

Ladies Lusting for the Conservative:

Enhancing Conservative Didacticism through Morals and Marketing in Samuel Richardson's

Pamela and E. L. James's *Fifty Shades of Grey*

E. L. James's *Fifty Shades of Grey* series is undeniably popular franchise that has sparked a world-wide phenomenon crossing cultures, sexual orientations, age, and sex. To some, this may be surprising due to the sexual content of the novel: an exploration of a virginal college graduate's controversial relationship with a slightly older, very rich and successful man with surprising non-normative sexual preferences. This is not a revolutionary concept or limited phenomenon within literature, however. Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, published in the eighteenth century, explores a similar controversial relationship between a serving maid and her wealthy and powerful master which defied the class hierarchy embraced by Richardson's society. These texts created a media frenzy proclaiming shock at the erotic content. However there is also a distinctly conservative core to the romantic relationships where the protagonist is undeniably submissive to her partner. The popularity and controversial subject matter of these texts begs the question "what is it about these submissive females in relationships of social inequality so enticing to such a wide readership?". This essay will argue that the popularity of these texts is initially derived from the taboo relationship between the virtuous female and her debaucher suitor. However, these texts ultimately gain iconic status because of the conservative ideology at the core of these controversial relationships that is enhanced through the marketing and publishing strategies used to promote the novels.

Within the context of this analysis, the term "controversial" in *Pamela* and *Fifty Shades of Grey* refers to the subversive or non-normative qualities of the romantic or sexual relationship

between the protagonists. The relationships violate societal conventions through the disruption of class hierarchies in Richardson's text, and sexual practices in *Fifty Shades of Grey*. The taboo socio-economic aspect of Richardson's text is a result of the economic aspects in marriage and the rising "servant problem" in eighteenth century Britain due to the changing relationship between servants and masters. James addresses a cultural conception of "normal" sexuality in through the exploration of BDSM (bondage/discipline, dominant/submissive, sadist/masochist) relationships by a virginal young woman. While more openly discussed since the novel's release, BDSM is still displayed as a non-normative sexual relationship in our culture through the attitudes of the characters in the novel. The controversial romances, however, are ultimately undermined by the authors' manipulations of the very of the conventions that make these relationships subversive and shocking.

Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* is an epistolary work that follows the budding relationship and eventual marriage between a virtuous servant and her master. This relationship begins with Pamela's master, Mr. B., making unwanted romantic advances upon her while she desperately tries to maintain her virtue. He is initially attracted to her because of her beauty; however, as he begins to consume her letters he becomes attracted to her intelligence and virtue. Because of her rejection of his advances, he abducts her to his country estate where he tries to seduce and rape her. Despite his actions, Pamela maintains her virtue, eventually falls in love with him, and, despite the societal conventions to the contrary, marries him.

While sexual interactions between a master and servant were not uncommon in Richardson's society, the marriage at the conclusion of the novel contradicts the rigid class structure. Despite the social mobility in the middle and lower classes, "it would be wrong to suggest that the Establishment welcomed intrepid social climbers with open arms. Recent

research has shown how hard it was to break into landed society at the highest level” (Porter 50). This is due in large part to the status of women as it relates to a woman’s ability to marry. Marriage was considered an economic relationship wherein it was still popular to choose a wife based on the assets she would contribute to her husband. This was due in large part to a woman’s inability to own property because of their legal status. When a woman was unmarried, all of her assets belonged to her father or male guardian but would be used as a dowry to indicate her worth and class. Once married, these possessions would be transferred to her husband. Robert Porter in his work “English Society in the Eighteenth Century” characterizes the status of women by citing Richardson’s contemporaries:

“In common law, wives had no rights over their children or to matrimonial property . . . This was because ‘in marriage husband and wife are one person, and that person is the husband’, as Sir William Blackstone deftly explained, glossing ‘the very being, or legal existence, or woman is suspended through marriage . . . with all their moveable goods so soon as they are married are *in potestate viri*, at will and disposition of the husband’; even a woman’s ‘very necessary apparel, by the law, is not hers, in property’” (Porter 24).

As a mere maid in his household, Pamela would have had no goods to contribute to her husband. Because of this, Pamela’s ability to contribute economically to the marriage would make the union improbable if not impossible.

Moreover, a woman was also seen as to have her socio-economic status absorbed by her husband wherein she would become the class of her husband. Mr. B. speaks to this in his condemnation of his sister asking “Where can the Difference be between a Beggar’s Son marry’d be a Lady; or a Beggar’s Daughter make a Gentleman’s Wife?” to which Mr. B. states”

The Difference is, a Man ennobles the Woman he takes, be she *who* she will; and adopts her into his own Rank, be it *what* it will: But a Woman, tho'ever so nobly born debases herself by a mean Marriage, and descends from her own Rank, to his she stoops to" (Richardson 422). This indicates that, while a woman may raise her position through marriage, the rank is dependent on the men. Were they to be of a lower status, the woman's rank would be forfeit. This indicates that not only did the women have no power over their own possessions, but they had no right or ownership of their class. This can be seen as empowering for people of lower birth, such as Pamela, but not of women of higher birth.

