Introduction

The repetition of a story at a particular moment in time – in the case of this book, the story of seduction in the later half of the eighteenth century in Britain – prompts at least two different interpretations of how history relates to narrative. The same story might be repeatedly told in order to popularize and naturalize a new historical idea, foregrounding a relation of similitude and emphasizing the mimetic or didactic function of narrative. Or the repetition of a story could denote difference where the deviations within similarity point to a dynamic relation between material conditions and imaginative narratives; in this case, the fact of a story's repetition would indicate both that changing historical conditions open up new objects of understanding and that narrative helps to constitute and to resolve conflicts posed by those new objects. *The Seduction Narrative* assumes the second formulation to explain how history and narrative interact in the "later eighteenth-century's preoccupation with seduction," as one historian names the obsessive retelling of the tale.[1] The plot of seduction – where a virtuous young heroine is seduced into believing her lover's vows – dramatizes women's consent to sex at a historical moment when, for the first time, women have "a right to a heart," as Clarissa boldly claims.[2] The period in Britain under study (1747–1800) witnesses the emergence of companionate marriage as a dominant cultural ideal and this revolution in the history of love carries with it a new social and cultural imperative for women to know their hearts and make choices based upon those affective truths.[3] This book argues that the story of women's failed knowledge of the heart – that is, the story of seduction – is compulsively repeated across fiction, non-fiction, ballads, essays and miscellanies in the second half of the eighteenth century not to naturalize a domesticated and de-sexed model for knowing one's heart but to resolve a historical contestation over what it might mean for women to have a right to feel love and erotic desire for their conjugal mate.

Contemporary feminist interpretations of the seduction narrative predominantly assume a unitary and mimetic model for reading seduction

stories in which the repetition of the narrative, especially as told in domestic fiction, functions to indoctrinate women into restrictive ideas of female chastity. Stories of virtuous young women who are seduced, abandoned and ruined by evil, libertine men, the argument goes, reflect the growing fetishization of female virtue and they discipline female readers not to have desires, not to go out in public, not to marry without familial consent. Anna Clark, for instance, interprets seduction as analogous to contemporary 'date rape' where women are always passive victims, sex is never consensual and seduction narratives enact the increasing sexual constriction of women.[4] Nancy Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction* gave us the most persuasive articulation of what I call the 'domestic woman thesis'; by interpreting female consent during the period through a Foucauldian lens where it turns out to be a form of coercion, she argued domestic fiction created the female subject who chooses her own sexual and domestic confinement.[5] I recognize the importance of this critical tradition, especially as a corrective to earlier criticism's refusal to acknowledge male sexual violence in literature. Roy Roussel, for example, in *The Conversation of the Sexes*, argued seduction denotes erotic play between two equal partners, leading him to suggest that Pamela invites sexual assault.[6] My own reading of seduction, however, suspends the critical binary that pits female agency against victimization to narrate the murky, open and undefined territory where 'yes' could – but does not always – mean 'yes' for women, and where no one truth about the meaning of seduction yet dominated cultural representations.

The organizing thesis of *The Seduction Narrative* follows from my understanding of repetition as difference: I argue that the popularity of seduction tales in the period reflects the absence, rather than the presence, of a dominant ideology that would constrict female desire and that seduction narratives are not punitive and didactic texts, punishing women who act on their feelings, but exploratory and probing texts, pursuing questions about the nature of women's affective and erotic lives. I survey stories of virtuous young women who are seduced into love and sex, some of whom fall and others who do not, in order to demonstrate that contradictory and competing versions of the tale existed and that these differences point us toward the untold possible narratives buried under the weight of a bourgeois ideal of femininity that comes to dominate by the end of the eighteenth century. The seduction narratives I highlight – both famous ones like *Clarissa* and lesser known ones like the chapbook *Innocence Betrayed, and Infamy Avowed: Being the History of Miss Maria Thornhill* – show that there were many different seduction stories exploring the new affective landscape of marriage by choice and not all of them end in the dominant plot of

middle-class domestic femininity. I place these untold stories within a history of love and relate them to how women came to write and make claims based upon their knowledge of the heart. Seduction narratives in the second half of the eighteenth century serve as the epistemic testing ground for imagining how women can know their hearts in the new romantic landscape and, as such, the knowledge they impart is far from unified.

