RAPE'S REPRISALS:

MISSING SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN EARLY MODERN FRENCH LITERATURE

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This dissertation explores figures of sexual violence in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French literature, pursuing alternative understandings of sexual violence to the modern legal conceptions of rape as a discrete event in which a person has sex with another person against or without that person's known and knowable consent. In readings of *Lettres portugaises*, I take up the affinities between the "missed experience" of Mariane's seduction and contemporary conceptions of trauma, pointing to the ways in which the modern distinction between rape and seduction has concealed the figuration of the trauma of seduction in the letters. I argue that the missed experience of violation comes to mark the very violence, and trauma, of seduction in this text. My readings of Madeleine de Scudéry's *Clélie, histoire romaine* explore the curious repetitions and elisions of the scene of rape from Scudéry's rewriting of the Roman historical accounts of the rape of Lucretia. I argue that although the scene of rape is missing from the narrative, it is precisely in and as this absence that Scudéry interrogates rape's specific violence. Turning to Choderlos de Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, I explore how metonymic and narrative substitutions both conceal and expose the retroactive construction of each victim's intention. In this way, despite the absence of intention—the absenting of intention—an ineffable violence nonetheless leaves its traces on the text. I ultimately argue that these literary figures of sexual violence might prompt us to rethink its contours and specificity in contemporary literary criticism, rape law, and anti-rape activism. We must consider, for instance, that the elision of rape or its conversion into a seduction are not necessarily proof of the "falsity" of a victim's claims or of rape's misogynistic suppression. Rather, we might begin to read the enmeshing of sexual violence and narrative itself as part of the domestication of its violence, a domestication which comes at the cost, rather than to the aid, of victims, survivors, and even perpetrators of sexual violence.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Megan Kruer graduated *summa cum laude* with a B.A. in French and Comparative Literature from Emory University in 2008. Her undergraduate senior honors thesis, "Subversive Myths: Examining the Rationale and the Representation of Rape in *Lucrece* and *The Cenci*," marked her first exploration of figures of sexual violence in literature. She began her graduate studies in French in the Department of Romance Studies at Cornell University in the fall of 2009, earning her M.A. in 2012, and Ph. D. in 2016. She has published articles on violence in seventeenth-century French theater and narrative prose fiction. Her research and teaching interests include early modern French literature, violence and law in literature, and feminist and literary theory. She is currently a lecturer in the Department of Literatures and Cultural Studies at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, where she teaches French language and literature courses, as well as courses in the Medical Humanities program.

For Allanoma

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Introduction

Today, rape is generally defined as a nonconsensual sexual act. Rape is committed when someone has sex with another person who does not want to have sex. However clear this definition might seem at first glance, the notion of consent central to the modern conceptions of rape becomes more unwieldy when it comes time to determine the truth of the victim's nonconsent and the accused's guilt in the legal prosecution of rape and other sexual offenses.

In fact, the definition of rape in the *U.S. Code* makes tellingly little mention of the victim's nonconsent. [1] Article 129, Section 920, Title X of the *U.S. Code* defines rape as a criminal offense in which the defendant commits a sexual act by using force resulting in grievous bodily harm or death, by making threats to use such force, or with a victim whom the defendant has rendered unconscious.[2] The only reference to consent in the *Code*'s definition of rape appears in subparagraph 5, which specifies as rape a sex act committed by "administering to that other person by force or threat of force, *or without the knowledge or consent of that person*, a drug, intoxicant, or other similar substance and thereby substantially impairing the ability of that other person to appraise or control conduct" [emphasis added]. The qualification—"or without the knowledge or consent of that person"—suggests that had the victim known that they would be or consented to being rendered unconscious (perhaps for the purpose of engaging in a sexual act in an unconscious state) then the sexual act that followed would not be a rape.

However, in the terminological clarifications of "consent" that follow the definition of rape, *the Code* explains that, in fact, no such consent is legally possible:

> A sleeping, unconscious, or incompetent person cannot consent. A person cannot consent to force causing or likely to cause death or grievous bodily harm *or to being rendered unconscious*. A person cannot consent while under threat or in fear or under the circumstances described in subparagraph (C) or (D) of subsection (b) (1).

According to the *U.S. Code*, one cannot *legally consent* to the use of grievous bodily force or to being rendered unconscious and then having sex. Such sex is *de facto* nonconsensual; it is always rape.

Although *the Code* does positively define consent as "a freely given agreement to the conduct at issue by a competent person," it does not discuss how the law will decide in the singular instance whether consent was freely given, forced, or completely lacking. Instead, *the Code* determines in advance to what conduct one can and cannot consent (a point underscored through the self-referentiality of "or under the circumstances described in subparagraph (C) or (D) of subsection (b) (1)." While consent "may be inferred based on the circumstances of the offence," it is more likely that consent will be determined to be de facto present or lacking according to the legal criteria of consent. The actus reus—the prohibited act—will be determined by the presence of extreme force or threats of it or the unconsciousness of the victim, without requiring any inquiry into the desire, will, or inner experience of the victim or even the mens rea—the prohibited mental state—of the defendant.[3]

