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Fainting and Death: Representations of Passivity in Richardson's Pamela and Clarissa

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Fainting and Death: Representations of Passivity in Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa*

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Introduction

Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1748) have been widely read and discussed since their publication, both separately and in relation to each other. In his introduction to *Pamela*, Thomas Keymer states that the reliability of the narrative is questioned and satirized (most notably, by Henry Fielding's *Shamela*), and notes that this leads to "Richardson's much more subtle and controlled exploitation of epistolary indeterminacy in the multiple adversarial narratives that structure *Clarissa*" (xvi). In addition, Terry Eagleton remarks that Richardson's *Pamela* "is a kind of fairy-tale pre-run of *Clarissa*, a fantasy wish fulfilment in which abduction and imprisonment turn out miraculously well" (37). In a way, *Clarissa* literalizes certain aspects of the narrative that are implied but never fully developed in *Pamela*. Pamela and Clarissa are both subjected to sexual violence, but Pamela successfully defends herself against the threat of rape, and eventually agrees to marriage, while Clarissa is raped, and chooses death. This summary is, of course, overly simplistic, but it hints at the most important events in Richardson's novels, namely Pamela and Clarissa's responses to the rape (attempts).

The heroines of *Pamela* and *Clarissa* have been the subjects of interpretation and criticism, particularly regarding the portrayal of Pamela's fainting fits, and the meaning of Clarissa's death. The published scholarship on Richardson's *Pamela* reveals that the authenticity of Pamela's faints has been debated frequently, yet no consensus has been reached. As Richard Gooding points out, "the perceived hypocrisy of the heroine" posed a major issue for the anti-Pamelists in the eighteenth century, and this continues to be debated nearly three centuries after the publication of the novel (122). Stuart Wilson and Jacob Littleton believe that Pamela's faintings are not feigned: Wilson states that, "[u]nlike so many later heroines of the sentimental novel, Pamela does not faint at will," and Littleton notes that Pamela's "fits continue far longer than self-defence requires," and that they are thus "genuine

responses to severe peril” (88; 291). Terry Castle’s interpretation is somewhat ambiguous, but she clearly indicates that Pamela’s faints are, at least, self-willed: she claims that, by fainting, “Pamela tries, desperately enough, to prolong refusal of sexual appearances” (“*Pamela as Sexual Fiction*” 482). Christiane Zschirnt claims that “Pamela’s fainting characteristically serves an ambiguous purpose,” because her “seductive modesty” allows her to prevent the loss of her virtue while indirectly securing her marriage to Mr. B (56).

Like Pamela’s faintings, literary critics have interpreted the death of Clarissa in various, sometimes contradictory, ways. Elizabeth MacAndrew and Susan Gorsky consider her death “a triumph, not a defeat” (735). Eagleton believes Clarissa’s death signifies “an absolute refusal of political society: sexual oppression, bourgeois patriarchy and libertine aristocracy together” (76). Terry Castle describes her death as a “methodical self-expulsion from the realm of signification” (*Clarissa’s Ciphers* 109). G. J. Barker-Benfield acknowledges the existence of different interpretations, yet asserts that the death of Clarissa “should be thought of as a nervous disorder in extremis” (35). John Mullan links Clarissa’s death to her sensibility, claiming that her death represents “the inevitable end of her irremediable grief” (110). Similarly, Jolene Zigarovich refers to Clarissa’s grief as the indirect cause of her death, and she argues that Clarissa’s death is “a joyful climax” (123). These scholarly interpretations illustrate that Pamela’s propensity to faint and Clarissa’s death are generally associated with the heroines’ subjection to sexual violence, and simultaneously suggest that fainting and dying can be considered as methods of resistance.

This thesis will critically explore the literary representations of passivity in the sentimental novel, and examine how passivity relates to agency by conducting a close reading of Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* and *Clarissa*. I will argue that the concepts of passivity and agency are not inherently contradictory by demonstrating that the heroines of Richardson’s novels are able to enact agency through their passivity.

This thesis builds on Dana Wight's "Being Passive/Passive Being: Passivity as Self-Expression in Gothic Literature" to contextualize passivity as a form of feminine agency. In this work, Wight claims that the

Gothic elements of transgression, terror and sexual threat, while limiting the activity of the heroine, delineate a trajectory for the development of a passive subjectivity through stillness and immobility, positions that have been nearly categorically misread or repeatedly interpreted as synonymous with vulnerability, penetrability and powerlessness. (188)

Although Wight limits her argument to the representations of passivity within Gothic fiction, I will argue that her understanding of passivity (specifically, in terms of stillness) can also be applied to the literature of sensibility, specifically Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa*. Wight asserts that the Gothic heroine's "passivity is legendary," and she indicates that this is crucial to her argument (184). Douglas Thorpe confirms that the Gothic heroine is passive, and he claims that "[t]he passive figure is prominent in the novel of sensibility" as well (106). In addition, Patricia Meyer Spacks claims that "passivity and compliance comprise the acceptable poses" for the heroine of the sentimental novel (88). Like the Gothic heroine, the central female character in the literature of sensibility is passive, meaning that Wight's understanding of passivity can be applied to Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa*.

This thesis will explore the "possible active or strategic forms of passivity" that, as Wight notes, have seldom been discussed (182). Wight uses "stillness" to refer to the moments "when the heroine faints, sleeps, falls ill or loses consciousness," i.e., when she finds herself in a state of physical passivity (184). In this thesis, I follow Wight in conceptualising passivity as inactivity, specifically in terms of stillness. Additionally, this thesis draws on the concept of agency as defined by Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks in *Challenging Women's Agency and Activism in Early Modernity*. Wiesner-Hanks describes agency as an

individual's "capacity to act, make choices, and intentionally shape their own lives and the world around them to some degree" (10–11). Although I will adopt Wiesner-Hanks's definition of agency, I will exclude the following section: "capacity to act" (10–11). Furthermore, the concept of agency, as defined by Wiesner-Hanks, informs my understanding of related concepts, namely bodily autonomy and narrative control. I define bodily autonomy as one's right to assert their will over their body, and narrative control as an individual's ability to be in charge of the narrative, especially their own; bodily autonomy and narrative control thus fall under the larger concept of agency.

While there is a substantial body of research on Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, few researchers discuss the meanings of passivity and agency in the eighteenth century, and none of the published scholarship I have encountered explores the representations of passivity as agency in the sentimental novel. I believe that reading Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa* attentively can help to deepen our understanding of the complex relation between passivity and agency, especially within the eighteenth-century literature of sensibility.

The first chapter of this thesis will discuss the historical background to contextualize the concepts of passivity and agency in the eighteenth century, and within eighteenth-century sentimental fiction. The second and the third chapter contain close readings of Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa*. In chapter two, I will examine the representation of passivity in *Pamela*, and analyse how passivity (as shown through her fainting) relates to agency by comparing Pamela's active resistance to her passive resistance, addressing the possibility of the faint as feint, and discussing how Pamela's faintings complicate her role as the narrator. The third and final chapter will explore how *Clarissa*'s eponymous heroine exerts agency through her will—both in the sense of her wish for death, and her testament. In this chapter, I will also discuss Clarissa's association of marriage with the loss of female identity, the inefficacy of her faints and illness, and the significance of the rape. This thesis will show that the

representations of passivity in Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa* reveal that passivity can be employed as a form of agency, suggesting that the concepts of passivity and agency are not mutually exclusive in eighteenth-century literature of sensibility.

Chapter 1: Passivity and Agency in the Eighteenth Century

This chapter explores the concepts of passivity and agency within the eighteenth-century context. Passivity and agency are defined, both separately and in relation to each other. The association of passivity with femininity is explained through the emergence of the two-sex model, as introduced by Thomas Laqueur. One of the consequences of this new understanding of the sexes—sensibility—is discussed to elucidate the prevalence of sexual violence in the literature of sensibility. Finally, the literary faint is contextualized and linked to resistance, suggesting that passivity and agency are not mutually exclusive.

1.1 Defining Agency and Passivity

Historically, agency has been defined in numerous ways, but it has predominantly been associated with activity and actions. Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks defines agency as an individual's "capacity to act, make choices, and intentionally shape their own lives and the world around them to some degree" (10–11). She explains that the concept of agency plays a significant role in women's history and gender history, and that agency has thus been frequently discussed by feminist historians, such as Lynn M. Thomas, who explore why "agency has been such a powerful concept, particularly for periods and places in which historians seek to overcome an emphasis on victimization or passivity" (Wiesner-Hanks 11). In "Historicising Agency," Thomas stresses that it is necessary to "rethink agency by examining it as a historical concept, a concept that people in the past have defined and deployed in quite different, and sometimes disorienting, ways" (335). Although her work mainly focuses on agency in relation to modern Africa, Thomas notes that the majority of feminist historians are "well positioned" to examine agency as a historical concept because of their determination to "overcome earlier or popular portrayals of their historical subjects,

especially women, as passive victims,” suggesting that the concepts of agency and passivity are closely connected (334).

