

# From Imprisonment to Reconciliation — The Stockholm Syndrome of *Pamela*

Yefei Pan<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jiangsu University, Zhenjiang, Jiangsu, China

Correspondence: Yefei Pan, Jiangsu University, Zhenjiang, Jiangsu, China.

doi:10.56397/SAA.2024.06.17

## Abstract

This paper aims to analyze *Pamela* through the lens of Stockholm Syndrome, a condition where captives develop psychological bonds with their captors due to power imbalances. The paper contends that Mr. B's coercive tactics amount to a form of legal abduction, with Pamela's eventual affection for him indicating Stockholm Syndrome. This analysis also reflects on the broader context of women's confinement in the 18th century, asserting that true love must be based on mutual respect and equality, not coercion and control. The research method includes a close reading of the novel, focusing on Pamela's changing attitudes toward Mr. B. The study reveals that Mr. B's coercive tactics amount to a form of legal abduction, with Pamela's eventual affection for him indicating Stockholm Syndrome. The conclusion reflects on the broader context of women's confinement in the 18th century, asserting that true love must be based on mutual respect and equality, not coercion and control.

**Keywords:** Pamela, Samuel Richardson, Stockholm Syndrome

## 1. Introduction

Samuel Richardson, an 18th-century British novelist, is known for his conservative views and focus on the moral issues surrounding marriage. His representative works, including "*Clarissa*" and "*Pamela*," often feature maids or middle-class women as protagonists. Richardson excelled at depicting the emotions and psychology of his characters, creating a model for British family novels. "*Pamela*," in particular, is notable for pioneering English sentimental literature.

The study contends that Pamela's relationship with Mr. B exemplifies the psychological and social mechanisms that can lead to Stockholm Syndrome. By analyzing Pamela's evolving

attitudes towards Mr. B, the paper aims to demonstrate how power imbalances and coercive control can be misconstrued as genuine affection. This analysis underscores the importance of mutual respect and equality in relationships, contrasting with the coercive and controlling dynamics depicted in the novel. The research method involves a close reading of "*Pamela*," focusing on the protagonist's changing attitudes towards Mr. B. By tracing Pamela's psychological journey, the study reveals the underlying power structures and social norms that contribute to her perceived affection for her captor. This approach not only enhances the understanding of Richardson's work but also provides insights into the historical and literary context of women's roles

and relationships in the 18th century.

## 2. Changes in Pamela's Attitude Towards Mr. B — From Hatred to Affection

*Pamela* tells the story of a fifteen-year-old maidservant named Pamela Andrews, whose employer, Mr. B, a wealthy landowner, makes unwanted and inappropriate advances towards her after the death of his mother. Pamela strives to reconcile her strong religious training with her desire for the approval of her employer in a series of letters and, later in the novel, journal entries all addressed to her impoverished parents. After various unsuccessful attempts at seduction, a series of sexual assaults and an extended period of kidnapping, the rakish Mr. B eventually turns over a new leaf and makes Pamela a sincere proposal of marriage. In previous studies, some scholars already have discussed the imprisonment (both physical and moral) in *Pamela*. In this article, I want to discuss Mr. B's imprisonment of Pamela from a new aspect: Pamela's Stockholm Syndrome.

### 2.1 The Stockholm Syndrome Tendency of Pamela

The Stockholm Syndrome is a pathological psychological complex of dependence and assistance that arises during the hostage taking process. The formation of the Stockholm Syndrome has its own psychological mechanism and external environmental factors, and roughly goes through three stages: fear, unease, and sympathy. (ZENG Xiaxing, DING Yong & CHEN Han, 2023) It is supposed to result from a rather specific set of circumstances, namely the power imbalances contained in hostage-taking, kidnapping, and abusive relationships. Therefore, it is difficult to find a large number of people who experience Stockholm Syndrome to conduct studies with any sort of validity or useful sample size. This makes it hard to determine trends in the development and effects of the condition, and in fact it is a "contested illness" due to doubts about the legitimacy of the condition.