In "Rape and the Rise of the Novel," Francis Ferguson argues that what rape law seeks to evade through such definitions of consent is precisely the problem of consent. Rather than adjudicate on the difficult question of mental states and the complexity of human sexual desires—questions that are central to modern conceptions of what rape violates—courts determine whether or not a rape has taken place *formally*, according to the legal definitions of

situations to which the law has determined a victim can or cannot legally consent. In doing so, Ferguson argues, the legal solution to sexual violence is, quite problematically, to evacuate one of the subjects involved in the rape—the victim—of sexual agency in order to establish a more verifiable means of determining when a criminal sexual offense has taken place. The substitution of consent for what Ferguson calls "stipulated states"—i.e. the presence or absence of marks of bodily harm, the age of the victim, etc.—in the legal definitions of rape signal a deep problem that rape presents to law, one which persists even after feminist rape reform was made law.[4]

Indeed, one of the greatest achievement of feminism—reshaping the social understanding of rape as a violence committed against the victim (and not against the victim's father or husband as sexual offenses have historically been conceived)—has also served to underscore the inadequacy of the law to deal with a crime that is predicated on mental states. Susan Estrich explains in "Rape" that although a criminal offense is typically defined by an actus reus (the prohibited act) and mens rea (prohibited mental state with which the actus reus was committed), "[t]he definition of rape stands in striking contrast to this tradition, because courts, in defining the crime, have focused almost incidentally on the defendant—and almost entirely on the victim" (1094). This focus on the mental state of the victim—the status of his or her consent—rather than the defendant—his or her knowledge of the victim's consent or nonconsent—in rape trials, Estrich argues, has frequently resulted in a legitimate justification for the defense to present information about the victim's sexual history. If the crime of rape is based predominately on the victim's mental state at the time of the assault then an inquiry into that mental state is pertinent to the defendant's ability to prove his or her innocence. What the victim did or did not do, thought or did not think, said or did not say becomes of greater importance for the prosecution of a rape than what the defendant did or did not do, thought or did not think, said or did not say. The

result: sexual offense trials get caught up in determining the victim's guilt or innocence rather than the defendant's. Estrich argues that were the law to try rape cases like other criminal offenses, which is by focusing on the defendant's knowledge of the victim's non-consent and intention in committing the sexual act, then the victim would at least no longer effectively be on trial for the crime committed against him or her.

Political and feminist theorist Carole Pateman, however, had in 1980 already pointed to the problems that have arisen when the defendant's mens rea, rather than the victim's, determines whether or not he or she is found guilty of rape. Pateman argues that the interpretation of mens rea in rape cases "is grounded in complex beliefs about the 'natural' characters of the sexes" (158). She does not see the problem to be mens rea itself but "the manner in which it has been interpreted" (159). In the infamous decision in *DPP v Morgan* (1979), which Pateman offers as a striking example, the judge ruled that a defendant's belief in the victim's consent did not have to be a reasonable belief in order to clear him of charges.[5] In *DPP v Morgan*, Morgan held an unreasonable, but legally admissible and ultimately exculpatory, belief in the victim's consent, even after he had used extreme force and threats of extreme force against her. Pateman argues that the ruling judge upheld the defendant's unreasonable belief as admissible because the use of force is always, to some degree, expected in a culture in which men are expected to be the active sexual partner and women the passive sexual partner.[6] The unreasonable belief, in other words, was not considered by the judge to be so unreasonable.

If approaching sexual offenses from either the angle of the victim's or the defendant's mens rea leads to the failure of law to properly adjudicate them, then how exactly should the law be handling sexual offense?[7] In Patman's and Estrich's articles, this question goes unanswered insofar as for both the interpretive problems that the law encounters in determining the actus rea

of rape are attributed to the patriarchal ideology that governs legal decisions. For Pateman although,

> [t]he problem of "objective standards" and "reasonable mistakes" in rape highlights the extent to which "consent" and "nonconsent" have been emptied of meaning. That this fact appears unremarkable is tribute to the success of three centuries of mutual accommodation between liberalism and patriarchalism. [8]

This problem will remain, Pateman concludes, as long as "in the relationship between the sexes, it is always women who are held to consent to men" (164). Like Pateman, Estrich also attributes the failures of law to deal with the actus rea of rape to "the way society (or at least a powerful part of it) views sex" and to "the lengths to which the law has gone to enforce and legitimize those views" (1095). Rather than solutions, their feminist framings of the problem results in what Janet Halley calls "feminist paralysis."

Despite their stated determinations of the sexual subordination of women to men as *the* cause of the interpretive problems of the actus reus of rape, both Pateman's and Estrich's analyses suggest a more nefarious problem for legally determining the actus rea of rape. "Rape," Pateman argues,

> is conventionally presented as a unique act that stands in complete opposition to the consensual relations that ordinarily obtain between the sexes. The most tragic aspect of even a brief consideration of the problem of women, rape, and consent is that rape is revealed as the extreme expression, or an extension of, the accepted and "natural" relation between men and women. (Pateman 161)[9]

And for Estrich,

> [a]t its simplest, the dilemma lies in this: If nonconsent is essential to rape (and no amount of force or physical struggle is inherently inconsistent with lawful sex), and if no sometimes means yes, and if men are supposed to be aggressive in any event, how is a man to know when he has crossed the line? And how are we to avoid unjust convictions? (Estrich 1095)

If the prohibited act indeed has more in common with "the consensual relations that ordinary obtain between the sexes," "if no sometimes means yes," then how are courts to know the difference?[10] In both Pateman's and Estrich's articles, the resemblance between rape and consensual sex is not offered as a constitutive challenge to the law's (or for that matter the victim's or defendant's) ability to *know* the difference between them. Rather, they cite these resemblances as indicative of the (moral) problems they perceive in a society in which sex and rape are *so* similar.

