

A Case for Hard-heartedness: *Clarissa*, Indifferency, Impersonality

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ABSTRACT

Reading *Clarissa's* hard-heartedness through the lens of indifference clarifies what is at stake in her still-puzzling and multi-layered defection. The phenomenon of hard-heartedness in Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* is here re-evaluated through John Locke's concept of "indifferency" and through contemporary theories of impersonality. Beginning with an account of the novel's reception in which readers were unnerved by *Clarissa's* refusal to marry her rapist, I locate an important counter-response in Anna Laetitia Barbauld, who valued precisely the quality of impassivity in Richardson's heroine. In eighteenth-century thought, a similar form of disengagement is articulated by Locke's notion of indifference, an impartiality that risks alienation for the sake of understanding and autonomy. By featuring an impersonal *Clarissa*, I show how the novel's theory of character, in which a hidden interiority underwrites personhood, contains its own critique of a depth-model of psychology. I conclude by examining a phase of *Clarissa's* narrative not often discussed: her life as an urban rape survivor, an incarnation that offers the most challenging as well as the most promising possibilities for the impersonal person in the novel.

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The Problem of Love

After the long-suffering Clarissa Harlowe finally dies and her rapist, Robert Lovelace, appears to lose his mind, a fellow libertine reports in a letter that “he was actually setting out with a Surgeon of this place, to have the Lady opened and embalmed.—Rot me if it be not my full persuasion, that if he had, her heart would have been found to be either iron or marble.”¹ Famously hard-hearted, Samuel Richardson’s character Clarissa has garnered accusations from fictional libertines, eighteenth-century readers, and twentieth-century critics alike. Sarah Fielding, tracking readers’ responses to the novel, recorded the impression that “her Heart was as impenetrable and unsusceptible of Affection, as the hardest Marble.”² Hard-heartedness offends because it betrays not an inability to love but an absolute refusal to do so. The hard-hearted person is not just unfeeling, affectless, and inhuman (to take a few of Merriam-Webster’s synonyms for “stonyhearted”), she refuses to feel, to express affect, to be a human. This article reassesses the phenomenon of hard-heartedness in conversation with John Locke’s concept of “indifferency” and contemporary theories of impersonality with the aim of recasting Clarissa’s obduracy as something besides Christian fervour and offering a more philosophical interpretation of her disregard. What emerges from Richardson’s surprising picture of social defection is an exteriorized, transparent model of the subject, a difficult figure for the novel and the novel reader to handle.

Richardson’s immense fiction opens with the correspondence between Clarissa and her best friend, Anna Howe, a demanding reader who wants all “the particulars” about what her friend says, does, and thinks amid the scandal that the rogue aristocrat Lovelace has brought upon Clarissa’s family (1:1 [39]). As the story escalates into an abduction and rape narrative—with Clarissa fleeing an arranged marriage to one man, Roger Solmes, only to find herself forced into cohabitation with another—

1 Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa; Or, The History of a Young Lady*, 3rd ed., intro. Florian Stuber, 8 vols. (1751; New York: AMS Press, 1990), 8:41. References are to this edition. To accommodate readers, I have also placed in brackets the equivalent pages from *Clarissa, or The History of a Young Lady*, ed. Angus Ross (London: Penguin, 1985), 1382.

2 Sarah Fielding, *Remarks on Clarissa* (1749; Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, UCLA, 1985), 13.

Anna's need to know Clarissa's feelings gains urgency. From the famous "throbs" and "glows" Anna imputes to her friend, to her sober recommendation that Clarissa marry her rapist, Anna investigates what she is already convinced of: "It is my humble opinion, I tell you frankly, that on enquiry it will come out to be LOVE" (1:62 [71]).

Like Anna Howe, Richardson's readers discredited Clarissa's account of her own feelings, convinced that she did love, or at least should have loved, her rapist. Richardson wrote to two young female fans, "Would you not wonder ... that there are Numbers of your Sex, who pity the Lovelace you are affrighted at, and call Clarissa perverse, over-delicate, and Hard-hearted; and contend, that she ought to have married him?"³ Challenged to make dying a more attractive option than coupling, Richardson found himself in the position of a scold. In his correspondence with Dorothy Bradshaigh, who famously expressed her disinclination to finish a novel in which Clarissa dies rather than marries, Richardson observed that Lovelace had clearly succeeded with some women. Reading to the last volume, he wrote to Lady Bradshaigh, "will cure you for your Love for the Man—Perhaps however you would not wish to be cured."⁴

In the end, Richardson denied readers the only outcome that could make good on the relentless brutality of his plot. In response, they simply disbelieved or even overwrote *Clarissa*, determined to marry her off, whether by rehabilitating Lovelace or by undoing his rape.⁵ Readers' debates about whether Clarissa was a sexual prude, a narrative killjoy, or a paragon of female virtue created a confusion that Richardson loved to hate. According to Sarah Fielding, "the many contradictory Faults that [Clarissa] was at once accused of, is almost incredible."⁶ The bottom line seemed to be: if Clarissa could just love Lovelace, readers might then love her. Their experience of the novel boiled down to the question, "Is she in love?"—with most answering that yes, as Jean

3 Samuel Richardson to Astraea Hill and Minerva Hill, 14 December 1748, in *Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson*, ed. John Carroll (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 102–3.

4 Samuel Richardson to Lady Bradshaigh, 26 October 1748, in *Selected Letters*, 97.

5 See, for example, Elizabeth Echlin, *An Alternative Ending to Richardson's "Clarissa"*, ed. Dimiter Daphinoff (1755; Berne: Francke Verlag, 1982), which removes the rape even though both Clarissa and Lovelace die.

6 Fielding, 13.

Hagstrum writes, “Clarissa was indeed in love with the person of Lovelace and contemplated a deeply satisfying union of body and soul” with him.⁷

And yet *Clarissa* is a demonstration of the many ways to say no: “Let me then repeat, that I truly despise this man! ... I love him not, therefore!”; “I cannot but hope that I never, never more shall see him in this world ... I cannot consent”; “I have taken [the resolution] never to marry *this*; and if not *this*, *any* man”; “I must tell you, Sir, (it becomes my character to tell you) that, were I to live more years than perhaps I may weeks, and there were not another man in the world, I could not, I would not, be yours” (6:376, 6:423, 6:378, 7:98 [1116, 1141, 1117, 1191]). But her very repetitiousness (6:376, 419 [1116, 1139]), as well as the novelist’s inclusion of a counterfactual narrative in which a susceptible maiden warms to the possibility of reforming her devoted rake, undermines the force of her negation: “I once indeed hoped ... that I might have the happiness to reclaim him: I vainly believed, that he loved me” (6:376 [1116]).⁸ Each utterance sounds like a more unconvincing defence against the tide of her own feelings, which are so apparent to everyone else.

Richardson scholars have interpreted at length the novelist’s complex and elaborate engagement with readers.⁹ *Clarissa*, Tom Keymer argues, encourages within the reader “a heightened awareness not only of the dangers represented in Lovelace but also of his own susceptibility to them.”¹⁰ Accordingly, the reader’s purported experience of loving and then un-loving Lovelace after

7 Jean Hagstrum, *Sex and Sensibility: Ideal and Erotic Love from Milton to Mozart* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 200, 202.

8 Lovelace draws out this narrative in greater detail: “Oh but truly, she hoped to have the merit of reclaiming him. She had formed pretty notions how charmingly it would look to have a penitent of her own making dangling at her side to church, through an applauding neighborhood: and, as their family increased, marching with her thither at the head of their boys and girls, processionally, as it were, boasting of the fruits of their *honest desires*” (970).

9 Several studies explore the reception history of *Clarissa*: see, for example, Carol Houlihan Flynn and Edward Copeland, eds., *Clarissa and Her Readers: New Essays for The Clarissa Project* (New York: AMS, 1999); and Lois E. Bueler, ed., *Clarissa: The Eighteenth-Century Response, 1747–1804*, 2 vols. (New York: AMS Press, 2010). For an introduction to the Clarissa Project, see Florian Stuber and Margaret Anne Doody, “The Clarissa Project and *Clarissa*’s Reception,” *Text* 12 (1999): 123–41, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30228029>.

10 Tom Keymer, *Richardson’s “Clarissa” and the Eighteenth-Century Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 76–77.

the rape coheres with Richardson's moral and didactic purpose. Yet it is readers' precise inability to stop loving Lovelace and their refusal to believe Clarissa or forgive her for not doing the same that marks the novel's reception history. Clarissa's imputed desire—the love Anna Howe discerns, which readers experience vicariously, and everyone expects to see manifest at long, impossible last—generates the dissonance so closely associated with the history of reading Richardson's foundational novel.

