

ROMANCE AND REVOLUTION

by

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I. ROMANCE AND REVOLUTION: AN INTRODUCTION

“It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife” Jane Austen¹

“You know what I don’t get? When like, people write romance stories where two characters are so in love with each other, it’s all magnetism, but they don’t even have fun together, or are even nice to each other sometimes. ‘Our love could level a thousand mountains and conquer a million cities.’ Okay, but are you even friends?” Tumblr²

Novelistic tropes are persistent. This is especially the case in the romance genre. From the early eighteenth century to the present day, a consistent set of themes and motifs emerges. “Romance” is an ambiguous term with multiple associations. There is Medieval romance which includes courtly love, highlights quests for love and knowledge, is didactic, and promotes Christian values and faith. Medieval romances also center narratives around becoming a good knight and keeping one’s troth³ meant for moral or amoral characters. Women in these narratives remain pure and chaste, waiting for their lovers to triumph and find them. Narratives such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Le Morte d’Arthur* could be classified as Medieval Romances. These stories particularly looked at the good and bad elements of court life. Although these are a few consistent elements that can be seen in Medieval romances, Raluca Radulescu notes that the term is broader than these generalized categories. He states one must “acknowledge that the elasticity of the term ‘romance’ in Middle English is so great as to rob it of much

¹ Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*. Puffin Books, 1813. Penguin Classics, 2003.

² Paintinggraves. *Tumblr*, December 8, 2020.

<https://paintinggraves.tumblr.com/post/636946178526806016/ofools-you-know-what-i-dont-get-when-like>

³ Middle English: Truth. From the Oxford English Dictionary: (noun): Belief, a formula of belief, a creed. *Obsolete*.

useful definitional capacity” (Radulescu 33). From this early definition, it is clear that “romance” is hard to pin down.

Moving forward, English Romantic poets of the early nineteenth century such as William Wordsworth, Samuel Tyler Coleridge, and John Keats wrote poetry about the true nature of man, an escape to nature, and emotions surpassing reason. Nicholas Szenczi describes this Romantic period as “a transition from the sensualist empiricism of Locke and Hume to a revival of idealistic doctrines, as the rejection of mechanical materialism in favor of organic theories, as the dethronement of reason and the exaltation of feelings” (180). The desire to write poetry that challenged current political upheaval and thought processes began a new wave of Romantic poetry that pushed the norms of society.⁴

Modern romance novels are also distinct from Medieval Romance, and Romantic poetry; however, romance novels are as hard to pin down as Medieval Romance and Romantic poetry. Novels that specifically highlight the courtship and romance plot have existed in many forms in the past. However, Pamela Regis highlights Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela*, as the model for romance novels that swept the eighteenth century. Although Richardson leaned on older forms of the novel to create *Pamela*, Regis argues that,

Richardson mastered the form of the romance novel, and fully understood

Pamela’s financial vulnerability, both before and after her marriage to Mr. B.

When Richardson chose to focus upon a courtship, he accomplished more than

⁴ The revolution I refer to is the French Revolution (May 5, 1789 – November 9, 1799). The French Revolution demonstrated how precarious power structures can be, as the French monarchy was murdered by the working-class members of society.

simply avoiding fragmented episodic plots at work in the fiction of his contemporaries. In choosing to write a romance novel—the story of the courtship and betrothal of one or more heroines—he had at his disposal the elements of the form and elements of a romance novel⁵... and he exploited them to full advantage. (65)

Not only was *Pamela* incredibly popular upon its release, but its form and characters still influence romance writers today. Richardson's influence can be seen in novels such as *Pride and Prejudice* (Jane Austen), *Jane Eyre* (Charlotte Bronte), *A Room with a View* (E. M. Forster), and more modern texts such as *Fifty Shades of Grey* (E. L. James), *Gabriel's Inferno* (Sylvain Reynard), and *Dirty, Sexy, Saint* (Carly Phillips and Erika Wilde). Although the term romance novel can be seen as a relative term to many books and stories, Regis helpfully provides a guideline for what constitutes a romance novel. According to Regis, these eight criteria are what make up a romance novel:

1. Society defined: when the present circumstances and expectations of a society, community, or town are made clear.
2. The meeting: The scene in which the male and female romantic interests meet for the first time. Regis notes that more than one couple can come together in a novel.
3. The barrier: The conflict in the romance novel: the barrier is anything that keeps the union of heroine and hero from taking place. This barrier can be internal, external, or both.
4. The attraction: When the couple(s) begin to feel attraction on one or both sides.

⁵ Regis highlights eight thematic elements that make up a romance novel. These elements will be addressed later in this chapter.

5. The declaration: When one or both members of the couple make their feelings known. This does not mean that the relationship is solidified.
6. The point of ritual death: The moment in a romance novel when the union of heroine and hero seems completely impossible. It is marked by death or its simulacrum. The point of literal death can look like fainting away into a deathlike sleep, as in *Pamela*, or Ana refusing to return to Christian after she has been punished for the first time in *Fifty Shades of Grey*.
7. The recognition: The point when the couple(s) formally agree to date each other.
8. The betrothal: When the couple(s) is betrothed or married.

Along with these eight elements, Regis notes three more common elements which include

1. A wedding dance or fete.
2. The Scapegoat is exiled.
3. The bad converted. The bad characters in romance novels take the form of a rival lover or the primary antagonist of the story. Sometimes this character has a change of heart and is converted into a good character. (Regis 31-37)

Regis stipulates that these events do not always happen in this order, and some elements may be repeated. All of this paper's primary sources follow this classification of the romance novel except for *Fantomina: or Love in a Maze*, which does not include a betrothal or wedding scene. These criteria are important in narrowing down what does or does not constitute a romance. Similarly, the barrier(s) and point of ritual death define what type of relationship is possible for the protagonists: enemies to lovers, friends to lovers, forbidden romance, or traditional romance. Looking beyond the normal romance

plot shows how society placed barriers on men and women, such as the idea that men need to support women, while women remain chaste until they enter into a heterosexual, monogamous marriage with a man. These concepts were expected to be upheld. In this way, romance can be seen as an act of defiance against a society that upholds classist, sexist, patriarchal values, as the protagonists often break cultural norms to end up with the person they love. However, romances are still characterized by these norms, such as men being the stronger protective sex who convey little emotion to their female lovers, and who practice misogyny and abuse. Because romance plots are fantastical, none of the actions the characters perform matter in these books, as they do not reflect real life. Therefore, problematic elements in a novel can be ignored to enjoy the romance plot.

Multiple romantic subgenres remain popular, including western romance, gothic romance, paranormal romance, historical romance, and religious romance. These subgenres have groups of fans that may like one or more of these subgenres. Although all of these subgenres may contain trauma, abuse, and sexism, rarely do these elements make up the primary barrier of these types of novels. One of the romance novel subgenres that does capitalize on misogynistic, abusive relationships for the sake of the plot and barrier, is the forbidden romance genre. This genre uses male and female relationships that rely on a taboo of some kind to make the romance plot more intense, and the betrothal more satisfying, as the couple triumph over a prudish or strict society when the protagonists are betrothed. When the society that the protagonists live in reprimand and condemn the attempted relationship, when the couple enters into a formal relationship, the couple proves to themselves and society that their relationship is not wrong. An eighteenth-century example of this trope is *Pamela*, where the title character, Pamela, who is a

servant maid, is kidnapped by her wealthy employer, Mr. B., and eventually falls in love with him. In the twenty-first-century, this trope takes the form of the taboo of BDSM in *Fifty Shades of Grey*, and a student-professor relationship in *Gabriel's Inferno*. When looking at the crossover between eighteenth century and twenty-first-century forbidden romance novels, certain plots and themes emerge as core elements of this subgenre. The first is that the heroines must be put in some physical or emotional danger outside and beyond the point of ritual death. Often the heroines are continuously worn down to the point of exhaustion or acquiescence. Heroines that are not emotionally coerced show a stronger sense of self-worth and autonomy. Elizabeth Bennet from *Pride and Prejudice* is one of those characters that is not worn down by Mr. Darcy. Secondly, the heroines are defined by their male lovers and sacrifice their autonomy for the male protagonist's sake. Thirdly, money is the root of the couple's relationship and becomes a barrier to the love plot. Lastly, though not always present, is the fact that the heroines often think that their male lovers' extravagant gift-giving is a means of payment for sexual gratification. By examining these common themes and tropes, much can be said about how romance can influence readers and their expectations of love. Catherine Roach describes the complexity of reading romance and desiring romance in real life. She states,

[s]o you're buffeted by mixed messages about being sexy but not tawdry, independent but in a perfect relationship: today's Superwoman, somehow having and doing it all. You're worn down. You want some time to yourself and you want to talk to other women who understand. You want to relax and play. Here's one possibility: You could read romance stories. (Roach 13)

Thus, Roach establishes how women would like to be independent, happy, and sexy,

while also being in love with a man that loves, protects, and supports them. These two desires do not mesh neatly together. Because of these conflicting desires, women turn to romance novels for an escape where female protagonists can have everything they want and deserve. Although romance novels may provide an escape for women, these same novels have created controversy and detractors as early as the eighteenth century. An example of this can be seen with *Pamela* when fans of the novel were called Pamelists, and those who did not like the novel were called Anti-Pamelists. Similarly, Austen's *Pride and Prejudices* sparked debates over whether Elizabeth was progressive or not. So even if a female protagonist can "have it all," those women are not free from criticism.

If *Pamela* is the progenitor of the romance novel the twenty-first-century equivalent are two popular fanfiction stories, *The University of Edward Mason* and *Master of the Universe*, based on the popular paranormal romance trilogy, *Twilight*, written in 2005 by Stephanie Meyer. Both of these fanfictions had a steady following and pushed the writers to publish their stories in a printed publication. The desire to write fanfiction shows how captivating a story can be. To be able to take characters a person loved and have free reign with them is liberating, as fans can create characters that relate more to their lives and circumstances. Also, fanfiction writers can create more stimulating scenarios. A once relevant example of this is the desire for more sex scenes in the text. Meyer does not include a sex scene in *Twilight* until the fourth book, *Breaking Dawn*, which does not include much detail about the couples' sexual relations.

Meanwhile, Reynard and James include numerous and detailed sex scenes in their erotic writing. Sylvain Reynard's *The University of Edward Mason*⁶, is a non-canonical story

⁶ Edward Mason is Edward Cullen's human name. Once he became a vampire and was adopted by Carlisle Cullen, he changes his last name to Cullen to match his father's.

about Bella Swan being a student of Edward Cullen's in graduate school. Similarly, E.L. James's fanfiction, *Master of the Universe*, tells the story of when Bella meets an enigmatic and rich billionaire, Edward Cullen, and falls in love with him. Once these texts were greenlit for publication, both James and Reynard changed the names of the main characters so no legal action would be taken. Once these books were published, James and Reynard took down their fanfictions from Achieve of Our Own and Fanfiction.net. Although snippets of the original fanfiction can be found online, the original copies are permanently off the internet. These books' successes have created a mass market for romance novels. Although *Fifty Shades of Grey* is more popular, James notes in her acknowledgments that Sylvain Reynard inspired her, and thus *Gabriel's Inferno* is the progenitor of the modern forbidden romance boom. *Fifty Shades of Grey* in particular made reading this type of romance novel more acceptable.⁷ Alison Flood notes in an article for *The Guardian* that "one-hundred-million copies of E.L. James erotic trilogy have now been sold around the world" (par. 1). This statistic came out after the trilogy had been published by Vintage Books two years prior. With the series of novels becoming mainstream, the door was opened for many romance writers to become more prominent and publicly recognized. Whether people were reading *Fifty Shades of Grey* to make fun of it or because they loved it, it became a cultural phenomenon in the early 2010s. *Fifty Shades of Grey* was turned into a film trilogy in 2015, and more recently the sister of Elon Musk, Tosca Musk, has created a romance-themed streaming service called Passionflix, whose only goal is to adapt romance novels as accurately as possible into

⁷ Emanuella Grinberg notes in an article for CNN that part of what made *Fifty Shades of Grey* so acceptable in public was the cover design, which features a simple grey necktie instead of the traditional bodice ripper covers which feature scantily clad men and women. Greenberg, Emmanuella. "Explaining 'Fifty Shades' Wild Success." *CNN*, February 2017.

film adaptations. Passionflix currently has the rights to the *Gabriel's Inferno* trilogy and has made four films so far, with five more coming in the future. This thesis argues despite third and fourth-wave feminist attempts to dismantle hegemonic patriarchal, and classist structures of power, these oppressions remain vital to the romance genre, from the eighteenth century to the present. The genre often utilizes patriarchy and classism to foster suspense and imperil its heroines, yet ultimately, these structures of power are meant to be accepted and seen as reflecting true love. With this in mind, I conclude by highlighting the inclusion of BIPOC and LGBT+ communities in mainstream society to suggest more productive avenues for the genre to explore in the future.

II. POWER: LAND, INDIVIDUALISM, AND LOVE IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

In romance novels, money talks and women listen. Through the control of sex, money, gift-giving, and unequal class status, male protagonists mostly have all the power to themselves in these novels. Land becomes the minima for men to show their lovers that they will be secure with them, and at its maxima, money, and gifts are nothing more than a gross display of Capitalism in a society that struggles with inequality and poverty. In these narratives, money and social rank are often displayed through fashion. After Pamela's mistress, who is her sole means of employment, dies, and Pamela senses a growing attraction toward her from Mr. B., she desires to return to the poverty of her parents. Pamela dreams of her simple "grey Russet [frock] again, and my poor honest Dress, with which you fitted me out" which would suit the hard labor she would perform if she returned home (Richardson 25). Opposite to Pamela's attire is the refinement of Mr. B.'s clothes and dress. In the middle of the eighteenth century, fashion entered the Rococo period. With the help of the single treadle sewing machine and lace and fabric imported from India, the dress of the elite changed rapidly. Charles II unintentionally followed the fashions of Paris and brought about the first real change of attire (Laver 55-62). Mr. B. and his late mother followed these new fashion trends. Mr. B. gifts Pamela some of these expensive clothing articles including

Two suits of *Flanders* lac'd Headcloths, Three Pair of fine Silk shoes, two hardly the worse... and several ribbands and Topknots of all Colours, and Four Pair of fine white Cotton Stockens, and Three Pair of fine Silk ones; and Two Pair of rich Stays, and a Pair of rich Silver Buckles in one Pair of Shoes. (Richardson 19)

Pamela is astounded at the amount of wealth that Mr. B. has just given her. These clothes

would cost years of labor for Pamela. Later in the novel when Pamela and Mr. B. become betrothed and then married, the cost and importance of wearing the proper clothing are brought up again. Mr. B. gifts her three bolts of fabric, of which she will pick the color and pattern. He states clearly in the pseudo-contract, or proposition before their engagement, that “I will, besides, order Patterns to be sent you for chusing four complete Suits of rich Clothes, that you may appear with Reputation, as if you were my Wife. And I will give you two Diamond Rings, and two Pair of Ear-rings, and [a] Diamond Necklace” (Richardson 190). Later, when he is instructing Pamela on how to behave as his wife, he tells her to always look ready for polite society, as it would reflect badly on him if she did not.