What if rather than following Pateman and Estrich in resolving these questions by inscribing them within the feminist narrative of the sexual subordination of women to men, we instead leave them open, unresolved, in order to consider just what else the resemblance between rape and consensual sex might imply about sexual violence?[11] This is precisely what Ferguson begins to do by shifting her focus from the legal to the literary, from modern U.S. rape law to Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*. Clarissa, in Ferguson's reading, ultimately figures the "legally stipulated state of infancy in which the contradiction can never be overcome and not even consent itself can count to override nonconsent" (110). Clarissa personifies the problem of rape law, and in this way, *Clarissa* serves to recapitulate Ferguson's analysis of the deficiency of law "to put a limit to ambiguity by defining the understanding of a term or a situation" (109).

"[W]hat *Clarissa* argues is that all the negotiations in the world cannot supply the deficiency in stipulation that is made apparent when a thing may be its opposite" (109).

Indeed, according to the expanded definition of rape—advocated for by liberal feminism, adopted by most anti-rape activism, and increasingly inscribed in the law—as a violence against the will and right to sexual self-determination of the victim, a sexual act can be rape even though the perpetrator never used physical violence or force against the victim (typically called marital, acquaintance or date rape). A sex act can be rape even though a victim never explicitly stated his or her non-consent (often called freezing or paralyzation). Neither the absence nor the presence of bodily marks can necessarily determine whether a given sex act was consensual or nonconsensual. Neither the absence of verbal non-consent nor even the presence of verbal non-consent can necessarily determine whether a given sexual act was consensual or nonconsensual. When rape and sex can look so much alike, do and can the legal conceptions of sexual offenses best theorize, conceive, and articulate what is violent about sexual violence? Can and should we expect the law do more than simply redress—when it can be proven in a court of law—a harm "as old as the human race" (Smith 188)? The ways in which sexual violence exceeds the legal attempts to make it locatable, prosecutable, and meaningful through its simultaneous consolidation in and evacuation of consent remain under recognized by theorists and anti-rape activists alike. Whether this is out of a (misguided, for reasons I will address in my chapters) silent respect for survivors of sexual violence or a real critical oversight, the same questions go unasked and unanswered.

If, as I will argue throughout this project, law conceives of sexual violence according to its limits rather than according to the complexities of the violence itself, what has been left out?[12] What about rape exceeds the legal and moral determination of guilt and innocence? What

refuses to be absorbed into these delineating discourses and is left out of the problematic of consent from the start?[13] In this project, I explore the excess of rape and seduction to their legal determinations in and as their figurations in literature. To my texts, I ask, how does literature conceive of sexual violence differently from legal, scientific, and moral discourses? And, what can literary figures of rape teach contemporary discourses about sexual violence?

Despite the numerous problems the law faces when attempting to adjudicate sexual violence, it is nonetheless sexual offense laws that have surreptitiously come to dominate how critics read figures of rape in literature. This under-critical application of legal understandings of sexual offenses results in an even greater over simplification and domestication of sexual violence. As I will discuss in chapter 3, "Between Rape and Seduction: The Indetermination of Intention in *Les Liaisons dangereuses*," there is, more specifically, a tendency in feminist literary criticism to name literary representations and figures of certain sex acts rapes.[14] By properly identifying the sexual act as a rape, this criticism aims to correct a cultural and aesthetic wrong: sexual acts that are named seductions (by the text itself or by critics) or that have been elided from the narrative (either in the work of literature itself or by critics) are "reclaimed" and made legible as violent through the act of naming.

One of the best examples of this reading strategy is laid out by editors Lynn Higgins and Brenda Silver in their introduction to *Rape and Representation*, a 1991 volume of essays on rape in literature and art that remains a touchstone for any literary criticism on rape. Higgins and Silver argue that the treatment of rape in literary works and criticism have failed to take seriously the reality of the rape's violence on women's bodies and minds. [15] Treatment of rape in literature, they argue, has been dominated by (male) authors and critics who use rape as a metaphor, who

eroticize rape's violence, or who naturalize the sexual violation of women through the "obsessive inscription" and elision of rape in the western literary canon.

Against this tendency to naturalize the violence of rape by treating it as a metaphor, the essays in *Rape and Representation* will instead reread rape "literally" in order to "reclaim the physical, material bodies of women from their status as 'figures' and reveal the ways in which violence marks the female subject both physically and psychologically" (4). Higgins and Silver explain that this task,

> necessitates a conscious critical act of reading the violence and the sexuality back into texts where it has been deflected, either by the text itself or by the critics: where it has been turned into a metaphor or a symbol or represented rhetorically as titillation, persuasion, ravishment, seduction, or desire (poetic, narrative, courtly, military). (4)

Ultimately, the volume proposes to "undo the metaphor" through a doubled artistic and critical gesture: "outward to an analysis of context—historical, theoretical—and back to close reading that brings social and textual/critical practices together" (7).