This, however, is only one aspect of the rigid class hierarchy. The larger barrier between the marriage of a noble and his servant is the social stigma that would follow as a result of the rising "servant problem" in Richardson's society. Kristina Straub defines this term as "a collection of hopes and fears that clustered around a member of the household whose mixed contractual and affective status formed the basis from many of the contradictions embodied in the family under early capitalism" in her work *Domestic Affairs: Intimacy, Eroticism, and Violence between Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (6). While previously servants had been bound to their masters because of a sense of duty, this relationship was altering to be based solely on an economic basis.

While this fear was not wholly recognized until the nineteenth century, the servant problem originated in the eighteenth century and was addressed in texts such as Richardson's *Pamela*. In essence, the "servant problem" is the fear of the employers regarding the changing identity and power of servants through the evolution of the servant's contractual obligations to their masters. Pamela represents this fear through the closeness that develops between a maid and her master and the social upheaval that would follow. Because of the steadily rising wages

of servants, the social mobility of the lower and middle classes were strengthening. This caused a paranoia in the upper class wherein people were afraid that this increased mobility would lead to the disintegration of the class system altogether. They believed that this would lead to a society wherein not only would there be little of a distinction between mistress and maid, but also an interloping and intermarriage of the classes. Part of these fears also included the belief/fear that servants were immoral and would do anything for money.

These attitudes are represented in Richardson's text through the reactions of Pamela's parents and Lady Davers to Pamela's union with Mr. B.. The parents indicate the strict class structure through their misgivings of their daughters new station in life to which they say "But our chief Trouble is, and indeed a very great one, for fear you should be brought to any thing dishonest or wicked, by *being so set above yourself*" (Richardson 13, my emphasis). This reaction followed Pamela's news that she was gifted her mistress's old clothing. By wearing her mistress's old clothing, she was a walking reminder of the servant problem as her physical manifestation demonstrated the lessening of the class difference. This clothing acts as a literal manifestation of the inability to discern mistress from maid through one of the most common class distinctions, clothing. Even though they are of a lower socio-economic status, her parents are concerned with the ramifications of their daughter acting above their station.

Likewise, the fear of social mobility involved what the upper echelons worried would be a dilution of the ruling elite through the creation of a middle class. This fear is evident through Pamela's marriage to Mr. B. and Lady Davers's reaction. In addition to contravening the power relationship between servant and master, the marriage would raise her above her meager social standing to the class of her former employers through the policies previously described. Prior to their marriage, Lady Davers decrees "either you will have her for a kept Mistress, or for a wife . .

. as to the *other* [making her your wife] . . . you would be utterly inexcusable. Consider, Brother, that ours is no up-start Family; but is as ancient as the best in the Kingdom; and, for several Hundreds of Years, it has never been known that the Heirs of it have disgraced themselves by unequal Matches . . . I, and all mine, will renounce you for ever, if you can descend so meanly; and I shall be ashamed to be called your sister” (Richardson 257). Like the nobility at large, Lady Davers detests the idea that she will find herself related to someone she previously considered her inferior. By marrying a servant, Mr. B. would lessen the gap between the nobility and what they considered inferior people by elevating a maid to the mistress of a vast estate.

E.L. James’s text follows many similar plot elements and themes of Richardson’s text. Like Pamela, Anastasia is of a lower socio-economic status than the man who pursues her, Christian Grey. The plot follows by exploring Anastasia’s attempts to understand her new role and the new rules of her role. This role is challenged by several people around the protagonists. However it is eventually accepted by society. Anastasia’s relationship with Grey is challenged not because of her class standing but because of a different societal taboo, one that is derived from the sexual practices of the male protagonist.

The taboo relationship created in James’s text is a result of Grey’s practice of BDSM. As employed in this novel, BDSM refers to a relationship between a dominant partner and his submissive that is punished only if she violates a clause of their agreement or disobeys her dominant. As a “dom” and a sadist, Grey enjoys having women in his complete control and enjoys being able to punish them for their indiscretions. In his previous relationships with women, he controlled facets of their life ranging from their sexual experiences, which includes when and how they have sex, to their eating, sleeping and domestic habits. This even extends to their physical representation of themselves. However, the BDSM relationship described by

James is fairly conservative in its negotiation of the punishment aspect. As part of a sadism/masochist relationship, the dominant inflicts physical pain on the submissive to produce sexual gratification for both parties. This can involve physical force, sex toys, or any variety of objects. In *Fifty Shades of Grey*, however, the violent aspect of the relationship is used as a repercussion that Anastasia loathes and feels degraded by. Because of this, the discipline aspect of BDSM is used to control and circumvent Anastasia's independence.

This relationship is shown to be controversial in the text because of the attitudes of Christian Grey once he reveals his transgressive sexuality. While he thoroughly enjoys his sexual "deviances" in private, Grey demonstrates the disapproval of the general public through his own fears of Anastasia's reaction to his deviances. When Grey tells Anastasia of his sexual preferences, he fears that she will never want to speak to him. This can be seen even prior to his disclosure when he says "Once you're enlightened, you probably won't want to see me again" (James 74). Likewise, her friends show their disapproval of his sexuality through their concern for Anastasia's welfare. For example, her roommate Kate fears "he's dangerous. Especially for someone like you" (James 39). While some may not consider BDSM an abnormal or controversial sexual expression, James creates the air of condemnation through the various characters' criticism and distrust of Grey's practices.