In that history, however, an important counter-response emerges that argues against love and advocates for another kind of quality besides desire. In 1804, forty-three years after Richardson's death, London printer Richard Phillips purchased the author's letters "at a very liberal price" from his grandchildren and commissioned Anna Laetitia Barbauld to oversee their selected publication.¹¹ Six years before affirming Richardson's place in the canon with her influential fifty-volume *British Novelists* anthology, Barbauld privileged the achievement of *Clarissa* in her edition of his letters. What she admired so much about its heroine was that same characteristic that Richardson's contemporary readers had found so objectionable: Clarissa's unrelenting heart. Barbauld points out that unlike Pamela Andrews, who maintains her chastity but then says yes to life with Mr B, Clarissa loses her chastity but does not waver in her commitment to be alone. Barbauld writes, "In circumstances the most painful and degrading, in a prison, in a brothel, in grief, in distraction, in despair," Clarissa says no. Love is not realized with the speed of an arrow, and marriage does not erase a rape. "With Clarissa it begins, —with Clarissa it ends" (lxxxiii).

If Richardson's famous attempt at "a new species of writing" in *Pamela* was to catch young minds "when Passions run high," then what was the demonstration in *Clarissa* when passions, if they ever existed to begin with, run bone dry?¹² Barbauld, like Richardson, took issue with readers who craved more romance from the plot. She records in her preface that "the generality of

11 Anna Laetitia Barbauld, "Life of Samuel Richardson, with Remarks on His Writings" in *The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson*, ed. Anna Laetitia Barbauld (London: Lewis and Roden, 1804), 1:v. References are to this edition.

12 Samuel Richardson to Aaron Hill, sometime between Hill's letter of 15 January 1741 and Hill's response of 9 February 1741, and to George Cheyne, 31 August 1741, in *Selected Letters*, 41, 46–47.

readers are perhaps inclined to wish, that Lovelace should give up his wicked intentions, reform, and make Clarissa happy in the marriage state. This was the conclusion which Lady Bradshaw so vehemently and passionately urged the author to adopt" (lxxxvii). The wish, Barbauld maintains, to extract a redemptive love story from a tale of such incredible "wickedness" defies delicacy and even rationality. Between Lovelace and Clarissa, "nothing takes place of that pleasure and endearment which might naturally be expected on the meeting of two lovers" (xcii). Clarissa, she writes, is simply hunted. Clarissa's achievement is to stay the course of non-conjugality, leaving the reader to appreciate "the greatness of mind with which she views and enjoys the approaches of death" (ciii). Searching Richardson's meaning ("That Clarissa is a highly moral work, has been always allowed; but what is the moral?"), Barbauld remained unfazed by the novelist's confusing and potentially punishing affective demands, convinced that Clarissa had done well to die (xcix). A minority voice among readers, Barbauld asserted that Clarissa's firmness, her precise lack of any change of feeling, her unresponsiveness to others' desires are what win "our fondest affections" (cii).

Barbauld's account shifts the emphasis in Richardson's novel from its traditionally perceived conflict between man and woman or body and spirit to a more subtle kind of struggle. Clarissa's thorough refusal, the "greatness of mind" that orients her towards death and dying, not only confounds the marriage plot but also establishes a disconnect between others' insistence on her secretly compliant mental life (she does love him) and her open noncompliance (she would much rather die than marry). To Anna Howe's insistence that "a close examination of the true springs and grounds" of her feelings will reveal "LOVE," Clarissa responds, "Let me enter into the close examination of myself which my beloved friend advises. I did so, and cannot own any of the *glow*, any of the *throbs* you mention—*Upon my word*, I will repeat, I cannot"; and in case Anna is not convinced, Clarissa spells it out once more: "THIS man is not THE man. I have great objections to him. My heart *throbs* not after him; I *glow* not" (1:63–64 [72]). But, as Richardson would soon learn, protesting at all was protesting too much. Anna responds simply, "It is no manner of argument that because you would not be in Love, you therefore are not" (1:66 [73]).

Confusingly, Richardson himself confessed to Aaron Hill: “I must still say, that I would not have *Clarissa* in Love, at setting out: And that I intended the Passion should be inspired and grow, unknown to herself, and be more obvious, for a good while, to every-body than to herself.”¹³ Such plans corroborate the interpretation of Richardson’s heroine as a “hermeneutic casualty,” to use Terry Castle’s phrase, a subject of others’ interpretations who can never signify her own pleasure or power—only her own pain.¹⁴ Not only eighteenth-century readers but also modern literary critics have blamed *Clarissa* for bungling her own marriage plot. Ian Watt’s characterization of *Clarissa* as withholding sexual feeling posits a different subject from Castle’s: one who does experience pleasure and power but perversely denies their existence. In *The Rise of the Novel*, Watt complains, “*Clarissa* could perhaps have married Lovelace, very much on her own terms had she known her own feelings earlier, and not been at first so wholly unaware, and later so frightened, of her sexual component.”¹⁵ Richardson’s suggestion that *Clarissa*’s love is really about other people’s perceptions, or “every-body’s” other than her own, reinforces this bind of reading her as either deprived of or depriving others of love. Is there another model?

Taking Barbauld’s cue, we might want to allow that *Clarissa* could just not be in love rather than not know that she is. For today’s reader of eighteenth-century fiction, Barbauld opens up a different model of novelistic subjectivity and requalifies certain characteristics such as hard-heartedness, a stolid lack of development, and the refusal of interiority—traits that otherwise appear antithetical to the tradition of psychological realism so closely associated with Richardson. Barbauld’s contrarian interpretation presents a further challenge to scholars to articulate a critical framework for reading *Clarissa*, the master text in that tradition, without the bind of refusing the heroine either credibility (she will not acknowledge her real feelings) or legitimacy (she is a monster for not having any). In this article, I examine the phenomenon of unfeeling, not in the religious context often used to explain *Clarissa*’s peculiar practices of the self, but in conversation with

13 Samuel Richardson to Aaron Hill, 26 January 1747, in *Selected Letters*, 81.

14 Terry Castle, *Clarissa’s Ciphers: Meaning and Disruption in Richardson’s “Clarissa”* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 16.

15 Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 237.

theories of disengagement that make legible the strange vision of liberty advanced by Richardson's changing portrait of a lady.

In the eighteenth century, the idea of an extreme form of social detachment that serves the cause of intellectual and physical freedom belongs to Locke. Despite his clear investment in its formulation, Locke's concept of "indifferency," described at length in *Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, is an undertreated topic of Enlightenment philosophy. The second section of this article will explain the difficult blend of impartiality and concentrated disregard that defines this affectless affect. I want to reconsider Clarissa's hard-heartedness through Locke's picture of indifferency, to recast her impassivity as an intellectual stance and contextualize "the greatness of mind" that incurred Barbauld's admiration and others' repugnance.¹⁶ Reading Clarissa through Locke does not exclude religious interpretations that see her anti-sociality as a turn towards Christian meaning and dying, but it does reframe Clarissa's mode of disengagement as a philosophical position as well as shifts the emphasis to how Clarissa, after the rape, lives rather than dies.¹⁷

16 Regarding John Locke's influence on eighteenth-century literature, see Richard A. Barney, *Plots of Enlightenment: Education and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); and Christopher Fox, *Locke and The Scriblerians: Identity and Consciousness in Early Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). For a discussion of Richardson's and Richardsonians' particular engagement with Locke, see Derek E. Taylor, *Reason and Religion in "Clarissa"* (Abingdon: Ashgate Publishing, 2009). Taylor observes that while "the evidence would seem to suggest that Samuel Richardson was moderately interested in—if somewhat unsure of—John Locke," the fact that "Richardson lived in the age of Locke" has suggested the philosopher's saturation into the novelist's thinking and writing, especially in *Clarissa* (34). In a chapter called, "Un-Locke-ing Samuel Richardson," Taylor argues that while Richardson scholars, including Jocelyn Harris, Florian Stuber, John Dussinger, and Terry Castle, emphasize the novelist's fundamentally Lockean world view (a sense of empiricism, religion, and hermeneutics all filtered through the philosopher), they ultimately interpret Locke's influence as "short-sighted, misplaced, or self-defeating" (37). Accordingly, Taylor argues that Richardson "offers a critical examination of Locke's philosophical, political, religious, and epistemological positions," and Taylor suggests instead what he sees as the more compelling influences of John Norris and Mary Astell (38).