Although Mr. B. demonstrates his wealth via clothing and fashion, his real wealth lies in his multiple estates and tenants living on his land. B. A. Holderness confirms that during this period the landed gentry “increased territorial concentration, as the economic gap between gentry and small free holders and the aristocracy widened” (557). Mr. B. owns land in both Bedfordshire, Lincolnshire, and Kent, as well as possibly owning a home in London. Thus, he is one of the gentlemen that took the opportunity to buy out smaller farms, and profit from the property taxes he would receive from his tenants. Pamela describes his Lincolnshire estate as “noble” in its grandeur (Richardson 41). When Pamela is taken away to Bedfordshire, she meets one of the tenant farmers’ daughters who admits that Mr. B. is her ““Father’s Landlord!”” (Richardson 103). Because Mr. B. owns so much of the land that makes up his estate, Pamela finds it very difficult to escape to safety. She knows that if she does escape the great house, it is likely that she will be captured by one of Mr. B’s tenants. When Pamela arrives at the

Bedfordshire house, she describes it as a “handsome, large, old, and lonely mansion, that looks made for solitude and mischief” (Richardson 108). This house, though not as grand as the one in Lincolnshire, includes a pond, gardens, courtyards, and stables. Mr. B. pines for Pamela so badly that he offers up his fortune via land to her. He states, “I cannot live without you; I would divide with all my soul, my Estate with you, to make you mine upon my own terms” (Richardson 213). This statement of love shows three things about Mr. B.’s lifestyle and opinions. First, he increasingly lusts after Pamela if he is willing to share his fortune with her. Second, because of his money, he has become accustomed to getting what he wants when he wants it. He is generally able to throw money at a problem and have it be solved. Third, because of this attitude, he desires Pamela on his terms, and when she rejects him, he becomes angry. Later Mr. B. makes the same proposition as before, saying,

I began to consider it would have made you miserable, and me not happy; that if you should have a dear little one, it would be out of my own Power to legitimate it, if I should wish to inherit my Estate; and that, as I am almost the last of my Family, and most of what I possess must pass to a strange Line; disagreeable and unworthy persons. (Richardson 269)

Here Mr. B. further shows how much money has shaped his mindset. He is afraid of making Pamela miserable, but also, he does not want to make a mistake that will hurt him later on. Thus, Mr. B. shows that he cares more about having a legitimate male heir than Pamela herself. He would rather Pamela have his child, than his estate go to a distant male family member. When *Pamela* was written, inheritance laws, or common laws, were in place; they stated, “settlements of a family’s property, usually drawn up at the

time of the eldest son's marriage, both entailed the estate on the first male to be born of that marriage, and specified the amounts of the portions to be given to the younger sons and daughters" (Okin 123). These laws required that if a legitimate male heir was in a household, then that heir would get the bulk of the property and assets of the estate.⁸ Therefore, if Mr. B. has a son with Pamela out of wedlock, there will be no way for that son to inherit his estate. These kinds of laws put Pamela in a double bind. If Mr. B. rapes her and dismisses her services, she will be unable to find employment, and if she marries him and does not produce a male heir and Mr. B. dies, she would likely be thrown back to poverty by a distant male relation. For Pamela, there is no winning scenario, but for Mr. B., Pamela becomes a means to an end. Mr. B's primary concern is his land. If Pamela does not provide a son for him, he can dispose of her and try again with another woman. At the end of the text, the system of patriarchy is reassured: "She made her Spouse happy in numerous and hopeful Progeny" (Richardson 499). Mr. B. gets his wish for an heir, and Pamela gets to live her life in luxury.

Because of his great wealth, Mr. B. often loans or gifts money to Pamela and her parents. He promises her "500 *Guineas*," as well as the "250*l. Per Annum*" which will come from his newly bought Kentish estate, which her parents will live on (Richardson 189). It is this excess of money and land that highlights the biggest power that Mr. B. has over Pamela—that is, his position in society is so much higher than hers. Pamela is fully aware of the dangers of having a relationship with one's master. She states so when Mr. B. first kisses her: "You have taught me to forget myself, and what belongs to me, and

⁸ For more on the Patriarchy of eighteenth-century England read "Historicizing Patriarchy: The Emergence of Gender Differences in England, 1660-1760." McKeon, Michael. "Historicizing Patriarchy: The Emergence of Gender Differences in England, 1660-1760." *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 23, no. 3, Spring 1995, pp. 295-322.

have lessen'd the Distance that Fortune has made between us, by demeaning yourself, to be so free to a poor servant" (Richardson 23). Interestingly, Pamela begins this apology by blaming herself for being forgetful, even though Mr. B. is the one who initiated the conversation with a kiss. This further shows how little power she has in this relationship. Pamela cannot risk making Mr. B. mad and being sent away from his service in disgrace. When she becomes more vocal against his advances, he threatens her by saying, "We shall make out between us, before we have done, a pretty Story in Romance, I warrant ye!" (Richardson 32). Here, Mr. B. reduces Pamela down to a picture he can hold. It is because of Mr. B.'s great position that he can abduct Pamela and dismiss any of the servants that took pity on Pamela and her situation. Regis states, "all these actions to deny Pamela her liberty and property are proof of B.'s inability or unwillingness to recognize Pamela as a person with rights. This is fundamentally the real barrier to this marriage" (69). Pamela is not the only one to protest Mr. B.'s advances. Mr. B.'s sister, Lady Danvers, is highly opposed to B.'s interest in Pamela. Lady Danvers reprimands Mr. B. for the stigma he will bring to the family name if he goes through with the marriage to Pamela, noting, "that our's 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 Heir of it have disgraced themselves by unequal Matches" (Richardson 257). In such a hierarchical society, the union between Mr. B. and Pamela would be cause for scandal. Regis quotes Eaves and Kimple, who state that this marriage would be "'distasteful' to many of Richardson's contemporaries (151)" (67). Although their marriage is supposed to cause much uproar in high society, once Pamela and Mr. B. are wed, the only person that has a serious issue with their marriage is Lady Danvers herself. However, after Lady

Danvers interrogates and witnesses how well Pamela has adjusted to high society, with time, even she regards Pamela as an equal.

Pamela's transition into a higher society than she is accustomed to happens more easily because she is a malleable person. When she is given directions on how to act and dress in high society, she shifts into those behaviors and mannerisms. Richardson simplifies the process of accruing a new identity. He does this as a way to reward Pamela's virtue and perseverance. Once she had made it through the major trials of her ordeal, her life will be easy and restful. When Pamela first meets some of the neighboring landowners, Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Jones discuss Pamela saying, "Did you ever see such Excellence, such Prudence, and Discretion Never in my Life, said the other good Lady. She will adorn, she was pleas'd to say, her Distinction. Ay, said Mrs. *Peters*, she will adorn any Station in Life" (Richardson 287). Although Pamela is accepted by all, even Lady Danvers, at the end of the novel, she pays a high price to achieve the happiness she has obtained. Mr. B. may see Pamela as an independent human by the end of the text, but he spends the majority of the novel inserting himself into her narrative. Pamela's letter writing to her friends and parents is one of the ways that she asserts her autonomy in the novel. At the beginning of the text, Mr. B. takes note that "this Girl is always scribbling; I think she may be better employ'd" (Richardson 22). If Mr. B.'s infatuation with Pamela has set in already, he must know that the writing she produces could be a deterrent to his plans for her. Later in the text, he asks to be given all the letters Pamela has sent to see the narrative she has constructed about his character. He asks kindly to see

what you have written. I long to see the particulars of your Plot... I have a Title to see the Fruits of your Pen. — Besides, says he, there is such a pretty Air of

Romance, as you relate them in your Plots and my Plots... the Liberties you have taken with my Character, in your Letters, set us upon a Par, at least, in that Respect. (Richardson 232)

Mr. B. is smart enough to know that if his character is maligned and this narrative gets out, he could become the subject of scandal, which he has worked very hard to avoid. In handing over her letters to Mr. B., Pamela, in essence, hands over the last part of her autonomy. To further this idea of stripped autonomy, Pamela has the letters she has about her time in captivity sewn into the lining of her petticoat. Mr. B. threatens to discover them himself, but Pamela insists that she remove the letters in the privacy of her chambers. By threatening to undress Pamela, and forcing her to do so, Mr. B. violates her body autonomy. Jessica Leiman writes, “slowly, through [Mr. B’s] own letters and speech, he offers his own competing account of the novel’s principal events, spinning a counter-narrative that Pamela diligently transcribes in her journal” (232-33). In doing this, Mr. B. creates a palimpsest of Pamela’s original story and character. In submitting her narrative to him, Pamela agrees to become the fine lady he wants her to be. She is no longer the insubordinate “witch” or “sauce-box,” but becomes a meek well-mannered gentlewoman (Richardson 40). *Pamela* teaches that only through complete submission can women be happy, and exist in high society.

In some ways, Pamela is subliminally making up for all the gifts, money, and security that Mr. B provides her with. The death of Pamela from the beginning of the novel is secured when she internalizes Mr. B.’s rules for how they will have a happy marriage. Most of these rules involve his image, and his happiness, and require her to submit herself to his ultimate authority. Here are some of the edicts that Pamela must

follow:

2. That I must think his Displeasure the heaviest thing that can befall me.
4. That I must not make a complement to anybody at his expense.
6. That I must bear with him, even when I find him in the wrong.
20. Some Gentlemen can compromise with their Wives for Quietness-sake; but he can't.
23. That a Woman gives her Husband Reason to think she prefers him before all men. (Richardson 448-9)

Although Pamela writes notes of agreement or disagreement after each of his rules, she never acts against these edicts once he has given them to her. These commands point out how fragile Mr. B.'s ego and reputation are. Pamela may be happily married, and have affective individualism, children, and security in her marriage to Mr. B., but it is no wonder why she feels unable to call him anything more personal than "*Master... that is a Language I shall never forget. He shall always be my Master; and I shall think myself more and more his Servant*" (Richardson 303). Although Pamela has physically entered the landed class, mentally she is still a menial servant-girl.

Written nearly seventy-five years after *Pamela, Pride and Prejudice*, by Jane Austen, incorporates many of the same elements as the former does. *Pride and Prejudice* follows the romance of Elizabeth Bennet, the second oldest daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, who are middle-class and have five daughters. Elizabeth meets Mr. Darcy at an assembly where a dance is being held. Elizabeth holds such prejudice against Mr. Darcy, while Mr. Darcy is supremely prideful. Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy slowly come to terms with the fact that they love each other. The couple finally understands that they share the

same wit, compassion, and vivacity. The novel ends with Mr. and Mrs. Darcy's marriage. There is a significant wealth gap between Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth, and those of the high society originally scorn their marriage. However, Mr. Darcy's process of falling in love and eventually marrying Elizabeth is much less forceful than Mr. B.'s treatment of Pamela. The Bennet family situation is complex. As members of the lower-middle class, with Mr. Bennet making "two thousand a year" from his estate and no male heir to inherit the estate, it is the job of the five daughters to marry men of equal or greater wealth than their own (Austen 29). Mrs. Bennet frequently tries to help with marriage plots, all of which go sour, except for Jane and Mr. Bingley. This situation reflects Mr. B.'s fear of not having a legitimate son to inherit his wealth. The Bennet family is trapped in a situation that makes them required, by law, to hand over their estate to a distant male cousin—Mr. Collins. Mr. Darcy, on the other hand, is handsome and makes "ten thousand a year," which Vivien Jones clarifies makes him one of the four hundred richest men in England" (Austen 12, 382). Although Elizabeth's lack of money is a large barrier for Mr. Darcy, the main issue for the couple is their bad opinions of each other. After Mr. Darcy refuses to dance with many women at an assembly, the community of Meryton, and Elizabeth, agree that "he was discovered to be proud, to be above his company, and above being pleased; and not all his large estate in Derbyshire could save him" from being "the most disagreeable man in the world" (Austen 12-13). This reaction from the town is interesting because they take offense at being slighted by a man who perceives himself well above them. In the case of Pamela, she had no right to scorn Mr. B. for his station in life because she is so beneath him, but here, there is a finer dynamic of elitism and class hostility playing out. This is due to the middle and upper-middle-class nature of

the Meryton society. Most of the families in Meryton are not wealthy compared to Mr. Darcy, or Mr. Bingley. Yet certain members of Meryton, mainly Sir William Lucas, see themselves as equal to Mr. Darcy, which is an offense to someone of Mr. Darcy's status (Austen 97).⁹ Mr. Darcy's pride and sophistication make him state that the Bennet's low connections "materially lessen their chances of marrying men of any consideration in the world" (Austen 37). Mr. Darcy's prediction turns out to be almost true when Mr. Collins proposes to Elizabeth in a mortifying manner. Elizabeth responds, stating, "I am perfectly serious in my refusal. —You could not make *me* happy, and I am convinced that I am the last woman in the world who would make *you* so" (Austen 105). After multiple refusals, Mr. Collins gives up. Mrs. Bennet is bothered by this because according to her, Mr. Collins would make a fine match, and in marrying him, the family house would stay closer to the Bennet line. Mrs. Bennet is wrong. As Elizabeth states, she would hate being married to Mr. Collins. Elizabeth gets to witness firsthand what being married to Mr. Collins is like later in the text.

After being ashamed because he was rejected by Elizabeth, Mr. Collins goes to stay with the Lucas family. The daughter of Sir William Lucas, Charlotte, is a good friend of Elizabeth's. When Elizabeth finds out that Mr. Collins has proposed to Charlotte, and she has accepted his offer, Elizabeth is crushed. Elizabeth notes, "Charlotte, the wife of Mr. Collins, was a most humiliating picture" (Austen 123). However, Charlotte's approach to marriage, and what would make her happy in a marriage is different from Elizabeth's. Charlotte appears calculated from the start of the

⁹ Vivien Jones clarifies in the endnotes of the text, that Sir William Lukas has been knighted in St. James court, but holds a low position. Sir William thinks he is higher in society than he is, and is thus, part of the "pseudo-gentry" (Austen 348).

text concerning partners. When Mr. Collins asks that she name the date of their union, she thinks,

And though such a solicitation must be waved for the present, the lady felt no inclination to trifle with his happiness. The stupidity with which he was favored by nature, must guard his courtship from any charm that could make a woman wish for its continuance; and Miss Lucas, who accepted him solely from the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment, cared not how soon that establishment was gained. (Austen 120)

Charlotte's opinions on marriage here are solely dependent on her having a stable livelihood, something that Elizabeth is also concerned with. Charlotte also displays emotional intelligence by knowing that Mr. Collins is so flighty that he might propose to any girl that showed a crumb of affection for him. Thus, Charlotte weighs her odds and accepts Mr. Collins. Although she may not be happy, she knows she will be secure. Regis notes that the eighteenth-century romance novel's barriers often focus on the female protagonist's ability to have affective individualism, security, and love. In the case of Charlotte, she gives up love to obtain the other two qualities of security and individualism. Regis states, "If the romance novel form reflects social changes in its treatment of effective individualism and love, it also highlights problems with the long-established practice that eliminates, in law, the very distinctions that affective individualism and love between spouses implied" (61). Regis notes that to have love and affective individualism, there had to be some equality in the decision-making of the couple. However, once a woman was married, her husband has all of the control again: "Society granted her autonomy as long as she was an unmarried woman, then removed it

the minute she married. No wonder a woman's choice of spouse was so fraught with drama" (Regis 61). Although Charlotte's marriage would seem to limit her affective individualism, because her primary goal is to be secure, she is unbothered by this fact. Also, Mr. Collins is so absorbed by his patroness, the great Lady Catherine de Bourg, that Charlotte often has a good deal of time to herself.