The *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* reveals that passivity is, in fact, linked to agency. The *OED* defines agency as the “ability or capacity to act or exert power; active working or operation; action, activity” (“Agency”). This definition of agency does not explicitly mention passivity, but it does include activity, which is significant because passivity is defined as the “absence of activity, involvement, participation, or exertion” in the *OED* (“Passivity”). According to the *OED*, agency is thus equated with activity, while passivity is associated with the opposite: inactivity, i.e., an absence of activity. However, while this clearly demonstrates that the concepts of passivity and agency are related, it is important to note that passivity and agency are not mutually exclusive, especially in the sentimental novel (which will be addressed in more detail in section four). Nonetheless, the earliest recorded use of this definition of passivity dates back to the seventeenth century, meaning that it is still relevant to the discussions of passivity in the eighteenth century.

Despite the fact that it is useful to define passivity, the concept of passivity as it is represented in the eighteenth century evades easy definition. Based on the aforementioned definition, there is no reason to suspect that passivity is a gendered term. Yet, Scott Paul Gordon asserts that “passivity is still considered by scholars as a term that early modern discourse largely used to characterize women” (8). In addition, Patricia Meyer Spacks mentions how Freud’s assertion that “the term masculine ... means active [and] the term feminine means passive” is useful in describing gendered relations in the eighteenth century (71). She elaborates on this by stating that “women of the period knew their appropriate social stance and their assumed social condition to be passivity; in this sense, at least, the term defines the female state” (Spacks 72). Similarly, Julie Peakman argues that the eighteenth-century woman was expected to be “passive, submissive and asexual” (75). In the eighteenth

century, passivity is thus explicitly associated with women, or perhaps more accurately, with their (perceived) femininity.

1.2 A Brief History of Sexuality

The association of passivity with femininity can partially be explained through the radical changes that took place in the eighteenth century regarding the history of sexuality. Thomas Walter Laqueur introduces the concept of the “one-sex model” and the “two-sex model” to describe these changes (8). As the term suggests, the one-sex model refers to the belief that there was only one sex, which was based on male anatomy: “the vagina is imagined as an interior penis, the labia as foreskin, the uterus as scrotum, and the ovaries as testicles” (Laqueur 4). This meant that women and men were not seen as physically different, but as different versions of the same sex; more specifically, the female body was thought to be the inverted and inferior version of the male body (Laqueur 4). In the eighteenth century, the two-sex model replaced the one-sex model, and this shift resulted in the dominant view that “there are two stable, incommensurable, opposite sexes and that the political, economic, and cultural lives of men and women, their gender roles, are somehow based on these ‘facts’” (Laqueur 6).

The gradual move towards the two-sex model led to a reconceptualization of the female body and female sexual desire, because while women were still considered to be inferior to men, the female body was no longer perceived as an inverted version of the male body; women were regarded as the opposite of men, and categorized based on their anatomical and reproductive differences. In the one-sex model, both the male and the female orgasm were thought to be necessary for conception, but following the switch to the two-sex model, these beliefs changed: women’s sexual pleasure (and consciousness) were deemed unnecessary, while the necessity of male sexual desire remained undebated (Laqueur 3). As Sally O’Driscoll points out, the fact that women were able to conceive without experiencing

sexual pleasure meant that “it could be claimed that the proper nature of women was to have little sexual desire” (107). In other words, women were thought to be passionless, whereas men were believed to be passionate. This reconstruction of the notion of female sexual desire, caused by the emergence of the two-sex model, “opened up the possibility of female passivity” (Laqueur 3).

1.3 Sensibility

Like the concept of female passivity, sensibility was based on the innate differences between the sexes (Kim 150). In a general sense, sensibility referred to “the faculty of feeling, the capacity for extremely defined emotion and a quickness to display compassion for suffering” (Todd 7). However, while sensibility did not exclusively concern women, the concept of sensibility became gendered, since women were thought to be more “susceptible to influence,” as well as prone to sudden bodily expressions of emotion, such as crying, blushing and fainting (Todd 19). Todd notes that the cult of sensibility was predominantly shaped by literature from the 1740s to the 1770s, although sentimental elements can still be found in later works of fiction, especially in Gothic novels (9). The literature of sensibility became known for its archetypal victim: “the chaste suffering woman, happily rewarded in marriage or elevated into redemptive death” (Todd 4). Richardson’s *Pamela* and *Clarissa* demonstrate the two possible outcomes for the heroine in the sentimental novel, since Pamela and Clarissa’s suffering ends in marriage and death, respectively. The eighteenth-century sentimental novel was often didactic in nature, and usually featured a “stress on virtue in the heroine” in the form of (attempted) rape (Todd 66). The terms used in sentimental works of fiction are generally prescriptive rather than merely descriptive; Todd explains how certain terms, like ‘virtue’, “indicate sentimental doctrine and expect a sentimental understanding” (5). In addition, sensibility is linked to (a lack of) sexuality in women: “sensibility, when

admired, was assumed to imply chastity, and only if denigrated was feared to denote sexuality” (Todd 8). Eighteenth-century sensibility is thus directly connected to female virtue, which is performed through the female body. While bodily virginity was undoubtedly expected and desired, the concept of virtue (particularly in relation to sensibility) encompasses more than the physical state of the female body; “an unawareness of conduct and an innocence of the mind” were considered to be necessary qualities for women (Zschrnt 52–53). However, the existence of these traits was nearly impossible to prove, because “the purity of a woman’s mind could only be read by the signs of her body,” meaning that bodily signs, like fainting, were still necessary to recognise virtue and sensibility in women (Sallmann 47).

1.4 Passivity as Agency

The virtuous heroine of the sentimental novel had to suffer, because according to Todd, sensibility “needs some action to display itself, some male aggression and sexual power to threaten it” (112). Similarly, John Mullan explains the prevalence of (sexual) assault in sentimental works of fiction by stating that “sensibility, and therefore virtue, is most excited, and therefore most manifest, when threatened” (124). In other words, women’s bodily responses to the threat of rape revealed their sensibility and virtue.

According to Zschrnt, “the image of the delicate, swooning heroine thrived in the sentimental novels of the second half of the century” (48). Within the literature of sensibility, the heroine usually faints as a reaction to sexual assault, because by the eighteenth century, fainting had acquired gender, and it was considered to be a typically feminine act. The near absence of the topic of fainting in contemporary medical handbooks suggests that it was primarily a subject of literature rather than of medicine (Zschrnt 48). This meant that the fictional and the factual faint—specifically, as a response to rape—were perceived differently.

As Julie Gammon notes, eighteenth-century law revealed that fainting “was taken as a sign of consent,” whereas “a woman’s ‘swooning’ in literature was viewed by the readership as evidence of her non-consent as she had been unable to give consent actively” (16). Frances Ferguson acknowledges that the faint is indeed interpreted as a sign of nonconsent in eighteenth-century literature, and notes that women are rendered incapable of consenting and resisting actively (100). Similarly, Katie Barclay reveals that “[w]omen no longer refused or consented to sex, but were made utterly passive to male desire” (38). In eighteenth-century literature, women were primarily represented as passive characters (Thorpe 106).

Women were unable to consent actively, and unable to resist actively, suggesting that “passivity and compliance comprise the acceptable poses” for the female characters in the sentimental novel (Spacks 88). However, passivity is not merely an “acceptable” position: it can be seen as a form of agency. Spacks claims that eighteenth-century female writers “characteristically define a heroine by her weakness, showing how weakness and passivity become social resources” (57–58). Barker-Benfield argues that “women’s nervous illness could be a means of self-preservation” (32). Similarly, Mullan states, “As long as sensibility, that capacity which escapes speech, is represented as a set of bodily symptoms, the picture of exemplary femininity can be one of sickness, of physical debility” (110). This suggests that the societal expectations of femininity—most notably, sensibility and passivity—were not merely aspects of women’s identities that limited their capacity to act. Whether women realised it or not, their passivity could potentially be used to their own advantage, e.g., to protect themselves from harm, suggesting that they can enact agency through their passivity.

In the eighteenth century, agency and passivity were viewed as contrasting concepts, since agency was linked to activity, whereas passivity was characterized by inactivity. Laqueur explains that the gradual move from the one-sex model to the two-sex model led to

multiple significant changes in the perceptions of sexuality, and subsequently, gender. The female body was thought to be passive and passionless as opposed to the active and passionate male body. This distinction based on the two sexes showed itself in the construction of gender roles and gender relations, too; women were expected to display bodily signs of sensibility, such as fainting. In the sentimental novel, the heroine often responds to the threat of rape by fainting rather than resisting actively. However, Spacks, Barker-Benfield, and Mullan imply that passivity does not necessarily negate agency, and that passivity can even be considered a form of agency.

Chapter 2: Fainting and Narrative Control in *Pamela*

This chapter examines the portrayal of fainting in Richardson's *Pamela*, and how this relates to resistance and agency. It opens with a detailed (and chronological) overview of the faints to demonstrate the gradual move from active resistance towards passive resistance. The second section of this chapter addresses the issue of feigned faints to show that fictional women recognized that fainting could potentially be used to their advantage. The third and final section acknowledges that fainting complicates the notion of narrative control, and demonstrates that Pamela's passivity ultimately prevents her from being silenced.