The marriage of Mr. B and Pamela is a legal abduction of Pamela by Mr. B, and her falling love with Mr. B clearly showed her Stockholm Syndrome. After the death of the old lady, the master Mr. B does everything to deceive Pamela into his own trap. At first he behaved so nice to Pamela that Pamela relax her vigilance until in the gazebo, where Mr. B finally exposed his evil intentions. When Pamela refused, he tried to use his position to threaten and control Pamela —

warning her not to tell others about the gazebo incident. He also tried to control Pamela's correspondence, admonishing her not to tell her family about it. After much consideration, Pamela decided to leave Bedfordshire and return home to live a peaceful life with her parents. Mr. B allowed Pamela to leave in his traveling four-wheeled carriage, escorted by the coachman Robin from Lincolnshire. Naive Pamela did not realize that she had fallen into Mr. B's trap. The carriage did not take her home; instead, it brought her to Mr. B's estate in Lincolnshire. Throughout the plot, the master, Mr. B, has always regarded himself as the supreme boss. To him, Pamela is just a lowly servant, and he has absolute control over her. Foucault once said, "Discourse is the formal carrier of power, and power produces discourse." (XIA Guiju, 2023) In other words, discourse is the product of power, and the operation of power is hidden in the practice of discourse. In the patriarchal society, men dominate everything, men's words are the authority, and women became the object of oppression and manipulation.

Mr. B uses his position to call on everyone around him to "imprison" Pamela — both physically and mentally. It is the exercise of what Foucault calls disciplining power, this "carefully calculated and persistent mechanism of operation," in order to "train" Pamela to be his tame mistress. "The implementation of discipline must have a mechanism to enforce by watching", everyone in Pamela's mansion follows the instructions of Mr. B to monitor Pamela. For instance, Mrs. Jewkes imposed strict spatial isolation on Pamela. She not only required Pamela to stay in the same room with her and scrutinized every letter Pamela wrote, but also forbade her from talking to the servants and deprived her of the right to move freely. In short, Mrs. Jewkes "did not trust me (Pamela) to go anywhere out of her sight." (Samuel Richardson, 1998) All the people in the mansion fixed their eyes on Pamela, and because of this, Mr. B can exert his influence without being here — he can keep track of Pamela's condition, and issue orders regarding her condition, through which he can further "train" Pamela to achieve his ultimate goal. Pamela, under Mr. B's tutelage (even though she consistently rejects his advances during this period) eventually became his wife willingly. Mr. B's coercive discipline of Pamela is, in contemporary opinions,

undoubtedly imprisonment. Somehow, Pamela falls in love with Mr. B, the man who started her imprisonment.

#### 2.1.1 Pamela's Surrender to Mr. B

When confronting with Mr. B's morbid imprisonment, Pamela is supposed to struggle. In her account, she does repeatedly emphasize how much she wants to go back to her parents. Later, however, Pamela wrote to her parents several times that she was not sure when she would be home. "I probably won't be back this week, because I have to get those linen clothes fixed and put everything in order that is within my purview." After Mr. B referred to himself as a "leprechaun" with "evil language," Pamela was still thinking about her job: "I can't say yet when I'm going to leave." Some scholars have pointed out that Pamela's reasons are "inadequate" and are "delaying her return date." When Pamela was under house arrest, when she heard that Mr. B had nearly drowned in pursuit of his prey, she made no secret of her fear that "despite all the ways he treated me harshly, I could not hate him"; If Mr. B were to die, Pamela would definitely regain her freedom, but she said, "When I heard of his sudden misfortune, I couldn't help but rejoice in his safe escape." Even then she called Mr. B "a narrow-minded master." In Pamela's previous account, she was deeply disgusted with Mr. B's intention to misbehave herself, and from her point of view, Mr. B was cheap, presumptuous, and disrespectful. So why did she develop romantic feelings for Mr. B?

#### 2.2 Key Aspects Indicative of Stockholm Syndrome

One of the causes of Stockholm Syndrome is the strong worship consciousness, which means that humans instinctively have a sense of worship for the strong. When in a closed environment, the person who holds the right to survive of others becomes the stronger one, thus obtaining the subconscious admiration and worship of the other. In the novel, Mr. B holds significant power over Pamela, both socially and economically. He confines her, limits her freedom, and exerts psychological pressure. This power dynamic is central to Stockholm syndrome, where the victim feels powerless and dependent on the captor.

In a hierarchical era, it is reasonable that Pamela can not go beyond the limit of the time. The nature of master-servant relationships in 18th-century Britain was patriarchal rather than

contractual. Firstly, servant work was still regarded as a "duty" and had not been integrated into the capitalist value system. Secondly, the nobility and bourgeoisie, following feudal traditions, still treated their servants as if they were their own children. Moreover, given that masters and servants lived under the same roof, so close to each other, a purely contractual relationship between them was never possible. (ZHANG Hu, 2024) When Mr. B proposed to her, she is worried that "for such a good man's love, I am too unworthy to possess." At this time, Pamela no longer cares about Mr. B's previous frivolity and philandering, and has reached a compromise with Mr. B and the entire upper class. Pamela's initial resistance is a form of self-preservation, but as the novel progresses, she adapts to her circumstances. Her eventual acceptance and affection for Mr. B can be seen as a psychological strategy to survive and find stability in a hostile environment.

