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## ■ MEANS OF EXERCISING POWER IN SAMUEL RICHARDSON'S *PAMELA; OR, VIRTUE REWARDED*

In this article we discuss matters related to forms of *physical* and *psychic conflict* between the representatives of two socio-cultural classes in the eighteenth-century England, namely between the virtuous maid and the aggressive aristocrat of the eighteenth-century while the latter tries to take possession over the woman's body by means of *rape*.

Anne Vinsel considers that from a social and psychological standpoint rape constitutes a form of sexual assault of a person against her/his wishes (Vinsel 1977: 184). Vinsel also mentions aspects related to the so-called "rape mythology", for example the case of women secretly wanting to be raped. The author emphasizes the fact that rape is an exertion of male power over women. A means of social control and a weapon of war, rape evolved and also constituted a stimulus to the establishment of the family. Thus, rape has always been an instrument in keeping women subdued and aware of their inferior position. In her review essay, Vinsel comments that Brownmiller's book<sup>1</sup> accentuates a central notion in the discussion about rape, namely the fact that rape is the logical outcome of *unequal power relationships* between women and men. It is then an extreme form of the normal man-woman interaction.

The two authors (quoted by Vinsel 1977: 185) mention the motives that lead to rape, among which we mention the male's sexual desire, the desire to humiliate the female, or the intention to keep her under the control of fear, etc.

Vinsel also refers to Russell's comments about the roots of rape as a social phenomenon. The author states that the grounds for rape are offered by the separate and unequal socialization to which males and females are subjected in the society. Russell speaks about notions like *female* and *male mystiques* which represent the features traditionally associated to each sex, namely those characteristics that are regarded as typical to a woman and typical to a man. Therefore, the author traces the roots of rape in the perpetuation of these notions, too. Consequently, the clash between the qualities regarded as "supermasculine" in many societies – like aggression, force, power, strength, toughness, dominance, or competitiveness – and those regarded as characteristic to women – passivity, submissiveness or physical weakness – gives way to rape as an extreme acting out of this situation (Vinsel 1977: 186).

We consider that, since the distinct roles and qualities attributed to women and men are socially noticeable and socially distributed, it is only normal that these features

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find expression in women's and men's sexual behaviour. Rape is then not a rare and deviant act in the eighteenth-century England as far as the high-low social clash is concerned. On the contrary, it seems to have been embedded in the cultural norms that regulated the relationships men-women, because of those very norms regarding the female and male mystiques. The existence of these mystiques automatically made women more vulnerable to rape and men more aggressive in performing it.

Novels like *Moll Flanders* or *Pamela* also bring forward practices of the nobility that can be seen as crimes. For instance, the young aristocrats often forced women into having sex with them out of various reasons, like: the desire to have fun, the strong belief that they were entitled to claim control over the others, especially over women as they were considered to be weaker, or because of a powerful sexual drive. Of course, all of these are traces of a superficial or inappropriate education; squire B. himself hints at this and he is ready to tame his strong will according to the laws of reason. *Will* is in fact the key-word which best characterizes any nobleman's behaviour. Mr. B. displays the aristocratic ideology of *libertine jouissance*, and his sister makes it clear that his past was that of a libertine, as he sometimes amused himself in duels ("a Manslayer") and in amorous relationships (419).

Mullan (1990: 70) takes notice of the fact that *libertinism* was not only considered to be an act of subservience to over-insistent sexual urges, but it was a vice which in fact acknowledged and strengthened the consistency of virtue and feeling. It is not accidental then that the squire first notices Pamela among his dead mother's maids and appoints her to take care of his linen, a task which is the cause but also the result of his libertine way of life.

We People of Fortune, or such as are born to large Expectations, of both Sexes are generally educated wrong. You have occasionally touch'd upon this, Pamela, several times in your Journal, so justly, that I need say the less to you. We are usually so headstrong, so violent in our Wills, that we very little bear Control (443).

Terry Eagleton identifies the presence of the Don Juan myth in *Clarissa* (in Roberts 1986: 143), but we think that its presence can be felt in *Pamela* too, though squire B. is an atheist of love mainly because of the existing social constraints. Like Lovelace, squire B. is also a "patriarchal predator", a refuter of marriage and of the patriarchal order altogether.