Both authors manipulate the elements that make their texts subversive to create a conservative core that resonates through the text. Richardson normalizes the relationship between Mr. B. and Pamela by lessening the very factor that makes their relationship controversial: her class. The fears encapsulated in the servant problem are undermined in Richardson's text through the elevated social standing Richardson creates from Pamela prior to her marriage. The romance between Mr. B. and Pamela is normalized in the text through

Pamela's distinctions from other servants. These distinctions are derived from her physical appearance, education, and ideals.

Pamela is shown to be distinctive from the rest of the serving class first through her appearance which has been elevated after the death of her mistress. As described by her parents, Pamela has been transformed by her dead mistress "who took such care of you . . . and for Three Years past has always been giving you Cloaths and Linen, and everything that a Genteel woman need not be ashamed to appear in"(Richardson 13). As part of the contractual relationship between a mistress and her servants, the servants were often clothed in some form by their mistress. However, Pamela's mistress takes this one step further by bequeathing Pamela the clothing of a wealthy mistress. While this is not described as elaborately embroidered or other such attributes of fine clothing, it none the less elevates her from the rest of the serving class as it visually distinguishes her from the rest of the serving class. This indicates an internal distinction of social standing in Pamela's heritage decreasing the socio-economic gap between herself and Mr. B. As such, Mr. B.'s attraction to her is legitimized.

Her education likewise distinguishes her from the rest of her class. This education is a result of her mistress's care towards her as it was the "Lady's Goodness had put me to write and cast Accompts, and made me a little expert at my Needle, and other Qualifications *above my Degree*" (Richardson 11, my emphasis). As her clothing elevates her above the status of a simple servant, this quote demonstrates that her education likewise indicates that she is of a higher class, or destined to be. Likewise, she does not hold morals common in the serving class. This can largely be seen in her fidelity to her parents and her insistence on her virtue. The distinction of her morality is demonstrated through her refusal to sacrifice her virginity to her master, as was the common practice at this time (Porter 97).

By placing Pamela so far above the station of a conventional servant, Richardson portrays the marriage as a consequence of Pamela's personal attributes that raise her so far above her station rather than the mixing of the classes. By this, I mean that because Pamela is not portrayed as an ordinary servant, and as such the marriage between the two is made far less controversial. Rather than portray a romance between a common servant and her master, *Pamela* displays a marriage between a master and a person in his employment who has the appearance of someone in the middle class. This elevated characterization is increased as the editions of the text progress wherein Pamela's diction becomes increasingly formal and less of that of an ordinary serving girl. These distinctions naturalize both Mr. B.'s attraction to her and their eventual marriage transforming it from challenging the social order to a didactic romance that demonstrates the rewards of a virtuous life.

The controversial sexuality of *Fifty Shades of Grey* is similarly decreased through James's alteration of the very aspect that made the relationship controversial: Grey's sexual preferences. This is a result of James positioning BDSM preferences as something to be cured, not something to be engaged in by healthy and willing adults. James positions BDSM fantasies as a result of Grey's previous sexual trauma, not an active choice by a grown man. By doing so, James diminishes the controversy surrounding BDSM. Grey cites his troubled past regarding his mother and, legally, sexual assault at the hands of an older woman as the causes for his lifestyle. Because of this, BDSM is shown to be a corruptive force that Anastasia cures, not a lifestyle to be encouraged. The first aspect of this past is his relationship with his mother, or lack thereof. Grey cites his desire to inflict pain on women as a result of his birth mother's abandonment and as a way to reciprocate the pain of her abandonment through physical pain to others. The second element of this troubled past is his inappropriate sexual relationship with an older woman while

he was in his teens. Already a troubled teen, this woman “tutored” him in the BDSM lifestyle. As a result, this sexuality is represented as the last resort of damaged people rather than a conscious choice. Anastasia’s participation in these acts is likewise not shown to be an educated decision. A virgin until she met Grey, she had what can only be described as a crash course in sexual interactions. Likewise, she does not enjoy many of the aspects of this relationship. Instead, she participates in these aspects as a way to cure Grey of what is positioned as a defect.

While some may argue that the BDSM relationship is liberating and empowering because Anastasia makes the conscious choice to enter into a submissive relationship, it has little to do with my analysis as Anastasia herself feels degraded by the several aspects of the relationship. Regardless of her decision to be submissive to him, the narrative encourages the conservative values inherent in her submissive role outside of the sexual relationship. Thus her willingness to participate in these practices does not empower Anastasia. Instead it causes her to be emotionally unstable as she frequently breaks down and weeps uncontrollably after her sexual encounters with Grey. Similarly, the BDSM lifestyle isn’t encouraged in the novel or displayed as a healthy expression of sexuality. Instead, Grey becomes less and satisfied with this expression of sexuality and moves towards a more conventional sexual relationship.