17 Kathryn L. Steele examines *Clarissa* through the Christian reading practice of "diffidence, or the practice of avoiding direct interpretive struggle." Steele, "Clarissa's Silence," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 23, no. 1 (2010): 4, doi: 10.1353/ecf.2010.0003. For other compelling religious interpretations of the novel, see Lois Chaber, "Christian Form and Anti-Feminism in *Clarissa*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 15, nos. 3-4 (2003): 507-37, doi: 10.1353/ecf.2003.0023; Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook, *Epistolary Bodies*:

The final section of this article explores the possibilities for subjectivity that emerge from a state of disgrace. “When Catastrophes are winding-up, what changes (changes that make one’s heart shudder to think of) may *one* short month produce!” Clarissa tells Anna Howe (6:382 [1119]). Such changes speak to the potential of what I conceive of as the impersonal person, and her value to the Richardsonian project of the novel. Clarissa after the rape, I argue, redefines alienation, what Locke describes as the major cost of indifferency, as its major perk. Impersonality comprehends the antisocial stance of indifferency but significantly recontours the indifferent subject. My reading of the novel focuses on a phase of Clarissa’s narrative not often discussed: her life as an urban rape survivor, an incarnation that baffles other characters as much it did Richardson’s readers. In representing Clarissa as an extroverted rape survivor in London, Richardson invites readers to confront a subject whose very transparency confounds the protocols of reading already established by the preceding pages of his novel.¹⁸

Since Frances Ferguson’s landmark reading of consent in *Clarissa* in “Rape and the Rise of the Novel,” literary critics have been able to set aside the novel’s conventional project of constructing an interiority.¹⁹ Ferguson made that move possible by recasting the primacy of psychology in the novel from a given to a problem in her examination of the internal contradictions of rape law, its simultaneous call for and negation of mental states through the question of consent: “From the moment after the rape, when Clarissa begins dying and Lovelace begins longing

Gender and Genre in the Eighteenth-Century Republic of Letters (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); and John A. Dussinger, “Stealing in the great doctrines of Christianity: Samuel Richardson as Journalist,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 15, nos. 3–4 (2003): 451–506, doi: 10.1353/ecf.2003.0018.

18 Working-class women in the eighteenth century could come out as rape victims. For a discussion of a hard-hearted eighteenth-century British culture in which rape was a disturbingly popular topic of humour, see Simon Dickie, “Rape Jokes and the Law,” in *Cruelty and Laughter: Forgotten Comic Literature and the Unsentimental Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011). Dickie observes that although rape cases in the mid-century rarely advanced to capital trial, cases were regularly brought to and resolved at the level of the local magistrates, who usually administered monetary compensation to the plaintiff. “Repugnant as this transactional logic may be, it does at least suggest that ordinary women were not completely helpless” (Dickie, 228).

19 Frances Ferguson, “Rape and the Rise of the Novel,” *Representations* 20 (Autumn 1987): 88–112, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2928503>.

for her consent, the novel is literally haunted by the specter of psychology, in which mental states do not so much appear as register the improbability of their appearing.²⁰ In reading *Clarissa* as both summoning and compromising the possibility of an interior, Ferguson made the psychological novel an inherently unstable concept, enabling critics to turn to other types of discourse in their analyses. Sandra Macpherson has argued, for example, that the emergence of strict liability law in the eighteenth century produces “a formalist account of action indifferent to questions of motive and practices of interiority.”²¹ Macpherson accordingly reads *Clarissa* through the lens of felony murder, a crime that unsettles standards of intentionality, motive, and agency because it holds people accountable for acts that they did not directly do. Jonathan Kramnick recasts the emphasis of Richardson’s novel from the content or authenticity of Clarissa’s emotions to her broader assumptions about how actions and intentions work in the world. The achievement of *Clarissa* is not, he writes, “to establish an individual’s psychology against its misperception by others, at least if we define psychology in terms of an interiority that surpasses what is available to the reader or, even, to the person herself.”²²

Such studies make a compelling counterturn away from the investigation of subjectivity and towards a kind of surface reading of intersubjective relations. In my reading of *Clarissa* as a rape survivor, I argue that in her very transparency, Clarissa disables any incentives for psychological discovery: where nothing is hidden, there is no point—and no pleasure—in probing. By featuring an impersonal Clarissa, I want further to show how the novel’s theory of character, in which a hidden interiority underwrites personhood, contains its own critique of a depth-model of psychology. The

20 Ferguson, 106.

21 Sandra Macpherson, *Harm’s Way: Tragic Responsibility and the Novel Form* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 66.

22 Jonathan Kramnick, *Actions and Objects from Hobbes to Richardson* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 204. Kramnick explores the status of human action in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and argues that the model of intentionality to which Clarissa Harlowe adheres, in which motives justify actions, conflicts with the model ascribed to by everyone else in the novel, in which intentions are imputed from events. Quoting Watt’s *Rise of the Novel*, Kramnick writes, “Whether or not Clarissa ‘withhold[s] her sexual feelings from Anna Howe, and even from her own consciousness,’ is for our current purposes immaterial” (203).

achievement of Richardson's novel may be to establish that model, but it is also to dismantle it. The dissonance produced by such a twinned project is clear when we return to the scene of the novel's popular and critical reception and to the concept of interiority that makes so much of *Clarissa's* unacknowledged feelings. When the payoff of revelation has been evacuated, any efforts to discern the truth of someone's feelings become suspect, if not invalidated. Lovelace's designs to "unlock and open my Charmer's heart" are rendered nugatory (4:146 [620]).

Locke, Indifferency, Liberty

In 1706, two years after his death, Locke's brief treatise *Of the Conduct of the Understanding* was published, the purpose of which was to address the "several Weaknesses and Defects in the Understanding, either from the natural Temper of the Mind; or ill Habits taken up, which hinder it in its progress to Knowledge."²³ Within forty-five sections that feature such captivating headings as "Reasoning," "Haste," "Wandering," and "Bottoming," Locke explains that his *Conduct* will "take notice of, and endeavor to point out proper Remedies" for some of these faults (2.6). One important remedy for the neglect and mismanagement of the mind is what Locke calls "indifferency," a position of studied impartiality in which one maintains indifference towards all opinions in order to weigh their truth claims independently.

"Indifferency" is the only heading that appears in the *Conduct* as three distinct sections (11, 34, and 35). Its repetition and its appearance within several other sections in Locke's treatise speak to both the slipperiness and the importance of this concept. The *Oxford English Dictionary* attests to the complex usage of the term, especially in the early modern period. The sense of an impartial or neutral stance in "indifferency," used by Thomas More and John Donne and adopted by Locke in the *Conduct*, has since given way to the shades of apathy and devaluation

23 John Locke, *Of The Conduct of the Understanding*, intro. John Yolton (1706; Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1996), §12, p. 47. References are to section and page numbers of this edition. According to his letters, Locke originally intended *Of The Conduct of the Understanding* as a new and significant chapter for the fourth 1700 edition of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Instead, *Of The Conduct of the Understanding* was published in 1706 in *Posthumous Works of Mr. John Locke*, ed. Peter King.

conveyed by “indifference”—an affective stance of “I don’t care” rather than an epistemological one of “I don’t know.”²⁴ Yet, no stable distinction can be made between “indifferency” and “indifference”: the boundary between neutrality and disaffection turns out to be permeable.²⁵ In reading *Clarissa* alongside the *Conduct*, I want to keep the affective boundaries between the two terms open, to allow for the opposite movement to take place in which disaffection slides back into impartiality.

Locke explains in the *Conduct* that maintaining “an equal indifferency for all truth” means “receiving it in the love of it as truth, but not loving it for any other reason before we know it to be true” (12.44–45). Truth-value alone—not custom, religion, or family—must guide the understanding. This is not to say that keeping one’s mind “indifferent to opinions” is to avoid adopting them in the end, but it is to avoid being swayed by factors apart from hard evidence.²⁶ Indifferency involves “enquiring directly into the Nature of the thing itself, without minding the Opinion of others, or troubling himself with their Questions or Disputes about it, but to see what he himself can, sincerely searching after Truth, find out” (34.105). In learning to “receive and imbrace” evidence by disregarding—rather than by thoughtfully considering—the views of others, the indifferent person paradoxically both opens herself to the outside (the truth is out there) and also shuts herself down (just not in other people) (34.101). In conversation with Richardson, I show how the concept of indifferency recasts the

24 *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (online version June 2011), s.v. “indifferency,” “indifference”

25 See, for example, Jane Barker’s “To my *Indifferent Lover*, who complain’d of my *Indifferency*” in which “indifferency” means both a contemptible lack of feeling and a laudable disinterestedness. Barker, *A Patch-Work Screen for the Ladies* (1723), in *The Galesia Trilogy and Selected Manuscript Poems of Jane Barker*, ed. Carol Shiner Wilson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 105–6. While indifferency and disinterestedness both convey impartiality, disinterestedness protects others from the prejudices and advantages of the subject, fostering a relationship between them, whereas indifferency protects the subject from the prejudices of others and forecloses on any relationship, at least for a time. The benefits of disinterestedness thus accrue more to the object, of indifferency to the subject.

26 To practice indifferency, Locke assumes two things: that the truth is self-evident and that one has unmediated access to it. Assent, he writes, “should be regulated by the evidence which things carry with them” (*Conduct*, 33.99). He adds later, “I never saw any reason yet why truth might not be trusted to its own evidence” (*Conduct*, 34.104).

habits of recalcitrance, negation, and alienation that readers have found so antipathetic in his heroine. While religious interpretations of the novel have explained Clarissa's turn to impersonality as a shift to Christian hermeneutics, Locke's model of indifference reorients our interpretation within a discourse of political philosophy and in relation to issues of intellectual and physical autonomy.²⁷ Indifference roots the subject in an environment designed to compromise understanding but in which she must also learn to navigate and live.