Squire B.'s attempts to rape Pamela are mainly rooted in the education he had received, as we have commented above. Proud and possessing a violent will, he is all the more inflamed by Pamela's behaviour. She uses his name in an ill manner in her letters to her parents and he feels that she perverts his reputation "*in his House and out of his House*" (31). Moreover, the squire considers that, since Pamela is a servant, it is part of her duty to obey him, or his desires and orders. On the other hand, Pamela claims that she knows nothing of her "*Duty, but how to cherish her Virtue and good Name*" (31-32). In fact, this clash between her notion of duty and virtue and his lies at the basis of the harassing scenes in which he attempts to rape the young woman while she desperately tries to deter his intentions.

The ironic *discourse of the predator* is also supported by arguments taken from his readings. What he wants to suggest is that he, as an aristocrat, could never be blamed

as a rapist though he funnily takes the blame upon himself: "Who ever blamed *Lucretia*<sup>2</sup>, but the *Ravisher* only? and I am content to take all the Blame upon me; as I have already borne too great a Share for what I have deserved" (32). Mr. B. loves and desires what is virtuous and honest while he knows himself to be a varlet and, due to Pamela's resistance, he eventually confirms the integrity of what he seeks to destroy. M. Foucault outlines the transgressive force of the literary *libertine* so as to illuminate the paradox of *the relationship victimizer – victim*:

Underneath the great violator of the rules of marriage – stealer of wives, seducer of virgins, the shame of families, and an insult to husbands and fathers – another personage can be glimpsed: the individual driven, in spite of himself, by the sombre madness of sex. Underneath the libertine, the pervert. He deliberately breaks the law, but at the same time, something like a nature gone awry transports him far from all nature; his death is the moment when the supernatural return of the crime and its retribution thwarts the flight into counternature<sup>3</sup>.

However, in Richardson's novel, libertinism is not fully exercised by squire B. This happens because, from external reasons, he cannot be a real abductor since his morals are rehabilitated by Pamela's model of virtue, and because he does not find his retribution in death. Conversely, he changes his status from a libertine into a husband who admires his wife exactly for the same qualities for which he had previously snubbed her.

At times, the squire mocks at Pamela's education, for she is not like most of the other servants. Her "learning" is then another aspect to tease and attract him and, though she desperately devotes her life to save her virtue, his reaction to her bold retorts is to try to touch her body again and a chase starts, as on different occasions, when the squire follows the girl in various rooms of the house with the sole goal of raping her. It is somewhat awkward that she freely tells her parents about his freedoms:

He by Force kissed my Neck and Lips; (...) He then put his Hand in my Bosom, and the Indignation gave me double Strength, and I got loose from him, by a sudden Spring, and ran out of the Room; and the next Chamber being open, I made shift to get into it, and threw-to the Door, and the Key being on the Inside, it locked; but he followed me so close, he got hold of my Gown, and tore a Piece off, which hung without the Door (32).

The squire's education has taught him that he is the master of the entire household, whether we speak about objects or human beings. Thus, his promise towards his mother that he would take care of the young maid is understood as the desire to do whatever he pleases with her for "she is young, and every thing is pretty that is young" (51). Even the neighbouring ladies see Pamela as an object of desire and passion. What is more, Pamela is, again, a mere object and she is the one who, due to her beauty, attracts men: "Says Lady Towers, Can the pretty Image speak, Mrs. Jervis? I vow she has speaking Eyes! O you little Rogue, says she, and tapt me on the Cheek, *you seem born to undo, or to be undone!*" (53)

Pamela sadly comments upon the subordination of females to male will, especially when the women are servants working in the houses of powerful men. She realizes that she is all the more audacious and impudent for counteracting the squire's sexual abuse and, as we said, her courage and her verbal as well as behavioural resistance are only meant to incite the squire. The sexual struggle between women and men takes place at all the levels of the society where women are expected to be subdued to whatever men require. In a critical moment, Pamela exclaims "(...) what a World we live in! for it is grown more a Wonder that the Men are resisted, than that the Women comply. This, I suppose, makes me such a Sawce-box, and Boldface, and a Creature; and all because I won't be a Sawce-box and Boldface indeed" (71).

Further on, the squire uses the closet as a hiding place again from where he plans to attack the girl when she enters the room. Obscenity is generally associated to small, closed and obscure places. Significantly, the obscurity and the narrowness of such a space seem to symbolize the squire's indistinct personality and his doubtful actions. Similarly, he tries to trap the victim in her bed as he can control and put her out of action more easily in a fixed and rather small space. Sometimes the girl is so vigilant after the "Closet-work" that she unconsciously starts to take part in his hunting game, whereas the watched one turns into a watcher – and has the control – even though only for some moments: "(...) it seems he said, he thought two or three times to have burst out upon me; but he could not stand it, and wish'd I might not know he was there. But I tript up again so nimbly (...) that I just saw his Back" (81).