RETROSPECTIVE HISTORY AND THE MEANING OF SEDUCTION

The feminist interpretation of seduction as always already reflecting the "desexualization of women," to use a phrase from Ruth Perry's groundbreaking essay on the subject, invokes a larger historical argument about women in the later eighteenth century that this book hopes to challenge.[7] As many scholars and critics have described, female sexuality over the course of the eighteenth century was re-imagined as essentially passive against an earlier image as innately active.[8] This desexualization, along with the emergence of a bourgeois domestic sphere, is often used as evidence that the period witnesses the beginning of the end for women's sexual freedom and their public or political subjectivity. Scholars may disagree on the effects of the gender revolution but they concur that the eighteenth century marks a number of major shifts in thinking about women, gender and sexuality, notably: the emergence of the ideal of companionate marriage and the replacement of a hierarchical model of sexual difference with a complementary model where women are imagined as innately chaste and essentially different from men, not inferior versions of the superior male.[9] A feminist critical commonplace now assumes that the social, economic and ideological changes happening to women, sex and marriage over the century ultimately resulted in less freedom for women and that the domestification and sentimentalization of women produced overall negative effects. Jane Spencer was one of the first to voice this assessment of the long eighteenth century in *The Rise of the Woman Novelist* when she read the shift from amatory to sentimental seduction novels as compromising the feminist message implicit in writers such as Delariviere Manley and Eliza Haywood.[10] Ruth Perry provides a more recent example in *Novel Relations* where she identifies a transformation in the structure of kinship "from a consanguineal to a conjugal basis for family identity" and argues that this shift resulted in a "net loss" for women.[11] What interests me about the "net loss" thesis is not whether it is empirically verifiable (it is probably not a question of less or more freedom, but of different kinds of freedoms and restraints) but how it has structured

what it is we now know about women in the later eighteenth century, a knowledge I would like to expand.

In contrast to a negative historiography, I emphasize a sub-cultural history, a history focused on narratives subordinated to the one that becomes dominant.[12] *The Seduction Narrative* abandons the retrospective gaze of the 'domestic woman thesis' which operates from a teleology that reads the nineteenth-century ideal of passive, domestic and desexed femininity ('the Angel in the House') as always already the inevitable outcome of a gender ideology in flux during the eighteenth century. I do not assume that the ideal of bourgeois femininity was a lived reality for women in the nineteenth century either since the hegemony of 'the Angel in the House' is also a matter of debate.[13] But I do argue, especially in Chapter 5, that it achieves dominance as an ideal following the revolutionary decade of the 1790s and that this later dominance has skewed our interpretation of the second half of the eighteenth century. Susan Staves notes in her *Literary History of Women's Writing in Britain, 1660–1789* that the "*terminus ad quem*" or the end date for history determines the shape of an historical narrative since it is structured "to explain how that point got reached."[14] By suspending the ending of the story of the eighteenth-century gender revolution, I reanimate a contested history of women and affective agency. The seduction tale, I argue, provides a forum to query how a woman should act on the new desires of her own heart and furnishes a heterogeneous discourse for determining how women can recognize love. Taken together, seduction narratives ask a series of questions about women, love and marriage. Should a woman marry a man she does not love out of family duty? Does affective choice constitute a legitimate justification for disobeying parents? Can a woman love twice? Can love without money sustain a relationship? Is love outside the bonds of marriage ethically superior to mercenary sex inside marriage? What is the relation between passion and emotion, love and sex? This book argues that these questions were answered in many different ways, ways that have been effaced by the answer that comes to dominate. The endings of seduction narratives by the nineteenth century may suggest that the road to virtue is straight and narrow, but the paths to erotic love traced within later eighteenth-century tales provide many alternative routes for where a woman's heart could lead her. In *Uneven Developments*, Mary Poovey argues, in relation to mid-Victorian gender ideology, that the story of a dominant ideology is never as clear as its dominance suggests; in contrast, she reveals "the extent to which what may look coherent and complete in retrospect was actually fissured by competing emphases and interests."[15] In suspending an historical narrative about women's loss of

power over the course of the eighteenth century, I hope to trace the fissures and dispersals of meaning that seduction references.