The narratives also engrain a conservatism that is didactic in nature that lessens the controversy created by the romances. The conservative core residing within these relationships is evident in the power structure reinforced that places the men in control of the submissive woman. Likewise, the works both have an underlying Christian morality that is enforced through the characterization of the female protagonists as virtuous and thus worthy of their wealthy suitors. Because of their virtuous behavior, the women are able to attract these men and

ultimately tame their sexual perversions. This conversion results in the epitome of Christian happiness: marriage and children.

One important element of the conservatisms of both texts can be seen in the female protagonists who are virginal and virtuous compared to the men trying to debauch them. Pamela virtue is far more obvious than that of Anastasia Steele due to the lack of premarital sex. Despite Mr. B.'s numerous assaults and high jinxes, Pamela retains her virtue, which was superincumbent on her virginity. Had she lost that, her meager social standing as a servant would have been degraded even further. Her adherence to societal conventions of chastity is taken so far in the text that she contemplates suicide rather than succumbing to the humiliation and disappointment of her parents that would result from surrendering her virginity to Mr. B.. As such, "[Pamela] function[s] as [an] exemplary figure struggling toward Christian heroism in a hostile environment" according to Jerry C. Beasley in his essay "Romance and the 'New' Novels of Richardson, Fielding and Smollett" (443-444).

The hostile environment Beasley refers to is all the more compelling due to both the ferocity of Mr. B.'s attacks and his previous success. Prior to his assaults of Pamela, Mr. B. seduced another woman of lower class and impregnated her. Refusing to be tricked into marriage by her family he eventually adopts the child, however never attached himself to her mother. The cause for his abandonment of her, rather than a marriage between the two, was a result of the class difference and what he believed was her family's scheming to elevate their own station. By succumbing to his seduction, she demonstrated what he believed to be an indication of her inferiority and thus made her undeserving of marriage. Because of Pamela's refusals, Mr. B. shows more ferocity in his pursuit of Pamela even going so far as to dress as a woman in an attempt to rape her. Because of his attempts, prior success, and general

characterization, “Pamela Andrews, with all the wit, cunning, and energy that give life to her character, is . . . projected as an almost flawless creature, a romantic heroine re-cast as a serving maid” (Beasley 445). This idealized characterization results in Pamela acting as a prescriptive role model. Her story acts as an example of the rewards that are the result of a woman’s adherence to behaviors harped on by society. These attributes also include obedience which will be discussed regarding Mr. B’s conversion.

As previously stated, a woman’s virtue during the eighteenth century was meant to be her utmost prized possession. Richardson’s heroine follows this belief nearly to her death as demonstrated when she threatens to kill herself beside the lake of Mr. B.’s country estate. Earlier in the novel, Pamela affirms her commitment to her virtue when writing to her parents “I will die a thousand Deaths, rather than be dishonest any way . . . for altho’ I have liv’d above myself for some Time past, yet I can be content with Rags and Poverty, and Bread and Water, and will embrace them rather than forfeit my good Name, let who will be the Tempter” signing her letter “Your dutiful Daughter *till Death*” (Richardson 15; my emphasis). This insistence on virtue is mimicked by authority figures of the novel such as Pamela’s parents. When responding to their daughter, her parents write:

“Yes my dear Child, we fear- you should be *too* grateful,- and reward him with that Jewel, your Virtue, which no Riches, nor Favour, nor any thing in this Life, can make up to you . . . the Loss of our dear Child’s Virtue, would be a Grief that we could not bear, and would bring our grey Hairs to the Grave at once. If you love *us* then, if you value *God’s* blessing, and *your own* future Happiness, we both charge you to stand upon your Guard; and, if you find the least Attempt made upon your Virtue, be sure you leave everything behind you, and come away

to us; for we had rather see you all cover'd with Rags, and even follow you to the Church-yard [the grave], than have it said, a Child of ours preferr'd worldly Conveniences" (Richardson 14).

The effect of this discussion of virtue so immediately in the text is to inscribe the attitude the readership should strive for in their own lives. Richardson imparts onto his readers the seriousness and importance of virtue through its insistence by even the lower classes. While it is implied Pamela's parents were once of the middle class, the emphasis of their poor stature indicates they have fallen far below this socioeconomic status. As such, their insistence on Christian values over monetary gain demonstrates Richardson's challenge of "the servant problem." Because of the shifting relationship between master and servant from one of duty to one of monetary gain, servants were often viewed as immoral and willing to do anything to earn money. Their insistence that Pamela relinquish her worldly possession in favor of her chastity thus stands as their exceptional morality and the entitlement of their daughter for such an auspicious marriage.