2.1 Fainting and (Passive) Resistance

Richardson's *Pamela* features various moments in which its eponymous heroine succumbs to a fainting fit. These fainting fits are not necessarily unusual within its eighteenth-century context: the faints are caused by heightened emotions that overwhelm her until she becomes unconscious. The most significant aspect of Pamela's fainting fits is that they are almost always induced by Mr. B's unwelcome sexual advances. As the novel progresses, his attacks become increasingly violent, and so do Pamela's fits; the severity of her faints is dependent on the level of threat that Mr. B poses.

Mr. B's first attempt to initiate a sexual relationship between himself and Pamela occurs in the summerhouse. He puts his arm around her, and he kisses her, even though she "struggled, and trembled, and was so benumb'd with Terror" (23). While he clearly still harasses her, it is significantly less violent than the attacks that follow (although Pamela is not yet aware of this). Her fear and resistance demonstrate that she recognises that Mr. B poses a sexual threat to her, but not to the extent where she is actively concerned about the potential loss of her virginity. This is confirmed by Pamela's bodily response to Mr. B's actions: "I sunk

down, not in a Fit, and yet not myself; and I found myself in his Arms, quite void of Strength, and he kissed me two or three times, as if he would have eaten me” (23). The severity of Pamela’s response to Mr. B’s harassment mirrors the severity of the sexual threat to her. She does not fully faint, yet she is not entirely conscious either, because she feels as though she has lost her senses—and herself. This is further emphasized when she tells Mr. B: “you have taught me to forget myself” (23). While her statement can also refer to her social position (i.e., her role as Mr. B’s servant), it still suggests that Mr. B’s actions cause her to behave, and think, unlike herself. Pamela disconnects from her sense of identity as a result of the threat of sexual violence, which implies that identity is linked to bodily autonomy.

In addition to demonstrating that she feels disconnected from herself, Pamela’s language choices reveal that she regards herself as passive. She mentions that Mr. B’s assault left her “quite void of Strength,” which is arguably the most obvious indicator of her passive physical state (23). Her lack of strength, in combination with her emotional distress, causes her to be unable to control her own body. The terms Pamela uses to recount the event indicate an absence of resistance; more specifically, her language choices imply an involuntary passivity. When she almost faints, she does not lower herself to the ground, or sit down, but she *sinks* down, which implies a lack of control over her actions. Similarly, she “found” herself in the arms of Mr. B, which could be interpreted in various ways, but it is likely that she is either unaware of how it happened, or she reluctantly accepts her position because she is unable to remove herself from his arms (23). In both cases, the term “found” indicates a state of passivity. Additionally, Pamela mentions that Mr. B kisses her “as if he would have eaten me” (23). In this phrase, Pamela frames Mr. B as the subject, and herself as the object—but more importantly, it suggests that she considers herself to be equivalent to prey, while she sees Mr. B as an aggressive predator. Her use of language shows that she becomes passive during Mr. B’s unwelcome sexual advances.

However, Pamela is not completely passive—in fact, she resists verbally as well as physically. She manages to free herself from Mr. B without fainting; she bursts free from him, and “was getting out of the Summer-house” until he pulls her back inside and shuts the door. Pamela refuses to remain in the summerhouse with Mr. B, and despite his reassurances that he will not harm her, she exclaims that she “won’t stay” (23). Her resistance against his sexual advances is apparent, which she shows by physically attempting to escape him, as well as verbally expressing her anger at his sense of entitlement. Although Pamela was “benumb’d with Terror” moments earlier, she now claims to have “lost all Fear, and all Respect” for Mr. B (23). She believes she has a right to be angry because he has forgotten “what belongs to a Master,” and she reminds him that her position as his servant does not allow him “to be so free to a poor Servant” (23). While Mr. B is angered by Pamela’s words and her resistance, he eventually allows her to leave (although not without warning her to keep his advances a secret). The Summer-house attack is significant because it is the only attack within the novel that Pamela successfully escapes from without fainting: her active physical and verbal resistance still have a decent effect on Mr. B. However, it is important to reiterate that this is also one of Mr. B’s less violent attacks, and while his actions are clearly sexual in nature, there is no immediate threat of rape.

The second assault—and Pamela’s first true fainting fit—takes place relatively soon after the Summer-house attack, and it is notably more violent: Mr. B attempts to rape her. Pamela tells Mrs. Jervis about Mr. B’s actions in the summerhouse, despite the fact that he warned her (and even offered her money) to prevent her from talking about what occurred. Mr. B is furious that Pamela failed to obey his orders, and he threatens her with sexual violence as a result: “you may as well have *real* Cause to take these Freedoms with me, as to make my Name suffer for imaginary ones: And saying so, he offer’d to take me on his Knee, with some Force” (31). Pamela’s protests are ignored as he tells her to “be easy” and to “let

the worst happen that can” because she will “have the Merit, and [he] the Blame” (32). He acknowledges that sexual intercourse with him would be devastating for Pamela, yet he refuses to accept that she does not consent (32). Mr. B is not merely threatening to rape her, but he is also attempting to justify it—paradoxically, by promising to take the blame upon himself. This is further exemplified by his allusion to Lucretia: “who ever blamed Lucretia, but the Ravisher only? and I am content to take all the Blame upon me” (32). He compares Pamela to Lucretia, and he likens himself to the Ravisher, i.e., Lucretia’s rapist. However, Mr. B’s argument is nonsensical: as Pamela reminds him (and the reader), Lucretia considers her rape as dishonour—to herself, but more crucially, to her family—and she dies by suicide.

Despite Pamela’s educated response to Mr. B’s absurd argument, Mr. B refuses to discuss the rape of Lucretia with her. Her verbal resistance seems to have an effect on him, as he resorts to physical violence. Mr. B’s threat of rape thus becomes increasingly explicit, as well as violent, because he demonstrates it through his words, as well as through his actions. In other words, Mr. B’s verbal threat of rape is accompanied by a physical one: he “by Force kissed [her] Neck and Lips” (32). His assault does not end with these non-consensual kisses:

He then put his Hand in my Bosom, and the Indignation gave me double Strength, and I got loose from him, by a sudden Spring, and ran out of the Room; and the next Chamber being open, I made shift to get into it, and threw-to the Door, and the Key being on the Inside, it locked; but he follow’d me so close, he got hold of my Gown, and tore a Piece off, which hung without the Door. (32)

The second attack is marked by violence: the repeated use of the term “force” to describe Mr. B’s actions refers to physical strength as well as coercion—both of which he uses violently. Additionally, his desperate attempt at fulfilling his sexual desire results in material damage. The immediate threat of rape ends with the locking of the bedroom door, yet it is not as distant as it was in the Summer-house attack. Therefore, it is no surprise that Pamela’s

response is more extreme, albeit proportionate to Mr. B's advances. Mr. B's attack causes her to faint: "for I knew nothing further of the Matter till afterwards; for I fell into a Fit with my Fright and Terror, and there I lay" until Mrs. Jervis enters the room upon Mr. B's request (32). Although Pamela recovers briefly, Mr. B's mere presence triggers another fainting fit immediately after: "I was two Hours before I came to myself; and just as I got a little up on my Feet, he coming in, I went away again with the Terror; and so he withdrew again" (32).

This scene demonstrates the growing ineffectiveness of Pamela's active resistance, and simultaneously hints at the efficacy of passivity. Pamela resists against Mr. B's threats of rape by asserting that she would rather die than lose her virtue: "and may I never survive one Moment, that fatal one in which I shall forfeit my Innocence" (31). Moreover, she uses Mr. B's statement about Lucretia against him; she indirectly threatens to attempt suicide, like Lucretia, if she were "used barbarously" (32). Her statements do not deter him from kissing her and touching her breasts, so Pamela's "Indignation" at being touched inappropriately prompts her to run away, and she manages to lock herself inside another room, but not before Mr. B damages her clothing (32). Her physical resistance leads to her safety, but it remains unclear whether it was enough to cease his attack because Pamela faints immediately after locking the door. However, the fact that Mr. B enters the room again once she has regained consciousness suggests that it was not his intention to desist. In any case, this attempted rape scene signals that Pamela's active resistance becomes less effective.

The attempted rape at the Bedfordshire estate highlights the importance of Pamela's passive resistance. Mr. B hides in the closet in Pamela's room, and when he reveals himself, Pamela flees to the bed she shares with Mrs. Jervis. Pamela clings to her and begs her not to follow Mr. B's orders to leave her alone with him. Mrs. Jervis assures Pamela that she will stay, and claims she would sooner lose her life than allow Mr. B to harm Pamela; she even expresses her willingness to defend Pamela both physically and emotionally. Although Mrs.