Elizabeth ends up much happier than Charlotte. Although Mr. Darcy has a great deal of power, he rarely uses his influence for ill. The only time in the novel in which he does so is to discourage his best friend, Mr. Bingley, from pursuing a relationship with the eldest Bennet daughter, Jane. He admits so, to Elizabeth, stating, "I did not wish her to be indifferent because I wished it; —I believed it on impartial conviction, as truly as I wished in its reason. —My objections to the marriage were not merely those, which last night I acknowledged [a lack of connections]" (Austen 192). Mr. Darcy continues for some time insulting Elizabeth's family behaviors, which are discomfoting at times. However, after Mr. Darcy realizes the error in this thinking, he confesses the whole plot to Mr. Bingley, and Jane and Mr. Bingley are happily married (Austen 365).¹⁰ When Mr. Darcy realizes he is in love with Elizabeth, despite her family circumstances, he uses his power to save the youngest Bennet sister, Lydia, from scandal. In doing so, he forces the rakish character of Mr. Wickham to marry Lydia (Austen 346). In the end, Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth, though not on the same financial footing, fit well together as an intellectual couple. Mr. Darcy states when he realizes that Elizabeth might accept his second marriage proposal, that, "It taught me to hope, as I scarcely allowed myself to hope before" (Austen 347). Although the misuse of power in this novel is not trivial, unhealthy

¹⁰ The book seems to indicate that Elizabeth and Darcy, and Jane and Mr. Bingley have a double wedding, which the BBC's 1995 *Pride and Prejudice* miniseries depicts.

power dynamics come back stronger in twenty-first-century novels.

III. POWER: PRADA, CONSUMERISM, AND LUST IN THE TWENTY FIRST-CENTURY

Fifty Shades of Grey, written by E. L. James, displays capitalism to the extreme. The novel was originally a fanfiction of the paranormal romance tetralogy, *Twilight*, written by Stephanie Meyer. *Fifty Shades of Grey* was originally titled *Master of the Universe*, which indicates how much power dynamics are important to the text. *Fifty Shades of Grey* follows the narrative of enigmatic billionaire Christian Grey, and his whirlwind BDSM romance with the young virginal Anastasia Steele.¹¹ Christian's tastes lean only to the side of luxury. He gifts Ana a "first edition [copy of] *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, which is "worth a fortune" (James 54-55). Christian has accumulated his wealth through his international conglomerate company, Grey Enterprises. What exact business he does is unclear, but it is lucrative, to say the least. With his youth and excess wealth, he tells Ana that he will "lavish money on [her]. Let me buy you some clothes" (James 107). And buy her things he does, including underwear, a MacBook Pro, a car, a phone, wine, and the list goes on (James 54-55, 70, 178, 261, 299, 308). Christian's wealth rivals that of Mr. B. and Mr. Darcy. Although Christian may enjoy giving Ana these gifts, she does not enjoy receiving them. At the beginning of their relationship, Ana jokes with her roommate, Kate, that it is "all about the money" (James 85). However, as their relationship develops and Christian gifts her more expensive items, she becomes disturbed at his excessiveness. Later in the text, Ana wants to return the book he gave her at the beginning because "[t]hey're just too much"; she later adds that when he buys her luxury items it "makes me feel cheap" (James 151, 152). However, Christian remains oblivious to her feelings and continues to lavish her with gifts.

¹¹ Later in *Fifty Shades of Grey* Anastasia goes by the name Ana, which I shall call her hereafter.

Christian's desire for control over Ana is abusive. One of the first ways abusive partners begin relationships is a process called love bombing, where the abusive partner presents the abused partner with gifts to get in the abused partner's good graces. After the abusive relationship has started, it is much harder for the abused party to get out. Ana also subconsciously associates the gifts she is being given with the sexual release she is providing Christian. After they first have sex Ana's subconscious, states, "[He] *wants to make you some kind of kinky sex slave*" (James 126). Ana, like Pamela, may be apprehensive of Christian's wealth at first, but as the trilogy continues, she becomes accustomed to the life of luxury that he can afford her. In Heather Havrilesky's article, "Fifty Shades of Late Capitalism," Havrilesky notes that the BDSM sex that may have drawn readers in becomes "hopelessly repetitive somewhere around the third or fourth novel" (76). With as many options for sexual variance BDSM has to offer, even the first book's sex scenes are unimaginative. Ana's constant utterance of "Oh My," during sex or any other occasion, becomes cliched and vicariously embarrassing quickly. Havrilesky compares the endless supply of brand name items with the endlessly dull sex scenes:

Soon the numbing parade of luxury brands—Cartier, Cristal, Omega, iPad, iPod, Audi, Gucci—takes on the same dulled impact as endlessly tweaked nipples and bound wrists... the superior quality and enormous cost of each item are mulled in excruciating detail. Just as traditional male-centered pornography seems to feature a particularly clumsy, childish notion of sexiness, the concept of luxury on offer in *Fifty Shades* is remarkably callow. (78)

Havrilesky's assertions also recall Richardson's supposed inability to write about a class above his own. In the introduction to *Pamela*, Thomas Keymer notes that one of the early

criticisms of *Pamela* was that “Richardson failed to grasp the niceties of her [Pamela’s] social world, reveling in repeated solecisms about title and rank that he was as much the uncouth *arriviste* as Pamela herself” (xxvi). James’s handling of excessive wealth and popular name-brand luxury items that do not show any refinement or finesse in Christian’s taste indicates little knowledge of aesthetics, spending habits, or decorum of the upper class he lives in. Havrilesky summarily states that the *Fifty Shades of Gray* trilogy is not about sex, but about Ana’s entering the hallowed halls of the one percent (78). Although the sex may be repetitive and boring, it, along with Christian’s wealth, is the greatest power he holds over Ana, just as Mr. B.’s land and money are the greatest power over Pamela.

Because Ana is a virgin and oblivious to the culture of BDSM, Christian gets to teach her everything. Ana realizes that there are some questions she would like to ask Kate instead of Christian. However, because Ana has signed a non-disclosure agreement about the type of relationship they will be having, he does not allow her to get her questions answered (James 95). After Ana loses her virginity to Christian, she states, “I knew at that moment I would do anything for this man” (James 142). The concept of BDSM is as new to Ana as sex is. Christian provides her, and all of his Submissives, with his list of rules for the Dominant and Submissives arrangement. This list of rules echoes the rules Mr. B. gives Pamela to ensure they have a happy marriage. These rules of conduct are supposed to be for the safety and pleasure of both the Dominant and the Submissive; however, Christian does such a poor job of explaining them, and Ana does such little research on the topic, that both parties put themselves into a dangerous situation. Some of the major clauses in the contract that cause issues later are these,

DOMINANT

15.2 The Dominant accepts the Submissive as his, to own, control, dominate, and discipline during the Term, The Dominant may use the Submissive's body at any time during the allotted times.

15.3 The Dominant shall provide the Submissive with all the necessary training and guidance on how to properly serve the Dominant.

15.5 The Dominant may discipline the Submissive as necessary to ensure the Submissive fully appreciates her role of subservience to the Dominant and discourage unacceptable conduct. (James 168)

The contract also provides the safe words of yellow and red to mean hesitate for yellow, and full stop for red. The core issue with Ana and Christian's relationship is that they want different things from each other. Ana dreams of a relationship like the ones her literary heroines get, while Christian wants a person to dominate (James 260, 168). In the context of the first book, it seems that neither party can get what they want. Christian tries to save the relationship by agreeing to be a *normal* boyfriend to Ana one night a week, on the condition that he can buy her a new car for graduation (James 260-61). Thus, even when he is attempting to do something that she really wants, he must give her something with strings attached. Ana does not want the kind of relationship that Christian desires. However, her sympathetic nature and the intrigue of Christian keep her returning to him. Christian admits that he is glad she is a virgin because "I'm only beginning to understand what it means. Simply put . . . it means that you are mine in every way" (James 293). This also means that Ana will have nothing to compare the sex she is having with any other experience, not even masturbation. Ana finally cracks under the pressure

of not knowing if she will be able to take whatever punishments Christian may give her, and she intentionally breaks the rules to see how bad the punishment will be. Ana also has an ulterior motive for breaking the rules. She longs to touch Christian on the chest, something that he does not allow due to his trauma in childhood. Ana is hoping that if she can endure Christian's pain and pleasure from BDSM then "maybe he will let me touch him" (James 504). As Ana and Christian have been trying to work around each other's desires, it is no surprise that Ana ends up hating being punished. After being spanked six times Ana thinks, "in this moment I think I hate him" (James 506). Christian attempts to comfort her, but the fact that he did not notice her distress sooner pushes her over the edge and she leaves him, vowing not to come back. This is the novel's point of ritual death. However, it is much more than that. Firstly, Ana completely forgot to use the safe words that would have halted or stopped the punishment altogether. Her desire to see what Christian is like at his worst kills any love she felt for him. Christian also forgets to remind Ana that she can use the safe words anytime. Had the couple been doing anything more intense on the BDSM spectrum, Ana could have been more hurt than she was with the spanking. From many of the kinkier scenes in the book, it is clear that Ana does not enjoy being dominated or being toyed with. The article "Consent Isn't Enough: The Troubling Sex of *Fifty Shades*," written by Emma Green, highlights the many problems with sexual power in the book. Green writes that kink and the consent that is the basic understanding of everyone in the community is not explained well in the book.

Therefore,

the problem is that *Fifty Shades* casually associates hot sex with violence, but without any of this context. Sometimes, Ana says yes to sex she's uncomfortable

with, because she's too shy to speak her mind, or because she's afraid of losing Christian; she gives consent when he wants to inflict pain, yet that doesn't prevent her from being harmed. (Green par. 1)

The BDSM described in the novel breaks many of the normal rules that the kink community follows. James also gets the basic concept of BDSM incorrect, as Christian sees kink as almost a sexuality, instead of a sexual inclination. Green writes, "Sex itself is portrayed as a comprehensive proxy for the emotions involved in their relationship. Although they do talk about their relationship, Ana's too afraid of losing Christian to express the depth of her fears about the kind of sex he's asking her to have" (19-20). Ana's desire for sex is largely left unexplored in the novel. Ana feels some shame related to her virginity, but what she is looking for is glossed over by the fact that Christian is a stand-in for her literary heroes. As can be seen from *Pamela* and *Pride and Prejudice*, what those characters desire is safety and security from a man above their means. Although Christian is certainly above Ana in his class status, the sex they have is not safe, nor is it explicitly consensual in some cases. Furthermore, Christian sees BDSM as a form of therapy to help him get past his traumatic childhood in which he had no control. Ana reflects on this and states, "so it's a form of therapy" (James 437). Instead of asking why Christian has not sought out traditional therapy, Ana agrees to help him via her body and submission because she wants to know more about his past. Christian uses Ana's naiveté for his sexual gratification and manipulates Ana into doing anything he pleases. The punishment scene at the end of the first novel may have been too much for Ana, but she will come running back in no time; which she does quickly in the second book. Her resolve to never see Christian again lasts about a week. By having the contract be such a

point of contention in the book, Christian can possess Ana like an object, just like Mr. B. can possess Pamela.

If personal and corporate greed are not exemplified enough in *Fifty Shades of Grey*, *Gabriel's Inferno*, written by Sylvain Reynard, sells the concept harder. *Gabriel's Inferno* tells the story of Julianne Mitchell and Gabriel Emerson.¹² Julia is a family friend of the Clark family, whom Gabriel is adopted by. One evening while visiting the Clarks, Julia meets Gabriel who has just used cocaine. Gabriel and Julia share an evening and a passionate kiss. Gabriel forgets the encounter, but Julia does not. Years later, Julia is now in Professor Emerson's Dante seminar as a graduate student. The novel follows the professor-student relationship and the couple's attempt to skirt the university's non-fraternization policy. Ana is described as middle-class in *Fifty Shades of Grey*, but Julia is decidedly poor in *Gabriel's Inferno*. The text constantly brings up issues of money and class in tactless and unrealistic ways. Julia is first introduced to Gabriel and she throws "her things into a shabby L. L. Bean knapsack that she had carried since she was a freshman undergraduate" (Reynard 7). Her belongings are old, and she has little money to spend on clothes or accessories. As Gabriel becomes her trust fund later on in the text, the contrast between his style and wealth makes it obvious that Julia and Gabriel come from very different walks of life. Ana was embarrassed about her virginity, but in this novel, Julia is embarrassed about her virginity, and social status. When Julia's father asks if she needs any financial assistance, she replies, "No, Dad, I have enough to live on with my scholarship if I'm careful" (Reynard 10). She does not have enough money to live on. She lies to shield her father from her current financial situation because she

¹² Julianne generally goes by the name Julia in the novel, so hereafter I will call her Julia. Gabriel is the only one who continues to call her Julianna, even though she asks him not to call her that.

knows her father is also living close to poverty. Either way, the shame that Julia feels about her situation is normal. How she gets out of this situation is not.

Gabriel, on the other hand, can spend money on anything he wants. He received his small fortune from his deceased biological father. Julia brings up the question of how Gabriel has so much money; knowing that as a professor he cannot make that much. Gabriel's sister Rachel clarifies that he "'inherited it.' 'Gabriel refused the inheritance at first, but later changed his mind'" (Reynard 126). When Gabriel visits Julia's apartment for the first time, he calls it a dump and notes that it was "smaller than his guest bathroom" (Reynard 26). His rudeness and disdain are evident. Furthermore, he unintentionally refers to Julia as a piece of dirt, as well as bashing displaced people he sees around his apartment (Reynard 24, 26). This behavior lasts the majority of the book until Julia accepts Gabriel's money and status as he becomes her benefactor. Similar to *Fifty Shades of Grey*, Gabriel's affection is mostly shown in the form of money. However, Gabriel does more than Christian than just lavishing gifts on Julia. Due to Julia's financial circumstances, Gabriel's actions seem more degrading.