The insistence on female virtue is subversive to the standing of servants and further distinguishes Pamela from all of those around her. During the eighteenth century, servants were in "the posture of children" wherein masters were expected to train and supervise their servants. This duty was performed by the mistress who was in charge of the "regulation of servant in general and maidservants in particular. If masters are depicted as the family's primary religious leaders, mistresses provide the day-to-day guidance that supports that leadership" (Straub 85). Pamela challenges this relationship by "set[ting] off a cultural revolution in thinking about the female domestic, and allowed for her conceptualization as a moral subject, sharing values, including chastity, with her mistress" (Straub 88). Because of this societal conception of

servants, Pamela's insistence on her virtue is all the more didactic and iconic. It begs the readers to follow the example of one who is supposed to have to be governed by others to make the moral decisions and yet is able to act morally in their absence. Without the governance of a mistress or similarly positioned woman, Pamela still strives to remain pure and virtuous. Richardson utilized this conception to demonstrate how virtue should be engrained in every aspect of a woman's countenance and would ultimately be rewarded, as the subtitle of the work implies.

Pamela also demonstrates the Christian or Puritanical value of obedience. This obedience is hierarchal and dependent on her socio-economic status. As an unmarried woman and servant, she is expected to be obedient to her parents, her social betters, and, in particular, to her master. Her obedience to her parents is evident in her desire to please them by following the example they have set for her. This can most obviously be seen in her insistence of her virtue as has been previously described in which she follows her parent's wishes and tries to kill herself rather than lose her "jewel". Likewise, she strives to follow the instructions of those around her despite their own sentiments towards her. For example, when Lady Davers brings ladies with her to Pamela's room, Pamela stands waiting for their instructions.

This is not a complete obedience, however. The one person whom Pamela frequently disobeys is one in which she should obey implicitly because of her occupation: Mr. B.. However, this disobedience is not condemned by Richardson or Pamela's society because of the eventual conversion of Mr. B. through the taming of his sexuality. While Pamela is shown to obey her master, her obedience dissolves in instances where Mr. B makes sexual advances towards her. When he gives her a contract outlining their possible sexual relationship, for example, she constantly voices her disagreement with being made a mistress. One clause

stipulated that Mr. B. would “directly make you a Present of 500 Guineas, for your own Use” in addition to “directly mak[ing] over to you a Purchase I lately made in Kent, which bring in 250 l. per Annum” if she would “be Mistress of my Person and Fortune as such as if the foolish Ceremony [marriage] had passed” (Richardson 189). Despite the monetary gain she would receive, she resolutely refuses him saying “I dread your Will to ruin me is as great as your Power. Yet, Sir, will I dare to tell you, that I will make no Freewill Offering of my Virtue” (Richardson 190). Once married, however, this disobedience is erased as Pamela becomes the dutiful wife and Mr. B is converted from an adulterer and seducer to husband.

This conversion is emphasized in the text in the ending of the novel where the didactic properties of the text are perhaps most evident. In this section Richardson summarizes the moral lesson to be learned from each of the characters beginning with Mr. B.. In this summarization, Mr. B. is described as a “fashionable Libertine, who allow’d himself in the free indulgence of his Passions” yet the reader is encouraged not to condemn him as “he betimes sees his Errors” (Richardson 500). The effect of this conversion is to demonstrate the ways in which Richardson’s readership may strive to better themselves. Like Mr. B., they may have sinned; however, like him, they may strive above it.

Despite the erotic element to *Fifty Shades of Grey*, the novel preaches many similar conservative values emphasized in Richardson’s text. From her initial characterization, Anastasia is differentiated from the contemporary college freshmen through her virginity, regaining an 18th century notion of virtue. This aspect can still be seen as inscriptive to virtue today as a woman’s morality is often intertwined with the amount of sexual partners she has had. This can be seen in modern cultural conceptions of female sexuality wherein women with multiple sexual partners at one time are often denoted as whores and looked down upon for their behavior. The virgin can

be seen as idealized in this way through the moral ascriptions assigned to women displaying sexuality in popular culture.

This attribute, and the innocence that is implied with it, distances Anastasia from the sexualized character common in society and erotic literature. Unlike those surrounding her, she is “an innocent” (James 39). This is shown through her inability to interact with the narrative’s debaucher without blushing; and eighteenth century indication of chastity and innocence. In her early meetings with Grey, and nearly all subsequent encounters in the series, she finds her “cheeks heat[ing] at the realization” of his sexual advances” (James 26). Their relationship is characterized and dependent on the “unnerving effect” he holds on her as it provides the readers with an essential ignorant heroine to whom they can relate, if not in sexual inexperience then through their own ignorance of a BDSM relationship (James 12). This aspect of virtue can even be seen in the descriptions of her arousal. For example, while in the hardware store, Grey’s presence automatically makes Anastasia “blush furiously” (James 25). Even the issue of her sexual desire for another person is shown to be unexplored to any depth as his mere presence causes a “current” of sexual energy “zapping through me like I’ve touch an exposed wire” that she feels “all the way down to somewhere dark and *unexplored*”(James 27, my emphasis). Likewise she is also naïve as to the implications of Grey’s discourse with her as she constantly questions his reactions. These questions litter the pages of James’s novel such as “Am I that funny?” or “Why is he so interested?” or “What does that mean?” in regard to his constant chuckling at her misunderstanding his intentions (James 27, 28, 47).