The simple opposition between "literal" and "figural" rape in Higgins and Silver's introduction is one that tends to dominate thinking of rape, both in literature and in contemporary politics. Rape, feminists and anti-rape activists insist, is always rape: it is not a metaphor, it is not a figure. In its negative form, "no means no," its affirmative "yes means yes," or to-the-point "rape is rape," contemporary anti-rape activism expresses the "obviousness" of sexual violence through what in logic is called a tautology, a proposition that is neither refutable nor verifiable. The success of recent anti-rape activism may have been to make the difference between sex and rape seem obvious, to make rape seem completely distinguishable from sex. However, if, we are to take sexual violence seriously, we must admit that we are faced legally, socially, and

theoretically with difficulties that tautologies, and perhaps even the modern definition of rape as a nonconsensual sexual act, fail to address—or worse, obfuscate.

Even in their introduction, the possibility of treating rape only "literally" is called into question. For Higgins and Silver, rape is precisely of significance to feminists and anti-rape activists because it is *used* as a metonymy for the larger cultural, economic, and historical oppression of women (particularly their bodies and freedom of sexual choice). The reason why rape, as an instance of physical violence, is taken up by feminists, why it needs to be read literally, is because it is not only literal, it is metonymic: rape figures in much feminist thought the larger social issues that feminist theory and feminist literary criticism aim to bring to the foreground of U.S. politics and literary interpretation. The violence, as they conceive of it, of any particular instance of rape cannot be made to mean the way Higgins and Silver want it to mean except to the extent that one departs from the particular instance of meaningless suffering and violence to the larger social and political contexts in which the violation takes place, is given meaning, and in turn made meaningful as violent. In other words, rape and other sexual offenses are inextricably linked to the ways that they have come to function as a figure within the discourses that both discover and produce the "reality" sexual offenses.[16]

In contrast to the attempt in *Rape and Representation* to restore the legibility of rape against the literary texts that suppress it, I will trace what the illegibility of rape—its elision and doubling as well as its corruptibility by metaphor, seduction, etc.—might teach us about its violence. Tracing the elusive contours of sexual violence, I will engage not only the ways that it is made socially meaningful, but also the ways in which it cannot be made socially meaningful, the ways that sexual violence interrupts both the social rape narratives that come down to us

from antiquity as well as the more recent impetuses to narrate rape, as the ritualized retrospective construction and discovery of the violation of a true intention.

Each of the three chapters of this dissertation, contain a communion of formal literary and textual and historical, legal analysis. The goal of this pairing is to attend to not only the ways that modern legal conceptions of sexual offenses shape our ability to appreciate their literary excess to them which they in turn shape, but also the ways that past legal conceptions of sexual offenses shape and are shaped by them. As will become more apparent in each chapter, interrogating the excess of sexual violence to sexual offenses is not only a modern, legal and theoretical question, but in fact a question that preoccupies the figurations of rape in French literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Early modern France is quite obsessed by sexual offenses. Much scholarship accounts for this fascination through the threats sexual offenses pose to patriarchal social order emerging under the absolutist monarchy. In "Engendering the State: Family Formation and State Building in Early Modern France," Sarah Hanley argues that the family served as a privileged site for the confrontations between French judicial authority and the ecclesiastical courts, royal councils, and customs of private vengeance. Her notion of the "Family-State compact" identifies a progressive usurpation, beginning in her study with the 1556 marriage edict that required parental consent in all marriage contracts. Before, marriage had previously been under the sole authority of the church. Not only did civil marriage laws exert their authority over individuals and families, but they extended that authority to church law, which was required to uphold the French edicts in the ecclesiastical courts. The 1579 edict on clandestine marriage "linked clandestine marriages with the capital crime of *rapt* (by seduction or abduction) and other extraordinary penalties (such as banishment)" (10).

By extending the definition of clandestine marriage to include *rapt de seduction*, this edict effectively removed marriage legitimacy cases from ecclesiastic courts, Hanley explains, which were unable to impose the death penalty, placing them squarely under the authority of the Parlement of Paris. As seventeenth-century jurist Laurens Bouchel blithely remarks in *Bibliotheque ou thresor du droit francois*, it was pointless for ecclesiastic courts to rule in cases of clandestine marriage before the civil courts for, "toutesfois, elle n'a pu oster ny remettre la peine capitale introduite par la loy civile contre le ravisseurs: et en ce cas l'on dit qu'il n'y a si bon mariage que l'on ne puisse rompre d'une corde" (50). What the church might bring together, civil punishment will suspend, quite literally, with a noose. Bouchel explains that marriages achieved through *rapt* are,

> la plus grande playe que l'on scauroit faire en une Repulbique car ce seroit ouvrir la porte a la licence de seduire et suborner toute fille, pour apres esperer avoir leur consentement de mariage, au desceu de leur pere et mere, parens ou tuteurs: et apres les avoirs ravies pour se sauver du crime de rapt, pour chasser et gagner le consentement de mariage, qu'on pourroit extorquer par *dol* ou subornation de la fille facile a decevoir, au desceu de ses parens: en quoy apres Dieu, la Republique est principalement offensee, ayant interest que les filles soient gardee et honnestement douees et colloquees en mariage. (50)