The first way that Gabriel helps yet degrades Julia, is when she is on the floor of her apartment picking something up and he thinks, "It pained him to see her constantly on her knees, although he couldn't exactly say why" (Reynard 29). The sexual connotation of this statement and Julia's body position are easy to recognize. However, more importantly, Julia being on her knees is a reminder of the subservience of the lower class being crushed by the one percent. It is also a position reminiscent of precarious work that the working class must take on to continue their existence. Jobs such as child care, house cleaning, or sex work are often not glamorous or desirable, yet are services that have to

exist for the rich to enjoy their lives, and for the poor to live at all. In Marxist thought, the existence of classes is the driving force behind the inequality seen in the world. The class position of Pamela and Julia demonstrates how new class systems arise from older class systems, and those that remain in power continue abusing the working-class (Marx and Engels 474). Just as *Pamela* showed the strained relationship between the high and low classes of England, and the abusive relationship between Mr. B. and Pamela, *Fifty Shades of Grey* and *Gabriel's Inferno* display the same types of class antagonisms and abuse, just in a new context and society. The desire for Julia to get off of her knees is brought up a few more times in the novel in the same light. Given the two-hundred-seventy-one-year gap between the release of *Pamela* and *Gabriel's Inferno*, these kinds of sexually laced classist remarks should be very different. Yet Reynard pulls from a strong tradition of toxic masculinity and elitism that renders the two novels very similar despite the extensive writing gap.

The second way Gabriel pulls Julia from poverty is by feeding her. Because she is so poor and cannot afford proper food, Julia is described as if she is a woman of ill health from the eighteenth century. She is exceedingly pale and thin. When she meets her friend Paul for the first time he observes, “how small her hand was in comparison to his. He could have bruised it just by flexing his palm.” (Reynard 6). From this description, Julia could be mistaken for a frail child. Even though this description describes someone that might be suffering from an eating disorder, Julia is later described as the height of femininity and beauty. This description set up a very unrealistic beauty standard. Because Julia is constantly hungry, Gabriel makes it his job to feed her. He begins by taking her out to a steak dinner (Reynard 36). He then insists that if she is ever hungry, she should

come to him and he will buy her food. Julia is slightly offended by this notion. However, once she realizes what Gabriel's lifestyle includes, she acquiesces to his desire to feed her. If Christian wants to lavish money on Ana, then Gabriel wants to feed Julia himself; this is Gabriel's way of lavishing Julia. After the couple gets to know each other better, and Julia has breakfast with him, she "quickly concluded that she was eating better at Gabriel's than she'd ever eaten, outside of Italy" (Reynard 264). In buying, preparing, and feeding Julia, some of her autonomy is stripped away. He could simply give her money to buy groceries, but he wants to oversee the process himself as if she were just a child. This obsession with food is similar to one of Christian's rules, that Ana must eat a certain number of meals each day from a list of only certain foods. This is one of the items that Ana most strongly protests during the course of the book. When Gabriel first asks Julia to let him "feed you," she thinks it is odd but allows him to do so (Reynard 69). The food is so good that it is almost orgasmic for Julia. Later, when Gabriel asks to feed her again, she gladly agrees. When Julia discusses Gabriel's habit of feeding her, this exchange happens, "'Yes. I was hungry and you fed me.' *Twice*, thought Julia. 'You *were* hungry?' Gabriel's voice was rough, horrified, and he stopped dancing immediately" ... "I'll give you my American Express card tonight, for God's sake. I won't have you hungry. I won't" (Reynard 116). What is unfortunate about Gabriel's responses to Julia's hunger are twofold. The first is that he treats her like a child again. The second is that Gabriel is seemingly unaware of, or inconsiderate of the overall impoverished nature of many of the people surrounding him. He belittles a displaced man that was around his apartment, not realizing that if Julia were seriously injured, she might be in so much debt that she could become that man. The distaste that Julia has for Gabriel's control of her

quickly dissipates when she sees what she gets for allowing him to own her.

The last way Gabriel uses money as a means of power over Julia is through gifts and physical cash. Gabriel's consumerist greed that feeds his overinflated ego is obvious in his possession of multiple Armani Suits, a Jaguar, a fancy apartment, and the best things that money can buy. He bestows this privilege on Julia by giving her a bursary that amounts to "five thousand dollars per semester, payable on top of her regular graduate stipend" (Reynard 141). This gift from Gabriel is partly out of pity at seeing Julia's apartment and hearing that she had to turn down her acceptance at Harvard due to her financial situation. Gabriel also gives her a hundred-dollar gift card to Starbucks at the same time because one of his fellow students insulted Julia's intelligence and position in the university (Reynard 141). Although it is obvious to Julia that the Starbucks gift card is from Gabriel, he tries to keep the bursary a secret. He does this because he knows that he would put his position as a professor, and her position as a student in jeopardy if the university was to find out about their increasingly romantic relationship. Gabriel is fully aware of this and articulates this thought by saying,

any relationship with Gabriel had the potential of tainting both their careers. Once their connection was discovered, he'd be the gifted professor who'd tapped a piece of ass in one of his seminars... and she would be the young slut who spread her legs to get her degree because she wasn't smart enough to get it any other way. (Reynard 290)

In this scenario, Gabriel still has the upper hand as he would potentially still have his job, but the credibility of Julia and her whole career is at stake if anyone finds out about them. This situation mimics Mr. B. and Pamela's relationship. Whereas sleeping with Pamela

might tarnish Mr. B.'s reputation, it would ruin Pamela's life. Multiple times when Julia implies that she wants to take their relationship further Gabriel exclaims "I could get fired for that!" (Reynard 78). Although he is thinking of Julia by not accepting her advances, his spoken words around the subject primarily center around himself and his position in the university. Julia also receives a gift of Prada shoes, a leather bag, and a dress from Gabriel, although Julia believes they are gifts from his late mother. Gabriel does this because he pities Julia and wants to see her "*petals open*" (Reynard 79). This gesture would be kind if it did not sexually benefit him as well. Multiple times in the narrative Gabriel is described as having a foot or shoe fetish. By purchasing Julia shoes, which he knows he will get to see, he is satisfying his sexual desire in the process.

The more gifts Gabriel gives Julia, the less they feel like gifts and the more they seem like bargaining chips. Once Julia finds out all of the money that Gabriel has spent on her, she tries to return the gifts like Pamela and Ana. In doing so, Gabriel responds, "I won't play gift card ping-pong with you all evening" and that the bursary cannot be returned (Reynard 157). Whenever the topic of his money is brought up by Julia, he becomes excessively aggressive and hostile to her. He claims to pity Julia and that he is trying to make "penance" for his early misdeeds in life, but his underlying anger may be a subliminal way of his showing that he has a distaste for her poverty. Julia responds to his demands by saying, "it looks like you're trying to buy me," to which Gabriel responds, "Buy you? Believe me, Miss Mitchell, nothing could have been further from my mind! I am deeply offended at being so maligned. If I wanted you at all, I certainly wouldn't have to buy you" (Reynard 157). Gabriel's desire to not be misunderstood is not helped by his ego and vanity. Julia can see that all of the money Gabriel has given her

looks like it could be the setup for a sexual repayment later on. Gabriel, insulted by this idea states that he could obtain her sexually in other ways. The method he is referring to is not made known, but his statement inherently sounds threatening, and like assault could be involved. Julia, like Ana, becomes part of the upper class when she enters into a formal relationship with Gabriel. Afterward, they fly first-class to Italy, eat at a fabulous restaurant, drink the best champagne at their luxury hotel, and have sex for the first time. Gabriel and Julia are said to be “sated in a large white bed... she fell asleep in his arms, happier than she had ever been. She was loved” (Reynard 545). Julia seems to be fully assimilated into the lap of luxury. She is loved by Gabriel and by his “small fortune” (Reynard 51). It is only in the lap of luxury that female protagonists are finally allowed to be secure in their position in society. Once they have gained enough money, they can begin treating people like their earlier selves, with disdain and contempt. These women replicate the morals and attitudes their male protagonists have.

The last and most prominent power that Gabriel has over Julia is that he is her professor. Gabriel conducts his class like he conducts the rest of his life, in a sullen and overbearing manner. When Julia does not pay attention to him during one of his lectures, he calls her into his office and verbally abuses her. He uses his position of authority flippantly. Instead of having a conversation with Julia about a misunderstanding, he says,

I see that you came here on scholarship to study Dante. I am the only professor in this department that is currently supervising theses in that field. Since this is not going to work, you'll have to change your thesis topic and find another supervisor. Or transfer to another department, or better yet, another university. I'll inform the director of your program of my decision, effective immediately.

(Reynard 20-21)

Simply because Julia was not paying attention in one class, and because he misunderstood an attempted act of kindness, Gabriel wants her out of his sight, and also the university if possible. Gabriel's temper often gets the best of him. After Julia tries to end her attraction to Gabriel and refuses to answer his incessant calls, he takes the discussion to the lecture hall. He states, "I've decided that rather than having a normal seminar today, I will deliver a lecture. I will be examining the relationship between Dante and Beatrice. In particular, what transpired between when Dante met Beatrice the second time and she rejected him" (Reynard 222). What follows on the next six pages is an unprofessional lecture pointed at Julia about how she has failed him as a lover. Julia takes the bait and responds to his criticisms. This odd behavior of professor Emerson and Julia goes unnoticed by most of the class. However, Paul, who loves Julia, and Christa, who loves Gabriel, do think, "what in the holy hell just happened to their Dante seminar" (Reynard 226). Gabriel taking his and Julia's private conversation into a public place with so many witnesses that know both of them is further proof of his abusive and possessive behavior. As Gabriel closes out his "lecture" he twists the knife in Julia by saying, "No one was beautiful enough, no one made him feel the way she did. He always wanted her—he just despaired of ever finding her again" (Reynard 228). Gabriel puts all of the blame on Julia and notes that even in their relationship's infancy it was wrong because she was underage and he was not. Due to the manipulative nature of their relationship, Julia becomes emotionally fatigued. When the couple goes to a club for the first time Gabriel senses her hesitation and states, "Julianna I promise I won't bite. You don't have to be so anxious," to which she responds "even though she knew he was

trying to put her at ease, he'd upset her countless times, and she was fatigued by it" (Reynard 114). This scene shows emotional exhaustion and the strain that comes with relationships that are imbalanced in one or more ways. Because Gabriel and Julia's relationship is not technically legal, it means they must constantly be on the lookout for those that could expose them. Or they can sequester together in Gabriel's apartment which they often do. Or they can fly to another country, courtesy of Gabriel's money, but even there they are not outside of scrutiny. Gabriel tries to avoid any legal problems by asking his lawyer how to avoid himself and Julia getting caught. His lawyer notes, as has been often noted by Julia, "I need to warn you, if observing the non-fraternization is a term of your employment, you violate it at your peril and the peril of your job" (Reynard 287). The lawyer, John, also asks if Gabriel has slept with Julia and if she is underage, to which Gabriel takes great offense. They parley terms and the conversation ends with John warning Gabriel to stay away from Julia as much as possible, and not to have sex with her during the semester. It is safe to say that the relationship between Gabriel and Julia is on uncertain grounds where the university is concerned.¹³ In an effort to be unbiased, Gabriel has someone else grade Julia's papers for the rest of the semester (Reynard 377). Even with that being the case Julia has an advantage over her classmates as she can ask Gabriel specific questions anytime and has access to his office, home, and space in the library which contains valuable research about Dante.

Julia does have one defense against Gabriel in her pocket that she can and does use against Gabriel. She knew him when he was younger, and she knows that at one time he loved her. This is the fiction that Reynard wants their audience to believe. Julia's

¹³ Although Gabriel and Julia are able to keep their relationship private for the first semester, in the second book, *Gabriel's Rapture*, the major conflict is the university finding out and investigating their relationship.

secret knowledge, like Pamela's letters, loses its power once it is made known to Gabriel. The audience learns early on that Julia has an obsession with Gabriel. She keeps a picture of him from a long time ago under her pillow; she notes, "their entire relationship was based on a single night" (Reynard 62). This becomes an issue because Julia hopes that Gabriel will remember her from their first romantic encounter, but he does not. Instead of reminding him of who she is she just hopes beyond hope that this knowledge will come to him miraculously. Upon their first meeting, Gabriel had just punched his adopted brother into a glass table sending him to the hospital. Julia goes out to Gabriel and they eventually end up in an apple orchard kissing. They spend the night together and, in the morning, Julia finds herself alone. Julia takes hours to find her way back to the house and leaves before he comes back (Reynard 63-72). The evening was so pure and romantic to Julia that she has not found anyone that could compare to him. Gabriel does remember Julia once more, but he has to get incredibly intoxicated to do so. In this scene, Gabriel calls Julia "Beatrice" because this is how he remembers her from their night long ago (Reynard 188). The fact that Gabriel only remembers who Julia is when he is drunk should be a sign that he is not well mentally. This turns out to be true because once he becomes sober, he has no memory of the night before and blows up in Julia's face. Julia has her hopes crushed because she was sure she was going to be reunited with the man she had loved long ago. She describes this feeling, stating,

was that the sound of her heart snapping in two? Or just the final nail in the coffin in which her dead love rested, but not in peace? Perhaps it was his tone of voice, angry and commanding. Perhaps it was the fact that in that one question she realized he no longer viewed her as Beatrice, and all her realized hopes and

dreams just fucking *died* in their infancy. (Reynard 194-195)

Her secret knowledge that she was finally able to share with her lover has been forgotten again. This is her breaking point, and she leaves him just as he remembers who she is. Having Gabriel remember and then forget her is more painful to Julia than him never knowing who she was in the first place. Julia is later told by Gabriel that he did not remember her because he was “hungover and strung out on coke” (Reynard 267). Julia’s reaction to this information is similar to when Gabriel did not remember that she was his Beatrice. She thinks, “*Slam*. That was the sound of Julia’s fairy tale dream crashing into the unyielding wall of reality. ‘I spent the night in the woods, alone, with a twenty-seven-year-old coke head who was strung out and drunk. What a stupid, stupid girl!’” (Reynard 276). This information and reaction reveal a lot about Julia, but also about the repeating structure and themes of the romance novel. The first thing to note is that Julia realizes the image of Gabriel she had in her head was a fantasy. She had a false image of the person she loved a long time ago. Secondly, Julia’s secret which gave her power over Gabriel means nothing because their encounter was not at all what she had originally thought. Also, keeping this secret hurt her chances of living the life she wanted with Gabriel. Gabriel brings this up in the odd lecture, stating, “‘he waited for her for years. She knew where he lived. She knew his family... why didn’t she make an attempt to contact him?’” (Reynard 223). Gabriel is correct here. Julia’s insistence to wait and see if he would remember her years later makes no sense. Essentially all the autonomy Julia thought she possessed by knowing this secret is ruined by reality. Gabriel also rewrites this fantasy of Julia’s by returning to the orchard with her later in the text (Reynard 422-431).