My rejection of a history in which the repetition of seduction seamlessly evidences the rise of domestic ideology comes out of this book's concentrated and expansive readings across a large sampling of seduction narratives, in canonical novels such as *Clarissa* and Henry Fielding's *Amelia*, in lesser-known novels by women such as Elizabeth Inchbald's *Nature and Art* and Elizabeth Griffith's *History of Lady Barton*, in chapbooks and ballads circulating in cheap print form and in newspapers, miscellanies and memoir accounts of and about penitent prostitutes. A closer look at this large cross-section of texts delays the presumption that a conventional story was in place during this period. By the turn of the nineteenth century we can expect to find the generic plot of seduction: that of a young, innocent, naive orphaned country girl who travels to London where she falls for the false promises of an upper-class rake who abandons her and where, forced to earn her bread through prostitution, she eventually dies a penitent death. *The Penitent Daughter; Or, The History of Elinor de Burgh* exemplifies this conventional narrative in which "the world is full of seduction" and Elinor's fate is sealed when her family loses its money and sends its beautiful sixteen-year-old daughter to live with a vain widowed aunt in the city.[16] But in later eighteenth-century texts, I argue, the narrative path does not always and inevitably lead straight to ruin from the moment the beautiful, innocent and naive heroine opens her first novel, or takes her first glass of wine, or likes fine dresses, or travels to London, or accepts help from an old woman she does not know. In other words, her first step is not necessarily her last. In the *History of Lady Barton*, for example, we do not know how the story will end and if Louisa will find her way to Lord Lucan's bed, either licitly or illicitly. In many of the Magdalen penitent prostitute narratives, the seducer is not, in fact, a seducer (a man who entices a woman to yield under false pretenses), but an authentic lover whose right to be loved by the heroine the tale staunchly defends. The first-person account of "The Life of an Authoress" which prefaces *Literary Amusements; Or, Evening Entertainer* begins with a story of virtue as risk: her mother having died in her infancy, the author is orphaned when her clergyman father passes away as she comes of age; her guardian aunt and cousin despise her because she is beautiful and intelligent so they send her to London to dispose of their competition; upon arrival, she loses her box with all her money and the address for where she is to go into service; alone, beautiful, innocent and vulnerable, she stands on the precipice of seduction and ruin. The twenty-first-century reader may quickly interpret the signs within the story as anticipating an inevitable tale

of ruin but the seduction never arrives. Instead, she falls into writing and her story ends up as a complaint about women's relation to print culture. She cannot sell her novel or her sermons and thus she is forced to enslave herself to translations for money. The swerve in the narrative from virtue at risk to a feisty rant against the barriers to a woman's professional life charts one fissure of many in the dominant meaning assigned to seduction's narrative.[17]

In order to provide a narrative analysis of the divergences in seduction's meanings, this project employs a broader definition of the seduced maiden than the one Susan Staves uses in her seminal article on the subject, "British Seduced Maidens"; there she defines her object as "young women of previously fair fame who are persuaded to consent to illicit intercourse."[18] Since Clarissa is raped Staves omits Richardson's novel, as she does any text that includes a heroine who fights off her seducer.[19] My definition is more expansive because I want to suspend the assumption that the ending is known in the beginning and to hold out the possibility that the heroine's consent may not have been attained through persuasive coercion. I include stories with varying sexual climaxes from seduction (that is, consent to illicit sex under false pretenses) to romantic love consummated (both illicitly or licitly) to rape and to chaste virginity. The common thread weaving seduction together is that the heroine is in danger of misreading the signs of illicit sex for the signs of love or, vice versa, of misinterpreting authentic love as feigned. Seduction narratives tell the story of a woman's struggle to decode the new semiotics of courtship and love and they offer ways to determine when to believe a lover's vows and when to recognize deceit. The heroine of *The Adventures of Miss Lucy Watson* points toward this epistemological plot when she writes of her lover who promises marriage: "I know not what to think of Sir Edward. I think he speaks truth, and yet I have strong suspicions of the contrary."[20] Her suspicions turn out to be mostly correct as Sir Edward marries another after abandoning her and her daughter, though he later regrets not marrying Lucy whom he truly loved. Lucy's query into what to think of love grounds the hermeneutics of suspicion that I argue defines later eighteenth-century seduction narratives. What links the tales that I discuss in this study is that reading the signs of love within the narrative necessarily and radically involves learning how to read the feelings of one's own heart. Because my definition of seduction foregrounds the semiotics of love and relates it to knowledge of the heart, my project highlights what Charles Horne, in his hysterical attack on the evils of lost female chastity, *Serious Thoughts on the Miseries of Seduction and Prostitution*, called the "most cruel, unmanly, and destructive" type of seduction:

I have pretty fully described the miseries attending seduction and prostitution, but I have forgot to define *seduction* in so plain a manner as I ought, I shall therefore divide seduction into three distinct heads, viz. The first I shall call seducing the affection, the second I shall term the seducing of the person, and the third, the seducing the mind, and occupying it by vanity, idleness, and gaiety … The most cruel, unmanly, and destructive, both to families and society, is the seducing the affections.[21]

