

Tomorrow will be
anxious for itself: a
close reading of
devotion and allusion
in ...



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On page 496 of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, the young woman ponders her account of God's mysteries. Her story's strange circumstances provide sight of both personas of Mr. B___: one foul, one noble. Her successful endurance through frightening displays of his physical control over her fuels burgeoning comprehension of the role lack of worry plays in self-preservation. A reading of the scene contextualized by Matthew 6 allows the reader to grasp the ways in which Richardson might have used Scripture to ground exposition of the residual anxiety that haunts Pamela in matrimony; at the very least, we see that her inability to accept the bliss afforded to her is allegorical, rather than annoying.

Samuel Richardson held religion in high esteem, particularly as a reason to write. He pursued "an easy and natural manner" rather than that of the "improbable and marvellous" romances of his time (Dobson). The unrealistic nature of Pamela's romance suggests that the author intended more meaning than the sentiments directly expressed. Rather, it seems that he intended her natural confusion and reservation regarding the new state of Mr. B___ as kind partner to emphasize Matthew 6, a chapter that might, to a hesitant reader, appear to be more about birds than personal freedom.

Pamela spends pages on these trepidations: just after her husband assuages them, she begins again. To the reader, these concerns feel repetitive and unnecessary. To an eternal God, they must be even more so.

The simplicity of Pamela's joy establishes that her issues meant less than they did at the time. Her letters create a record of difficulties, and even though she escapes the compulsion to cast herself as a victim (outside of well-intentioned verse), they represent the human urge to cultivate a record

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of wrongs. Richardson shifts the message to that of Matthew 6. In doing so, he upholds the reality that humans, like birds, are not created to store anything up or away. Here, we see that Pamela is not able to contain her feelings, so much so that Mr. B_____ “ would [only] permit [her] to say, That I was not displeased with him!—Displeased with you, dearest Sir! said I: Let me thus testify my Obligations, and the force all your Commands shall have upon me” (496). The reflexivity of her excited words draws through from the dully lyrical sentences before it to the moment of truth, and she kisses him, viewing it as a Liberty.

Neither of them can handle the intensity of their love, but she accedes to fear almost immediately. She draws away, writing “ but yet my Mind was pained at times, and has been to this Hour.” She receives a gift, yet places constraints on emotion. Pamela expresses thoughts that are centered on Mr. B_____’s death, concluding that she “ cannot bear to suppose—[she] cannot say more on such a deep Subject!” She proceeds with the thought that human Life is a “ poor thing... subjected to imaginary Evils” and loses sight of what compelled her to begin with.

This method of thought is perfidious because of how quickly it draws her off track. Throughout this, she holds her concerns to be below her “ shallow Mind.” Although this may be true, the connection to her God sustains hundreds of pages; throughout these, she often brushes off what matters in a misguided attempt to feel free in her own way. Then when she is surprised by what happens, it fits in as something distinct, accepted within her parameters rather than as something to witness. Richardson teases out the qualities of her experience, exploring the series of perturbations and how <https://assignbuster.com/tomorrow-will-be-anxious-for-itself-a-close-reading-of-devotion-and-allusion-in-pamela/>

she addresses the realities, hopes, dreams, and fears of a constantly-evolving life. In passages such as this one, he plants sentences that show her mindset; here, she thinks of death as an ending for “this excellently generous Benefactor” and buries her feelings in worry. Here, like before, she prays what she wants. This act frees her from the brutal words which pinpoint the experience of her incidentally-tumultuous life. In doing so, she attains the acuity and focus to draw her through to another era.

Pamela maintains a posture of worship while warding off her sly Master, who attempts to exert himself over her. Despite the threat of violent rape, Pamela worships the LORD; her eyes retain light and she avoids the expression of darkness. She remains pure. Ultimately, she perceives the futility of “Apprehension of remote Contingencies” due to joy which truly abounds (Richardson 496). The institution of marriage guides Pamela to rely on Mr. B____ as she begins to release the burden of wariness. Her life soon becomes peaceful, as Pamela witnesses the sustenance of Mr. B____’s ardent love for her. The discourse of this passage with the sixth chapter of Matthew showcases Pamela’s newfound maturity.