Jervis is unable to protect Pamela, her behaviour during this scene is still noteworthy, because it establishes her as a morally good character (which will be addressed in more detail later). Mr. B is visibly upset by Mrs. Jervis's disobedience, yet he still refuses to remove himself from the bed. Unlike the previous times, Pamela fails to free herself from Mr. B's grasp, and ultimately, she is unable to stop him from touching her inappropriately: "I found his Hand in my Bosom, and when my Fright let me know it, I was ready to die" (63). Whether she truly feels ready to die or not, Pamela's statement can be seen as another way of expressing her wish to remove herself from the situation, since she is unable to escape and to defend her body from Mr. B's unwelcome touch. Pamela does not lose her life during Mr. B's assault, but she loses her consciousness before he is able to continue his sexual advances; she "sighed, and scream'd, and fainted away," and Mr. B leaves the room (63). Pamela protests verbally as well as physically, but this does not discourage Mr. B in the slightest, which demonstrates that Pamela's active resistance is ineffective, and indicates that she is only able to resist against Mr. B through her passivity.

In the final scene of attempted rape, Pamela's passive resistance proves to be successful: Mr. B stops immediately when Pamela faints, and more crucially, he vows to never attempt to assault her again. Initially, Mr. B holds the power, which Pamela acknowledges by stating that "there was nobody to help [her]: And both [her] Hands were secured" by Mr. B and Mrs. Jewkes (203). It becomes apparent that Mr. B agrees with Pamela's assessment of the situation when he tells her, "[Y]ou are in my Power!—You cannot get from me, nor help yourself" (203). Their statements reveal that Pamela is unable to resist physically; Pamela gives the reason, and Mr. B notes the consequences. Interestingly, Pamela stresses that there is no one else who can help her escape from Mr. B, whereas Mr. B emphasizes that Pamela cannot help herself. Pamela does not even consider the thought that she could rescue herself: she regards herself as passive. Mr. B's comment about Pamela's

inability to help herself is undeniably meant to be taunting, but he still implies that she would be able to act if it were not for him—he acknowledges it as an option, Pamela does not. Pamela never elaborates on her indirect claim that she cannot act to free herself from Mr. B, but it can be argued that Pamela realises that her attempts at active resistance are futile. During the previous attacks, her verbal responses are remarkably clever (e.g., when she corrects Mr. B’s interpretation of Lucretia), but in this scene, she seems to be rendered incapable of resisting verbally. Pamela is unable (or unwilling) to form an argument, and she appeals to Mr. B’s emotions instead when she tells him, “O sir ... leave me, leave me” (203). In spite of Pamela’s desperate pleas, Mr. B “put his Hand in [her] Bosom,” and consequently, Pamela faints: “with Struggling, Fright, Terror, I fainted away quite, and did not come to myself soon; so that they both, from the cold Sweats that I was in, thought me dying” (204). When Pamela regains consciousness, Mr. B assures her that he did not harm her, because “he was frighten’d” by her violent reaction to the attempted rape (204). He explicitly mentions that her fainting fit causes him to stop his assault immediately:

As soon as I saw you change, and a cold Sweat bedew your pretty Face, and you fainted away, I quitted the Bed ... and my Passion for you was all swallow’d up in the Concern I had for your Recovery; for I thought I never saw a Fit so strong and so violent in my Life; ... for what I saw you in once before was nothing to it. (206)

Mr. B reveals that his concern for Pamela is crucial to his decision to desist, suggesting that the success of passivity as a form of resistance is not guaranteed, because it is dependent on the character of the assailant; in *Clarissa*, Lovelace is not deterred by the eponymous heroine’s unconsciousness. At first, Mr. B merely swears “that he would desist from his Attempt,” but the following day, he vows he “will not attempt to force [her] to any thing again” (204, 206). Although Mr. B’s promise is influenced by his feelings for Pamela, this does not negate the fact that Pamela successfully defends herself from rape by fainting.

2.2 *Feigned Fainting*

When Pamela's active verbal and physical resistance is ineffective, she faints, and by doing so, she protects herself from Mr. B's unwelcome sexual advances. This raises the question of whether her fainting fits are genuine bodily expressions of virtue. Following the publication of *Pamela*, the representation of Pamela's virtue has been endlessly debated and satirized. Gerald Levin argues that the novel's "principal controversy centers in the motives of the heroine" (319). According to Corrinne Harol, the controversies surrounding Pamela's motives are caused by the belief that women, as "observers of themselves" and their virtue, are "in a position to deceive men" (136). Soile Ylivuori notes that bodily signs of sensibility, like faintings, "were supposedly involuntary," meaning that "they were thought to reflect genuine feminine sensibility" (89). However, women realised that these bodily acts were perceived as genuine, and as a result, they "often imitated them in order to produce the appearance of ideal femininity" (Ylivuori 91). Although Richardson intends to portray Pamela as unambiguously virtuous, the anti-Pamelists suspect that Pamela has hidden motives, and most notably, that her (bodily) actions are insincere. This "Pamela-as-hypocrite interpretation" is realised in other works, such as Haywood's *Anti-Pamela*, and Fielding's *Shamela* (Gooding 122). These satires of *Pamela* include feigned faints. For instance, Shamela affirms that she purposely pretends to faint because of "the Instructions [her mother] gave [her] to avoid being ravished" (Fielding 329). Her mother's advice proves to be useful, because Mr. Booby halts his attack, and promises "that he would leave the Bed" (Fielding 329). Shamela and her mother are clearly aware that men's sexual advances can be halted by fainting, and they use this to their advantage.

As Boram Kim points out, "from a male point of view, swooning was probably seen as a means of obstructing the act of sexual intercourse" (159). Pamela faints in response to the sexual threat that Mr. B poses, which enables her to preserve her virtue, but at the same time,

her faintings prevent Mr. B from achieving sexual pleasure. Like the anti-Pamelists, Mr. B seems to believe that Pamela is conveniently fainting, and he accuses her of faking her fits. He exclaims that Pamela “has a lucky knack of falling into fits when she pleases,” thereby emphasizing the convenience of her faints, as well as hinting at the fact that Pamela deliberately chooses to faint (65). As the novel progresses, his accusations become more direct; when Pamela feels as though she will faint, Mr. B states that her fainting spells should not be taken seriously, since “she is Mistress of Arts ... and will mimick a Fit, ten to one, in a Minute” (183). After the final scene of attempted rape, he reconsiders his actions as well as his beliefs; he asserts that he views fainting as an act that the female “Sex can shew when they are in Earnest,” indicating that he believes Pamela is sincere (206). However, Mr. B is not the only character who doubts the sincerity and the severity of Pamela’s fainting fits. Mr. B halts his assault when Pamela faints, but Mrs. Jewkes scolds him for this, and encourages him to continue as soon as Pamela regains consciousness:

And will you, Sir, said the wicked Wretch, for a Fit or two, give up such an Opportunity as this?—I thought you had known the Sex better.—She is now, you see, quite well again! This I heard; more she might say; but I fainted away once more, at these Words, and at his clasping his Arms about me again. (204)

This passage serves as a reminder that Pamela faints as a response to an immediate sexual threat, and it implies that the verbal threat of rape (by Mrs. Jewkes) and the physical threat of rape (by Mr. B) are perceived as similarly dangerous by Pamela; the cause of her faint is a combination of Mrs. Jewkes’s words and Mr. B’s bodily actions. More importantly, Mrs. Jewkes implies that Pamela is aware that bodily signs of sensibility can be faked, and that this is precisely why she recovers quickly; Mrs. Jewkes suggests that Pamela’s fainting fits might not be genuine. Although Pamela reacts to Mrs. Jewkes’s verbal threat by fainting, it can be

argued that this reaction is at least partially caused by Mrs. Jewkes's accusation of insincerity, because Pamela faints as soon as Mrs. Jewkes voices her suspicions.

As the narrator, Pamela controls the narrative. Therefore, her refusal to acknowledge Mrs. Jewkes and Mr. B's claims is significant because it prevents the reader from learning the truth. With Pamela neither confirming nor denying their accusations, she is subject to interpretation. Although Richardson intends to portray Pamela as virtuous, it is still impossible to know whether or not Pamela's fainting spells are genuine, which is further complicated by the fact that Pamela appears to recognize the potential benefits of passivity, especially fainting and illness. She notes that "Health is a Blessing hardly to be coveted in [her] Circumstances, since that fits [her] for the Calamity [she is] in continual Apprehensions of; whereas a weak and sickly State might possibly move Compassion for [her]" (178–179). Pamela turns out to be right: Mr. B eventually swears that he will never attempt to rape Pamela again because his concern for her outweighs his sexual desire. Her attempts at active resistance are futile, but Pamela manages to defend herself from Mr. B's sexual violence by fainting; as she predicts, her "weak and sickly State" (i.e., her unconscious body) causes him to desist. It becomes increasingly clear that she understands the significance of her passivity when she writes, "I ... have Reason to bless God, who, by disabling me in my Faculties, enabled me to preserve my Innocence; and when all my Strength would have signified nothing, magnify'd himself in my Weakness!" (205). Pamela reiterates that her active resistance would have been ineffective, and she highlights that she is able to protect her virtue through her passivity, or in her words, the "disabling" of her "Faculties" (205). This does not necessarily prove that Pamela has hidden motives, or that her bodily signs of sensibility are insincere, but her statements about the (potential) usefulness of passivity signal that, like Shamela, she understands that fainting can be used to her advantage.

