lady Davers, Mr. B's sister, complimented how Pamela looks and acts, although she also advised Pamela to be mindful of her virtue.

Pamela continues her letter. Later, Mrs. Jervis confirmed to Pamela that Lady Davers and Mr. B were praising her. Lady Davers did suggest, however, that perhaps Pamela was too pretty to live with a bachelor like Mr. B. In response, Mr. B agreed that maybe Pamela should go live with Lady Davers. Pamela tells all this to her parents, suggesting it's proof that Mr. B has no bad intentions. Because of this, her mother and father should feel free to use the money she sent earlier.

Analysis

While Lady Davers approves of how Pamela looks and acts, it's only because here, Pamela shows modesty and deference, demonstrating that she's aware of her lower status.

Letter 5 - Summary

Pamela writes to her mother and father that she will keep sending letters because John seems to like visiting with them so much when he delivers them. She has no news about going to Lady Davers's house yet, but she assures her parents **that Mrs. Jervis treats her like a daughter**. When Harry, one of the male servants at the house, started talking about Pamela's beauty and grabbed her once as if to kiss her, Mrs. Jervis scolded him angrily and praised Pamela for her restraint in avoiding him.

Continuing her letter, Pamela says she doesn't like the way male servants look at her, even though most of them treat her well enough, particularly when Mrs. Jervis is around. Pamela assures her parents that she feels safe and that she knows Mr. B won't try to harm her because he knows it would ruin not only her reputation but his as well.

Analysis

Mrs. Jervis's concern for Pamela's safety suggests that she has similar concerns to Pamela's parents, and so she ends up acting as a surrogate parent to Pamela while she's away from her real parents. The brief episode with the male servant shows that Pamela's parents and Mrs. Jervis aren't just imagining the threat that Mr. B might pose to Pamela.

[Read the selection of Letters in file apart](#)

The importance of Virtue

Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* has the subtitle "Virtue Rewarded," making it clear that virtue is important to the story. In the novel, "virtue" is most often synonymous with **virginity**, reflecting how most of the novel revolves around protagonist **Pamela's efforts to remain a virgin despite the tricks, assaults, and threats of rape from her master**, Mr. B. As the novel goes on, however, particularly after the wedding of Pamela and Mr. B, it soon becomes clear that chastity isn't Pamela's only virtue. The Editor himself states directly that he hopes audience will see Pamela as an all-around role model and strive to emulate her virtuous behavior. Among Pamela's many good qualities are her **patience, open-mindedness, and ability to forgive—all of which are tenets of the Christian faith**. Even **after enduring all of Mr. B's abuse, for instance, Pamela never hates him**, and she ultimately forgives him and all his accomplices, like John and Mrs. Jewkes. Pamela's behavior, **the novel suggests, shows what virtue looks like in action**.

Although Pamela suffers during much of the novel—even while acting virtuously—she eventually reaps incredible rewards for her virtue. **While Pamela acts virtuously for spiritual reasons, the**

rewards that she and others receive in the book for good behavior are often material and tangible. For example, as a servant, Pamela was excited to obtain four guineas, but after winning over Mr. B with her good behavior and becoming his wife, she obtains hundreds of guineas to spend on herself or give away as charity. Pamela's poor but dignified father and mother similarly receive a large income as a reward for their modest lifestyle (Mr. B gifts it to them following his marriage to Pamela), and many characters like Mr. Williams and Mrs. Jervis, who help Pamela, receive their own material rewards. **Together, the fates of all these characters help make the case for a Christian God who actively intervenes in earthly life in order to help the virtuous who deserve it.** Richardson's Pamela demonstrates that **the value of virtue is both spiritual and material, with the concrete rewards of wealth and status representing the less tangible but even more important spiritual benefits of virtuousness.**

Class and Morality

Samuel Richardson's Pamela **explores the difference between the wealthy upper class and the poor lower class in 18th-century Britain.** While virtuous characters in the book often receive material rewards for their good behavior, this doesn't mean that the wealthiest characters are always the most moral. In fact, when they first appear, the wealthy Mr. B is a libertine, and his sister, Lady Davers, is full of old-fashioned prejudices against people from lower classes. Mr. B himself admits how his wealth has made him spoiled, and he isn't used to other people telling him "no." In contrast to these flawed upper-class characters, Pamela's poor father and mother are among the most honest characters in the book, and the reverend Mr. Williams is much kinder to Pamela than Mr. B, despite his lower social status.