The same pattern of autonomy and secrets being stripped from and changed

happens in *Pamela* as well. Pamela uses her ability to write down her own story, and send letters to her parents for guidance as her only means of taking control of her situation. Even though Pamela thinks her private thoughts are being shared with herself and those whom she would like to see them, she is incorrect. Mr. B. has the horseman, John, share all the letters that he finds. Even though Mr. B. reassures her that his reading was ““not to your Disadvantage, I’ll assure you; for they gave me a very high Opinion of your Wit and Innocence”” (Richardson 229). Even though Pamela’s letters did not paint her in a bad light, Mr. B., still violated her privacy by reading them. When he finds out that she has more writing that he has not seen he insists on reading those journals and correspondences as well (Richardson 234). Pamela’s letters do not hurt her quite like Julia’s secret does; however, because Mr. B. is privy to Pamela’s inner thoughts he can plan around and stop any ideas Pamela has of escape. Pedro Garcia notes in his essay, “Novel, Romance and Quixotism in Richardson’s ‘Pamela,’” that Pamela has inflated the tensions between herself, Mrs. Jewkes, and Mr. B. Garcia states, “in the literary universe presented by Pamela, despite its air of authenticity and reality, personal feeling, fears, and desires, become principles of characterization, and this creates the polarization of reality into evil and good which characterizes romance” (309). Julia and her over-involved fantasy about Gabriel mirror Pamela’s narrative writing which puts complex characters into neat boxes of villains or heroes.

Pamela, *Fifty Shades of Grey*, and *Gabriel’s Inferno* show the process of women giving into male desire, and transforming into elitists: Mr. B. tames and civilizes the wild Pamela; Christian indoctrinates Ana as his pseudo sex slave / idol, and Gabriel lifts the impoverished Julia into his domain. These men’s lines of control are secure, as all of their

wives end up having children to take the reins of power after these men are gone. The ideals for men and women that these novels set up are wholly unrealistic. Readers may gravitate toward this genre not only to live out their romantic fantasies, but also the fantasy of homeownership, a steady job, access to money, and overall security in their lives. These novels bring up the question of what love and romantic relationships would look like outside of the realm of Capitalism.

IV. ABUSE, ASSAULT, AND TRAUMA

In modern romance novels, male lovers are often depicted as tall, dark, and mysterious. They must have an air of intrigue or some dirty secret that they must keep from the world. This is part of their allure to the women who pursue them. Ana, Julia, and Samantha find that Christian, Gabriel, and Clay are emotionally unavailable, fascinating, and make it part of the women's mission to find out what secrets lie beneath their perfect exteriors. These men often have more than one secret, but it is the original trauma that these men have endured that has made them silent to the world. In *Fifty Shades of Grey* Christian tells Ana “the woman who brought me into this world was a crack whore” (James 367). Along with this, Christian has circular burn marks from cigarettes on his chest. The consequence of physical and emotional abuse that these men endured has long-lasting and devastating consequences for the women in their lives. For Christian, his trauma manifests further when he is fifteen, when “one of [his] mother's friends seduced [him]”; she was a Dominant and he was her Submissive for “six years” (James 154). This leads to Christian only having BDSM relationships and not ever entering into romantic relationships, that is until he meets Ana. Throughout the novel, Christian refuses to admit that this pedophilic relationship with the older woman, whom Ana titles “Mrs. Robinson,” was problematic. Instead, he insists that he learned a lot of things from her and that she is a good friend. His continued relationship with this woman is a constant barrier for Ana, as she sees clearly how Mrs. Robinson has affected Christian. The adverse effects of prolonged trauma manifest for Christian in an inability to keep stable relationships, even with his own family. Christian's choice to remain closed off to the world upsets Ana. When Ana wants more information about his childhood and how he

got his scars, she has to pay a price to get it. Ana resorts to bargaining with Christian, and he notes that she is “always so keen and eager for information” (James 361). The bargain is a bad one, as Ana participates in some BDSM activity, and by the time they are finished she is almost too exhausted to stay awake and hear Christian. Although, before she goes to sleep, Christian does provide a snippet of information, saying, his biological mother is dead, but was a prostitute and addicted to drugs (James 167). Ana may end up enjoying the kinky sex she has to get this information, but kink is not her idea of a relationship. She resorts to this method as a last chance effort. This scene shows three pieces of information about Ana’s desire for information about Christian’s past. Firstly, it shows how unwilling Christian is to be open with his partner, even though he expects to know and dominate everything about her life and body. Secondly, Christian uses sex as a coping mechanism for his trauma. Lastly, Christian intentionally tires Ana, physically and mentally so she cannot ask him more questions once he has given her the information he is comfortable with divulging. Ana’s roommate previously stated that Christian “uses sex as a weapon,” but he not only uses it as a weapon but as a shield as well (James 201). Another manifestation of Christian’s trauma is his fear of losing people. Christian’s hold on Ana is solidified because of the contract Ana has to sign to become his Submissive. In the section of the contract under availability, the document states, “The Submissive will make herself available to the Dominant from Friday evenings through to Sunday afternoons each week during the agreed Term at times to be specified by the Dominant” (James 167). Due to the contract, Ana is obligated to spend time alone with Christian, or if he so chooses, they can go out and do things, but he makes all of those choices for Ana. Even if it is not the weekend, Ana spends the majority of her time with

Christian anyway because he stalks her every move. He even admits to tracking her cellphone to keep an eye out for her (James 62). This situation happens early in the book before Christian has even shown that much interest in her. Apart from being very possessive and also illegally tracing her location, Christian forms an unhealthy and possessive attachment to Ana. When Ana is with her friends, specifically Kate, she is reminded that Christian's behavior is bad and suspect. Even without knowing that he is a Dominant, Kate is the one who astutely points out that Christian "uses sex as a weapon," and "fuck[s] you into submission" (James 201). Kate is also very observant because she does not know anything about the nature of Ana's sexual relationship. Kate also often mentions that she feels off about Christian, that something is wrong with him. In one instance when Christian has sex with Ana as a means of controlling her, Kate notes, "Ana, I don't understand, you just let him make love to you," "No Kate, we don't make love – we fuck – Christian's terminology. He doesn't do the love thing"; Kate responds adeptly, "I knew there was something weird about him. He has commitment issues" (James 202). Kate knows the type of relationship that Ana is desiring, and she recommends continuing the relationship with caution regarding Christian. However, Ana is too hypnotized by her whirlwind romance and ignores Kate and continues seeing Christian. Lastly, Christian has a closed-off relationship with his adoptive parents and siblings because he has to hide his BDSM lifestyle from them. After Ana is introduced to Christian's mother, he admits that he has "never introduced a woman to my mother" and later his family confirms that they assumed he was gay because he never brings girls home (James 153, 352). The tone in which these comments are made is rude. Christian's siblings use the possibility of Christian being gay as a joke.

Romance novels also always have to have a rival lover, even though they do not stand a chance against the male protagonist. *Fifty Shades of Grey*'s man that fills that role is José, who is a friend of Kate and Ana's. At a bar, José asks Ana to be his girlfriend, and she responds, "José, no, I don't want this. You are my friend" (James 59). When José does not take no for an answer and tries to kiss Ana, Christian steps in and saves her. Christian reflects on this interaction by saying, "What is his problem [Christian's]? Apart from a silly drunken girl calling him in the middle of the night so he thinks she needs rescuing. And it turns out she does from her over-amorous friend" (James 63). This scene is significant because José is one of the only people of color represented in the text, and he fills in the role of the villain. It should be noted that José is not the only one who falls head over heels for Ana. In Ana's case, almost every man in this book falls instantly in love with her, and therefore Christian sees it fit to not allow her to interact with anybody.

The male protagonist, in *Dirty, Sexy, Saint*, Clay, experiences similar abuse to that experienced by Christian. *Dirty, Sexy, Saint*, written by Erika Wilde and Carly Phillips, follows the story of Samantha Jamieson, daughter of a billionaire. When Samantha finds out that her father is planning an arranged marriage with her current boyfriend to form a merger of the two families' companies, Samantha decides to forge her own path. Ditching her luxury life, car, and cell phone, she ends up at Clay Kincaid's bar. At the end of the night, Samantha's credit card is declined, and she has to rely on Clay to help her. Samantha ends up living and working for Clay, and the unlikely couple starts falling in love. Because Clay grew up in such a toxic environment, he and his brothers were regularly abused. Clay tells Samantha about his past and states that he is the "bastard child of a crack whore" (Phillips and Wilde 166). Also, like Christian, Clay was burned

with cigarettes. He describes this to Samantha when he states, “one of the things [his step-father] Wyatt like to do the most to assert his authority was to pin me down on the floor and press the burning ends of his cigarettes against my back” (Phillips and Wilde 212). For Clay, his sexual trauma manifests similarly to Christian as he only seeks one-night stands with women and refuses to enter into romantic relationships with anyone until he meets Samantha. Clay’s sexual appetites are also similar to Christian’s, as Clay prefers rough sex. Clay highlights the struggles with interpersonal relationships when he states he is

undoubtedly jaded when it came to women. He wasn’t amused by them, and he didn’t laugh with them much, either. He didn’t do relationships, romance, or dating. Normally, the extent of his interaction with a woman was serving one drink at the bar or hooking up for a quick fuck. (Phillip and Wilde 26)

Because of Clay’s views, his experience in life is lonely, as if he does not want relationships, but does not want friends either. The only genuinely positive relationships he has at the beginning of the novel are with his employees, whom he is trying to help. Thus, he gets his nickname “Saint.” This quote also displays the arrogance that Clay has toward women, who seem, inferior from his perspective. Even, if Clay wanted to be in a relationship with a woman, this attitude would drive them away. His lingering resentment for his mother’s inability to step in and stop the abuse he endured has ruined his chances of a happy life.

What is interesting about the similarities between the description of abuse by Christian and Clay, is that in most cases, the mothers seem to be blamed for the abuse that the child endured. Both of the fathers that were responsible for helping create

Christian and Clay are dead or gone. In the father's place, abusive men come into Christian and Clay's lives. Although Christian and Clay endure physical abuse from the men in their lives, what seems to make them more ashamed is the fact that their mothers were sex workers and not the fact that they endured abuse. The abuse and the fact that Christian and Clay's mothers were sex workers are correlated. However, Christian and Clay are willing to discuss the abuse, but unwilling to admit early on the profession their mothers held. Christian and Clay fear the reactions that this knowledge will cause Ana and Samantha. In a way, they are blaming their mothers for the majority of the abuse they endured. It is difficult to forgive when one is suffering; however, this does not mean that the mothers were not also victims of abuse, as their drug addictions forced them into precarious work — primarily sex work to support themselves. From this pattern in modern romance novels, it seems the mothers are to blame for the formative problems of men, and is other women's desire to fix these broken men, to learn, and forgive their mistakes along the way.

One correlation between all of the twenty-first-century male protagonists, or at least the ones discussed herein, is that they are all adopted.¹⁴ Christian and Clay work past some of the abuse they endured after being adopted. However, Gabriel struggles with being adopted. Despite being abused before adoption, Gabriel lashes out at his adoptive family by abusing drugs and people during his colligate years. Gabriel's dark secret is that in college he accidentally got his on-and-off-again girlfriend pregnant. He went away on a bender and when he returned, he fell asleep. Once he was sobered up, he discovered his girlfriend, Paulina, had tried to commit suicide. Although Paulina did not

¹⁴ Clay is not regally adopted by anyone; however, technically he was adopted by the previous owner of the Kincaid bar which Clay now owns.

die, their child did. In a moment of anger and self-hatred, Gabriel admits to Julia that he is a “murderer. A drug-addicted murderer” (Reynard 493). One side effect of Gabriel’s trauma is his inability to control his emotions. Gabriel provides an example of the struggle with emotional regulation, as he gets angry at anything that annoys or inconveniences him. One instance of this is when Julia is waxing poetic about Gabriel’s deceased adopted mother and he interrupts her and says, ““If you think I do things out of pity for you, then you don’t know me very well. I am a selfish, self-absorbed bastard who barely notices the concerns of other human beings. Damn your little speech, damn your low self-esteem, and damn the program”” (Reynard 120). Gabriel is self-aware enough to admit his fault of selfishness. However, he did not need to retaliate by taking down his student at the same time. This interaction also shows how vulnerable he becomes when thinking of his mother. Gabriel’s emotions rise, often and uncontrollably towards anger, and they take out anyone near him. Another instance of Gabriel’s anger springing up out of the blue is when he sees Julia with her friend Paul and he thinks, ““*Angelfucker,*’ the expletive sprang to his mind unbidden and uncensored” (Reynard 74). This jealousy is supposed to be romantic and make the audience realize that he is jealous of Paul. However, it speaks more to how Gabriel’s emotions can change from calm to enraged unprompted. At one point Julia also reflects on his anger and thinks, “although she was positive that her Gabriel would never, ever strike her, she had no idea what Professor Emerson would do when provoked” (Reynard 198). This seems more like a line from a horror novel than a romance novel. From this quote, Julia sees two distinct personalities in Gabriel. As a professor, he is cruel, uptight, and rigid, but when they are not in the classroom, he can be calm, kind, and sensitive. Much of the contrast in character that

Julia sees is because of her memories of Gabriel she had as a child. When she was young, Gabriel was kind, loving, and affectionate, but as a professor, she sees none of those qualities. Gabriel is a pitiable character, as his mood swings are related to the trauma he has endured as a young adult; however, other innocent people should not have to bear the brunt of his anger as Julia does. Because she is such a selfless person, when Gabriel states he would have been nicer to her, she replies, “and then found some other student to rip apart? If that’s the case, then I’m glad your anger was directed at me. Then you couldn’t take it out on anyone else” (Reynard 59). Although Julia has been infatuated with Gabriel for years, when they are reintroduced, he emotionally manipulates her into becoming his punching bag.

Gabriel, like Christian, keeps Julia isolated from the outside world. It is clear that Gabriel feels threatened by other men and any other friends Julia has because she could fall in love with another man, or someone might point out how irresponsible and toxic their relationship is. Due to this fact, Gabriel isolates and emotionally manipulates Julia into spending most of her time with him, or alone in her apartment. When she states that she is lonely, Gabriel asks if he can buy her a “kitten or a rabbit,” which she does not appreciate (Reynard 359). Animals are great, but she indicated that she wanted human companionship, and making that offer to buy her a pet is a mockery of her loneliness. Julia and Gabriel also argue all of the time, which drains Julia of energy. She states after a fight that “he’d upset her countless times, and she was fatigued by it” (Reynard 368). Gabriel often uses her empathy against her by asking her to make decisions that he knows she may not like. However, he knows Julia will agree because he knows he will be hurt if she says no. And she does not like to see him hurting. One such example is when Julia

requests that he return an expensive book he bought her. After this conversation, he walks off silently, and she reflects

on the one hand, she wanted to be independent and not play the part of the poor helpless bird with the broken wing. On the other hand, she had a kind heart and did not like to cause creatures' pain. She had seen Gabriel's eyes. Behind his sudden show of temper, he was hurt. Deeply. (Reynard 368)

Julia's description of herself as a bird with a broken wing and Gabriel as a poor sad creature shows how involved she has become in playing the role of a heroine in her own fantasy. Gabriel will help and heal her, and she will comfort him. What Julia seems to be oblivious of is that Gabriel is a grown man with a fortune. He does not need her help. After this encounter, Julia keeps the book. The manipulation and gaslighting that happen in this relationship are abusive, and thus the cycle continues anew.