This virtuous behavior is shown to be a requisite even of Grey despite his sexual intentions. This is evident in a contract dictating the limits of their sexual relationship. In the contract Grey specifically cites “The Submissive will conduct herself in a respectful and modest

manner at all times” (James 173). By having such a sexually inexperienced heroine, James portrays desirable women as those that are ignorant of sex, the exact sentiment in Richardson’s text. This is reinforced by Grey’s own characterization which portrays him as the ultimate male specimen. Not only is he exceedingly wealthy, he is described as being so attractive as to have a power over all of the women in the room. His attraction to Anastasia reinforces the convention of virtue as he quickly overlooks more sexually experienced women in favor of the “unsullied” Anastasia.

However, the loss of her virtue is not looked upon with shame. Instead her virtue is sacrificed, like Pamela’s obedience, to the conversion and healing of the novel’s would be hero; Christian Grey. Through their sexual relationship, even with its sexual deviances, Grey is eventually converted from his “abhorrent” sexuality and brought back to what the novel describes as “vanilla” sex (James 355). The abhorrence of the sexuality is phrased through Grey’s fear of Anastasia’s response to learning of his BDSM tastes in which he perpetually fears that she will leave him because of his practice. This sentiment is reiterated in times of crisis as Grey constantly feels judged for what he believes to be his perversion. For example, Grey states he engages in this behavior because he is “fifty shades of fucked up” which Anastasia then tries to cure through her acceptance of the submissive role (James 267). In this way, James positions BDSM as the indication of a deeper psychological pain that can be cured by the love of a woman. It is not positioned as a willing choice by Grey, nor does Anastasia ever fully embrace the lifestyle. Instead, the punishment aspect of their relationship is something that Anastasia uses to force Grey to talk about his past. For example, when Anastasia wants to know why Grey won’t allow her to touch him, she bargains for the information by allowing him to punish her:

“Tell me and you can [spank me]” (James 361). Like Pamela’s disobedience, Anastasia’s loss of virtue acts as the catalyst for his eventually conversion to more “vanilla” appetites.

Not only does the copulation lead to marriage and children, but conservative gender roles are simultaneously inscribed. In their relationship, Grey takes the stereotypical dominant role as protector and provider. This role is directly referenced in the text when Grey describes his protective attitude as “part of my role is to look after you” (James 286). Likewise, Anastasia takes the submissive, supportive role that enables her to cater to his every whim.

The submissiveness idealized in Pamela is equally evident in Anastasia through the very relationship that makes the text so controversial. Because of the nature of their BDSM relationship, Anastasia must submit to Christian in any way that he so chooses. This is outlined in a contract between the two before the relationship begins. In this contract, Grey asserts control over aspects of her life ranging from her physical appearance to her living arrangements. Prior to entering into this relationship, however, she does argue with him for limited rights. For example, one stipulation Grey generally holds with his submissives is control over how much they eat and their sleeping habits. Anastasia refuses to do so, however she only feels comfortable voicing this via email in the same way Pamela only felt comfortable doing so in paper. This initial assertion of independence is undermined through the submissive attitude she projects when she is in his presence. Prior to the finalization of the parameters of their sexual relationship, for example, she questions whether “I should ask permission” to leave the breakfast table (James 76). This submissiveness is reinforced when he later becomes her boss as he is then able to regulate even her relationships with coworkers. By portraying the woman in such a submissive way, James creates a heroine who is the antithesis to the “modern” woman. As such,

she ingrains her series with a Christian dogmatic prescription for the idealized female: subservient, obedient, and, eventually, maternal.

Likewise, their sexual relationships lead both parties to a hetero-normative, Christian relationship with conservative gender roles. By hetero-normative, I mean that James and Richardson privilege the expectation of Christina relationships: marriage and eventual procreation. Richardson's text does this with little fuss to the contrary. As Mr. B. comes to realize his faults and curbs his sexual appetite for Pamela, a marriage quickly follows. While not included in the novel, there is a metaphorical procreation through Pamela's acceptance and adoption of Mr. B. illegitimate child from his past. After hearing of her existence, Pamela quickly takes on a motherly persona as she immediately seeks to remove the child from the far off school to someplace far closer to Mr. B. By doing so, the child acts as an indication of the children that are to come from Pamela's union with Mr. B.

While not in the first volume, Anastasia and Grey eventually follow a similar pattern by marrying and having children. Instead of maintaining their sexual relationship, the BDSM aspect is used as a stepping stone to the actualization of a Puritan ideology surrounding male female relationships. While it does not take place in the first novel of series, Grey and Anastasia eventually marry and have children. This perpetuates the Christian ideology of the text through the glorification of these acts. Rather than simply have a sexual relationship, the sexual relationship evolves to a more normalized sexual relationship that results in a conventional marriage and children. Thus the atypical sexuality ultimately dissolves to the most conventional of male/female relationships.

These conservative values are not only enforced through the texts themselves, but also through the marketing and publishing methods used to generate popularity. In this context,

marketing and publishing methods connote the physical appearance of the text that may include the title of the piece as well as its physical packaging, and available formats. This also refers to the publicity, either by the publisher or the author that was used to promote the texts. As technology has evolved, the analysis of *Fifty Shades of Grey* will include the influence of social media.