The anxiety she experiences arises from worries of instability and sequestration. From attempted escape by way of a window to hidden letters, she continually turns to suitable devices for the maiden under duress who Richardson so disdains. However, she persists with a determined spirit and dedication to her personal record. The reward of her hope lies in Heaven, safe from the theft posing danger to treasure on Earth. The implicit presence of the Bible in Pamela justifies an examination of implicit parallels between the teachings of Jesus and the beliefs of Pamela, who esteems the power of <https://assignbuster.com/tomorrow-will-be-anxious-for-itself-a-close-reading-of-devotion-and-allusion-in-pamela/>

language. Moreover, the textual evidence appears particularly significant in light of Richardson's Biblical references throughout the novel, as documented in footnotes. Pamela's consistent use of the moniker "Master" for Mr. B____ helps the reader understand the nature of Pamela's trials. She cannot prevent the will of Mr. B____ even as she sequesters herself, yet she escapes scotch-free; as her life is in flux, the prospect of subjection to matrimonial constraints frightens her, so much so that she displays it as a yearning for reassurance. Mr. B____ occupies a position from which she could be destroyed externally or internally scarred, yet God persists.

This means that Mr. B____ never shakes Pamela's faith, even when she herself does not feel a thing. His positioning as husband illustrates that Pamela has no reason to escape: she is safe. Before matrimony, her salvation rests with the man's actions. Jesus says, "no one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other." Pamela overcomes her disgust of Mr. B____ without displacing the significance of God in her life. Her overtly Christian marriage solidifies the hierarchy of duty in which Pamela places herself. Her dedication to her husband serves as worship to the overarching Master, while Mr. B____ cultivates his own religious devotion.

The scene in Pamela holds strong parallels to the themes of Matthew 6, and further attention only strengthens grounds for a Biblical comparison. For one thing, Richardson's contemporaries knew the Book well, whether more for its literary merit or religious status. Another reason is the general significance of the chapter, which contains the Lord's Prayer. The connection initially

appears in terms of worry and general concern, but this originates in trust;
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Pamela must feel the release of her justified tension before she knows what is next. Perhaps surprisingly, her difficult past allows her to move beyond the barriers she sets up for herself. Only through worship does she escape the impulse to hold back and solely express the things she would like to hear assuaged. This selfish desire prevents the bliss God intends for her, and Richardson hopes to show this.

Aside from page 494, when Mr. B___ suggests that he is not “such a Herod” as to ask Pamela never to seek any other men in the event of separation, the closest religious footnote appears on page 447. This defines the concept of “supererogatory,” which is defined as “the surplus of good works.” In Roman Catholicism, this form of performance can mitigate the effect of sin and help the penitent sinner. This formulation of merit contrasts with the religious development of Pamela and Mr. B___, who learn not to trust external signifiers of devotion through the processes of misunderstanding and resolution. Matthew 6 elucidates Pamela’s meditation, and analysis of her thoughts in light of the chapter helps absorption of the lessons contained in the text. Mr. B___’s request for her to maintain pleasant appearance cannot perturb her while she begins to comprehend that her body cannot be defined by the nature of her dress. Samuel Richardson’s interaction with Biblical guidance demonstrates the pathways through which Pamela and Mr. B___ transcend class for the sake of their love. The reassurance of Jesus’ words allow Pamela to move beyond her initial preoccupation with manner and aesthetic. Herein lies her freedom.

Richardson wished to avoid the improbable novel, and, in Pamela, he

establishes startling plot twists in such a way as to draw the attention of his
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reader to the Bible. His interaction with the chapter of Matthew 6 shows how an allegory provides subtle insight to a framework of cultural awareness, and that this long-ago novel interacts with a passage familiar today. The section of his novel displays more than just the fabric of influence, especially because he avoids direct allusion in this way. Rather, he uses the epistolary form to track Pamela's consciousness as she grapples with her life and lives amidst a world of strange improbabilities.