

Virtue in pamela



In Pamela, Samuel Richardson teaches a religious lesson through Pamela's pride in virtue, love through purity, and ultimately forgiveness of others. He presents his character as rigorously devoted to God, which often makes her seem vain, manipulative, selfish, and hypocritical. Although she may seem to portray these characteristics, the truth is all that matters to her is her virtue. Throughout the novel, Pamela portrays a pious pride in her virtue and humility. In the novel, she is extremely proud, not of the beauty of her face or body, but of virtue, which she protects in the name of God. She equates losing her virtue as "worse than cutting her Throat" (104). Richardson demonstrates a lesson through Pamela's pride in virtue, showing the other characters that purity and righteousness will always prevail. Pamela's virtue even opens the blind eyes of the Squire when he exclaims, "Her Virtue is all her Pride, shall I rob her of that?" (211). Although she might be mistaken as vain when she tries on her humble attire and professes, "I never lik'd myself so well in my Life" (60), Richardson uses this to show how Pamela is happy in her poverty because it is honest and virtuous. She is proud of the honesty of her low birth because she sees much vanity in the wealthy as exhibited by Lady Davers. After reading the letter concerning Pamela's inequality to the Squire's birth, Pamela becomes furious at Lady Davers for stooping to "such vain Pride" (222). Pamela prays that God will not let the "Conceitedness, Vanity, and Pride" (279) of wealth consume her. Her pride in virtue is an honorable pride because it focuses on God, whereas, the pride she fears is centered on status and wealth. Pamela demonstrates tremendous pride in her honesty and virtue, focusing on the ideals of God. Pamela's pride in her virtue eventually gains her the pure love of the Squire as oppose to his former lust. Pamela's protection of her virginity blossoms into a virtuous

love, her reward from God. Throughout the text, Pamela persistently denies the Squire's passions, through harsh words and actions. Her virtue only makes her more attractive to him: " I see you so watchful over your Virtue . . . my Passion for you is only increas'd by it" (184). She believes that a woman who gives in to evil and loses her virginity to be " the vilest of Creatures" (174). Pamela perceives her honesty with such importance to say, " my Honesty is dearer to me than my Life" (208). After her fits when he tries to rape her, the Squire finally realizes how important virtue is to Pamela. He learns to love and respect her through her virtue. In the end, the Squire recognizes Pamela as equal to his noble birth because of her virtue: " Let us talk of nothing henceforth but Equality; for if you will set the Riches of your Mind, and your unblemished Virtue, against my Fortune, the Condescension will be yours" (294). Pamela seems manipulative because she benefits from her virtue, increasing her social status. Although the reward for virtue in Pamela is marriage, Richardson shows that Pamela never dreams of this outcome, believing a " poor Servant is far unworthy of this great honour" (209). She continually thanks God for such an honor, seeing it as a reward from Him for all her sufferings at the Squire's hands. Because of her virtue, Richardson shows that God rewards Pamela with a very honorable marriage. Pamela, through her trust in God, finds the heart to forgive those who have threatened her most prized possession, her virtue. Although the Squire terrifies Pamela numerous times, sexually harassing her and trying to rape her, she finds it in her heart to forgive him. The Squire finally sees the error of his ways, begging, " tell me you forgive me for rushing you into so much Danger and Distress" (209). The actions he has inflicted upon her are horrendous, but she forgives him in spite of the pain and suffering he has

caused her. She has such a “ great Point of Reliance in God” (235) that she begins to trust a man that formerly terrified her, even learning to love him through forgiveness and innocence. Pamela sometimes seems selfish and hypocritical in her hasty forgiveness of the Squire in the face of a proposed marriage. Her opinion of him seems to change too abruptly, showing her selfishness for bettering her life and her hypocrisy for loving a man she once did not respect in the slightest. On the other hand, Richardson portrays Pamela’s forgiveness under the sanction of God, who dictates that everyone is to be forgiven. Pamela is so sweet and virtuous that she also forgives the “ most wicked Woman” (177), Mrs. Jewkes. Although Mrs. Jewkes assisted in her attempted rape, Pamela finds it in her pure heart to forgive even this “ vile” (177) woman. Through her happiness with the Squire, which she attributes to God, she finds it in her heart to “ forgive all that was disagreeable” (255). Pamela’s virtue leads the way towards the forgiveness of those who tried to ruin her. In Pamela, Richardson’s lesson through Pamela is to be proud of virtue because, in the end, God will reward it like He rewards her with love and happiness. Richardson also points out that she should forgive everyone that posed an obstacle to her virtue because those people only made her path of righteousness more difficult and, therefore, more rewarding. Although Pamela often appears to be vain, manipulative, selfish, and hypocritical, she is merely trying to live through God by retaining her most sacred possession, her innocence.