As we have said, the squire claims that it is only a duty for Pamela to comply with his requests of a sexual kind. Her postponement by confrontation is repaid by a harsher attack when the victim must live a time of punishment. The squire feels that physical constraint is the only means to make Pamela accept his list of proposals. Her body is at stake here in this negotiation of virtue and we can observe some stages that occur in any rape: *the body* is slyly watched, pursued and bullied gradually, and then it is sequestered and deprived of the possibility to counterattack or defend itself. Similarly, in this "rape scene", Pamela's hands are secured tight by her master and his assistant, Mrs. Jewkes. It is only even stranger that the assistant is a woman for she does not protect the other woman who is a victim but, on the contrary, she encourages the squire to do his job without any remorse.

But he kissed me with frightful Vehemence; and then his Voice broke upon me like a Clap of Thunder. Now, Pamela, said he, is the dreadful Time of Reckoning come, that I have threaten'd. – I screamed out in such a manner, as never any body heard the like. But there was nobody to help me: And both my hands were secured, as I said (203).

For Pamela, this moment of physical intimidation is paralleled by a moment of utter disgrace for her, choosing death rather than the perversion of her virtue. It is the moment which is of utmost importance for the subsequent evolution of her life. She finds the power to invoke the heavenly assistance when confronted with the rapist, as if hoping to dissuade him from his intentions: "O God! My God! This *Time*, this *one Time*! deliver me from this Distress! or strike me dead this Moment; and then I scream'd again

and again" (203). Pamela would prefer an alliance with God rather than rape which would coincide with a loss of virtue and purity, and she strongly acts against squire B.'s attempts to suppress her desire for sexual and moral independence. In Roberts' terms (1986: 142), this rejection is suggestive of the refusal of the political society under the forms of sexual oppression, bourgeois patriarchy, and libertine aristocracy altogether.

When the squire changes his strategy Pamela still fears that he looks for another occasion to rape her. Though wholly naïve in worldly manners and in the schemes of the rich, Pamela is witty enough to anticipate a future re-enactment of his attempts. Yet, though frightened, she no longer rejects his kisses, which shows that his new way of approaching her, namely with kindness and loving words, does have an echo in her heart.

(...) he seems to take another Method, and what I am more afraid of, because, may-be, *he may watch an Opportunity*, and join Force with it, on Occasion, when I am least prepar'd: for now, he seems to abound with Kindness, and talks of Love, without Reserve, and makes nothing of allowing himself in the Liberty of kissing me (...) (208).

As a fact, he blames her charm for his strong attraction to her and her beauty will always make her a victim of the opposite sex. By kissing her and putting his arm around her waist (208), he breaks his promise of keeping away from her *intimate space*, from her "honest Body", thus foregrounding that his intentions were never truly altered. In fact, he even pretends to value her judgment since he makes her his adviser regarding their relationship and he suggests once more that his obsession with her inevitably brings about the physical possession of her body: "I must have you" (213). *His discourse* depends very much on the use and functions of *modal verbs* (214, 216-219) which mainly show the two characters' contradictory states, shifting from uncertainty and impossibility ("I cannot say what you *ought to do*") to certainty and strong volition ("I must love you", "this I will say", "I will believe you"). This use of words also shows that there is another stage in their relationship, as suggested by the meanings of the modal verbs above. The *discourse of modality* skilfully discloses the game between truthfulness and the appearance of truthfulness, possibility and impossibility, or between certainty and uncertainty as related to their communication. The end of Volume I reveals the two main characters in the position of still building and negotiating their identities and interests in connection with each other, in a space of transition between reality and the appearance of reality:

(1) But, my dear Girl, what *must we do* about the World, and the World's Censure? – Indeed, I *cannot marry!* (218)

But sure, at least, he *must be* sincere for the Time! – He *could not be* such a practiced Dissembler! – If he *could*, O how desperately wicked is the Heart of Man! – And where *could* he *learn* all these barbarous Arts? – If so, it *must be* native surely to the Sex! (219)

The return of the formerly prosecuted object to the scene of the confinement is very important for Mr. B. since he interprets it as a sign of love. Rape is no longer possible

or threatening for it is love (an “irresistible Impulse”, 270, for Pamela) now that brings them closer, and Pamela even returns willingly to her Persecutor. Subsequently, Mr. B. often comes up to Pamela’s room with no intentions of rape and they share her private space peacefully. Further on it is even more explicit that the “Violator” of her innocence became a true “Friend” and “Protector” (333), the decisive step in fulfilling that *modal certainty and determination* expressed by his “I must have you” (213) being represented by their exogamous marriage<sup>4</sup>.