In Locke's account, it is crucial to recognize how the apparently antisocial operation of indifference is precisely engaged with the question of the social since it hinges on the problem of assent. Locke begins the section on "Assent," which precedes the final two parts on "Indifference," this way: "In the whole Conduct of the Understanding, there is nothing of more moment than to know when and where, and how far to give Assent, and possibly there is nothing harder" (33.99). We know that regulating assent is hard because we see how few people are capable of doing it: "some firmly imbrace Doctrines upon slight grounds, some upon no grounds, and some contrary to appearance" (33.99). Most people, according to Locke, are over-credulous, easily susceptible, and able to convince themselves of ideas even against their own judgment. The possibilities for self-deception are manifold. Only where evidence alone guides the understanding can people safely give or withhold their assent. Locke does not rule out the possibility that one will eventually agree with other people, but he emphasizes how the process by which one comes to agree is what counts. Having the same opinion as someone else has nothing to do with sharing it, since the other person's views are precisely what had to be disregarded in order to arrive at a position of assent. Indifference, Locke concedes in a classic understatement, is not "the short and easie way of being in the right" (34.103).

While indifference posits a sceptical view of other people's intelligence, it certainly does not spare one's own. Rarely do people "deal fairly with their own Minds, and make a right use of their Faculties in the pursuit of Truth" (34:102). In portraying

27 One could certainly argue that freedom for Locke is a fundamentally religious matter, and that a belief in eternal reward underwrites the possibility of rational judgment not yoked to immediate gratification. See esp. Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, book 2, chap. 21, section 60.

the understanding as a party to an agreement, as if one could contract to do right or wrong by one's own intelligence, Locke suggests that humans have the ability to pursue the truth but are generally not inclined to make use of it. Of people's natural faculties, he writes, "We fail them a great deal more than they fail us" (34.102). Such failings are, in part, simply human: unlike angels who possess perfect and infinite vision, "we are all short sighted, and very often see but one side of a matter." People must therefore manage with faulty cognitive equipment. Because "we see but in part, and we know but in part," we must take optimal advantage of those pieces of truth that are apprehensible by us (3.8). This task to discern the truth through reliance on one's own mind is the operation so thwarted by other people. We may often fail our own faculties, but it is the faculties of others—"whether Parents, Neighbors, Ministers"—that deeply compromise our understanding (3.7). While Nature imposes constraints on the mind, conventional wisdom and orthodox culture can cripple it. Locke advises, "He that will know the Truth of things, must leave the common and beaten Track, which none but weak and servil Minds are satisfy'd to trudge along continually in" (24.71).

If Clarissa at Harlowe Place was a gullible innocent, then Clarissa in London lives only to know the truth of things. Locke's account of indifferency emphasizes the coercive pressures put on assent, which resonates with the crucial issue of consent that critical analyses of Clarissa's rape have examined at length. Clarissa, drugged out of her senses, can say neither no nor yes to Lovelace's advances. Because such a rape scene conveys the absence of consent rather than the presence of refusal, it has served as an open field for retroacting the state of Clarissa's desires—which readers, critics, and characters are more than ready to supply. But so thoroughly steeped in active and outright negation is the rest of Richardson's narrative that the problem of consent is really not a problem. What Barbauld admired as Clarissa's consistent naysaying speaks to the force of not giving assent—a demonstration of how to avoid falling in line with all the parents, neighbours, and ministers who are sure to lead you astray. Clarissa's non-consent is therefore most visible in her refusal to marry her rapist rather than in the rape itself.²⁸ And, as

28 The pressures to say yes are widespread. "I charge you, if you *can*, to get over your aversion to this vile man," Anna Howe urges her friend after the rape (6:370 [1113]). In a report to Clarissa's mother, Mrs Norton asks whether the

I will argue, *Clarissa* takes naysaying to a new level in her post-rape life in London, where her renunciation encompasses social, intellectual, and physical concerns.

As in Locke's account of indifferency, other people in *Clarissa* have no credibility: the truth is that no one's opinion can be trusted. "As to the *world*, and its *censures*, you know, my dear, that, however desirous I always was of a fair fame, yet I never thought it right to give more than a *second place* to the world's opinion," *Clarissa* tells Anna Howe six weeks after her rape and four weeks after her escape (6:419 [1139]). Her loss of reputation further devalues the world's opinion, which slips from second place to no place as the orbit of her concerns moves away from the social: "What advantage would it be to me, were [my reputation] retrievable, and were I to live long, if I could not acquit myself to *myself*?" (6:419 [1139]). Like the indifferent subject who puts a premium on his own understanding, "who would deal fairly with their own minds, and make a right use of their faculties in the pursuit of truth," *Clarissa* abides by her ability and her right to reason. To Mrs Norton, she writes after the rape, "yet have I this consolation left me, that I have not suffered either for want of circumspection, or thro' credulity or weakness" (6:128 [986]). Lovelace's recourse to drugs to carry out the rape confirms her otherwise persistent presence of mind.

While indifferency is a position of irreverence ("Respect and Custom" cannot be counted as evidence), it is not a position of hostility (11.42) for Locke. There is for him no social value to truth: "Common or uncommon are not the marks to distinguish Truth or Falsehood, and therefore should not be any bias to us in our Enquiries" (24.71). We recall that the conundrum with indifferency is that it aspires to a kind of asociality and yet is preoccupied with social concerns. For Locke, the hardest part about being indifferent is detaching oneself from the bind of the "common or uncommon," that is to say, to be above the line of sociality itself. Moreover, in Locke's *Conduct*, social disengagement is, at least temporarily, also a defection from knowledge.

Harlowes will join the campaign along with "Lord M., from the two Ladies his Sisters, and from both his Nieces, and from the wicked man himself, to forgive and marry him" (7:31 [1155]). The only person who shares *Clarissa*'s opinion on the matter happens to be her mother, who replies to Mrs Norton that *Clarissa* would be better off dead than married.

Since what can be known is what others already know, it is best to be ignorant. Just as you might end up agreeing or disagreeing with others but must suspend all social considerations in the meantime, you also hope to distinguish what is true from what is false but cannot pretend to know the difference until then. Indifference means tuning out the general conversation until you can find an impartial way of joining it. Locke writes, “The surest and safest way is to have no Opinion at all,” that is, to eliminate all mental company (35.106).

Locke’s emphasis on safety reveals what is at stake in maintaining indifference. Freedom from intellectual dependency is on the line, but another, more material kind of freedom is at risk as well. Locke writes that fair and independent examination of evidence guarantees that “no body will be at a loss or in danger for want of embracing those Truths which are necessary in his Station and Circumstances” (34.102). In other words, the failure to know the truth endangers people all the time, by ill-equipping them to manage their situations. Navigating one’s station and circumstances requires the ability to assess information. Clarissa—drugged, duped, and displaced—loses her station, circumstances, and identity as “a Clarissa.” Locke describes how while there are costs to not being indifferent, there are also consequences from being so: “The World is apt to cast great Blame on those who have an Indifferency for Opinions” (12.45), and “those that break from [custom] are in danger of Heresy” (34.103).²⁹ The indifferent subject is both safe and not safe at all. If freedom is her reward, then alienation and persecution are her punishment.³⁰

29 “Indifferent” is an important word in a much earlier context, in Locke’s contribution to the early modern debate, heightened by Restoration politics, over “matters indifferent,” or *adiaphora*, described by historian Jacqueline Rose as “circumstantial details of worship (time, place, and ceremonies) unspecified in the Bible, imposed by temporal authority.” See Rose’s study of Locke’s *Two Tracts on Government* (1660–62), “John Locke, ‘Matters Indifferent,’ and the Restoration of the Church of England,” *Historical Journal* 48, no. 3 (2005): 603, doi: [10.1017/S0018246X05004589](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X05004589).