Dol, an archaic word meaning *fraud* gestures towards the inheritance system used in Ancien Regime France and in this way what was at risk in illicit sexual acts. Property, titles, and wealth are passed through women in marriage. Although the woman does not control her dowry herself, she does have certain rights to it, for instance in cases serious abuse, when she could appeal to

have her wealth revoked from her husband and returned to her, though it will continue to be mediated by her male relatives.[17]

Significantly, although social, political, and legal definitions of sexual offenses certainly find their way into literature, we find something which exceeds them in the literary figurations of sexual violence. [18] Sometimes in the absence, sometimes alongside, and sometimes before or after the legal or moral narratives, the literary figurations of rape give us to read another rape, one that it seems is just as evasive for early modern sexual offense law as it is for our own. Each of the texts I study—Guilleragues' *Lettres portugaises,* Madeleine de Scudéry's *Clélie, histoire romaine,* and Laclos' *Les Liaisons dangereueses*—presents its own challenges to both early modern and modern legal conceptions of sexual violence. Figuring sexual violence not as a determinate event, but as absent and multiple, missed and deferred, the rapes and seductions in these texts exceed attempts to locate their violence in space and time.

In chapter 1, "Misunderstood Experience: *Lettres portugaises* and the Violence of Seduction" I point to the ways in which the modern distinction between rape and seduction, as a distinction between forced and consensual sex, has concealed the trauma of seduction figured in the letters. Criticism on *Lettres portugaises* has frequently read the letters as staging a process of self-discovery. In this reading, Mariane's five letters serve progressively to establish and reinforce a difference between self and other, whereby Marine might claim desire for herself by realizing that she enacted her own, rather than the lover's, desire. This argument, interestingly, parallels the critical fascination with the true identity of the author which has preoccupied almost all criticism on the letters. The letters, in both critical accounts of them, arrive at a final meaning when the truth of intention and identity, merely buried, are finally uncovered.

However I argue that this reading fails to appreciate the deep epistemological crisis the "seduction" poses for Mariane's very ability to experience of the affair, a crisis in knowing that might also be placed at the heart of the quest for the text's "true author." Taking Mariane's obsessional interrogation of the lover's intention seriously, I explore how each rhetorical attempt to resolve the question of whether her lover really loved or really seduced her betrays the fictional nature of the knowledge that it produces. Apostrophe, the primary mechanism by which Mariane attempts to collapse the radical difference between self and other in order to know the other's intention, is exposed as just that: a mechanism, a contrivance that can only produce a fictional knowledge.

Yet the epistemological crisis set off by the seduction is not confined to the inability to ever absolutely know another's intention. The other's inaccessible intention comes to unravel Mariane's relation to her own intention. The seduction produces a temporal disordering which attacks the nun's very ability to experience, to arrive at a narrative of events that she can relate to. Leaving uncertain exactly what has happened, the seduction in the letters punctures the self-enclosure of intention, violently deferring Mariane's ability to determine her own intention and thereby experience the affair as either a love or a seduction story. In this way, rather than a narrative of self-discovery, the letters perform a series of iterative returns to an irreducible uncertainty that remains unresolved and unsettling beyond the final letter. It is uncertainty of violation, rather than the direct experience of it, that marks the violence of seduction in the letters. Thus undermining the very possibility of arriving at a narrative of intention—either the lover's or Mariane's—that is total, final, or closed, the letters face modern readers with the challenge of conceiving sexual violence beyond its modern conception as a violation of consent. Intention is made not the attribute of a self-enclosed subject, but contingent, infinitely deferred

and thereby incomplete. The missed experience of violation comes to mark the very violence, and trauma, of seduction.

The challenges to the self-same subject that arise from the infinite deferral of a conclusive understanding of the affair in my readings of *Lettres portugiases* give rise to questions of narrative and history—both personal and collective—which I take up in chapter 2, "Doubled, Divided, and Disseminated: Rape in Madeleine de Scudéry's *Clélie, histoire romaine*." Scudéry's *Clélie*, a rewriting of the Roman historical narrative of the rape of Lucretia, brings to the fore the ways in which the very possibility of rewriting exposes the incompleteness of any narrative.

Narrative closure has been particularly sought in other authors' dealings with Lucretia's story. In ancient Rome historical accounts, the violence of the rape is contained and concluded by Lucretia's suicide and the narrative sublation of the rape into Republican revolution. In other seventeenth-century literary treatments, the violence of the rape is contained and concluded by narrative determinations of Lucretia's true intention (i.e. she was really raped, and not seduced or complicit) and the narrative sublation of the rape into the story of the triumph of virtue over vice, the overthrow of the illegitimate ruler. "The rape of Lucretia" thus becomes, in some of the most central texts that transmit it, the story of the rape's assimilation to narrative purposes that in fact contain, rather than communicate, its violence. The history of "the rape of Lucretia" becomes the history of its narrative domestication, and in particular, its political narrative domestication.