The greatest link between the marketing strategies of these texts was the initial means of promotion: word of mouth. Both works were promoted by the audience that consumed the texts. This was due in large part to the authors self-publishing the texts. According to Keymer and Sabor's text "*Pamela in the Marketplaces: Literary Controversy and Print culture in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland*" cites the popularity as reliant on the gossip surrounding the text as well as celebrity endorsements: "In a culture of sociability and polite gossip, performances like these- [of reader's praising the text at length in addition to] a celebrity endorsement in a fashionable spa, a promotional sermon from a metropolitan pulpit – were worth whole bales of conventional newspaper advertisement" (25).

Likewise, James and her publishers took advantage of the digital world both through the e-book craze as well as social advertising like Facebook and Twitter. The book was originally self-published by James as a fan fiction of the popular *Twilight* series. Therefore, part of its popularity was gained through the commonalities between the two. However, the text also gained popularity due to word of mouth of the readers through social networking sites where readers were able to give fairly anonymous accounts of their reactions to the text. The text eventually gained a cult following that led Random House paying for the rights to publish it for a wider audience.

By promoting their texts through word of mouth, the authors were able to lessen the didactic properties of the works by instead focusing people's attention on the sensationalist aspects. Richardson did so by distinguished his text from the romances being published at the time by writing in a lower form of literature and including erotic elements (Keymer and Sabor 35). Instead of emphasizing the "religious glosses that larded the text," Richardson provided a product that spoke to the desires of his society. He discovered a market for more salacious romances and wrote something to suite this growing market. The audience can be seen in contemporary reviews of the text wherein the romance aspect, not the didactic, was emphasized and commented upon. One reader, for example, noted that he was interested in the novel because "Things that Sort in English but seldom appearing made me a little curious to see it" (quoted in Keymer and Sabor 22). Likewise, it is important to note that Richardson was not writing high-brow fiction. Instead "*Pamela* is as brashly commercial as a Hollywood blockbuster, not so much a novel as 'a whole cultural event . . . the occasion or organizing principle of a multimedia affair, stretching all the way from domestic commodities to public spectacles, instantly recordable from one cultural mode to the next' (Keymer and Sabor 5). The effect of this technique was to gain an initial popular and loyal readership. By writing a salacious romance, but a romance none the less, Richardson made the work appeal to women who began to worship the novel like a bible. This worship can be seen in the artifacts that women bought to accompany the novel which will be analyzed further on.

Similarly, *Fifty Shades of Grey* relied on the salacious sexual relationship to promote its popularity, though not necessarily in the way James intended. In an ironic turn of events, the bondage aspect of the novel originally turned off its major demographic: housewives. The text has been described as "mommy porn" by nearly all of those writing on James's controversial

series and undeniably her predominant audience is women between the ages of 30 and 50. The sexual elements of bondage and punishment, however, did not initially interest the audience. Instead, many were “first appalled by the graphic sex scenes and the depictions of bondage, gagging and whipping, but that they responded in spite of themselves to the classic romance-novel love story: The man is rich, powerful, well-dressed, dominant yet wounded; the woman a 21-year-old virgin. He ties her up and forces her to call him "sir," sure, but he takes care of her like a princess. It's got it all - the *Pretty Woman* fantasy of being rescued by a guy in a suit, the fixation with chastity as evinced by *Twilight* and a release of responsibility for the stressed modern woman about taking the sexual initiative” (Smith “S&M Sells”). The women were drawn to the texts because of the conventional story romance that is embodied within the texts. However this quote also highlights the element of the BDSM relationship that did draw the readers in: Anastasia’s submission. In this way, the popularity of James’s text is equally reliant on the taboo and controversial plot elements.

Instead of the transgressive sexual acts (the punishment aspect of the BDSM relationship), the *Fifty Shades* franchise gains its popularity from the submission Anastasia is expected to give Grey. This is due to the main audience for the texts: married, working mothers. The primary readership of James’s works are “multi-taskers, says Mr. Osmond [marketing and publicity direct at Random house]. ‘They are workers, wives and mothers, making lots of decisions and fulfilling many roles. They are completely obsessed with Christian . . . who fulfills a number of fantasies. Inside this fantasy Christian makes all the decisions and that’s really appealing” (Delaney “Sex Still Sells”). These women find this relationship appealing for the very reason that feminist cringe: the woman makes no decisions. These women are engaged by a relationship that leaves them a blank slate, with their decisions made for them by a controlling

partner. This reinforces the text's conservative ideology by demonstrating the effectiveness of James's portrayal. Despite all the liberties now available to women, the submissive female role still sparks an interest and a desire in women. As such, James was able to accommodate this desire by portraying the conventional virtuous, submissive woman with an updated twist that simultaneously intrigues and revolts the readers.