30 The appearance of indifference in book 2 of Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) in chapter 21, “Of Power,” clarifies how the concept is bound up with the question of liberty, or the “power to act or not to act according as the Mind directs.” Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Niddich (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 282, §71, lines 32–33. Where the *Conduct* is concerned with indifference of opinion, the *Essay* is concerned with indifference of action. For example, Locke describes the power to move one’s hand or to let it rest as demonstration of the freedom of indifference. He writes,

Richardson revises Locke's script, but it is important to recognize how Richardson's plot reproduces the elements of danger and defiance in pursuit of intellectual and physical freedom. Clarissa's station and circumstances are suddenly jeopardized by the very structures (family, friends, conventions of decorum) that have hitherto seemed to secure them. Under pressure by others' competing interests, the young heiress tries to understand whom to trust during her household persecution and, later, what happened to her in her violation. Richardson's novel elaborates Locke's binding of the problem of sociality to the problem of knowledge. After Clarissa's private investigation of Lovelace's "regular and preconcerted plan of villainy," she demonstrates the paradox of indifference, shutting out other voices in an acceptance of hard facts, taking the antisocial and unorthodox route back to social acceptance (6:132 [989]). Clarissa's worth will eventually be restored, but through the path of total relinquishment—she cannot count on others' opinions and has to stop caring about them. First subjected to and then actively sifting through layers of human corruption, she finally ceases thinking about other people. The seemingly narcissistic economy that takes over the text (the insular tracking of Clarissa's writing, belongings, and time) replaces the social practices that seemed to come with the form of epistolarity and with being "a Clarissa."³¹ Indifference's

"if during the rest of my Hand, it be seized by a sudden Palsy, the *indifference* of that operative Power is gone, and with it my Liberty: I have no longer Freedom in that respect, but am under a Necessity of letting my Hand rest." Further, it is important that "the Power of moving my Hand, is not at all impair'd by the determination of my Will" (p. 284, §71, lines 8–15). Even if one decides to move, one must still be physically free to forbear moving. This non-abstract example of constraint or freedom demonstrates for Locke "what sort of *indifference* Liberty seems to me to consist, and not in any other, real or imaginary" (p. 284, §71, lines 19–21); Raymond Polin calls this "the power of organizing one's thoughts and movements according to one's own preferences." Polin, "John Locke's Conception of Freedom," in *John Locke: Problems and Perspectives, a Collection of New Essays*, ed. John W. Yolton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 2. The *Oxford English Dictionary* includes Locke's usage found in the *Essay* under the definition of "indifference" as "indetermination of the will; freedom of choice; an equal power to take either of two courses." For more on Locke's difficult and much reworked chapter, "Of Power," see Gideon Yaffe, *Liberty Worth the Name: Locke on Free Agency* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). See also Kramnick, 155–62.

31 See Erik Gray, *The Poetry of Indifference: From the Romantics to the Rubáiyát* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005). Gray defines "poetic indifference" as the representation of indifference as well as carelessness for the

extreme centralization of understanding allows Clarissa to understand the implausible story of her own fall from paragon to disgrace. Such truth clears the ground for a new kind of subject, but one who does not resemble a figure of Enlightenment. Richardson's take on the Lockean subject may be a figure of stark political survival and intrepid autonomy, but she is also a surprising departure from the subject of sensibility or sympathy that has become somewhat emblematic of the age.

"We are surprised at your indifference, *Miss Harlowe*," say Sally and Polly, two of Lovelace's female minions who visit Clarissa in prison (6:257 [1056]). "Indifference" appears many times in Richardson's novel, mostly as a state of disaffection ("such indifference, such coldness") or apathy ("more miserable if she loved him, than if she could have been were she to be indifferent to him") (6:154, 7:42 [1000, 1161]). When Sally and Polly charge Clarissa with indifference, they remark her focused disengagement: "Will you not write to any of your friends?" "No," she answers. Clarissa does not wish to contact friends, to eat, or even to move. "I have no wish for any liberty but that of refusing to see [Mrs Sinclair], and *one* more person" (6:257, 259 [1056, 1057]). At this point, only the wish for negative liberty can be sustained. The indifferent subject's powers of refusal have not yet widened into a more expansive agenda for asserting freedom.

The indifferent subject defects not only from sociality but also from knowledge. Since no received ideas can be trusted, the search for truth begins without any conception of it. Clarissa thus puts herself in a position of ignorance, no longer recognizing the distinction between what is true and what is false. Locke's concept of indifferency helps us to comprehend the move away from others as a life-saving conduct of the understanding rather

form of poetry itself. An indifferent poem disregards its readers' expectations: "It manifests indifference not only in what it says but in what it does, or rather in what it fails to do" (5). Under the Romantic prescription to express strong feeling in order to elicit strong feeling, Gray argues, "a detectable strain of indifference began to appear in English poetry" (3). Similarly, I argue that within the sentimental novel's hothouse of sympathy and passion in the eighteenth century, disaffection bloomed. For resonances between poetic indifference and *Clarissa*, see Gray's study of Keats's personal letters and epistolary poem in "Indifference and Epistolarity in *The Eve of St. Agnes*" (27–46). There Gray writes, "The epistolary mode offers special ways not only of addressing but also of *avoiding* issues of deep human concern" (29).

than as a fickle form of hard-heartedness. Where indifference helped us to interpret the antisocial, in its full-fledged vision of political and philosophical freedom, indifference leads us to the possibilities for a new kind of sociality that is contained in a model of impersonality. In the final section of this article, I argue how Clarissa after the rape fulfills this possibility, abandoning not only what and whom she knows, but also what and who she is. With the loss of station and circumstances, other recognizable parts of the self must go. Clarissa in London proceeds with this casting off not with the funereal aspect of a self-made martyr, but with something like urban glee—a disorienting if not shocking affect. In this reading of the novel, I reinterpret the loss of virtue as the necessary and indeed liberatory abandonment of an identifiable personhood, in which it is important to cease knowing who one is. From the naysaying practices of indifference emerges a high-stakes form of impersonality that alone secures one's mental and physical safety, what Locke calls in the *Essay* "the care of our selves."³² For Clarissa the rape survivor in London, impersonality—a disarming exteriorization of personhood that abandons all former terms of subjectivity—secures some bare but vital necessities: freedom from encroachment and harassment, physical mobility, the right to accept or refuse company, the ability to work and to write, and, finally, the power to live or not to live anymore. In the face of such an ostensibly grim script, I want to locate a certain upside. Richardson's impersonal spin on indifference recasts alienation from a cost in Locke's account to a decided benefit in *Clarissa*.

Impersonality and the Gifts of Wretchedness

The qualities of indifference found in Locke's account of managing the mind resonate in other instances of Enlightenment thinking: in Descartes's disbeliever who must clear epistemological ground by subjecting all that he thinks is true to dissent and distrust and in a Hobbesian model of interiority that is premised exclusively on self-interested action. Barbauld's admiration for the firmness in Clarissa's character highlights the virtues of such negative thinking—its unusual and untouchable integrity, fine-tuned sense of doubt, and transparent presentation of person. What

32 Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, p. 266, §51, lines 18.

indifferency is not, however, is a form of individual expression. Ruth Grant and Nathan Tarcov make the point in comparing Locke's *Conduct* to Rousseau's *Émile*. They argue that Locke's text, unlike Rousseau's, "is an education for individual independence and self-mastery, but certainly not for individuality and self-expression."³³ In turning away from a model of individualism, we could further characterize the indifferent subject as what has been called "persons without personality," what Clarissa enthusiasts like the widow Mrs Lovick see as "an angel, not a woman" and detractors like the libertine Richard Mowbray call a heart of iron (6:352, 8:41 [1103, 1382]).³⁴

Of the phenomenon of impersonality, Sharon Cameron writes, "The person is a surface—nothing that *can* be penetrated, something that does not even register contact—is impervious as a stone would be. This hardness which comes about because there is no inside (nothing in which an inside might be situated) is a state without exception."³⁵ Cameron's theory of impersonality advances the antisocial turn in Locke's account. If the indifferent subject refuses contact or penetration, the impersonal subject simply averts it. The person is "nothing that *can* be penetrated." An indifferent Clarissa initiates her own fact-finding mission, dismissing the concerns of others as she reconstructs the truth of what happened to her. An impersonal Clarissa, untethered to the paradox of indifferency (open to evidence and closed to others), presents a kind of subjectivity that is neither open nor closed: "the person is a surface ... there is no inside." This concept of the person—unrecognizable in the violable young lady of virtue but also in the hard-hearted subject of indifferency—marks the most radical alternative to the staple of personhood that Richardson perfected in *Pamela* and in the first half of *Clarissa*. If the meta-apparatus of the novel (its mandate to search for hidden

33 Grant and Tarcov, introduction, xii. See also Yaffe's understanding of freedom in Locke as not "reducible to self-expression [but] ... a form of self-transcendence" (6).

34 I borrow this term from the French philosopher of science Georges Canguilhem, who quotes Louis Roule's observation of fish in *La Vie des rivières*: "Les poissons ne mènent pas leur vie d'eux-mêmes, c'est la rivière qui la leur fait mener, ils sont des personnes sans personnalité." Canguilhem, *La Connaissance de la Vie* (Paris: Vrin, 2003), 173.

35 Sharon Cameron, preface to *Impersonality: Seven Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), x.

feelings through the structure of subjectivity) is put on trial by indifference's hard examination of the facts, then it gets swept aside by the grander gestures of impersonality.³⁶

Locke's account of indifference highlights how what most defines Clarissa's turn away from sociality is her refusal to give assent. In the history of the novel's reception, that refusal has constituted a great betrayal against readers, against norms, against genre. In the case of Clarissa after the rape, a punitive solitude, or involuntary state of shame, is understood as more acceptable than the choice of solitude as a lifestyle. Clarissa's repackaging of antisociality as a beatific preparation for death ("What then, my dear and only friend, can I wish for but death?" [6:377 (1117)]) aims to manage public perception while also avoiding the charge of shame. She observes how, in not marrying Lovelace and in choosing "The Single-life," she will appear to have placed herself in moral quarantine: "Must I not *now* sit brooding over my past afflictions, and mourning my faults till the hour of my release? And would not everyone be able to assign the reason, why Clarissa Harlowe chose solitude, and to sequester herself from the world?" (6:377 [1117]). A brief life oriented towards dying solves the riddle of how to live acceptably alone. Yet, while Clarissa pushes us to interpret the rest of the novel through the lens of a death wish, resulting in a master narrative of Christian martyrdom, such a reading may lead us to overlook the kind of life she actually leads between her rape and her death—a different and not exactly saintly lifestyle. Clarissa's defection from love is not only a defection from sociality but also from personality.