Clélie's narrative rewriting of "the rape of Lucretia," however, begins by reopening the story and the history of the Lucretia story to the very interpretive ambiguities that these other versions of the story seek to contain. Opening with allegories of both the history of the narrative domestication of the rape's violence and an allegory of the disseminative violence of rape that

exposes the fictional nature of a narrative containment of rape's violence, *Clélie* suggests a manner of doubled reading, which I pursue in my analyses of the text's intertwined narratives of Lucrèce and Clélie. By doing so, I discover a curious series of repetitions and elisions in *Clélie*'s rewriting of the rape of Lucretia from Roman history. While the structure of the rape as it is recounted by Livy—a threat, followed by forced sex, and then Lucretia's suicide—is repeated in Lucrèce's forced marriage to Collatin, the infamous bedroom scene is conspicuously missing. I argue that rather than erasing the rape and its violence, the suppression and multiplication of the moment of rape in fact is a way of figuring it. This figuration insists upon the rape's temporal fragmenting and fracturing, coming both before and after, but literally missed as an event. By figuring rape as diffuse, disseminated, and divided, *Clélie* demonstrates how an overemphasis on rape as a discrete, temporally locatable event fails to grasp an aspect of rape's specific violence.

The third and final chapter, "Between Rape and Seduction: The Indetermination of Intention in *Les Liaisons dangereuses*," turns to the explicit contemplation of the difference between rape and seduction in Laclos' *roman en lettres*. The letters begin with a debate between seducers over the difference between taking and receiving, between *la prendre* and *se donner*, between rape and seduction. Is the difference between rape and seduction, the letters ask, essential (Valmont) or narrative (Merteuil), real or fictive? The epistolary mode seems uniquely capable of resolving matters. Through the enactment of the seductions, a third voice can emerge to corroborate Valmont's argument, or to prove, with Merteuil, his distinction to be a delusion of love. However, in the figurations of the rapes/seductions, a third voice precisely does not emerge, or emerges in ways other than this debate anticipates. For when the seductions/rapes are figured, the contiguity between will and act, act and narrative, and narrative and knowledge—the connection between the will and one's knowledge of it— comes undone. In the enacted

seductions, the victims' intention is missing at the critical moment in which it must be there to resolve Valmont and Merteuil's argument and satisfy the desire of the reader to know "what really happened." And yet, through metonymic and narrative substitutions the offense is effaced as such, through the belated construction of each victims' intention, which both constitutes and constitutively threatens its truth. But despite the absence of intention—the absenting of intention—an ineffable violence nonetheless leaves its traces on the text.

Taken together, *Lettres portugaises*, *Clélie*, and *Les Liaisons dangereuses* begin to construct a literary understanding of sexual violence, central to which are a self-divided structure and deferred temporality. By a self-divided structure, I mean that rape and seduction are divided between the supposed event 'itself' and the effects of that event, as well as the event 'itself' and the determinations and figurations of the event. By deferred temporality I mean that the violences that we name rapes and seductions do not take place in a single, unified, and present instant, but that their occurrences (if we can still call it such) take place through repetitions and reoccurrences, originarily displacing any original occurrence. These texts figure sexual violence not as a discrete, locatable violence but a disseminative violence. This temporality, I argue, is precisely what scholars have missed in their discussions and theorizations of rape when they constitute—through the narratives of law, religion, medicine, custom, and consent—sexual violence as discreet, isolatable act.

The differed temporality that is shown to structure both the rapes and seductions in the texts I examine thereby and notably 'unites' what tend, today, to be understood as radically different events—rape and seduction. Today it is somewhat taboo to link rape to seduction. While the absolute distinction between rape and seduction seems to be an unquestioned and necessary assumption of much rape criticism, I hope that by rethinking rape and seduction

together, both between chapters and within each chapter, we can better think both their heterogeneity and what they have in common. And to this end, or rather beginning, we can begin to explore what we can discover in the figurations of rape read through those of seduction, and vice-versa.[19]

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[1] Because sexual offenses are defined differently by each state, I have opted to use the definition set forth in Title X of the US Code.

[2] State definitions of rape, however, as Charlow explains, vary in their requirements of mens rea in the crime of rape. Some follow suit with the US Code, while others insist that a defendant must have had the intention to commit a nonconsensual sexual act.

[3] And mens rea (though never mentioned) will presumably be determined by the fact of having committed a sexual act in such circumstances, without inquiry into the actual intention of the defendant.

Janet Halley discusses the distaste for the use of force even in consensual sex in *Split Decisions*. She focuses especially on this line of thought in Foucault and Leo Bersani.

Foucault's thought on sexuality is central to the denaturalization and dessentialization of sexual desire as theorized by feminist and queer theory. It clears the way to interrogate what is considered normal and what is considered "perversion," "unnatural," "wrong," or just plain "bad sex" insofar as the discourse on sexuality would give rise not only to "good" sex but also to "bad" sex. Through this interrogation of the dark side of sexual acts, queer theorists have asked if the line between good and bad sex, between "loving" and "violent" sex—a line often evoked under a different guise in anti-rape activism and legal reform—is as definite as commonly believed.