2.3 Narrative Control

Whether Pamela actively chooses to faint or not (but assuming that she does lose consciousness), the act of fainting leaves her vulnerable; she inadvertently allows herself to take the risk of fainting in Mr. B's presence (Kim 160). The risk, in Pamela's case, is that she can never be certain that her fits will be enough to prevent him from raping her. Moreover, she has to live with the uncertainty of not knowing what happens to her—and how Mr. B treats her—while she is unconscious. Pamela's fainting fits are characterized by a temporary loss of consciousness, which means that she spends various vulnerable moments unaware of what happens around her (or possibly even to her), and that she has to rely on other people to know what occurred while she was unconscious. The epistolary form of *Pamela* adds another layer to Pamela's sense of uncertainty; Pamela does not have a clear understanding of what happened to her during her fainting fits, and therefore, it is also impossible to know for the reader.

When Mr. B attempts to rape Pamela at the Bedfordshire estate, Mrs. Jervis is already in the bedroom with them, and although she tries to interfere, she is unable to stop Mr. B from touching Pamela inappropriately. However, she protects Pamela by disobeying Mr. B's orders to leave the room, because she witnesses the attack. Pamela reacts to Mr. B's sexual advances by fainting, so she is unable to remember anything that happened while she was unconscious. She states that she believes "Mrs. Jervis saved [her] from worse, and she says she did, (tho' what can I think, who was in a Fit, and knew nothing of the Matter?)" (64). Pamela is "fully satisfied she [Mrs. Jervis] is very good," which implies that she trusts her, yet her words reveal that she still feels uncertain, because Pamela emphasizes that she has no firsthand knowledge of the event. Kathleen Lubey expands on this by noting that the "syntactical and grammatical unrest signals Pamela's own incomplete knowledge of what transpired" in this

scene (148). Lubey argues that this is illustrated by the use of parentheses and dashes in Pamela's writing, e.g., when Pamela writes, "I hope—I hope, I am honest!" (60).

Despite her admissions of doubt, Pamela appears to accept Mrs. Jervis's account of the attempted rape as truth; Pamela does not question her motives, because Mrs. Jervis is established as trustworthy. Needless to say, the opposite is true for Mr. B and Mrs. Jewkes, since he is the perpetrator, and she is his accomplice. Pamela distrusts them, because she recognizes that Mr. B poses a threat to her virtue, and that Mrs. Jewkes is willing to assist him. However, Mr. B and Mrs. Jewkes are also the only witnesses to the attempted rape, meaning that Pamela has no choice but to rely on their word to learn what occurred while she was unconscious. Once Pamela regains consciousness, she exclaims, "O tell me, yet tell me not, what I have suffer'd in this Distress!" (204). In contrast to Mrs. Jervis, Mrs. Jewkes does not assure Pamela that her virtue remains intact; in fact, Mrs. Jewkes refuses to discuss the event at all. Pamela remains unaware of what happened to her, and she declares that she "cannot answer for the Liberties taken with her in her deplorable State of Death," thereby emphasizing her lack of knowledge, as well as the passive state of her body (204). With Mrs. Jewkes unwilling to recount the encounter, Pamela has to rely on Mr. B to inform her of what transpired. He swears that he stopped his assault as soon as she fainted, and that he did not harm her. While Pamela cannot possibly know if Mr. B's account of the rape attempt is accurate, it becomes apparent that she tentatively accepts his explanation when she states, "I hope, as he assures me, he was not guilty of Indecency" (205).

Pamela is unable to narrate the events that take place when she is unconscious, which "creates an awkward gap in her narrative" (Leiman 230). For the majority of the novel, Pamela provides the narration: McKeon stresses that "it is letters written by her, not by him [Mr. B], that overwhelmingly dominate the narrative" (360). In other words, Pamela has authority over the narrative: she controls what the reader—in *Pamela*, and of *Pamela*—knows

and understands. She documents almost everything (e.g., her thoughts and her encounters with Mr. B) in her letters and her journal, which gives the impression of narrative completeness. However, the narrative remains incomplete: Pamela cannot narrate the rape attempts, because she cannot know what truly happened while she was unconscious. Simply put, her faints silence her. In spite of this, it can be argued that Mr. B's repeated attempts to silence Pamela in order to control her narrative are unsuccessful. Mr. B demands that Pamela "sends no Letters nor Messages out of the House, nor keeps a Correspondence unknown to" him, but even when he threatens her, Pamela refuses to obey his orders, and continues to write her letters and her journal (207). Additionally, Mr. B and Mrs. Jewkes anticipate that Pamela will "be quieter when she knows the worst," suggesting that they believe Mr. B's acts of sexual violence will silence her (203). More crucially, this statement indicates that Mr. B wants Pamela to be conscious during the rape attempts, because she will only be silenced when she "knows" what transpires, which is not possible if she is unconscious (203). Pamela is still unable to narrate the rape attempts, because her fainting fits silence her momentarily, yet, following Mr. B's argument, her faints simultaneously prevent her from being silenced permanently. Although the narrative remains incomplete, Pamela still has control over her narrative.

In Richardson's *Pamela*, the eponymous heroine faints in response to the threat of sexual violence. Although Pamela tries to resist verbally as well as physically, her active resistance continues to grow ineffective until her attempts at resisting actively prove futile. She ultimately succeeds in defending herself against Mr. B through her passivity. However, Pamela's ability to protect herself from rape by fainting raises the question of whether or not her faints are genuine, but this question remains unanswered; Pamela never responds to accusations of insincerity, so the truth regarding the nature of her fainting fits is inaccessible

to the reader. Assuming that Pamela does lose consciousness, even if her faints are not genuine, it becomes evident that fainting leaves her in a vulnerable position: firstly, because it does not guarantee that Mr. B will desist, and secondly, because it renders her incapable of narrating the event, since Pamela is forced to rely on others, including Mr. B, to tell her what transpired. While her fainting fits silence her momentarily, they ultimately allow her to control the narrative, because they prevent Mr. B from raping her. Despite the complexities of the representation of fainting in *Pamela*, it becomes clear that Pamela exerts agency through her passivity.

Chapter 3: Death and the Will in *Clarissa*

This chapter investigates the significance of the will in relation to death in Richardson's *Clarissa*. The first section provides an explanation of the heroine's aversion to sexual relations by illustrating the link between marriage and identity, and the second section demonstrates the use of passivity, specifically fainting and illness, as a means of resisting against marriage and sexual relations. This is followed by a brief summary of the rape and its narrative consequences. Sections four and five reveal the importance of Clarissa's will to die and her written will, respectively, and show that her will (in both senses) allows her to enact agency, and extend her agency beyond death.

3.1 Marriage and Identity

In *Clarissa*, the representation of family differs from the portrayal of familial relationships in *Pamela*. Pamela describes her parents as “the honestest, the lovingest, and the most conscientious Couple breathing,” and she believes that they “brought up a great Family” (455). Pamela clearly admires her parents, and she finds comfort in them, which becomes evident through the exchange of letters between her and her parents. The opposite is true for Clarissa because, as John Mullan points out, “it is with trouble within the family that the narrative begins, and it is the attempt of the family to exercise power over Clarissa for the sake of its material and social aggrandizement that sets her tragedy in motion” (64). The Harlowe family is “strangely discomposed” and “has been in *tumults*” since Clarissa's grandfather bequeathed his estate to her, and she explains that she has “borne all the blame” for this (41). Clarissa admits that she fears she has lost her “brother's and sister's affections” in her first letter, and this only continues to worsen throughout the novel (41). Clarissa's extended family also disagrees with her grandfather's decision; her uncle Antony asks her, “is

not this estate *our* estate, as we may say?" (155). The Harlowes resent Clarissa for her "independent fortune" because they believe that they have "a prior right" to the estate (154, 155). This indicates that the Harlowe family is insulted by her inheritance because of its function as a financial reward that grants Clarissa the possibility of independence. Charles A. Knight argues that their outrage at Clarissa is partially caused by her grandfather's disregard for his male descendants, because the will challenges "the basic principle of male succession in a family which is seeking the rapid acquisition of wealth" (1186). The Harlowes blame Clarissa for their lost opportunity to gain prestige, so, in their eyes, Clarissa's value is reduced to her ability to serve as a "potential guarantor of the family's collective good" (Tinkham 70). The members of her family no longer see Clarissa as a person—reduced to her sexuality, they view her as a commodity to be traded. The Harlowes believes they "ought ... to have a choice who shall have [Clarissa's legacy] in marriage," which explains their attempts to force Clarissa to accept the marriage proposal that they have arranged for her (155). Clarissa is thus unable to rely on her family because their demands are the cause of her suffering.