In the final episodes of the novel, after Clarissa has escaped Lovelace a second time, she works on her writing in London, mostly alone. She wants to hear from the people in her past, but she does not want to see them. She asserts the metropolitan privilege of being left alone. To Anna Howe's invitation to live near

36 On impersonality and the eighteenth-century novel, see Deidre Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), which relates the impersonality of eighteenth-century fictional character to the impersonality of commodity exchange; and Adela Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), in which Pinch argues that impersonal feelings are actually "transpersonal," in that they move from person to person and can be experienced as actually belonging to someone else.

her (Clarissa's dream not long before), she respectfully declines, preferring now the consolations of urban anonymity to country life with friends. The freedom to refuse company may have started with her refusing to see Lovelace, but it widens to encompass nearly everyone she knows. Her brief incarceration reveals the starkness of this need: "Cannot I be permitted to see whom I please; and to refuse admittance to those I like not?" (6:259 [1057]). Of her suitor-then-rapist-now-suitor-again, she declares "that I *can* and *will* forgive him, on this one easy condition, *That he will never molest me more*" (6:424 [1141]). To her old friend Judith Norton, she appeals, "Say not then, that you think you ought to come up to me, *let it be taken as it will*:—For *my Sake*, let me repeat ... you must *not* come" (6:130 [987]). She writes to Miss Howe, "Love me still, however. But let it be with a weaning Love. I am not what I was, when we were *inseparable* Lovers" (6:320 [1088]). As to what she is now, this "*Self*, this vile, this hated *Self*," she announces, "I will shake it off, if possible" (6:107 [974]). Clarissa puts the burden of selfhood onto her friend, calling Anna "my dearer *Self*," adding "for what is now my *Self*?" (6:196 [1022]).

If Clarissa is not what she once was, is no longer even a *Self*, then what is she? Clarissa's loss of selfhood can certainly be read as "the consequences of rape upon the woman's sense of self," in which Richardson "figures the assault on her body as an equally brutal assault upon her identity."³⁷ However, I want to consider Clarissa's active renunciation of selfhood through Richardson's peculiar swap of the lost daughter who solicits the concern of old intimates with a confirmed urbanite who prefers the company of strangers. On her first evening of freedom, she writes to Anna Howe: "Once more have I escaped—but, alas! I, my *best self*, have not escaped!"³⁸ Pseudonyms reinforce the change. Under the

37 Leslie Richardson, "Leaving Her Father's House: Astell, Locke, and Clarissa's Body Politic," *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture* 34 (2005): 153. This essay reads Clarissa's loss of self through Locke's theory of possessive individualism in which one has property in oneself. Rape, Leslie Richardson reminds, is "a crime against property" as well as identity (162). In conversation with Mary Astell's views on the self-ownership of single women, Richardson argues that *Clarissa* "problematizes the 'free agency' of a young woman" (159).

38 Impersonated by Lovelace and his accomplices before the rape and unconscious during it, Clarissa issues this frank disclaimer to Anna Howe: "But how to defend myself in every-thing that has happened, I cannot tell: Since in some part of the time, in which my conduct appears to have been censurable, I was not myself" (6:146 [996]).

assumed identity of “Mrs. Rachel Clark, at Mr. Smith’s, a Glove-shop, in King Street, Covent-garden,” she asks Miss Howe to send a line (6:107 [974]). Later, she assumes other urban covers: in addition to Mrs Clark in Covent Garden, there are directions to Mrs Mary Atkins at the Belle Savage on Ludgate Hill and to Mrs Dorothy Salcomb at the Four Swans Inn, Bishopsgate Street. Under these directions, Clarissa dispatches a flurry of letters from London to re-establish contact with her friends and to investigate the conspiracy against her. In an affectionate letter to Mrs Norton (“Let me, however, hope, that you love me still”), she inquires after her family and confirms some details of Lovelace’s plot (6:114 [978]). She then solicits information from Lovelace’s aunt Lady Betty Lawrance. To the Harlowes’ servant Sarah Hodges, she writes under strict secrecy, seeking further authentication and signing only “Your friend” (6:124 [984]). To her former maid Hannah Burton, Clarissa appeals for company: “Do you chuse to come and be with me? ... I am a very unhappy creature, and, being among all strangers, should be glad to have *you* with me” (6:111 [977]).

But, as the circus of pseudonyms suggest, Clarissa is now a stranger herself, removed from those who know her and in the care of the occupants of her building (her landlords who own the glove-shop downstairs and a distressed but genteel widow). As the responses trickle in to her several inquiries, Clarissa learns to “expect everything bad” from friends and family (6:129 [987]). Her letter to Anna Howe is returned with an admonitory note from Mrs Howe that orders her to stop writing to her daughter, a turning point for Clarissa: “The Letter I received from your Mother,” she later confides, “was a dreadful blow to me” (6:176 [1012]). The rheumatic Hannah Burton sends her sorrowful but inflexible regrets. The answers from Mrs Norton, Lady Betty, and Mrs Hodges all confirm Lovelace’s “complicated wickedness” (6:129 [986]). Of her family’s disposition to forgiveness, Mrs Norton reports, “No evil can have happened to you, which they do not *expect* to hear of” (6:115 [979]). Even Miss Howe, when cleared by her mother to answer her friend’s letter, betrays a cruel incomprehension of recent events: “What have you brought yourself to, Miss Clarissa Harlowe? ... What an intoxicating thing is *this love*?” (6:141 [993]). It is not the rape but

rather the responses to the rape that bring Clarissa to the nadir of expectations and that recalibrate the value of her “best self,” of having been “a Clarissa.”

The philosophical practice of indifferency begins with the position of no longer knowing what is true and what (who) is false. Once Clarissa knows the worst, she can expect everything bad until, finally, she stops expecting anything at all. Replying to Mrs Howe’s reprimand, Clarissa repeats a particularly cruel phrase: “When distressed, the human mind is apt to turn itself to every one in whom it imagined or wished an interest, for pity and consolation.—Or, to express myself better and more concisely, in your own words, *Misfortune makes people plaintive*: And to whom, if not to a friend, can the afflicted complain?” (6:110 [976]). This question, it turns out, is not rhetorical. Within days, Clarissa learns that for pity and consolation, she cannot turn to those in whom she “imagined or wished an interest.” Neither her family (her father curses her, her siblings betray her, her mother will not speak to her) nor her household intimates (Mrs Norton—“Surely you are my own Mother”) are good for anything but communicating the most dispiriting information (6:127 [986]). Her “honest and humane” co-tenants and her trusty health care team (“an excellent Physician, Dr. H., and as worthy an Apothecary, Mr. Goddard.—Their treatment of me, my dear, is perfectly *paternal!*”) prove to be more reliable caregivers (6:130, 319 [987, 1088]). The frightening condition of “being among absolute strangers” thus becomes a blessing for the rape survivor who seeks safety in anonymity (6:113 [978]). She is not so cowed by Mrs Howe as to forget two pieces of direction: “first,—that you will not let any of my relations know, that you have heard from me. The other,—that no living creature be apprised where I am to be heard of, or directed to. This is a point that concerns me, more than I can express.—In short, my preservation from further evils may depend upon it” (6:111 [976]). Clarissa, as Mrs Clark in a glove-shop, or as Mrs Salcomb at an inn, or as nobody at all, is in the newly coveted, distinctly urban position of being a stranger among strangers.

It is crucial then that Clarissa gets rid of her name. Neither Clarissa Harlowe nor the Female Paragon Formerly Known as Clarissa Harlowe, she can enjoy the fabled status of Nobody. In

her fragmented papers composed immediately after the rape, she will not sign her name. She closes a torn note to Anna Howe with “I am still, and I ever will be, Your true—Plague on it!” (5:303 [890]). In a scratched message to her father, she writes, “I don’t presume to think you should receive me—No, indeed—My name is—I don’t know what my name is!” (5:304 [890]). In subsequent messages, she reclaims her name but with embellishments such as “Your miserable CLARISSA HARLOWE,” “The unhappy CLARISSA HARLOWE,” “The unfortunate CLARISSA HARLOWE,” “Obliged servant, CLARISSA HARLOWE?” (6:107, 6:111, 6:114, 7:71 [974, 976, 978, 1177]). In her anonymous, pseudonymous, city life, Clarissa’s identity crisis marks a new dispensation of character. One episode, in particular, shows the benefits.