In "Is the rectum a grave?," for example, Leo Bersani asks if the pleasure of sex is perhaps the inseparability of the "good" from the "bad." Arguing with Catherine MacKinnon, but with perverse intent, Bersani insists on the (possible, not essential) positions of subordination and mastery in sex in order to contemplate the function of this particular polarization. Bersani insists that this polarization of power plays out not only one's mastery over the outside world, but also one's failure to control it:

> "To say this is not to propose and "essentialist" view of sexuality. A reflection on the fantasmatic potential of the human body—the fantasies engendered by its sexual anatomy and the specific moves it makes in taking sexual pleasure—is not the same things as an a priori, ideologically motivated, and prescriptive description of the essence of sexuality. Rather, I am saying that those effects of power which, as Foucault has argued, are inherent in the relational itself (they are immediately produced by "the divisions, inequalities and disequilibriums" inescapably present "in every relation from one point to another") can perhaps most easily be exacerbated, and polarized into relations of mastery and subordination, in sex, and that this potential may be grounded in the shifting experience that every human being has of his or her body's capacity, or failure, to control and to manipulate the world beyond the self" (216).

The ideal of sex as an intersubjective act, one in which the self of both partners is affirmed and protected, is what Bersani names phallocentricism: "Phallocentricism is exactly that: not the denial of power to women (although it has obviously led to that, everywhere and at all times), but above all the denial of the *value* of powerlessness in both men and women. I don't mean the value of gentleness, or nonaggressiveness, or even passivity, but rather a more radical disintegration and humiliation of the self" (217). Evoking Bataille, Bersani insists that for both positions—that of mastery and that of subordination—there is "a transgressing of that very polarity which […] may be the profound sense of both certain mystical experiences and of human sexuality" (217).

The seemingly unquestioned notion of "good" sex—sex which affirms rather than destroys the self—misses or attempts to eradicate from erotic experiences that which marks its specific excess and disintegration of the self. Considering in particular the responses to "gay sex" in the wake of the AIDS crisis, Bersani argues,

> That judgement, as I have been suggesting, is grounded in the sacrosanct value of selfhood, a value that accounts for human beings' extraordinary willingness to kill in order to protect the seriousness of their statements. The self is a practical convenience; promoted to the status of an ethical ideal, it is a sanction for violence. If sexuality is socially dysfunctional in that it brings people together only to plunge them into a self-shattering and solipsistic *jouissance* that drives them apart, it could also be thought of as our primary hygienic practice of nonviolence. (222)

Rather than violence, Bersani sees in the very "violence" to the self in the "social dysfunction" of sex, a practice that might assuage the violence between selves.

[4] Ferguson explains that feminist rape law reform ultimately repeats many of the same gestures it criticizes in patriarchal rape laws. "Thus Brownmiller and Dworkin share with ancient rape law the tendency to specify the male injury to the female in terms of formally identified and stipulated mental states. And they thus recapitulate, even though in a reversal of those early legal codes, the tendency of the law to negate particular psychological states and to substitute formal states for them. In other words, the process of reading an action as evidence of intention confines itself to stipulated states that are specifically detached from the notion of individual, actualizable psychological states. For ancient Hebrew law the act of sex carries with it the inevitability of consent. For Brownmiller and Dworkin, it carries with it the impossibility of consent: women, because they are women never consent: men, because they are men, always rape" (93-94).

[5] At issue in the case of the "reasonableness" of the defendant's belief in the victim's consent is the fact that there is no such thing as "negligent rape." In rape, it seems, the defendant must always have had the intention of committing a sexual act with a person whom he or she *knows* does not consent.

[6]In "Bad Acts in Search of Mens Rea: Anatomy of a Rape," legal theorist Robin Charlow describes an event that would seem to many an obvious case of sexual violence but which faces similar problems to *DPP v Morgan* of meeting the requirement of mens rea. According to court documents, in 1978, John Henry Sansregret [sic] broke into the home of his ex-girlfriend, ripped the phone from the wall, and threatened her with a butcher knife. He ordered her to undress and stand in a doorway so she could not escape while he covered up the signs of his forced entry. "In fear for her life," the ex-girlfriend tried to calm Sansregret by suggesting that they might get back together and by having sexual intercourse with him (266). When she was finally able, she reported the attack to the authorities, claiming that she had been raped. Charlow describes this

event because, though the incident might seem to be a clear case of rape, "in the complicated world of criminal mens rea, the question [But had she been raped?] is not outrageous and the answer is not so clear" (264). Although, as Charlow explains, rape law in Canada (where the Sansregret case was prosecuted) has changed since this case, the case remains indicative of "a problem that could occur in any case involving a crime that requires for conviction knowledge of some important fact…What makes these cases difficult is that the prosecutor must prove something about the defendant's inner thoughts, that he or she was subjectively aware of the fact in question" (265).

Like in Canada, rape is a criminal offense in the United States. However in the U.S. rape law is not determined federally, but at state level. Each state has its own legal definition of rape. Definitions of rape range tremendously in the mens rea required for the conviction of the accused.