Clarissa disagrees with the will of the family, i.e., an arranged marriage to Solmes, but she is not merely against the idea of marrying him: she is opposed to the idea of marriage itself. Clarissa suspects that her brother "shall never be easy or satisfied" until she is married, but despite his attempts to marry her off, she refuses to accept any marriage proposals; she mentions that she has already rejected Mr. Symmes, Mr. Mullins, and Mr. Wyrley (56). While her rejection of these proposals could be based on her opinion of these specific suitors, her letters reveal that her attitude towards marriage is not determined by them. It is undeniable that Clarissa opposes the thought of marrying Solmes, and that this is partially due to his character, but she declares that she would "rather not marry at all" (94). She voices similar thoughts throughout the novel: she is "very far from wishing to enter into [marriage] with anybody" and she would sooner "choose to be wedded to [her] shroud than to any man on

earth” (94, 514). Additionally, Clarissa tends to discuss the concept of marriage, and specifically the female experience of marriage, in a predominantly negative manner:

to be given up to a strange man, to be engrafted into a strange family; to give up her very name, as a mark of her becoming his absolute and dependent property: to be obliged to prefer this strange man to father, mother—to everybody: and his humours to all her own—Or to contend ... in breach of a vowed duty for every innocent instance of free will: to go no-whither: to make acquaintance: to give up acquaintance ...whether she think it reasonable to do so or not. (148–149)

Clarissa emphasizes that marriage inevitably leads to a loss of agency for women, mainly through losing their independence and their freedom. She stresses the fact that a married woman is expected to change her family name, and that this marks her as her husband’s property. Lovelace confirms the significance of the male surname when he threatens to “make a Lovelace of her” in order to possess her (1041). He also understands marriage in terms of male property, which becomes apparent during one of his attempts to convince Clarissa to become his wife, when he tells her, “If you will be mine, your injuries will be injuries done to myself” (909). Lovelace seems convinced that Clarissa will become his property if she consents to marrying him, but more importantly, he indicates that she will no longer be her own person. It is implied that their marriage would result in a complete loss of identity for Clarissa, because her identity would be completely subsumed within the identity of Lovelace, meaning that she would even lose her ability to claim victimhood. Lovelace believes that marriage will grant him ownership of Clarissa, which is further emphasized when Lovelace jokes to Belford that a marriage between him and Clarissa would mean that he has “been plundering [his] own treasury” (1041). Lovelace indirectly confirms Clarissa’s assertions about the female experience of marriage, e.g., the woman’s status as male property, and the loss of identity. Clarissa fears that, by marrying, her identity will be subsumed within the

identity of her husband, and that she will thus be unable to construct her own identity. Clarissa is opposed to marriage because of what it represents: for her, marriage signifies a complete loss of identity and agency.

Clarissa elaborates on the fact that women essentially lose their identity, i.e., their sense of self. This seems to be Clarissa's primary concern regarding marriage, since she believes "living *with*, and living *for*" a husband (especially one she dislikes) would be "a sad thing" (190). This idea of "living *for*" a husband echoes her previous statements about a woman's inability to make decisions because she is expected to prioritize her husband's wishes above her own (190). Clarissa prefers to live for herself and not for someone else; or, in her own words, she "ought to be" her "own mistress" (836). She considers her identity to be of more importance than her property (and the financial independence associated with it). She refuses to claim the estate, and she is more than willing to give it up, especially if it means not losing her sense of self: "take my estate, sir, with all my heart ... only leave me *myself*" (319). Clarissa values her identity—her autonomy—above all else, and unlike Pamela, she is not willing to surrender it in exchange for marriage.

3.2 Illness and Fainting

Clarissa is marked by Clarissa's resistance to any form of sexual relations, including marriage. Her resistance manifests itself in various ways, although it becomes increasingly more passive as the novel progresses. That is not to say that Clarissa never acts against the prospect of sexual relations (e.g., she escapes from her parents to prevent an unwanted marriage to Solmes) but this active resistance indirectly leads her to the moment of the rape—to the sexual relations that she tries desperately to avoid. However, even her passive resistance is not always effective, as is evidenced by her illness and her fainting fits. Clarissa's mother used to insist "that her child should not be married if, through grief or opposition, she should

be ill, or fall into fits” (348). While it remains unclear if Clarissa knew of this, it can be argued that Clarissa purposefully wills herself to become ill, and to worsen her existing illness. She learns that she will be married off to Solmes within a week, and she resolves to become ill: “what *can* I do? For fear they should have an earlier day in their intention than that which will too soon come, I will begin to be very ill. Nor need I feign much; for indeed I am extremely low, weak and faint” (341). In her next letter, she continues by stating that she is “far from being well” but that she “must ... make [herself] worse” than she currently is “preparative to the suspension [she hopes] to obtain of the menaced evil” (346). Clarissa leaves her parents’ house with Lovelace before the marriage is supposed to take place, but her cousin Dolly tells her that “illness can be no pretence to save” her, hinting at the ineffectiveness of her (wilful) illness (365).

Ironically, it is Lovelace who warns Clarissa (and the reader) that “fainting will not save” her either (378). While Pamela is able to prevent the loss of her virginity by fainting, Clarissa is not as fortunate. Pamela faints in response to an immediate sexual threat, and this ultimately causes Mr. B to desist. Clarissa initially reacts in a similar manner; like Pamela, Clarissa falls into a fainting fit when she perceives Lovelace as a sexual threat, but for Clarissa, the threat of rape is not immediate. This is clearly illustrated by Clarissa’s reaction to Lovelace’s unexpected appearance at Mrs. Moore’s residence in Hampstead. Clarissa flees to Hampstead to escape Lovelace because he behaved inappropriately towards her during the fire scene: he kissed her, and touched her, against her will. Lovelace assures her that he will marry her the following morning, but she seems convinced that she interprets this as “an indication that [he] intended to proceed to the last extremity” (724). He turns out to be right; Clarissa believes Lovelace “formed a plot to fire the house, to frighten [her] almost naked into his arms,” and she exclaims her relief at preventing “the vilest dishonour” (754). It is only because of Lovelace’s letter that the reader knows that the fire was an accident, and that

Lovelace had no intentions to rape her (at least, not directly after the fire took place). Clarissa continues to believe Lovelace used the fire as a ploy to assault her while she was in a vulnerable state. The narrative situation of *Clarissa* thus allows the reader to learn the truth in a way that would have been impossible in *Pamela*. This, however, does not change the fact that Clarissa fears Lovelace still poses a sexual threat to her. When Lovelace manages to manipulate Mrs. Moore into providing access to the room in which Clarissa is residing, Clarissa “no sooner saw who it was, than she gave three violent screams; and ... down she sunk at [his] feet in a fit” (772). It is no coincidence that Clarissa falls into a fit upon seeing him, which becomes clear when the sight of Lovelace causes her to faint again: “recovering her sight, [she] snatched another look at [him]; and then again groaned, and fainted away” (773). Lovelace also acknowledges that he is the reason Clarissa faints; he admits that he “withdrew once more ... finding her beginning to recover, lest the sight of [him] too soon should throw her back again” (773). Similarly, Miss Rawlins warns Lovelace that Clarissa “cannot bear the sight of” him (773). Lovelace’s presence triggers Clarissa’s fainting fits because she fears that he will continue his sexual advances.

3.3 The Rape

Clarissa’s (wilful) illness and her fainting fits can be seen as ineffective forms of resistance, because the Harlowes and Lovelace do not cease in their attempts to force sexual relations on her. The Harlowe family views Clarissa (and her sexuality) as a commodity to be exchanged; they plan to advance socially by arranging a marriage that is beneficial to them, while ignoring the fact that, for Clarissa, marriage represents a complete loss of identity and agency. Marriage entails sexual relations, but sexual relations do not necessarily imply marriage. Yet, in the specific context of *Clarissa*, both marriage and sexual relations are associated with the notion of male ownership, and subsequently, the loss of female identity.

Lovelace's attempts to seduce Clarissa are motivated by his desire to possess her, which ultimately leads to the rape, and causes Clarissa to lose her sense of self temporarily (as shown by the series of mad papers).

While Clarissa's rape has been endlessly debated, there seems to be a consensus among critics that Richardson's decision not to represent the rape scene complicates its function as the narrative climax. Helene Moglen refers to the rape scene as "the anticlimactic climax of the novel" because of its discursive absence (76). Similarly, Terry Eagleton views the rape as "the hole at the centre of the novel" (61). Terry Castle argues that "the text becomes uncommunicative" at the moment of the rape, and that this causes "a gap in the information" for the reader (*Clarissa's Ciphers* 115). The rape remains inaccessible to the reader, because Lovelace refuses to narrate the event in detail; in the shortest letter in the entire novel, Lovelace merely tells Belford that he "can go no farther" and that "the affair is over" (883). Lovelace deliberately chooses not to write about it, whereas Clarissa is unable to produce an accurate account of the rape because she is drugged and unconscious during it. Like Pamela, Clarissa cannot narrate the event because her unconsciousness and the narrative silence surrounding the rape ensure that Clarissa can never possibly know what happened to her while she was, as she later notes, "in a manner dead" (1413). The rape can thus be seen as a moment of crisis that neither the reader nor Clarissa herself has access to.