Upon dragging Clarissa to prison for fabricated debt charges, the arresting officer asks, “Is your name Clarissa Harlowe, madam?” to which she responds, “Yes, yes, indeed, ready to sink, my name *was* Clarissa Harlowe:—But it is now *Wretchedness!*” (6:250 [1052]). Clarissa’s name is swallowed up as if by a figure in a morality play. She identifies only and entirely with a state of “*Wretchedness*.” While this collapse of identity cannot exactly be affirmed, Clarissa’s renaming is consistent with her self-exposure as a rape victim, a disarming act of self-representation. Clarissa draws here on the unassailability of allegory: you cannot make “*Wretchedness*” any more wretched than itself. In not only claiming to feel wretched but also making herself the very figure of wretchedness, Clarissa forecloses the possibility of further degradation. Simply, there is no further. Clarissa trades in her old allegory of “Female Virtue” for its total wreckage, but the transaction has its benefits.

In thinking about Clarissa’s turn towards allegory, critics have understood a shift in Richardson’s project of the novel, what Claudia Brodsky describes as his “self-exposing representation of representation.”³⁹ Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook describes how the novel’s “signifying system of allegory,” which transforms Clarissa into a Christian martyr, displaces its former narrative values of verisimilitude, plausibility, and authenticity. In this account, allegory supersedes psychological realism, alienating the reader

39 Claudia Brodsky, “Narrative Representation and Criticism: ‘Crossing the Rubicon’ in *Clarissa*,” in *Reading Narrative: Form, Ethics, Ideology*, ed. James Phelan (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1989), 216.

and challenging the genre's epistemology of the transparent and "dictating heart."⁴⁰ How does the structure of character change under these new terms for fiction? After allegory, is character possible? We know that after the rape Clarissa does away with a depth-model of character. As John Richetti writes, she occupies "an essentially social and political location in which one can claim to be exactly what one appears to be to others, and at the same time refuse to be defined by a turbulent interiority where unruly desires and impulses operate beyond full control of the will."⁴¹ The values emphasized by Richetti, "scope, breadth, and comprehensiveness" over "mere depth ... unstable and destructive," resonate with the post-rape urban narrative that I want to privilege and also offer an alternative to a strictly allegorical reading of character. Richetti aligns Clarissa's transparency with her refusal to be victimized: no depth means no violation. After virtue, other configurations of the person become possible.

Clarissa's new urbanism, the condition of being a stranger among strangers, makes room for an externalized, transparent, surface model of character. Hiding in plain sight, Clarissa lives anonymously (she does not want to be traced by Lovelace) but also publicly (any other Londoner might see her around). Noting London's role in the novel, Hilary Schor points out "the energy and vibrancy of the city, the commercial spaces which the readers enter with some relief after the terrors of Clarissa's 'closet.'"⁴² An energized, city dweller suggests a new vision of the heroine—fearless, anonymous, itinerant—a figure who explores the streets of the city much more than she does the recesses of her heart. In this phase, *Clarissa* shuts down the space for private feeling, rejecting a model of always violable personhood based on sexuality and making room for a public, metropolitan identity

40 Cook, 104–11. On the "impersonality of eighteenth-century personification" of feelings, see Pinch (44–50). On characters' "semi-allegorical effects," see John Richetti, *Popular Fiction before Richardson, Narrative Patterns, 1700–1739* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 264.

41 Richetti, *The English Novel in History* (London: Routledge, 1999), 105–6. Richetti aims to unseat the reading of *Clarissa* as a "struggle for psychosexual domination" and instead to open up the novel's engagement with concepts about personality and sociability. Richetti's analysis makes us aware of the correlation between depth-readings of Clarissa (deciphering her interiority) and interpretations locked into plots of violence and loss.

42 Hilary Schor, "Notes of a Libertine Daughter: Clarissa, Feminism, and the Rise of the Novel," *Stanford Humanities Review* 8, no. 1 (2000): 98–99.

that challenges the very purpose of the novel to investigate someone's feelings. At this point, Richardson disables the incentives for psychological discovery hitherto so important to the plot. Where nothing is hidden, the search for secret feelings becomes both flat and sadistic.

While London in the nineteenth-century novel is the setting for mysterious events—the unravelling of secret lives and unknown identities—London in *Clarissa* propels a different, strangely wholesome-looking narrative. Edward Copeland writes in detail about Clarissa's active life in London. The city's well-regulated commercial sprawl, he argues, gives her the stability she has been looking for: "The language of commerce is the language of truth: in Clarissa's London, the coaches run on time."⁴³ A system based on money is much more transparent and benign than one based on violent passions. Clarissa's London, according to Copeland, is "an imaginary world of stable signs and symbols"; the city's infrastructure—the post, transportation, housing, and retail—runs efficiently and impersonally, unlike "the disorder of Lovelace's anarchic imagination."⁴⁴ But finally, tragically, Copeland argues, Clarissa's exit from London in a hearse down King Street expresses the inability of the city to protect her. If the impersonal conveniences of urban living benefited her in exile, they ultimately let her down: "The map of London, its public landmarks, its churches, inns, and parks, the business of its streets *seem* to give the option of freedom to Clarissa ... But London, as part of its modern definition, supplies no knight in shining armour to help the heroine."⁴⁵ The city can shelter, but it cannot intervene.

Copeland's grim summation of Clarissa's urban experiment ("a chilling vision of anomie—a world filled with people, and at the same time, a world despairingly empty") addresses the shortcomings of the city as an actor, but overlooks the subjectivity that such a setting makes possible.⁴⁶ Although London cannot keep Clarissa alive forever, it sustains her for four hundred pages—long

43 Edward Copeland, "Remapping London: *Clarissa* and the Woman in the Window," in *Samuel Richardson: Tercentenary Essays*, ed. Margaret Anne Doody and Peter Sabor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 55.

44 Copeland, 68.

45 Copeland, 57.

46 Copeland, 69.

enough for her to organize her afterlife as a book. Clarissa's corpse may be driven back to the country and reinstated as the eternally virtuous daughter, but her summer in London stands out as her most memorable and radical incarnation. In her rented rooms in Covent Garden and in her constant roving in the city, Clarissa approaches the kind of cosmopolitanism that Amanda Anderson defines as foremost a "reflective distance from one's original or primary cultural affiliation."⁴⁷ In the final instalment of Clarissa's life, urbanity fosters a cognitive and physical disengagement that becomes the condition for her writing. Belford records her movements: "She ordered the coachman (whom she hired for the day) to drive any-whither, so it was into the Air: He accordingly drove her to Hampstead, and thence to Highgate. There at the Bowling-green House, she alighted, extremely ill, and having breakfasted, ordered the coachman to drive very slowly any-whither. He crept along to Muswell-hill, and put up at a public house there; where she employed herself two hours in writing ... And then she wrote on for three hours more" (7:199–200 [1246]). Far from the bucolic privilege of Harlowe Place, Clarissa finds refuge and possibility in an urban hub. Freedom can be found any-whither that is the "Air" of London. Employed for hours in a public house, Clarissa is not a closeted female writer, but visible, busy, unconcerned. Not "Clarissa's London," as Copeland writes, but London's Clarissa commands attention as a pronounced alternative to subjectivity under an eros-driven plot in which Clarissa must either be a victim or a wife.

Clarissa's practice "not to keep her own Secret" but instead to publicize her rape is the key to this new dispensation. Such baldness scandalizes even Lovelace, who cannot imagine any incentive for making "our affair so generally known among the *Flippanti* of both sexes" (7:17 [1149]). In her view, however, the dishonoured have no reason to hide, as she explains to Anna Howe that "while *I* know it, I care not *who* knows it" (6:146 [996]). In declining to seek legal redress, Clarissa seeks to avoid the strain of public prosecution but not the shame of public exposure: "Not that I am solicitous, that my disgrace should be hidden from the world, or that it should not be generally known, that the man has

47 Amanda Anderson, *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 63.

proved a villain to me: For this, it seems, every-body but myself expected" (6:177–78 [1013]).⁴⁸

Clarissa's view that, since she knows the worst of herself, everyone else may as well know it (and probably already does) is a logic of indifference that eludes others. In the letter to Lady Betty Lawrance in which she comes out as a rape victim, she reveals, "I was first robbed of my Senses; and then of my Honour. Why should I seek to conceal that disgrace from others, which I cannot hide from myself?" (6:126 [985]). To illustrate Clarissa's eccentricity, Belford repeats the line in a letter to Lovelace: "The disgrace she cannot hide from *herself*, as she says in her letter to Lady Betty, she is not solicitous to conceal from the *world!*" (6:288 [1073]). Immediately upon returning to the glove-shop from jail, she announces to her landlady, "Oh Mrs. Smith, said she, as soon as she saw her, did you not think I was run away?—You don't know what I have suffered since I saw you. I have been in prison!" Belford glosses the account, "But dost thou not observe, what a strange, what an uncommon openness of heart reigns in this Lady: *she had been in a prison*, she said, before a stranger in the shop, and before the maid-servant: and so, probably, she would have said, had there been twenty people in the shop" (6:287–88 [1072]).⁴⁹ Courting the shock of friends and neighbours, Clarissa owns up to her scandalized position and outs herself: "You'll observe, Mrs. Lovick (for you seemed this morning curious to know if I were not a wife), that I *never was married*.—You, Mr. Belford, no doubt, knew before, that I am no wife: And now I never will be one" (6:356 [1105]). In this last declaration, one hears not remorse but jubilation.⁵⁰

48 See Anne-Lise François, *Open Secrets: The Literature of Uncounted Experience* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008). François's study, which defines open secrets as "nonemphatic revelation," challenges critical models that value exposure and are not "prepared to accept something that does not require either the work of disclosure or the effort of recovery" (xvi).