While not as intertwined and reliant on the taboo aspect, *Pamela*'s marketing also reinforces the didactic properties. This is accomplished through the subtitle of the text and the distancing of the novel from "romantic" works of the previous age. The subtitle of the text, "Virtue rewarded," emphasizes the inherent didactic initiative of the texts by implying the reward that accompanies a moral lifestyle. Needham characterizes this as a negative aspect as this subtitle focuses the "debate on the 'virtue' of Pamela rather than on her total characterization and solely on her reward rather than on the reward of others" (Needham 436). However, this subtitle augments the groups that became the books audience. The subtitle elevates the text by emphasizing and implicitly stating the desire for the text, to reward virtue. This subtitle and the message that accompanies it altered the readership by adding a group that it was missing. While women were immediately drawn to the text, men took a little more convincing. The subtitle accomplished this by drawing the focus away from the tawdry romance to the religious implications of the texts. This can be seen in the many of the later reviews which direct the attention to the female protagonist who's plights are eventually rewarded by her continued adherence to Christian values. This creates didacticism by encouraging the readership to imitate the virtue of the woman who was so justly *rewarded* for her behavior in the novel, the title character Pamela.

This subtitle also indicates that the conservative aspects of the text were, perhaps not the primary drive for the text's popularity. Instead, it implies that the didactic properties were secondary and had to be emphasized by the exterior of the text. At the time *Pamela* was published, the "English reading public had not totally renounced romantic writing which was to enjoy an enthusiastic revival in some new forms during later decades. But for the moment the prevailing spirit of the age was decidedly anti romantic, as is attested by the continued popularity of Cervantes, Le Sage, and Defoe, and by the excitement over 'anti-romantic' writers like Richardson, Fielding, and Smollet . . . despite their unbelievably valiant heroes, astonishing coincidences, and generally exotic dress these works seem to have concentrated less on the 'marvellous' than on the topical" (Beasley 438). Because of this, "the concessions made by Richardson . . . to a new romance tradition are important, and probably helped [his] 'new species of writing' to gain the notice of the public" (Beasley 450). The romance, therefore, was used as a marketing tool even by the author in order for his text to gain the interest of the public. Because this romance was so intertwined with the morality of the text, the marketing tactics used by Richardson that distinguished it from romantic works enhance the didactic properties by creating a sensationalist air around the text. This drew in the initial readership and evolved into the religious notoriety it received.

In a slightly different manner, *Fifty Shades of Grey* also distinguished itself from its literary genre through the physical appearance of the text and its marketing. Unlike Richardson's text, this differentiation from popular literature does not highlight the didactic properties of the text. Rather, it increases the availability of the text by decreasing the shame involved for the readership. This can be seen very simply in the cover art used. Unlike many pieces of erotic literature featuring busty broads with ripping bodices pressed against a half-

naked man, James's text instead has a far more subtle denotation of the sex acts of the novel: a grey tie. This was purposely done by the publishers and James to alleviate the guilt women feel when pouring over volumes such as these in public.

The inspiration for this choice was the shame the writer felt in her experiences with consuming erotic fiction in public: "E-readers has been very liberating for people because they can read whatever they like with no judgment. In fact I designed the book covers because in my early thirties I read a lot of romantic fiction when I was slogging into and out of London on the Tube - such a hideous journey that I was just buried in these terrible books- and they had these horrible covers with women with their clothes falling off. I hated that, so I designed really discreet covers where nobody would know it's a really salacious novel" (Singh "Fifty Shades of Grey Author"). While commuting to work, she would frequently feel judged by those around her because of the suggestive imagery cover art of the erotic novels, so much so that she eventually began ripping of the covers of the books. Trying to alleviate this fear from her readership, a less sexual image is projected. This created hype and obscurity around the subject matter thus further promoting its popularity. No longer did women have to worry about judgment on the subway while reading their literature. Now, they could inconspicuously consume the text with more privacy from preying eyes.

This image simultaneously adds to the readership and reinforces the conservatism of the text, like Richardson's subtitle, because it foregrounds the submissive aspect of the relationship rather than the sexual. The first novel is graced with the image of a tie. While seemingly random to the casual passer-by, the tie represents the submission of Anastasia because it was one of the props used to bind her while being punished for disobeying Christian. While this admittedly has a sexual aspect intertwined, it underlies the submission of Anastasia to Christian's

complete control. Because this control is shown to exceed the boundaries of their sexual relationship, the tie represents female submission to male authority and dominance in a wider scope. The cover art therefore reinforces and encourages the submission of women through the reward granted to Anastasia. Despite feeling degraded by elements of the submission, represented in the tie, Anastasia's perseverance and commitment to "curing" Grey eventually leads to her own reward. Because she, like the readership, comes to accept elements of the BDSM lifestyle, she is rewarded by becoming the chained apple of his eye and provided for for the rest of her life.

While many consider E L James's work to be a limited phenomenon, literary history shows us otherwise. Utilizing many of the same strategies and plot elements used by Samuel Richardson, James was able to reach major success with her *Fifty Shades of Grey* series by supplying a willing audience with a controversial romance. While Richardson's romance was created through the marriage of people from different socio-economic backgrounds, James mimicked the controversial aspect by introducing a new sexual lifestyle her audience itching for something new. However, these controversial romances contain conservative cores that are used to legitimize the taboo romances. The promotion of these texts through word of mouth relied on this controversial aspect to draw the readers in. This seemingly emphasizes the controversial and illicit aspect of these works however; this is supplanted by marketing techniques used after an initial readership was created.

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