Clarissa's unconsciousness also ensured that she was incapable of consenting. Frances Ferguson states that, in the eighteenth century, "the law of rape specifically stipulates that unconsciousness (along with states like idiocy, insanity, and sleep) 'negatives' consent" (100). According to Julie Gammon, this also applies to eighteenth-century literature, because the fictional woman's unconsciousness "was viewed by the readership as evidence of her non-consent as she had been unable to give consent actively" (16). Clarissa's unconsciousness

during the rape thus highlights the incompleteness of the narrative and Clarissa's inability to consent—but more importantly, it shows that she is unable to resist.

3.4 Self-Willed Death

As previously discussed, Clarissa remains steadfast in her opposition to marriage. She continues to voice her preference for death over any sexual relations, including marriage. At first, she seems hesitant, stating that she has “sometimes wished that it had pleased God to have taken [her] in [her] last fever” (41). This death would be notably peaceful, as well as passive; she is willing to relinquish control over her life to God. As the novel progresses, Clarissa gives increasingly detailed statements about dying, and she even mentions a rather brutal method, namely live burial. She insists on her preference for death by claiming that she “had rather be buried alive” than marry, and that she “will undergo the cruellest death” and “will even consent to enter into the awful vault of [her] ancestors, and to have that bricked up upon [her], than consent to be miserable for life” by marrying Solmes (101, 305). Clarissa has a morbid interest in death because she believes death can be a means of escape from the sexual relations that the Harlowes and Lovelace continually attempt to impose on her. Put simply, she prefers death over sexual relations, but she does not wish for it.

Immediately following the rape, Lovelace states that “Clarissa lives,” but he is, of course, incorrect: Clarissa dies (883). Clarissa's preference for death develops into a longing for death, which eventually culminates in her self-willed death. Throughout the novel, Clarissa asserts that she values her virtue, and she even declares that her “honour is dearer to [her] than [her] life” (725). Even after the rape, her opinion never changes; Clarissa believes that “when honour's lost, 'tis a relief to die” (893). Now that Clarissa is actively wishing for death, she suggests remarkably violent ways of dying. She encourages Lovelace to murder her, e.g., to “dig a hole deep enough to cram in and conceal [her] unhappy body” (911). She

elaborates by stating that it will be “the highest act of mercy [he] can do, to kill [her] outright,” and once more, Clarissa implores Lovelace to kill her, or to give her the means to do so herself:

Then, baring with a still more frantic violence, part of her enchanting neck—here, here ... let thy pointed mercy enter! And I will thank thee, and forgive thee for all the dreadful past! ... Or help *me* to the means, and I will myself put out of thy way so miserable a wretch! And bless thee for those means! (913)

This passage illustrates Clarissa’s desire to die, and it simultaneously highlights the impact of the rape on Clarissa. She specifically tells Lovelace to “let [his] pointed mercy enter” her neck; the knife or blade is clearly a phallic symbol. While it is impossible to know if Clarissa purposefully used phallic imagery, her words nonetheless serve as a reminder of the rape to Lovelace, and to the reader. This reminder is crucial because it proves that Clarissa is still severely affected by the rape. She finds herself in a state of mental agitation, meaning that her desire to end her own life can be seen as an expression of anguish rather than an intention to commit suicide. Clarissa might wish “that it were not a sin ... to put an end to her own life,” but it is, so as a paragon of virtue, she cannot kill herself (936).

Yet, Clarissa enacts agency through her passivity—through her refusal to act. Jonathan Kramnick considers viewing Clarissa’s death in terms of inaction: “What would it mean to consider the death of Clarissa as a major event in the novel, perhaps *the* major event, but not as an action?” (229). Kramnick’s question reveals the complexities of Clarissa’s death, because Clarissa wills her own death, and prepares for it, but she never acts on her wish to die. Her death is not an action; in fact, her death is marked by an absence of activity. There is no confirmed natural cause for the death of Clarissa, and she does not end her own life, so what causes her to die? According to Lovelace, Clarissa’s “departure will be owing rather to wilfulness, to downright female wilfulness, than to any other cause” (1346). Lovelace implies

that Clarissa dies simply because she resolves to die, and he is not entirely wrong. Clarissa's physician suggests Clarissa is not suffering from a medical condition, but that her "disorder" is mental rather than physical (1082). He admits that "her malady" will not be cured by any of his "prescriptions," so he recommends that she resolves "to do all in [her] power to be well" (1082). In spite of—or possibly, because of—her physician's advice to "cheer up [her] spirits," Clarissa does the opposite by preparing for her death (1082). She seems to be convinced that she will die soon, so she sells various articles of clothing because, according to her, "she should never live to wear them" (1083). If clothing is a mode of self-expression, then Clarissa's decision to discard her clothes can be seen as her way of abandoning her identity—that is, the identity she associates with the loss of her virginity. In any case, Clarissa's apothecary eventually confirms that she "would recover if she herself desired to recover, and would use the means," but she never recovers, so it can be concluded that Clarissa wills her own death (1127). However, Clarissa's death is not a sign of defeat; it serves a purpose. Tania Modleski notes that, in the sentimental novel, death

endows the woman with something like "tragic hero" status: "What can a heroine do?" asks Joanna Russ in pointing out that men have taken all the active plots. She can die. And in dying, she does not have to depart from the passive feminine role, but only logically extend it. (8)

Clarissa ignores medical advice knowing it means she is more likely to pass away, because it is her only way of exerting a sense of agency. By willing herself to die, she is able to restore her virtue, and reclaim her identity. Following Modleski's argument, the death of Clarissa can thus be seen as a logical extension of her role as a passive woman: Clarissa dies, because she refuses to act.

3.5 *Clarissa's Will*

Clarissa enacts agency through her passivity by willing herself to die, or more accurately, by refusing to act to ensure that her illness will lead to her death. However, it can be argued that this would have removed her agency as soon as she died, because Lovelace would undoubtedly attempt to gain control over her body. To prevent him from doing so, she composes her will.

In the first half of the novel, Clarissa is naïve in her belief that Lovelace is sincere, and she fails to realise that Lovelace is actively trying to control how she perceives him. Lovelace is aware of the fact that Clarissa values the act of writing to such an extent that she believes that “taking away [her] pen and ink” can be seen as an “act of violence,” and he uses this to his advantage: “as a prelude to his invasion of her body, Lovelace invades Clarissa’s correspondence—intercepting, stealing, and even forging letters” to manipulate her interpretations of events, other characters, and himself (321; Mullan 67). Todd asserts that, in the literature of sensibility, “the women’s letters in particular have their own integrity; this is frequently violated by men who stealthily take possession of and sully these letters in a way that expresses the seduction or rape they purpose” (Todd 76). Lovelace’s treatment of Clarissa’s correspondence foreshadows his violation of her body, and it implies that Clarissa’s writing represents her body. Following the rape, Clarissa realises that Lovelace deliberately deceived her in an attempt to control her body, and she resolves to stop him from violating her body again by constructing her will.

Clarissa is meticulously preparing for her death, and Belford acknowledges that she appears to be composed when he remarks that she “has been giving orders with great presence of mind about her body” (1357). In addition, Clarissa affirms that the rape “has not tainted [her] mind” or her “morals,” and that her “will is unviolated” despite Lovelace’s actions (1254). Yet, the rape undeniably influenced her final wishes: she specifies in her will that “the

occasion of [her] death not admitting of doubt, [she] will not on any account that [her body] be opened; and it is [her] desire that it shall not be touched but by those of [her] own sex” (1413). Clarissa’s insistence on maintaining this intact body, even in death, once again draws attention to the rape. Her wish to not be touched by men after her death can be seen as an attempt to prevent further violation of her body through her will. This also clarifies Clarissa’s decision to refuse the medical examination of her dead body; she would have to allow a physician to penetrate her body with a phallic symbol. The lack of an autopsy effectively prevents the other characters, as well as the reader, from discovering the cause of Clarissa’s death—it ensures that this mystery will forever remain unanswered. Through her will, Clarissa tries to mark her death as the final moment of denial of interpretation; she clearly expresses her desire not to be interpreted.

However, Lovelace continuously disrespects Clarissa and her wishes, so it is unsurprising that he also disregards Clarissa’s will. Lovelace refuses to accept that Belford is the executor of her testament, stating that he will execute it, and more importantly, that he will be “the interpreter” of her will (1385). Lovelace’s desire to know and interpret Clarissa is interconnected with his desire to possess her. To illustrate, he claims he will “have her laid in [his] family vault,” even though Clarissa repeatedly expresses her desire to be laid to rest with her grandfather in her family vault, because he believes she belongs to him (1384). Lovelace still views his relationship with Clarissa in terms of ownership and property: “Surely nobody will dispute my right to her. Whose was she living? Whose is she dead, but mine?” (1384). Although Clarissa never consents to marriage, Lovelace deliberately chooses to ignore this by referring to her as his “beloved Clarissa Lovelace,” while emphasizing that she is “no more Harlowe” (1384). Furthermore, Lovelace believes that Clarissa’s body should be “opened and embalmed,” despite her clear instructions to the contrary, because he wishes to “have possession of her dear heart” (1383, 1384). His desire to interpret and possess Clarissa is

literalized. Zigarovich acknowledges that Lovelace never gains possession of her heart, yet she argues that this is his “last and most macabre violation and appropriation of Clarissa’s body, corpse, and memory” (126). Lovelace undoubtedly intends to violate Clarissa’s (dead) body and her will, but he does not succeed, because her written will, including the appointment of Belford as the executor, prevents Lovelace from executing his plans.