49 Perhaps an instance of giving too much information, Clarissa also informs Mrs Smith, "I have not had my clothes off since Thursday night" (6:288 [1072]). Four days without laundry (she returns to the glove-shop on a Monday) does not appear to affect her stain-proof white damask nightgown, described by Belford as "beyond imagination white" (6:274 [1065]). My emphasis on Clarissa's chattiness about her rape differs significantly from Steele's focus on her silence. Steele observes, "After Lovelace rapes her, Clarissa retreats into an increasingly silent world" (12).

50 Patricia Meyer Spacks reads Clarissa's openness as a rape victim as a critique of "the self-elected doom of privacy" suffered by such submissive women as

In London now, the young lady once tasked to report her tender feelings to her best friend makes cheery gossip of her incarceration before temporary acquaintances and stray shoppers. The chance and disinterested audience of an urban retailer enables a freedom of speech that prying, intimate correspondents never could. Disgrace has its privileges, namely freedom from the cultural illogic of simultaneous concealment and transparency demanded by eighteenth-century female decorum.⁵¹ By refusing to keep her rape a secret, by refusing to keep any secrets, Clarissa assumes a certain control of her story. To say, as she does to Lovelace's relations, "I was robbed of my honor" disables others from accusing her of having none (she already said so herself) and of giving it up (she was robbed of it). When Clarissa later says that she was raped and jailed, she breaks her own taboos. Who could say worse of her than she has already and repeatedly said of herself?⁵² Clarissa after the rape achieves a kind of transparency, not about her thoughts and feelings but about her experiences—experiences that make even libertines blush.⁵³

In publicizing her rape, Clarissa, as William Ray writes, "distributes the burden of her identity among a large segment of the population."⁵⁴ Ray refers to her selected friends, family, and supporters, but her openness with Londoners extends that population to the entire city. Clarissa has nothing to gain from discretion but much to win from mass disclosure. Like Belford, Sarah Fielding's character Bellario takes note of Clarissa's logorrhea: "All false Shame has [Richardson] exposed, by shewing

her mother. Spacks glosses that such a gesture "also declares Clarissa's post-humous transcendence of convention and of concealment." Spacks, *Privacy: Concealing the Eighteenth-Century Self* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 16. Here, I address the transcendence she achieves while still living.

- 51 As Pinch writes, the eighteenth-century heroine "must be looking for signs of love and also be blind to them. Blinded by her education, the constraints of courtship, and the constraints of form, she must wish to know feelings without knowing that she knows them" (144).
- 52 Lovelace makes a similar defence. He writes to Belford of his crimes against Clarissa, "No one shall say worse of me, than I will of myself" (6:103 [972]).
- 53 For an alternative interpretation, see Leslie Richardson, who argues that "the arrest and imprisonment powerfully demonstrate that Clarissa does not have power over her own movements, that she is without claim to the liberty, the freedom, granted to those who own themselves" (166).
- 54 William Ray, *Story and History: Narrative Authority and Social Identity in the Eighteenth-Century French and English Novel* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishing, 1990), 178.

the Beauties of an open and frank Heart in *Clarissa's* charming Simplicity, when she tells Mrs. *Smith*, in a publick Shop, that she had been in Prison; and when in a Letter to Lady *Betty Laurance* she declares, that *the Disgrace she cannot hide from herself, she is not solicitous to conceal from the World.*"⁵⁵ All shame has turned to false shame, and dropping the pretence of modesty now merits public praise. Rachel Carnell observes that *Clarissa's* chattiness redefined who counted as the public in eighteenth-century London: "By thus publicizing the most intimate details of her private oppression, *Clarissa* expands the idea of the public sphere from periodical and coffee-house debates among propertied men to include gossip among neighbors and boarding-house keepers as well as epistolary exchanges between aristocratic women."⁵⁶ But when the boundaries of the self and the social are compromised, when "*the Most Important Concerns of Private Life*" are made astonishingly public, then the idea of the public realm does not just expand, it changes the protocols of subjectivity itself.

An impersonal *Clarissa* evacuates the model of personhood based on interiority, secrecy, and privacy. As counterintuitive as it may seem to compare a canonical Western novel to a theory of East Asian theatre, I feel compelled to think of Richardson's eighteenth-century experiment through Roland Barthes's conception of Bunraku. In his essay about Japanese puppetry, Barthes describes the function of Western theatre as "essentially to reveal what is reputed to be secret ('feelings,' 'situations,' 'conflicts') while concealing the very artifice of the process of revelation."⁵⁷ Such a description easily applies to the machinery of the psychological novel with its realistic unfolding of human desires. Bunraku, Barthes writes, dissolves "the driving link between character and actor which is always conceived by us as the expressive channel of an interiority." Disconnected from the operations of an expressive interior, the subject of Bunraku is defined by its features, interactions, and movements. *Clarissa* in this analogy works both sides: it stages secret feelings like Western theatre but, instead of concealing its "interiority effects" (to use Felicity

55 Fielding, 46.

56 Rachel K. Carnell, "Clarissa's Treasonable Correspondence: Gender, Epistolary Politics, and the Public Sphere," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 10, no. 3 (1998): 282, doi: 10.1353/ecf.1998.0030.

57 Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 172–74.

Nussbaum's phrase), the novel, like *Bunraku*, dismantles that apparatus.⁵⁸ Its elaborate narrative mechanics to search and then expose Clarissa's heart drive the novel forward until the whole machine breaks, at which point another conception of character emerges. Barthes writes that the face of the *Bunraku* puppet master "is offered to the spectator for reading, but what is so carefully and so preciously given to be read is that there is nothing to be read." Moreover, he writes, "we are scarcely able to comprehend [this exemption from meaning] since for us to attach meaning is to conceal or oppose it, never to absent it."⁵⁹ The character of Clarissa, I argue, is similarly incomprehensible—even more so because Richardson tempts his readers to search for the truth of her feelings before vacating the concept altogether. The difficulty of reading Clarissa (including her spectacularly blinding person, even as a "lovely corpse") has to do with her strange exemption from meaning, the way she neither conceals nor opposes nor possesses the desires imputed to her—there is just nothing to be read (8:14 [1367]). Barthes writes, "What is expelled from the stage is hysteria, that is theatre itself, and what is put in its place is the action necessary for the production of the spectacle—work is substituted for interiority."⁶⁰ Suddenly Richardson's "History of a Young Lady," with its seemingly immanent structures of suppressed erotic feeling, replaces hysteria with facts. Appending Lovelace's famous report, "And now, Belford, I can go no farther. The affair is over. Clarissa lives," is the rest of the story in which Clarissa lives, works, talks, moves, and then dies (5:291 [883]).

If *Clarissa's* new narrative economy does not run on secrets and lies, then what does it propose as an alternative source of energy? We return to the experience of reading Richardson's heroine as an encounter with an unyielding surface and to Barbauld's defence of such hardness. Barbauld's praise of Clarissa's moral and formal stasis honoured an interpretation in which there is no "wonderful recognition" of who a character really is. Whatever is to be known about her, we have known (and she has known) all along. For Barbauld, such lack of personal development is not to be regretted but rather revered as a value in the novel. I have

58 Felicity Nussbaum, *Rival Queens: Actresses, Performance, and the Eighteenth-Century British Theater* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 19.

59 Barthes, 173.

60 Barthes, 173–74.

argued that this account of Clarissa as static, transparent, open but not violable, impersonal and yet alive suggests a counter-model of subjectivity in fiction—a being who sheers away from the Richardsonian construct of an interiorized, psychologically volatile subject and yet is not simply a religious symbol. Locke's account of indifference helps to reframe this new subject in the context of Enlightenment concerns and to understand social disregard as a philosophical stance with the high stakes of truth and freedom. In his representation of Clarissa after the rape, Richardson reconfigures indifference's cost of alienation as a benefit of disgrace and, in doing so, endorses an urban model of sociality. An impersonal Clarissa pushes our comfort level even further, razing the project of novelistic subjectivity and undermining the reasons, to use Blakey Vermeule's phrase, for why we care about literary characters.⁶¹ We should remember that Clarissa, no longer "defined by a turbulent interiority," continued to mystify. If her refusal to marry her rapist defied cultural and narrative expectations, then her openness about the rape became a source of general confusion. In the end, a dead, Christian Clarissa may be easier to take than the living, impersonal version who precedes her.



61 Blakey Vermeule, *Why Do We Care about Literary Characters?* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).