The longer-lasting effects of the abuse Christian, Clay, and Gabriel endured continue to manifest as they develop into men. Christian becomes a Dominant, instead of the Submissive he originally was groomed as, and Gabriel, Clay, and Mr. B. enjoy sexual flings instead of relationships. Gabriel, Christian, and Clay are distanced from their biological or adoptive families as well. In the study, "Childhood Abuse Affects Emotional Closeness with Family in Mid- and Later Life," writers Tina Slava, Karen Roberto, Ana Jaramillo-Sierra, Laura Gambrel, Hassan Karimi, and Mitchell Butner describe some of the adverse effects that the trauma from early childhood can bring. These effects are "a variety of social and psychological problems including detached relationships with parents, interpersonal difficulties ... and impairment of emotional regulation" (Slava et al. 389). These effects are persisting and long-lasting and can be

seen in all of the male protagonists in *Fifty Shades of Grey*, *Gabriel's Inferno*, and *Dirty, Sexy, Saint*. Thus, the trauma that these men have endured affected them when they were young, but also throughout their adult lives.

Modern romance novels take the conflicts in relationships between the male and female protagonists to an extreme. However, older romance novels did the same thing. For example, Pamela discovers that Mr. B. has a dark past. It is not until after Mr. B. and Pamela's marriage that she learns about Sally Godfrey. Mr. B, during his years as a rake, had sex with Sally Godfrey and they continued to sleep together at "*Godstow* often, at *Woodstock*, and every neighboring place to *Oxford*; where he was then studying, as it prov'd, guilty lessons, instead of improving ones" (Richardson 481). Due to this, Sally Godfrey became pregnant. When she almost dies in childbirth, the young lady chooses to not stay in England and face her shame and moves to Jamaica instead (Richardson 481-483). Also similar to the isolation of Ana and Julia, Mr. B., takes it to the next level when he kidnaps Pamela and forces her to stay at his Lincolnshire estate when all she has asked for was to be returned to her parent's care. When Pamela writes to her parents about her "captivity," she assumes that her master will take her virginity and be finished with her. However, Mr. B. clarifies why he has forced her to his other estate in a letter, saying,

Dear Pamela, The passion I have for you, and your Obstinacy, have constrained me to act by you in a manner that I know will occasion you great Trouble and Fatigue, both of Mind and Body Yet, forgive me, my dear girl... I do assure you, that the house you are going to, shall be so much at your Command, that even I myself will not approach it without Leave from you. (Richardson 104)

Mr. B. knows that this kidnapping will horrify Pamela, yet he does not care that he has manipulated the servants that work for him, or imprisoned Pamela. He also asks for forgiveness and knowing that Pamela loved his late mother so much, takes advantage of her Christian beliefs in loving-kindness and forgiveness. He assures her that she will be at liberty in her new home, yet she is watched like a hawk by Mrs. Jewkes, the housekeeper. Lastly, Mr. B. breaks his promise to Pamela, by saying that he would not come to the house unless she asks him to. At an early stage of her imprisonment, Mr. B. comes and later tries to assault her (Richardson 63). Although Pamela is not allowed to leave the estate, she does meet a parson, Williams, whom she enlists for help in escaping. At the prospect of making a friend, and the possibility of escape, she writes, "I now think I am beginning to be happy. I should be sorry you should suffer on my Account; but I hope it will be made up an hundred-fold, by that God whom you so faithfully serve" (Richardson 129). As Pamela's escape attempts continue to get foiled by the servants that are loyal to Mr. B., Parson Williams' relationship with Pamela shifts. In one of his later letters, Parson Williams writes the only way he can see her escaping this situation is "that of Marriage with some Person that could make you happy in your Approbation. As for my own part, it would be as Things stand, my apparent Ruin; and, worse still I should involve you in Misery too" (Richardson 144). So, just like the modern romances, the friend becomes a rival lover. Sequestered away, abused, and almost assaulted, Pamela is forced to comply with the demands of her master. In the case of these novels, other men pose a threat, or barrier, as Regis would say, to the budding romance unfolding around the protagonists. This scenario is similar to Gabriel's, not so much that both the mother and child almost die literally, as in *Gabriel's Inferno*, but that if Sally Godfrey should

stay behind in England and her secret was made known, she would be dead to polite society. This is where the central concern of stability and safety comes into the frame. A similar situation nearly befalls Mr. Darcy's sister, Georgiana, when she elopes with Mr. Wickham at the age of fifteen. Mr. Darcy swoops to the rescue as her guardian and saves both Georgiana and his reputation from scandal, though he has to pay Wickham a high price to keep silent.

Now that the traumas of sexual, physical, and emotional abuse and their effects have been exposed, I will explain how the women come to know their lovers' secrets, and how they heal them of their pain. In the case of *Dirty, Sexy, Saint*, and *Fifty Shades of Grey*, the answer is through sex. After the men have had sex with their partners, they open up about the trauma they have endured. Nowhere is this trend clearer or more disturbing than when Samantha states, "despite his attempts to push her away, there was no mistaking he wanted her. And if the only outlet she could give him was a physical one, she'd grant him the permission to use her body to slake his emotional needs" (Phillips and Wilde 203). Samantha is physically allowing her body to be the conduit for Clay's trauma. Clay reflects on Samantha's sacrifice and says that she

had gotten him through one of the worst days in recent memory... [that] she'd surrendered everything to him, and allowed him to slake his primal need inside her, to release all the pain he'd kept buried since he was a kid because he didn't know jack shit about how to deal with his emotions. It had been so much easier to suppress the pain and misery, despite the dark memories lingering just below the surface, always there, silently festering, just waiting for the one trigger to cause an eruption when the past resurfaced again. (Phillips and Wilde 208-9)

After this sexual encounter, Clay is finally able to open up about the abuse he endured as a child and relates it to Samantha, who encourages and supports him as he tells the story. This interaction provides two pieces of information about trauma in romance novels. The first is that women have to be ready to sacrifice their bodies for the sake of a lover's mental health and take that responsibility on themselves. Second, not all women can perform this job, only the soulmate of a man can give them the proper comfort and care they ask for. In essence, it is a woman's job to fix her man's mental health and find out his secrets.

Men in modern society are told how they should act and respond to certain situations. Showing emotions and opening up about difficult experiences is still something that society has not prompted a lot in men, though there are more attempts and openness now than there were ten years ago. Kate Dvorkin notes in her article, "Working with Men in Therapy," how men are reticent about admitting emotional weakness. However, Dvorkin lays out a plan to help men work through these weaknesses without humiliating them. She notes,

Vulnerability, intimacy, and closeness are not traits valued by most men. Men are more likely to aspire to competency, risk taking, leadership, teamwork, problem solving, and stoicism. I use these values in the service of therapeutic work. Characteristics typical of men that can be valuable in therapeutic work include masculine camaraderie, discipline, rationality, and aggression. My goal is to support these qualities and apply them in facing covert fear or depression. (Dvorkin 224)

Through this type of uplifting therapeutic work, help for men to connect and overcome emotional hesitation is possible, something that may not have been available more than a few years ago. However, what James, Reynard, Phillips and Wilde do is create trauma and abuse as plot points in their novels. They capitalize on this abuse and make it a quirky and dark characteristic for their male lovers. This feels like a mockery to those who have suffered similar situations. Due to the trauma these men (and women) endure, there is a kind of role reversal where the men become domineering in their careers and attain financial stability but lack emotional security, and on the opposite side, women lose control of their physical security and gain control of emotional security. Women still suffer more in this bargain, as they must rely on men to support them financially, while they support those men emotionally. Women are expected to handle this task alone. Meanwhile, the men are free to sate their sexual desires on women they deem only worthy of a one-night-stand.

Sally Godfrey was a casualty of Mr. B's desire, as Paulina and her child are casualties of Gabriel's. Christian also has a list of fifteen ex-Submissives, some of whom are obsessed with him and do dangerous and reckless things to make him notice them again. These new women, Pamela, Samantha, Ana, and Julia are on a long list of women who came before them. Sally Godfrey, Paulina, and Christian's ex-Submissives were destroyed by these men, and society has taught Pamela, Julia, and Ana that it is these new women's job to resolve the male protagonist's issues and provide sexual comfort and excitement for them. These men need therapy, not women.

V. THE CULT OF VIRGINITY

Romance novels have had a fascination with virginal women since the genre's inception. It remains a fixture even in twenty-first-century novels when the stigma of a woman losing their virginity before marriage is less frowned upon. This trope has made purity culture mainstream and pushes back against the progressivism of third and fourth-wave feminism as well as the progress in the LGBTQ+ community. Romance novels, especially those that fall within the forbidden romance trope, are fantasies that hurt the women reading them.

Pamela's subtitle is *Or, Virtue Rewarded*. What is this virtue, and what exactly is the reward? Pamela is described in a note from the editor as a young woman, "having a taste of Easy and Plenty in a higher Sphere of Life than what she was born and first brought into, resolve to return to her primitive Poverty, rather than give up her Innocence" (Richardson 8). Now virtue and innocence are linked together. Although Pamela does have a flaw, which is that she was "too early debauched by pernicious *Novels*," which Mr. B. clarifies to be romance novels later in the text (Richardson 9). This means that Pamela has based her ideas about romance on tales of romantic exploits, and her expectations for love may be very high. In a letter that Pamela writes about the advances her master has made toward her, her parents respond with this, "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 anything in this Life, can make up to you" (Richardson 14). Here it is more plainly implied that virtue equals virginity. There is great emphasis on the fact that Pamela should stay a virgin, and on no account should she give up that quality. Pamela's parents remind her that all the earthly things she abstains

from in this life will be rewarded to her in some way in heaven. What will matter is if she has stayed pure and followed the lessons from the Bible.¹⁵ Pamela responds to this letter by noting, “I will die a thousand Deaths, rather than be dishonest in any way” (Richardson 15). She takes her virtue, virginity, purity, and innocence very seriously. In the modern context this devotion to purity is extreme, but for a woman of Pamela’s rank and socio-economic level, being seen as “damaged goods” would have serious repercussions. One of the barriers, Pamela’s persistence in keeping her virtue drives the narrative to its climax. Mr. B. becomes more frustrated the more she resists him, he becomes more attracted to her the more she resists. In one such case, Mr. B. takes action and states,

Because you’re a little Fool, and know not what’s good for yourself. I tell you, I will make a Gentlewoman of you, if you be obliging, and don’t stand in your own Light; and so saying, he put his Arm about me, and kiss’d me! (Richardson 23)

Pamela is horrified and begins to cry as she normally does on these occasions. Pamela reflects on this scene and why she will not accept this kind of treatment. She first thinks of her virtue, which is the first barrier in the novel. Secondly, she thinks of how inappropriate the relationship between a landed gentleman with a poor maidservant is. When Pamela brings these issues up with Mr. B. he shouts, “Who would have you otherwise you foolish Slut!” (Richardson 24). Mr. B. brings up an important point, which is if he has sex with her, she will not be viewed as pure or useful. It will be hard for her to find work and shame will tarnish her reputation as a servant that slept with their master.

¹⁵ The Bible makes many references to marriage and virginity. The following verses would be a small sampling of what Pamela was taught as a young woman: Hebrews 13:4 “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous” (ESV), Leviticus 21: 13 “And he shall take a wife in her virginity” (ESV).

This is why Pamela is so adamant about returning home where she will be poor, but safe. Pamela does not get her wish, as she is kidnapped by Mr. B. Pamela sees the risk to her virtue as so great that she considers drowning herself in the lake (Richardson 172-77).

Pamela is reminded, however, that she has no right to end her own life, according to the Christian doctrines of the time, and thus she does not go through with that plan. During her entrapment, Mr. B. tries to assault her. The scene is described this way:

But he kissed me with a 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 scream'd out in such a manner, as never my body heard the like. But there was nobody to help me. (Richardson 203)

This scene represents the point of ritual death, as Pamela physically faints away into a death-like stupor. This stops Mr. B. from assaulting Pamela and is the turning point in the novel. He realizes he is first, concerned for Pamela's well-being, and secondly, that using any kind of force will not work in attaining Pamela. He then sets out in transforming his character with the help of Pamela's virtue. Although many trials happen before their marriage, eventually the two are wed, and Pamela writes about it thusly:

And thus, my dearest Parents, it is your happy, happy, thrice happy *Pamela*, at last, marry'd; and to who? — Why, to her beloved, gracious Master! the Lord of her Wishes, — And thus the dear, once naughty Assailer of her Innocence, by a blessed turn of providence, is become the kind, the generous Protector and Rewarder of it. (Richardson 345)

This novel teaches readers that a woman's virtue is the jewel of her purity, and giving it up to the wrong man will ruin them forever. Pamela's disdain for Mr. B. changes quickly

as she realizes he cannot help himself and love her as he does. With this realization, Pamela makes it her goal to reform the rake. In this context, Richardson sees Mr. B.'s reformation and Pamela's moral lessons to him as admirable changes in both characters. However, there is a quick turnaround time between Pamela being willing to die to save her virtue and then going on to marry the man that would have ruined her to society. Richardson realized the irony of this situation. However, some of his readers were less aware. There are accounts that when the issue with the wedding scene was released, various groups went to the church and rang the church bell to celebrate the union (Regis 64). So, when returning to the question what is virtue, and what is the reward for it? *Pamela* makes it clear that virtue is virginity and purity, and the reward for maintaining one's virtue is to be married to a man above your status and live in security and happiness for the rest of your life. However, something more sinister is at the root of this marriage. Looking at the last quote provided, the control that Mr. B. had over Pamela is continued once they get married. Firstly, Pamela continues to call him "Master," even after their union. She does this because she feels unworthy of calling him his first name, which is never revealed. Secondly, she notes how large a shift Mr. B. has made over the course of the novel, and at the end, he has become "the generous Protector and Rewarder" of her virtue, which sounds like he has total control over her mind (Richardson 345). Mr. B. is the model for the eighteenth-century rake¹⁶. Therefore, it is Pamela's job to reform him and teach him lessons on virtue.

Pamela sold incredibly well and sparked many responses. There are accounts of ministers preaching about *Pamela* to their congregations and what a good example the

¹⁶ *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines a rake as "A fashionable or stylish man of dissolute or promiscuous habits." A common synonym at the time for rake was a libertine.

protagonist is of virtue. Although Keymer notes that the minister that made the endorsement from the pulpit may have been in debt to Richardson at the time of his sermon (xxiv). Others saw the irony in the novel and wrote spin-offs using satire to the extreme. Particularly, Henry Fielding with this novel titled *Shamela*. Whatever side one was on, Pamelists or Anti-Pamelists, it is hard not to see the impact of *Pamela* in society and other novels of the time. This is troubling because *Pamela* created a blueprint for the trope of the reformed rake, as well as romanticized Stockholm syndrome, described as when a captive person becomes attracted to their captor. These qualities are glorified and put in a romantic light. These problematic tropes continue in romance novels to the present day.