The worst form of seduction for Horne is neither enticing a woman to yield her physical chastity, nor corrupting her mind, but inducing her to give her heart where that affection is not reciprocated. This hierarchy of seduction implies that a woman's heart is deeper and more difficult for a seducer to penetrate than either the mind or the body and my study precisely thinks about what this ranking might mean to an understanding of gender. I see the narrative focus on a consenting heart – how a woman knows when to say 'yes' – to be what distinguishes seduction narratives in the second half of the eighteenth century from both earlier and later tales.

SEDUCTION'S KNOWLEDGE OF THE HEART

Seduction tales in the later eighteenth century foreground, almost entirely in first-person narration, the inner lives of a woman's heart in consenting to sex and, in so doing, they mark a shift in representations of female subjectivity through seduction. Critics have long noted the important influence of women's amatory fiction on sentimental writers such as Samuel Richardson but the two traditions are crucially distinct in their representation of seduction.[22] Seduction in amatory fiction is mostly told in third-person narration, it concentrates on "seducing the person," to use Horne's categories, and it functions as part of a plot of intrigue less attuned to characterization than to action, or to interiorized models of subjectivity than to exteriorized ones.[23] Later eighteenth-century seduction narratives are also distinct from their nineteenth-century counterparts which revert to largely third-person narration and are no longer concerned with the inner affective lives of their heroines since they assume that all women are passive victims of the evil crime. The assumption of victimization leads to fatalistic seduction narratives where the end is known in the beginning since the heroines's feelings could not change the plot. The heroine of *Victim of Seduction* (1811) is precisely what the title pleads, a victim, whose innate lack of sexual desire means that she could never have consented to sex and, thus, only the arts of an evil seducer could bring about her fall.[24] In between amatory physical intrigue and Victorian victim discourse lays the heart's knowing consent to desire.

In arguing for the particularity of seduction narratives in the second half of the eighteenth century, my interpretation of seduction differs from, and yet also confirms, Toni Bowers's work on seduction stories. In her survey article "Representing Resistance: British Seduction Stories, 1660–1800," Bowers reads the narrative as representing a "cover story" where "[p]lots featuring coercive heterosexual relations … [are] used as 'cover stories' for otherwise dangerous or incendiary ideas."[25] She reads seduction narratives, for example, as telling political allegories about Tory resistance or about revolutionary politics rather than as plotting female desire in and of itself. Thus, she concentrates on early eighteenth-century Tory narratives and 1790s fiction, leaving the ground between Richardson and Mary Hays left uncharted. I agree with Bowers that revolutionary politics fundamentally changes seduction's landscape at the end of the century, a discursive event that I discuss in the concluding chapter of this book. But in between *Clarissa* and *Victim of Prejudice* we can place countless retellings of the seduction plot that are not covers for political stories about broken vows but are primarily interested in the emotional signification of choosing love.

Probing the nature of a woman's knowledge of her heart, then, is the basis upon which I make claims for the historical specificity of seduction narratives in the period under study. Something happens in and around the mid-eighteenth century that makes women's inner affective lives narratable and this something was not entirely about restrictive sexual and domestic ideologies. In her exceptionally astute early article on seduction narratives, Susan Staves shows how seduction reflects gender attitudes in transition since the plot is only possible with increased emphasis on women's freedom: "If women have no rights over their own bodies but are simply the property of men to use as they will, as female slaves were the property of slaveowners, the idea of seduction is incomprehensible. On the other hand, if men and women are perfectly equal, seduction does not make much sense either."[26] Seduction requires the cultural belief that women's consent in sexual relations is necessary, a consent which includes women in modern forms of subjectivity or what Lawrence Stone has termed "affective individualism."[27] Yet it also requires the sexual double standard where female chastity is unequally valued and male sexual freedom accepted, for, as Elizabeth Hardwick notes in pronouncing the death of the seduction plot in the twentieth century: "You cannot seduce anyone when innocence is not a value."[28] This study pauses in the moment where seduction represents neither women's erotic agency nor their passive victimization but a complex in-between where anything is possible.