Apart from the influences of the class discipline, Mr. B's changes also contribute to Pamela's affection for him. Mr. B alternates between kindness and cruelty, a tactic that can create emotional confusion and dependency in the victim. This manipulation fosters a sense of unpredictability, making Pamela more susceptible to developing an emotional bond as a coping mechanism. Over time, Mr. B's behavior changes as he begins to genuinely repent for his actions and treat Pamela with more respect. This shift can lead Pamela to perceive him as a complex individual capable of kindness, reinforcing her emotional attachment.

Despite her initial fear and resistance, Pamela eventually marries Mr. B and seems to develop genuine affection for him. This transition from fear to love is characteristic of Stockholm syndrome, where the victim's perception of the captor becomes more positive over time.

Pamela's relationship with Mr. B exhibits several features consistent with Stockholm syndrome. The power imbalance, psychological manipulation, and her eventual emotional attachment to Mr. B align with the characteristics of the syndrome. However, it's also essential to view Pamela's story within its historical and literary context, where themes of virtue, social mobility, and moral redemption play significant roles. This dual perspective enriches the understanding of Pamela's complex emotional journey and the broader implications

of her relationship with Mr. B.

### 3. Conclusion

Pamela's reaction to Mr. B's numerous inappropriate behaviors seems strong. She merely hopes to use her noble virtues to move and conquer her master's evil intentions. This ideology of the heroine actually fully reflects the manipulation and influence of male discourse on female emotions. Only women like Pamela, who strictly adhere to the doctrine, respect themselves, remain unaffected by external temptations, and show absolute loyalty to their husbands, are accepted by their husbands and the entire patriarchal society. (WEI Liying & YAO Dongmei, 2012) From the denouement of the novel, it appears on the surface that Mr. B's disciplinary power has failed because Pamela, through her steadfast resistance, has reformed Mr. B, successfully freeing herself from her confinement and becoming Mr. B's wife. In reality, however, the ultimate goal of Mr. B's "training" was still achieved. Even though Mr. B chose to let Pamela return home, she ultimately came back to him willingly. She did not become Mr. B's submissive lover, but she did become his compliant wife. After marriage, Pamela's every word and action catered to Mr. B's expectations and demands. Therefore, Mr. B's disciplinary power actually succeeded. He effectively transferred Pamela from a physical prison into the intangible prison of marriage he had crafted. (GAN Letao, 2022)

Being "confined" is not only the dilemma of Pamela, the heroine of the novel, but also the dilemma of British women at that time. Women, in order to truly achieve equality and freedom and no longer be "confined", they cannot rely on men to liberate them. Instead, they need to stand on their own feet and gain independent economic status and political rights through their own wisdom and talent. At the same time, we should bear it in mind that forced possession, confinement, painstaking verbal torture and snooping (referring to Mr. B secretly opening every letter Pamela wrote to her parents) are not true love, they are a kind of pathological possession. A truly healthy relationship should be based on equal respect for each other's dignity and privacy. When involved in such an intimate relationship, women should remain conscious and independent and avoid falling into the trap of becoming victims of Stockholm Syndrome.

### References

- GAN Letao. (2022). "Pamela Forever 'Imprisoned': The Tragic Elements in the Image of Pamela." *Appreciation of Famous Literary Works*, (24), 103-107.
- Samuel Richardson. (1998). *Pamela*. Translated by Wu Hui. Nanjing: Yilin Press.
- WEI Liying, YAO Dongmei. (2012). Constructing an Illusory Female Discourse Empire — On Pamela's Discourse Power. *Social Science Front*, (10), 135-139+3-6.
- XIA Guiju. (2023). Interpreting the Power Struggle Between the Male and Female Protagonists in 'Pamela' Based on Foucault's Theory of Power Discourse. *Appreciation of Famous Literary Works*, (18), 127-129.
- ZENG Xiaxing, DING Yong, CHEN Han. (2023). The formation and response of Stockholm Effect in hostage crisis negotiations. *Journal of Beijing Police College*, (05), 87-92.
- ZHANG Hu. (2024). "'Virtue Unrewarded': The Servant Problem and Class Discipline in Richardson's 'Pamela'." *English literature studies*, (01), 29-47.