The manifestation of *rape* as exertion of *social power*<sup>5</sup> through physical intimidation, as externalization of frustration and anger, as perversion of the mind or as revenge reflects the trajectory of the characters through the novel and we think that this is the pivot which best shows the evolution of the protagonists’ bond. However, as a conclusion, we cannot speak about real rape in *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* because, as the title itself suggests, the heroine’s struggle to keep her virtue intact is to be rewarded with marriage. The well-planned rape never takes place and Mr. B. fails mainly because of one essential reason: he is unable to carry his action to an end, always being daunted by the victim’s fits. Maybe he could not have carried his intentions to an end even if the girl hadn’t fainted repeatedly.

If at the end of *Clarissa* both the female and the male protagonist must die as offenders of the social order, seeking the space outside this mundane world, in *Pamela* the union seems possible within the space regulated by the social norms. The new alliance between the low and the high classes is symbolically revealed by means of the marriage between Pamela and Mr. B. and this becomes possible only when the male ceases to attack Pamela’s “inviolable self” (Roberts 1986: 143) and chooses another approach, namely the Christian marriage.

- 1 Vinsel reviews two books on rape: S. Brownmiller’s *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*. 1975. New York: Simon and Schuster, and D. Russell’s work *The Politics of Rape: the Victim’s Perspective*. 1975. New York: Stein and Day.
- 2 A virtuous Roman woman, raped by a son of Tarquinius Superbus, whose suicide led to the expulsion of the Tarquins and the establishment of the Roman republic. <http://www.infoplease.com/dictionary/Lucretia>
- 3 Foucault, M. 1979. *The History of Sexuality: Vol. I. An Introduction*. (transl. by R. Hurley). New York: Vintage, 39, *apud* Mullan, J. 1990. *op. cit.* 71.
- 4 For a comprehensive analysis of the marital bond as a type of exogamous relationship also see Culea, M. 2007. Eighteenth-Century English Domesticity and the Virtues of Rational Marriage. *Cultural Perspectives* 12, Bacău: Universitatea din Bacău, 57-73.
- 5 If Vinsel approaches the problem of rape mainly from a psychological standpoint, Terry Eagleton (in Roberts, 1986) looks into the matter from a psychoanalytical but also from a cultural point of view. For the author, rape is not a disease but a symbol of the socio-cultural relationships between the two major cultural classes presented in Richardson’s novels, namely the aristocracy and the low classes. Accordingly, the obsession of rape works as a symbol for discrediting the aristocratic ideology and cultural hegemony. This is because the novels themselves became a part of the struggle between social classes and thus they gained an ideological use (Roberts 1986: 140). Eagleton also speaks about the *sex/text metaphor* (Roberts 1986: 141) as related to Richardson’s novels, which derives from the fact that writing replaces the reality. Thus, the progression of the text coincides with the deferment of sexual contact and the rape, in *Pamela*, is never represented as it never takes place. In fact, the text stops when sexual contact becomes possible. Moreover, the imminent rape is felt as destruction and is accompanied by hysterical gestures, yet Pamela becomes more balanced when the rape is replaced by institutionalized sexual intercourse.

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## SUMMARY

**MEANS OF EXERCISING POWER IN SAMUEL RICHARDSON'S *PAMELA; OR, VIRTUE REWARDED***

The article briefly presents an example of literary representations of power by means of sexual bullying. In *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* by S. Richardson the conflict between the social classes is symbolically mirrored by way of sexual struggles between male masters and female servants. We trace here a game between the victimizer and the victim where the purpose of the frolicking scenes seems to be merely sexual predation. At a deeper level, the sexual struggle between the protagonists speaks of the more general social pillaging of the poor by the rich in the eighteenth-century England. Finally, we show the way in which the conflict gradually gives way to peaceful cohabitation under the form of an exogamous alliance.

**KEYWORDS:** physical and psychic conflict, rape, power relations, female/ male mystiques, the libertine, the predator, sexual struggle, modalising desire.