Critics as distinct as Susan Staves and Jean Baudrillard agree that the heightened cultural fascination with seduction disappears at the beginning of the nineteenth century which places the historical phenomenon at the moment in the history of love when the need for a female subject capable of knowing her own heart emerges.[29] If, as Laura Kipnis argues in *Against Love: A Polemic*, "our version of romantic love [is] a learned behaviour that became fashionable only in the late eighteenth century," this book asks, what role does seduction play in teaching us how to love?[30] I look at seduction narratives as providing the classroom, as it were, to explore love's new meanings. Culture's obsessive retelling of the plot of seduction reflects the search for answers to the questions that become askable for the first time: Who is the female self capable of choosing her marriage partner? How does she know her own desire? How does she speak her will? How does she recognize her heart's truth? The seduction narrative dramatizes the battle for a woman's consent to sex for love (often against the will of her family who represent the older hierarchical style of patriarchy where sex is for lineage) and thus provides the perfect paradigm to explore these questions.

In linking the truth of the female self to the truth of her heart, I am revising Michel Foucault's famous thesis on sexuality and subjectivity in *The History of Sexuality*. There, Foucault argued that the proliferation of discourses about sex in the eighteenth century evidences a new subject whose very identity is determined by the truth of sex. Who we are in the modern age, Foucault argued, is centrally a matter of sex: "Whenever it is a question of knowing who we are, it [sex] is this logic that henceforth serves as our master key … Sex, the explanation for everything."[31] The truth of sex is crucially a hidden truth, concealed both within ourselves and to ourselves; thus, Foucault shows, it requires extensive new systems of knowledge to uncover it (the science of psychoanalysis, gynecology, pornography, etc.). I revise Foucault's emphasis on the epistemological authority of sexual desire by asserting that love, not desire, is the "master key" for female subjectivity. By saying this, I am not reiterating the stereotype that women's interest in men is about romance whereas men's interest in women is entirely sexual. What my proposition denotes – and it applies to both men and women – is that the eighteenth-century shift in understandings of the self had more to do with a history of emotions than a history of sexuality. The seduction narrative's epistemology of the heart, then, is part of the larger movement of sentimental philosophy, as evidenced in the writings of the Earl of Shaftesbury or Francis Hutcheson, that seeks to give greater authority to feeling as a way to truth. Seduction's particular focus on the female heart places romantic love, rather than familial or neighborly

love, as the subject of its knowledge. Thus the phrase "knowledge of the heart," ubiquitous in the period's literature, almost always refers to knowledge of a person's romantic affections.[32] I use "the female heart" throughout this study catachrestically, to signify how a woman's affections come to ground epistemological statements and thus become a space where truth lies. Seduction narratives develop a system of knowing, a semiotic apparatus that produces a hermeneutics, not of sexual desire, but of the truth of a woman's feelings or of "the female heart." I argue that love, not sex, is the master key because, in a fashion unprecedented in British history before the mid-eighteenth century, Woman formed the direct object of inquiry and the discursive site for knowing Woman is carved out as the female heart. How women *feel* comes to define what it is they *know*. The discursive explosion of interest in women's difference interrogated the female self through an infinite number of questions from the very general ('What was woman's nature?') to the particular ('Should women study the sexual systems of plants or was it an immodest endeavor?').[33] Taken together, the quest to know Woman pursues these questions through a woman's inner affective life such that the truth of her heart ultimately speaks the truth of who she is.

In locating knowledge of self in a woman's heart, the new epistemology requires this heart to speak, accounting for the proliferation of first-person female narrators.[34] The claim that 'I know my own heart' emerges in the second half of the eighteenth century as an oft-repeated epistemological statement whose truth becomes comprehensible through seduction's discursive structure. One of Richardson's favorite phrases, 'I know my own heart' permeates novels and memoirs through the period and allows women to take authority in determining affective relations.[35] In a search on the period from 1700 to 1746, *Eighteenth-Century Collections On-line* (ECCO) produced 192 hits for the phrase 'I know my own heart,' most in theological texts referencing a knowledge of God. But in the period from 1747 to 1800, there were 621 hits and the context shifts from theology to fiction where the object of the heart's knowledge is a male lover, not God.[36] Not only is the phrase mostly found in fiction, but it appears most often in the voice of a female narrator or epistolary writer. Indiana Danby, for example, writes to her unwanted suitor, encouraging him to marry another: "if I know my own heart, your happiness is my principle inducement [in recommending the marriage]."[37] Almost every man in *The History of Indiana Danby* desires Indiana but she authoritatively refuses them all (including the one who attempts seduction and then abducts her) on the basis of her knowledge of the heart. Heroine after heroine invokes the phrase either to lend authority