It might seem, then, that **the novel is critical of the class divide**, suggesting instead **that class has little to do with a person's character and that the class divide is not so extreme after all**—and that the marriage of the upper-class Mr. B to his servant Pamela proves it. Still, many characters—including Pamela herself—worry that marrying Pamela might hurt Mr. B's reputation, and ultimately the characters from **the gentry only accept Pamela because she knows how to act like a member of the upper class**, suggesting that the class divide is real after all—and that the novel upholds rather than criticizes it. It's noteworthy that many of the lower-class characters with the best manners (including Mr. Jervis and Pamela's parents) originally came from wealthier backgrounds but fell on hard times. By the end of the novel, Pamela marries Mr. B and so completes her transition to the upper class, and her charitable behavior toward all those around her suggests that she deserves the new authority she has gained. While Richardson's Pamela challenges some aspects of the British class system by **highlighting both the moral shortcomings of the upper class and the good morals of the lower class**, it ultimately upholds the status quo by suggesting that **members of the upper class deserve their privilege and power as long as they use it responsibly like Pamela.**

Religion and Marriage

Religion plays a major role in Samuel Richardson's Pamela, with its titular protagonist frequently praying to God to endure her lowest moments and thanking God for her successes. One of Pamela's core beliefs is that a person should only have sex after marriage, and this throws her into conflict with her master, Mr. B, who initially just wants to have sex with Pamela as soon as possible. Much of the novel hinges on the lead-up to the marriage of Mr. B and Pamela, with

marriage meaning something different to each of them. For Mr. B, marriage begins as just a **formality to trick Pamela into a sexual relationship**, and he's willing to resort to a sham-marriage if necessary, not caring about what role religion plays in marriage. **For Pamela, however, marriage and religion are permanently linked.** She considers the marriage ceremony an explicitly religion ritual, and **her religious beliefs inform her ideas about how to act as a wife.** The chapel that Mr. B's family owns represents the conflict between Pamela and Mr. B's different ideas about marriage and religion. For a long time, Mr. B and his family used **the chapel as a lumber storage shed**, showing how they put their earthly economic interests above spiritual ones. **Pamela's influence over Mr. B makes him more religious, and so her insistence on getting married in the chapel shows how she has made him more spiritual.**

Nevertheless, while Pamela wins the argument over the chapel, Mr. B's secular ideas about marriage still hold true as well. As Mr. B's convoluted affair with Sally Godfrey demonstrates, marriage can be a complicated legal and economic agreement that involves whole families. Furthermore, as Mr. B matures, his secular ideas about marriage become more altruistic—for instance, he demonstrates his care for Pamela by making **contingency inheritance plans in case of his own sudden death.** Pamela explores how marriage can be both a religious and a legal ceremony, arguing that Christian morality theoretically can lead to a happy marriage, but also **acknowledging how marriage involves more earthly, economic issues in practice.**

As Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* demonstrates, life in 18th-century England wasn't the same for men and women. The novel **portrays a patriarchal society where men generally held more power and had more independence than women.** Protagonist Pamela's situation hints at many of the problems that women in that era faced. Pamela notes in her letters and journal that women face a double standard. For instance, she suggests that **it's worse for a woman to lose her virginity than a man.** This is why Pamela experiences so much fear and shame around her master, Mr. B, who at times seems like he's even willing rape Pamela, which would mean the loss of her "virtue." Pamela's lower-class status makes her situation particularly bad, but even an upper-class woman like Lady Davers suffers from a double-standard—Mr. B specifically says that while his marriage to Pamela is noble, **it would be shameful for Lady Davers to marry one of her stable grooms (because a man becomes the head of the household, and it wouldn't be appropriate for a high-born woman like her to be ruled by a common man).**

Sexual Politics

But while Richardson often attempts to portray a female perspective sympathetically, his novel undeniably upholds **sexist ideas, particularly by modern standards.** **Pamela endures significant abuse from Mr. B, and even after reforming him, she must follow his rules**—all 48 of them—to make him happy, suggesting that he will always be more important than her in the marriage. And while the novel clearly portrays Mr. B's earlier behavior as wicked, it still reinforces the idea that Pamela should act submissively toward him. Also, while Pamela's virtue plays an important role in winning admirers, **her traditionally feminine beauty** seems to be equally important, and the novel portrays women who aren't traditionally beautiful, like Mrs. Jewkes, in a less positive light. While **Richardson's *Pamela* examines the difficulties women like Pamela faced in 18th-century England, it undercuts any potentially feminist themes by reinforcing the patriarchal idea that women should put men's needs above their own.**