As Clarissa continues her will, it becomes evident that she anticipates that Lovelace will refuse to comply with her requests (despite her explicit instructions), so she adjusts her will accordingly:

I may be put into my coffin as soon as possible: it is my desire that I may not be unnecessarily exposed to the view of anybody ... And I could wish ... that [Lovelace] might not be permitted to see my corpse. But if, as he is a man very uncontrollable, and as I am nobody’s, he insist upon viewing *her dead* whom he once before saw in a manner dead, let his gay curiosity be gratified. Let him behold and triumph over the wretched remains of one who has been made a victim to his barbarous perfidy. (1413)

She imagines Lovelace’s response to her death by drawing a parallel between her unconscious body and her dead body, and in doing so, she highlights her nonconsent. Clarissa foregrounds her status as the victim, because Lovelace continually diminishes the violence of the rape to avoid acknowledging the impact it has on Clarissa. According to him, Clarissa simply “takes it [the rape] too much to heart” (916). He muses that it is “nonsense ... to suppose that such a mere notional violation as she has suffered should be able to cut asunder the strings of life” (916). Her references to her violated body in her will can be seen as a way of ensuring that Lovelace will be unable to deny the severity of his actions: Clarissa’s death functions as proof of his violent mistreatment of her body.

If Lovelace still insists upon seeing her dead body, Clarissa hopes “some good person” will provide him with a paper from her that states: “behold here the remains of the once

ruined, yet now happy, Clarissa Harlowe” (1413). This note indicates that her death has a purpose, namely the restoration of her virtue, thereby linking her death to the rape. It can be argued that she aims to control Lovelace’s interpretation of her by providing him with the posthumous note: Clarissa clarifies the function of her death to discourage Lovelace from imposing his own meaning on her death (and by extension, her person). With this in mind, the inclusion of the Harlowe name can be viewed as Clarissa’s final claim to self-ownership: she stresses that she dies as Clarissa Harlowe, not as Clarissa Lovelace. The emphasis on the Harlowe name also emphasizes her nonconsent, because in the eighteenth century, “common-law rules of marriage say that it is impossible not to consent to sex with one’s husband (even one’s future husband, as the case may be)” (Kramnick 213). To clarify, Clarissa explicitly rejects Lovelace’s claims of marriage, and in doing so, she ensures that the rape cannot be interpreted as consensual, even retrospectively. Clarissa chooses to assign her own meaning to her death rather than allowing Lovelace to impose his meaning on her dead body.

Paradoxically, Clarissa extends her control over the narrative beyond death by allowing herself to become an object of interpretation. She is unable to control the narrative posthumously, but she allows Anna to preserve her letters for publication, so that they can serve as a “warning” to other “young creatures,” meaning that her story will be accessible to others (1254). Clarissa’s death might remove her voice from the narrative, but she is not completely silenced—her story will continue to be told. Clarissa’s written will grants her the ability to extend agency over her body beyond death.

In Richardson’s *Clarissa*, marriage is associated with the notion of male ownership, as well as the loss of female identity. Clarissa fears that she will be reduced to male property, thereby losing her sense of self, and the ability to define her identity. She attempts to enact agency by resisting passively, but she is ultimately subjected to the sexual relations that she

tries to avoid: Clarissa is raped. Clarissa's unconsciousness during the rape, and the discursive absence of the rape, prevents both Clarissa and the reader from knowing what transpired. The rape removes Clarissa's agency, her ability to consent, and her capacity to resist. Following the rape, Clarissa's preference for death over sexual relations transforms into her will to die, but she never acts on her desire to die; in fact, it is her refusal to act that causes her to die, and that provides her with a sense of agency. In the end, Clarissa's written will allows her to claim ownership over her body, because it prevents Lovelace from disregarding her wishes and violating her body for the second time, and it allows her to impose her own meaning on death, and her body. While she is still subject to interpretation, the publication of her letters ensures that she is not completely silenced, since her interpretation of her narrative will still be read. Through her will—both in the sense of her wish for death, and her testament—Clarissa succeeds in extending her agency beyond death.

Conclusion

This thesis explored the literary representations of passivity in Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, and examined how these representations of passivity relate to agency by conducting a close reading of Richardson's novels. It demonstrates that Pamela and Clarissa enact agency through their passivity, which indicates that the concepts of passivity and agency are not mutually exclusive in the sentimental novel, and shows that passivity can thus be seen as a form of agency.

The second chapter of this thesis focused on the representation of passivity in *Pamela* by analysing the eponymous heroine's recurring fainting fits. Pamela faints in response to Mr. B's unwelcome sexual advances, and this ultimately allows her to protect herself from rape: when Pamela's active—verbal and physical—resistance becomes ineffective, it is her physical passivity (i.e., her unconscious body) that causes Mr. B to desist. It is precisely because her passive resistance is successful that the authenticity of her faints is called into question. This issue is never fully resolved, since Pamela (as the narrator) refuses to address Mr. B and Mrs. Jewkes's accusations of insincerity, meaning that the reader cannot possibly know whether or not her faintings are genuine. Assuming that Pamela does lose consciousness, her fainting fits—characterized by a temporary loss of consciousness—force her to rely on the accounts of those who witnessed the attacks (namely Mrs. Jervis, Mrs. Jewkes, and Mr. B), and render her incapable of narrating the rape attempts. In other words, it is impossible for Pamela (and by extension, the reader) to know what occurred while she was unconscious, and since she cannot narrate what she cannot know, her faints silence her momentarily. This means that, like Pamela's knowledge of the events, the narrative will remain incomplete. In spite of this, Pamela retains narrative control. Mr. B and Mrs. Jewkes believe that Pamela will be silenced by Mr. B's acts of sexual violence—but only if she knows what happened. However, Pamela

cannot know what transpired during the rape attempts, because she faints (and loses consciousness), meaning that Pamela's faints ultimately prevent her from being silenced permanently. Richardson's portrayal of fainting in *Pamela* reveals that Pamela enacts agency through her passivity.

The third chapter examined how passivity is represented in *Clarissa*, especially in relation to her will to die, and her written will. From the beginning of the novel, Clarissa is opposed to marriage, because she fears that her identity will be subsumed within the identity of her husband, and that she will become his property; for Clarissa, marriage signifies a complete loss of identity and agency, which is why she continually states her preference for death over marriage. Clarissa attempts to resist against sexual relations (including marriage) by deliberately worsening and willing her illness, and by involuntarily fainting, but even her passive resistance to sexual violence is not always effective. This becomes increasingly clear when Lovelace rapes her despite the fact that she is drugged and unconscious—i.e., in a state of physical passivity. Her unconsciousness during the rape prevents Clarissa from producing an accurate account of the rape, while Lovelace simply refuses to narrate the event, meaning that the rape remains inaccessible to Clarissa and the reader. Following the rape, Clarissa's preference for death gradually develops into her will to die. Although she never acts on her wish to die, her death is undeniably self-willed, because it is Clarissa's refusal to act, in spite of medical advice, that ultimately causes her to die. Clarissa seemingly anticipates that Lovelace will disregard her final wishes, so she constructs her will, and appoints Belford as the executor of her will, in order to prevent Lovelace from violating her body again. Her death can thus be seen as her denial of interpretation, since her will ensures that she is able to assign her own meaning to her body, so that Lovelace cannot impose his meaning on her (dead) body. Even though her death removes her voice from the narrative, Clarissa is not completely silenced: the publication of her letters ensures that her story will still be told. Through her

death and the construction of her will—both her will to die, and her written will—Clarissa successfully sustains and extends her agency beyond death.

The literary representations of passivity in Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa* reveal that the concepts of passivity and agency are not inherently contradictory, and that passivity can be employed as a form of agency: Pamela and Clarissa enact agency through their passivity. However, it is crucial to note that the representations of passivity in *Pamela* and *Clarissa* demonstrate the *possibility* of passive agency, and that passivity does not guarantee agency. Pamela's faints cause Mr. B to desist in his assaults, but Lovelace is not deterred by Clarissa's physical passivity, like her fainting and (wilful) illness. Even when Clarissa is drugged and unconscious, Lovelace is not discouraged by the corpse-like state of her body, suggesting that the success of passivity as resistance to sexual violence depends on the assailant's character. While not always effective, the potential of passivity as a form of agency is significant, because it allows women to resist (especially against male violence) while conforming to the societal expectations of femininity.

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