The unrealistic nature of *Pamela* is obvious to modern readers. However, earlier writers took on the issue of love and virtue in as equally an unrealistic nature, but with more realistic outcomes for the protagonists. Examining Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina; or Love in a Maze* reveals how fickle men are, and how desiring a lasting relationship with a man can ruin a woman's reputation. This novel focuses on two people who are in high society. Unlike Pamela and Mr. B., Fantomina is left to her own devices, and her parents are not seen until the end of the novel. This trope of young women being unsupervised and unsupported by their parents is common in modern romance as well. Fantomina starts out going to an opera and sees many young noblemen soliciting prostitutes for later in the evening, instead of mingling with the women of higher society. Fantomina reflects on this and states, "the greater was her Wonder that Men, some of whom she knew were accounted to have Wit, should have Tastes so very Depraved" (Haywood 24). This leads Fantomina to put on a costume and pretend to be a prostitute herself. One thing Haywood

points out often is the stupidity of the men in this book. Haywood displays this early on when Fantomina makes her appearance as a prostitute and a man says, “Gad, she is mighty like my fine Lady Such-a-one, — naming her own Name” (25). This indicates two things about Fantomina and the men she solicits. Firstly, Fantomina may not be that adept at creating costumes that significantly change her appearance. Secondly, the men that she is soliciting may be too drunk or oblivious that this prostitute would be the woman of high society that they are claiming she looks like. Either way, Fantomina’s poor disguise, or the men’s poor judgment proves that none of these gentlemen or gentlewomen are good at making decisions. It is at this gathering that Fantomina meets Beauplaisir. After speaking, he admits that “the Passion he profess’d was not of that humble nature which can be contented with distant Admirations: — He resolv’d not to part from her without the Gratifications of those Desires she had inspir’d” (Haywood 27). Fantomina is frightened at the prospect of her virtue being tarnished; however, her desire for Beauplaisir encourages her to meet him again. Right before their second meeting, Fantomina reminds herself to “depend on the Strength of her virtue to bear her safe thro’ Trials more dangerous than she apprehended” (Haywood 29). Pamela similarly relies on her virtue to get her through difficult situations. Fantomina’s hope to stay pure works for the couple’s second meeting. However, on their third meeting, her hopes are dashed. In this third meeting, her final defense to try and protect her honor is to tell Beauplaisir that she is a virgin. But he does not care about her reputation and he deflowers her. This scene is described in this way:

But that he little regarded, or if he had, would have been far from obliging him to desist; — nay, in the present burning eagerness of Desire, ‘tis probable that had he

been acquainted both with who and what she really was, the knowledge of her Birth would not have influen'd him with Respect sufficient to have curb'd the wild Exuberance of his luxurious Wishes, or made him in that longing, — that impatient Moment, change the form of his Addresses. In fine, she was undone.
(Haywood 32)

Here Beauplaisir is a more accurate representation of a rake. First, he does not care that she is a virgin. Secondly, his desire for her is so great that even if he knew who she was, he would still have sex with her. In the introduction to the text, Sarah Creel, Bethany Qualls, and Anna Sagal wonder if this scene is a description of rape, and describe the “act of penetration... is implied to be involuntary” and that “Fantomina ‘struggled all she could’” (Haywood 8, 32). It is because Pamela faints away that stops Mr. B. the first time, and her virtue continues to stall him throughout the text. Here Haywood portrays a more accurate picture of a rake by showing how far they are willing to go for their desires, as well as how much of a conquest male protagonists take sex to be.

Fantomina realizes that her virtue may now be lacking, but she can still receive love from Beauplaisir, or so she hopes. She notes, “if he is really the faithful, the constant Lover he has sworn to be, how charming will be our Amour?” (Haywood 39). This quote indicates Fantomina’s youth, naiveté, and inexperience in society. Beauplaisir soliciting prostitutes at the start of the text shows him to be a fickle man. However, Fantomina is unaware of this, and as her first lover, she wants to stay with him. She does not get her wish. As Beauplaisir, continues his relationship with Fantomina, he grows increasingly bored with her. Haywood again typifies the rake, stating, “he varied not much from his Sex, as to prolong Desire to any great Length after Possession: The rifled charms of

Fantomina soon lost their Poignancy and grew tasteless and insipid” (39-40). This quote indicates the idea that Beauplaisir, after having sex with Fantomina, seems to own her and can get rid of her as he pleases. This may be because that Fantomina was posing as a prostitute, so he thinks of her as a lesser person. That idea in itself shows that Beauplaisir sees himself above other working-class people. Furthermore, Haywood admits when the couple first have sex, that even if Beauplaisir knew with whom he was sleeping, he would most likely proceed to the same end. Therefore, Fantomina realizes as many women do, that men do not always stick around, even if their partner loves them.

Fantomina, already being acquainted with fooling Beauplaisir with her costumes, follows him to the country and takes on the persona of a servant-maid named Celia (Haywood 41-44). For a month they have a pleasant time, but again he grows tired of this “new” woman and returns to the city. Fantomina takes two last disguises, The Widow Bloomer, and later in the text, Incognita, both of which Beauplaisir falls in love with again. Haywood repeats her mocking tone from the beginning of the text when none of the rich men were able to identify Fantomina as a gentlewoman at the opera by stating, “it may, perhaps, seem strange that Beauplaisir should in such near intimacies continue, still deceiv’d: I know men who swear it an Impossibility, and that no disguise could hinder them from knowing a Woman they had once enjoy’d”; Haywood follows up to state that Fantomina may have fooled Beauplaisir due to her being an excellent actress (51). The irony of this is that Beauplaisir would have seen private areas of Fantomina’s body, and interacted with those parts of her body four times at least, which no acting or disguise would be able to cover or hide. Fantomina does a fantastic job of keeping her personalities separate and untraceable to her. However, her exploits get the best of her.

The point of ritual death, which is never resolved, comes when “she found the consequences of her amorous Follies would be, without almost a Miracle, impossible to be concealed: — She was with Child” (Haywood 71-72). This pregnancy is a deviation from most modern romance novels where the couples have prolific sex lives, and rarely have children until later in the protagonist’s stories. The presence of Fantomina’s pregnancy suddenly thrusts the reader into the reality that women do become pregnant, even if they do not wish to be, and men can lose interest and move on if they wish. The narrative ends with Fantomina’s mother finding out her daughter’s situation, and who made it this way, and dragging Beauplaisir in for an interrogation. Once the whole truth of the matter is made known to the mother and Beauplaisir, and the mother demands he marries her daughter, he responds: “The blame is wholly hers, and I have nothing to request further of you than that you will not divulge the distracted Folly she has been guilty of” (Haywood 76-77). Instead of taking responsibility after knowing that he is the father of this child, he chooses his pleasure and the ability he had to continue being a rake instead of taking care of Fantomina and his child. Fantomina is punished for her actions by being forced to live out the rest of her days in France (Haywood 77). To those who read this without context, this punishment may seem like a terrible situation; however, the introduction clarifies that “enclosed Catholic spaces like monasteries and convents were frequently associated with excessive sexuality and lax behavior among eighteenth century English readers due in no small part to anti-Catholic sentiment and a prevailing discomfort with single-sex institutions” (Creel et. al., 15). This move at the end of the text, which gives Fantomina a chance to start another life in France is due to her high class. Had Fantomina been a character of Pamela’s station, her career and social life

would have ended once she was found out to be pregnant. This is an important distinction between the two texts. In *Fantomina*, Fantomina is of a high class and is still somewhat punished for the loss of her reputation and virtue, while in *Pamela*, Pamela is hardly ever blamed for continuing and eventually marrying a man far above her station. Thus, *Fantomina* portrays a more realistic society with relevant consequences to the action that sex and love had at the time.

Fifty Shades of Grey and *Gabriel's Inferno* treat this topic in a similar way that *Pamela* does. *Fifty Shades of Grey* uses Ana's virginity as one of the first of many barriers in the novel. Christian is asking Ana about her hard limits for the contract, right after showing her his BDSM room. She takes a long time to respond and Christian assumes she has restrictive limits. However, when Ana admits the truth that "I haven't had sex before, so I don't know"; Christian becomes irate (James 108). Christian's anger stems from the fact that she did not reveal this information to him sooner, and that he had just revealed the type of sex he enjoys in the Red Room of Pain.¹⁷ Either way, Christian's anger highlights the questionability of his character. When he inquires why she had never had sex before, she admits, "'no one's really, you know...' Come up to scratch, only you. And you turn out to be some kind of monster" (James 110). Ana's standards are impossible to meet because her romantic heroes are Mr. Darcy and Mr. Rochester. This love of literary heroes is reminiscent of Pamela and her love of romance novels. Both of these women are looking for something unobtainable, and therefore their ideas of love are twisted around a fantasy. Christian wants Ana as his Submissive and he states, "we're going to rectify the situation right now"; when Ana does not understand what he means,

¹⁷ This is what Ana calls Christian's sex dungeon.

he clarifies, “I am going to make love to you now” (James 110). Christian is very clear with his intentions, although he breaks some of his self-imposed rules to have sex with Ana. The sex scene that follows is not graphic for a romance novel. However, the circumstances and end of the sex act are unlikely. First, Ana being in this circumstance at all is unlikely, as she met Christian by coincidence. The fact that she would have sex with him, even though she has many doubts about his character and has known him only for a few days amplifies the fantasy of this scenario. Secondly, before they begin to have intercourse Christian states, “‘you are mine,’ he whispers. ‘Only mine. Don’t forget it’” (James 119). Here Christian already sounds like she is his submissive, even though this is her first time having sex, and she has not signed the contract yet. The desire for ownership he wants over her is troubling. The last absurdity of the scene is that Ana feels no pain during sex, even though it is a lively affair. She experiences pure bliss the whole time.

Christian taking Ana’s virginity does fix one of the barriers to their relationship, but it also opens the door to many other unforeseen problems. Unlike the eighteenth-century texts, Ana’s virginity is seen as a deterrent, not a virtue. However, the significance of her giving her virginity to Christian proves that he is the type of man she has dreamed of, even though he does not turn out to be what she wants at the end of the first book. The fast-paced nature of having sex with someone Ana has known for only a short time is similar to *Fantomina*, but Ana is less hesitant about the proposal of sex and going through with it. Christian fits the stereotype which Regis would call the “bad boy” or the “alpha male,” or the twenty-first-century equivalent to a rake. Therefore, Christian and Mr. B. are more alike than Ana is to Pamela or *Fantomina*. Christian admits that he

has had fifteen Submissives before Ana, but she was the first woman he “has slept with” or “had sex in my bed” with (James 153). Because of this, Christian considers this time sleeping with Ana as his first real loss of virginity as well, at least as a normal person and not a Dominant. As Christian starts to learn how to express his love more for Ana, which starts happening in the second book, Christian then realizes how significant her letting him take her virginity is. So, in this text virginity is not seen as a sign of purity, however, it does bring up many problems for later sexual interactions.

Among the modern romance novels mentioned in this paper, *Gabriel's Inferno* is the closest to *Pamela*, because Gabriel is similarly obsessed with Julia's virginity. The morality element of this book is because Gabriel, as the title suggests, is a Dante-like figure trying to sort out his sinful past. Gabriel is led through hell by his own pure and virginal Beatrice, Julia. Although this Dante storyline is merely an extended allusion, Reynard makes an obvious deviation from the original text. In the *Divine Comedy*, because Beatrice is saved from hell, she is not allowed to guide him through the first nine circles of hell. Instead, Virgil leads Dante through hell until Beatrice meets Dante in Purgatory. Whatever the case may be, Gabriel takes a lot of time in the book obsessing over Julia. Early on in the text, he notes that she “was not purely attractive; she was beautiful like an angel or a muse. And she wasn't merely beautiful; she was sensual and hypnotic, but also innocent. Her pretty eyes reflected a depth of feeling and radiated purity that he had never noticed before” (Reynard 37). At first, Gabriel is simply intrigued by this quality in his student, but as the romance progresses, he realizes he wants to partake in her purity as atonement for his sins. A majority of the morality comes from the Catholic poet, Dante, whom Julia is researching. When Julia reflects on her

virginity, she says, “She wanted to be loved. She would have forsworn sex forever if she thought it would guarantee her the kind of love that was the stuff of poetry and myth” (Reynard 62). Here Julia mimics Pamela and Ana, who were also swept away by literary romantic heroes. Julia’s fascination with Dante and Beatrice is not hindered by the fact that when Dante and Beatrice met, Dante was significantly older than the underage Beatrice. As it turns out, that was also the scenario with Julia and Gabriel’s first meeting. It is at this meeting that Julia falls irrevocably in love with Gabriel (Reynard 62). If he is obsessed with her purity, then she is similarly obsessed with his every mood and movement. Julia’s virginity does become a deterrent to their relationship in a few ways, but Gabriel relishes taking it at the end of the novel. One of these instances happens when Gabriel, his sister, and Julia are at a bar together, and Gabriel rudely comments, “You’re smiling like a teenager, Julianne. And I can sense your innocence. It’s more than obvious that you’re still a virgin” (Reynard 104). This is after he has had a few drinks and another man has made a pass at Julia. This interaction indicates multiple internal struggles with Gabriel. First, he sees Julia being happy for being admired and feels the need to knock down her ego so he feels better. Secondly, he does not sleep with virgins because he does not “make love,” rather, he “fucks.” Third, he is very attracted to her in this scene, and thus he uses her virginity as a way for him to stop himself from pursuing her. Lastly, although he is trying to stop himself from falling in love with her, he does not want her to be with anyone else; if he cannot have her, no one can. Although Gabriel is very possessive, and Julia does not enjoy his possessive nature, she is similarly possessive with him. Gabriel gives Paul the moniker of “*Angelfucker*,” and Julia coins the term “*Emerson Whore*” to any woman who tries to catch his attention (Reynard 98,151, 137).

Gabriel's and Julia's idiosyncrasies do make them aligned with each other in some ways.

After Gabriel's rude insinuation about Julia's sexual life, she becomes annoyed with Gabriel (Reynard 111). As both parties calm down, and Gabriel starts liking Julia more romantically, he attempts to make amends for his blunder at the nightclub. He begins by covering her "provocative" shoulder, and according to Julia this is "an intimate act, but very chaste; he *covered* her" and in this way "Virgil was honoring her" and "Julia believed that he would not mind that she was a virgin. And that upon knowing, his acceptance would cover her gently" (Reynard 135). The fact that Julia has started to internalize that her virginity, as something that needs to be covered, specifically by Gabriel, is reminiscent of Pamela and Mr. B. Julia seems to have developed the same kind of Stockholm syndrome as Pamela, even though her body has not physically been taken captive. Both women have allowed an internalized concept, virginity, to be externalized and taken over by men who do what they wish with that power. Later, Gabriel continues to applaud Julia's virginity when he sends her irises, which were "a symbol of Mary in the Middle Ages and so it became associated with virginity. In giving her irises, Gabriel was saluting her purity" (Reynard 264). One idea that does show some growth between the men in the eighteenth-century texts, and Gabriel, is that he states to Julia, "you would be a virgin even if he had forced you. You would be a virgin to me" (Reynard 277). This is right after Julia admits she was assaulted by her former boyfriend but not vaginally. Gabriel, as a modern man, understands that assault is not a choice. Whereas society in the eighteenth century may understand that, but would not want to associate with a woman that has been sexually used. What Julia wants is for someone to listen to her and empathize with her, and take her as she is. Instead, Gabriel makes this

situation about something that did not happen and turns the light on himself, and says that he would still see her as a virgin if she was forced to have sex with her ex-boyfriend. He is not listening to her experience at all.

As with *Pamela*, *Fifty Shades of Grey*, and *Dirty, Sexy, Saint*, Gabriel becomes monogamous once he realizes that Julia is the only woman for him. He tries to regain his chastity by not “fucking” other women, and thus “his Chastity made it all the more virtuous because of the strength and desperation of his desire” (Reynard 322). In all the modern romance books, as well as *Fantomina*, the men do not associate love and sex, or love and “fucking”. Meanwhile, the women who are virgins associate sex with love. This disparity in thinking makes it difficult for the women to always understand where the male protagonists are coming from in their previous relationships. Julia does understand, however, that Gabriel is making a sacrifice for her, and that he is waiting for her to be ready to have sex with him even though he wants to have sex with her anytime he sees her. This is similar to Mr. B. forsaking his rakish nature to be with Pamela. In the last section of the text, Gabriel and Julia overcome multiple barriers of family, former enemies, and the most significant barrier, that she is his student. After the semester is over, they travel to Italy together and consummate their relationship. Before they have sex, Gabriel thinks about how Julia had taken his “emotional virginity” and that she had done it “patiently and gently. He would give her nothing less” than the same treatment (Reynard 525). This sex scene is more realistic than *Fifty Shades of Grey’s* first sex scene, as Julia experiences slight discomfort, and the couple takes the process much slower (Reynard 537-43). The symbolism of this sex scene is closer to *Pamela* marrying Mr. B. That is, once Gabriel has sex with her, she is totally his. She notes this when she

says he “owns her, body and soul” (Reynard 507). With Julia and Gabriel’s relationship, Gabriel is fascinated by her purity and goodness. He relies on and insists that she “*look for him in Hell,*” which she does (Reynard 204). And it is her responsibility to drag him into the light. Julia, like Pamela, holds the superior morality which she gives away as a gift to Gabriel at the end of the text. Therefore, it is not an evenly balanced sexual relationship. In fact, nothing in their relationship is evenly balanced, except for how possessive they are of each other.

Pamela and *Gabriel’s Inferno* also share a religiosity that impacts the tone of sexual awakening and gratification at the loss of purity. In *Pamela*, the religious elements are seen with one of the main characters being Parson Williams, Pamela, and her parents who quote scripture and the Daily Book of Prayer to each other via their letters. Pamela’s purity is rooted in Christian ideology. *Gabriel’s Inferno’s* religious elements are rooted more in toxic purity culture rather than any denomination of faith. However, at one point Gabriel reminds Julia that he was raised Episcopalian (Reynard 362). The evidence that indicates purity culture in the text is, first, that Julia waits until she finds the perfect man to have sex with. Second, Gabriel constantly covers Julia when he thinks she is inappropriately dressed or tells her that she should change because she looks indecent. This may be a holdover from the fact that *Gabriel’s Inferno* is *Twilight* fanfiction, and Stephanie Meyer wrote *Twilight* from a strict Mormon perspective.

Romance novels provide a double standard between men and women not only in regards to virginity but the expectations for what women and men will do after they have become a couple. As stated before, male protagonists are womanizers who relish one-night-stands and the power to control their own money and businesses, while women are

mostly expected to remain virginal and rely on their male partners' money to help sustain them. Once the betrothal scene happens, and the couples are ensured to stay together, those standards change again. Women continue to rely on men's money, but now they have the added pressure to have children with their lovers, even if Christian and Gabriel do not explicitly state this fact outright.

In *Pamela*, the need for children makes sense, as Mr. B. fears that his estate will be entailed away to a distant relation. In the epilogue to the text, Pamela is described as making, "her beloved Spouse happy in a numerous and hopeful Progeny" (Richardson 499). The need for multiple children was important in the eighteenth century, as the rate of children dying during childbirth or in their early years was more common at the time, due to poor medical knowledge and practices. This is seen in Mr. B.'s previous relationship with Sally Godfrey. Mr. B. briefly describes the pregnancy of his mistress being one where Sally "suffer'd so much in childbed, that nobody expected her Life; and this, when she was up, made such an Impression upon her, that she dreaded nothing so much as the Thoughts of returning to her Fault" (Richardson 482). Sally Godfrey almost dying in childbirth proves how dangerous pregnancy could be during this time. It was such a harrowing experience for Sally that she refused to return to Mr. B. or her newborn daughter and instead fled to Madagascar. With this in mind, every time Pamela has a child for Mr. B., she puts her own life on the line for the sake of his happiness. That is a big sacrifice to make. The text does describe Pamela continuing to live to old age and being happy, but she is still required to serve Mr. B. with her body.

In *Gabriel's Inferno*, the issue of having children comes up once Gabriel's and Julia's relationship has been more solidified. Once the couple has decided to have sex,

the need for contraception comes up. Gabriel tells Julia that this will not be an issue for them because “I can’t have children, Julianne” (Reynard 429). The idea of wanting children is a concern that Gabriel had never had before because he had never equated having sex to making love before. Sex was simply an outlet for his anger and repressed trauma. Gabriel clarifies that he has had a vasectomy because “someone like me shouldn’t reproduce. The language that Gabriel uses to explain his infertility is very base. Words such as “sterilization” and “reproduce” demonstrate the disdain he has for the idea of children. It is also a sign that he views himself with these terms as well. It is not until the fourth book in the *Gabriel’s Inferno* series that Julia and Gabriel have a daughter, Claire. Much drama surrounds this choice and it leads to a multitude of fights in that book.¹⁸ Although it takes longer than usual for the protagonists to have a child, Gabriel and Julia fall into one of the normal tropes of the forbidden romance genre: that the family line must be continued, often to the detriment of the women having the male protagonist’s children.

¹⁸ *Gabriel’s Inferno* differs from many of the novels and other romance series which have already been completed as Reynard is still adding to the series and seems like they have no intention of stopping. Therefore, any events that happen in the series can be changed or given a different interpretation in future novels.

VI. CONCLUSION: LOOKING FORWARD TO A HEALTHIER ROMANCE GENRE

“You will never be able to make both of them good for anything. Take your choice, but you must be satisfied with only one. There is but such a quality of merit between them; just enough to make one good sort of man” Jane Austen¹⁹

Romance novels from the eighteenth century to the twenty-first century hold such striking dichotomies within them. Stories of love, loss, and reconciliation also uphold harmful structures of power, such as patriarchy and classism. By shedding light on the moments of sincerity and kindness in the texts, as well as providing more inclusive characters and scenarios, the genre can become a vessel for change and revolution. To see how positive change can be made in the genre, taking a step back and looking at the subgenre of the forbidden romance as a whole is needed. Looking at *Pamela*, Richardson propagates and popularizes the master-servant love plot. Richardson also places virginity and purity on a pedestal. *Fantomina* satirizes these concepts by creating a gentleman, Beauplaisir, who is so stupid that he cannot recognize *Fantomina* in her multiple disguises, even though he has sex with her each time *Fantomina* creates a new version of herself. Thus, *Fantomina* becomes a libertine woman, breaking the stereotype of purity and virginity. However, *Fantomina* becomes pregnant and is forced to move to France. The consequences of her reality catch up with her, which rarely happens in romance novels. This renders *Fantomina*, not a romance, as there is no betrothal or marriage between Beauplaisir and *Fantomina*. If *Fantomina* had not been punished for her sexual activity, she would be a model of a liberated woman. Had *Fantomina* ended with her not

¹⁹ Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*. Puffin Books, 1813. Penguin Classics, 2003.

being punished, a counter-narrative to the regular restrictions on womanhood would be provided. Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* continues the wealth gap relationship trope that *Pamela* popularized. However, Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy are on more equal footing because Elizabeth is not Mr. Darcy's servant. Twenty-first-century romance novels continue these tropes as *Gabriel's Inferno* relies on the trope of the student-professor relationship, as well as the wealth gap relationship. *Gabriel's Inferno* also highlights Julia's virginity. *Fifty Shades of Grey* focuses on the Dominant-Submissive trope and the trope of virginity. Lastly *Dirty, Sexy, Saint* focuses on the employer-employee relationship and a wealth gap relationship.

Because of the imbalanced power dynamics in forbidden romance novels, the heroines are often put in unnecessary danger to heighten the suspense of the novels. The scene of Pamela almost being assaulted by Mr. B, and Ana almost being assaulted by Jose are examples of this trope (Richardson 203 and James 59). Women are repeatedly placed in dangerous situations and rely on men to help them. The damsel in distress may never rest. Because the heroines are often low to middle-class, they rely on their male lovers' money and status for existence and thus take on a lesser role than their male counterparts. Clay and Samantha exemplify this trope, as Samantha has to beg Clay if she “can stay here until I can figure things out?” (Phillips and Wilde 47). Samantha was supposed to play the role of the independent risk-taker, going against her family's wishes. Just like *Fantomina*. Instead, she has to rely on Clay to survive outside her wealthy bubble. Lastly, money makes up the most interesting part of the lovers' relationships. Gifts are constantly given instead of quality time or words or affirmation. Because the men are the group giving gifts to their female counterparts, some of the women associate

these gifts with owning their male lovers' sex. This can be seen when Julia states, ““it looks like you’re trying to buy me”” (Reynard 157). Whenever Julia, Ana, or Samantha attempt to return the expensive gifts they have been given, Christian, Gabriel, and Clay, become angry. In one case when Ana attempts to pay for a meal, Christian states, “Are you trying to emasculate me?” (James 459). Christian, Gabriel, and Clay see money as being intertwined with their masculinity. Because Julia and Ana have significantly less money, they are presented as hyperfeminine and weak.

In contrast to these moments of despair and inequality, these novels provide a few scenes that counter the normal, toxic tropes of the forbidden romance genre. In *Pamela*, once Mr. B. has finally allowed Pamela to return to her parents, he falls into a fit of illness at her loss. This is an equivalent point of ritual death for Mr. B. When Pamela returns to him, it is out of genuine care for his well-being. When she arrives, he states, ““I cannot be ill, said he, while you are with me”” (Richardson 255). Pamela returning and curing Mr. B. is the ultimate role reversal, as Mr. B. coming and attempting to assault Pamela caused the first point of ritual death. *Pride and Prejudice* demonstrate how Mr. Darcy uses his power to unite Lydia and Mr. Wickham, when earlier in the text he used his power to split up Mr. Bingley and Jane. Once Lydia returns to Meryton she lets slip that ““[Mr. Darcy] was to come there with Wickham, you know. But gracious me! I quite forgot! I ought not to say a word about it. I promised them so faithfully”” (Austen 302). Because of this knowledge, Elizabeth realizes how much her family is in debt to Mr. Darcy. She thanks him later for his generosity, but he states that it was for her alone that he helped Lydia (Austen 346-7).

Finding moments of unadulterated affection in *Gabriel’s Inferno*, *Fifty Shades of*

Grey, and *Dirty, Sexy, Saint* is more difficult, as all of the scenarios and references being made are common to a modern reader. The abuse that takes place occurs in a recognizable society. It is as if twenty-first-century romance novelists have regressed their morals past those of the eighteenth century. Just as Elizabeth states to Jane in the epigraph of this chapter, it would take a combination of all the good bits of the eighteenth and twenty-first-century forbidden romance novels to make one good novel. It will take more work than simply emotionally abusing the men as much as the women are abused in these texts to make the genre more progressive. Equality need to derive from the raising of women's standards of living, and a less emotionally and physically abusive past for the male and female protagonists. Both Regis and Roach take a different approach to concluding their studies of the romance novel. Roach notes that the genre is lacking in more diverse love alternatives;

It's not that the novel insists on heterosexual love, as romance storytelling is admirably open to sexual diversity. The problem is that the genre places so much insistence on pair-bonded romantic love as a necessity for maturity and happiness. Students... cry in my office about the pressure to find One True Love" which excludes those in queer, polyamorous, or aromantic communities (194).

The forbidden romance novel takes a stronger stance against queer relationships as no characters in any of the books discussed in this project are part of the LGBTQ+ community. This lack of diversity will continue to exclude romance readers. Regis notes that the romance novel, which is scrutinized by the academic community, "is to discount and perhaps even deny, the most personal hopes of millions of women around the world (207). Given the survey of the six romance novels given in this thesis, much work needs

to be done in the twenty-first-century forbidden romance genre. *Gabriel's Inferno*, *Fifty Shades of Grey*, and *Dirty, Sexy, Saint*, fit more into Regis's conclusion that romance is a fantasy in which harmful power dynamics are placed in a romantic light. If the forbidden romance genre provided informed stories of BDSM, or the realities of poverty and the struggles to overcome them, as *Fifty Shades of Grey* and *Gabriel's Inferno* fail to do, then women would see themselves represented and empowered. If Samantha became an independent baker, separated from the multi-million-dollar Jamieson name, instead of wholly relying on Clay for money and housing, then women would see independence and strong-willed female leads attaining their goals. Not everybody wants to read a self-help book on starting a business. Many women, and men, want to read romance. As Roach points out,

Love matters. Romance fiction raises critical questions for the reader about self and society. As is true of high literary fiction, genre romance has the ability to provoke reflections about the culture, to hold up a screen or mirror that allows up to see and judge ourselves, (194)

If what is seen in the mirror is a straight, white, beautiful, and conservative couple, the genre of forbidden romance is failing to represent people today.

APPENDIX SECTION

Chronology

- 1725 Eliza Haywood: *Fantomina; Or Love in a Maze*
- 1740 Samuel Richardson: *Pamela; or Virtue Rewarded*
- 1813 Jane Austen: *Pride and Prejudice*
- 2010 Sylvain Reynard [Fanfiction]: *The University of Edward Mason*²⁰
- 2013 E. L. James [Fanfiction]: *Master of the Universe*
- Sylvain Reynard 2011: *Gabriel's Inferno*
- E. L. James 2011: *Fifty Shades of Grey*:
- Carly Phillips and Erika Wilde 2016: *Dirty, Sexy, Saint*

Glossary of Relevant Terminology

Archive of Our Own / AO3: The preeminent site for sharing fanfiction.

Canon: Does the content of the fanfiction match the source material accurately.

Fanfiction: Fiction written by a fan of a book, show, movie, or any other form of media.

Typically written online for free.

Fanfiction.net: An earlier and less advanced fanfiction publishing website.

²⁰ Fanfiction is a genre that is often serialized. Authors will post weekly or monthly updates to a current work in progress, as Reynard did with the *The University of Edward Mason*. The first and last dates of publication are unknown. Also, Reynard posted under a different pseudonym at the time, Sebastian Robichaud.

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