[7] In *Split Decisions: How and Why to Take a Break from Feminism*, Janet Halley attributes this sort of conceptual "paralysis" not to any reality of the situation but to the feminist theories of the sexual subordination of women by men: to "the profound commitment of so many [feminist, queer, gay, and trans thinkers] to an understanding of themselves as utterly without power" (14). Halley does not determine the source of this commitment, though she certainly associates it with most feminism in so far is it "carries a brief for f," Haley's shorthand for the tendency in feminism to "oppose the subordination of [women]" (18). "The intellectual, institutional, and affective trends contributing to this attitude are many: the proliferation on the left of minoritizing identity-based vocabularies in which high-priority political and moral claims can be made only by the 'marginalized' and the 'silenced'; the subordination-theoretical assumption that power is always bad; the fact that so many intellectually and politically productive contributors to this politics work in humanities departments, and that these departments are in a deep crisis, experienced as powerlessness, about their place in the university; the seeming inability of most participants in these politics to move beyond a certain sentimental and moralistic view of law and legal action in which nothing short of complete and total moral vindication by the *Supreme* Court *is* legal power" (14).

[8] "Most people would agree that a genuine mistake is possible today about the age of a boy or a girl (and objective evident of date of birth can be produced). But how could "you or I" make such a mistake about a woman's consent? And is it the kind of slip that results from ordinary human failings? How often is it a mistake at all?" Ultimately, Pateman does not advocate that we assume that defendants are always guilty, as she might be taken to be implying above. Instead, she sees the very giving of consent to mark an inequality that must be contested before we can find the "*language* through which to help constitute a form of personal life in which two equals freely agree to create a lasting association together" (164).

[9] I find Pateman and MacKinnon's point on the proximity, rather than the radical difference, between sex and rape very compelling. Most importantly, these arguments underscore the relationship between violence and sex which those who attempt to keep sex and rape at a far remove from one another, tend to deny (see for example cultural feminist arguments about the purpose of sex in the writings of Robin West, for example). However, as Janet Halley argues in *Split Decisions*, one of the problems with this "radical feminist" understanding of the relationship between sex and violence is that it betrays an underlying moralist condemnation of all sex because of its relationship to violence and oppression. This assumption that the inseparability of sex and violence makes sex bad is called into question for its failure to

appreciate, as Georges Bataille did, that the power of sex in human life seems to lie in (and not in spite of) its disarticulations of subjective integrity.

[10] Although she remains somewhat within the narrative framing of the sexual subordination of women by men, in *Consent: Sexual Rights and the Transformation of American Liberalism*, Pamela Haag also charts the progressive emergence over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of an antithesis between a woman's own consent and violence, between the expression of one's right to sexual freedom and seduction/rape. Through historical analysis of archival and cultural documents from hospital records to films, Haag traces the deployments and exclusions of consent in sexual rights from seduction to contemporary definitions of rape through consent's complex relation to economic policy and understandings of what it means to be a citizen. She interrogates "[w]hat types of relationship have been designated as authentic or legitimate examples of the "convergence of the wills…What contexts, types of relationships or social conditions have been thought to vitiate 'real' consent, and why?" (xvii). This question—where do we delineate between consent and violence—is critical, she argues, because the consent-violence pair, "underwrites the three dominant social relations of liberal culture: it is relevant to the meaning of sexual freedom; it shapes ideas of citizenship as defined through consent to a 'social contract'; and in a market economy driven by ideologies of free contract it contributes centrally to the assumed legitimacy of a labor relation" (xvii-xviii).

As liberalism develops in the U.S. over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Haag argues, the individual "freedom" of the "citizen" shifts from the right to make economic contracts without state intervention to the right to form heterosexual contracts without state intervention. The supplanting of economic contract freedom by sexual freedom leads Haag to conclude that the sexual subordination of women to men which continued into late capitalism is not simply the residue of a feudal sexual economy, but also a product of liberalism itself—a product of its notion of equality, freedom, and choice:

> The cultural invisibility of heterosexual violence—intarracial rape, other forms of sexual violence, and domestic violence against married women—in the mid-twentieth century prior to second wave feminism does not have exclusive origins in the vestiges of feudalism, or anachronistic, barbaric notions that men have entitlements to women's sexuality, but also—if not more so—in governing assumptions indigenous to modern liberalism itself. The "right" to be left along in sexual relationships and choices as a national ideal of free citizenship, a sexual laissez-faire, in turn stylizes an edgy, hardboiled, rugged individualistic idea of female sexual desire…(174-175)

The right to privacy—the hallmark of individual freedom of liberalism—becomes increasingly determined as a right to sexual freedom (although, as Haag's analysis demonstrates, a very restricted form of sexual freedom). As a result, "only extreme, literal, and easily validated forms of "coercion" or violence will qualify as an abrogation of the sexual will that must be 'interfered against'—punished—by the state" (181).

[11] For an analysis of the tendency in feminism to reduce complicated problems to the narrative of the sexual subordination of women by men, see Janet Haley, *Split Decisions: How and Why to Take a Break from Feminism*.

[12] As such, throughout this project, I will distinguish between legal definitions of *sexual offenses* and the complicated experience and social problem of *sexual violence*.

[13] For instance, Francis Ferguson insists in "Rape and the Rise of the Novel" that "The physical similarity between an intention to have consensual intercourse and an intention to have

nonconsensual intercourse [on the part of the sexual partner/assailant], meant that the only way one could communicate a difference between consensual intercourse and rape was by testifying about mental states" (90). This fact is of great interest to rethinking the violence of rape as a disseminative one. In a basic way, for instance, we see that rape repeats and is repeated in consensual sexual acts. A portion of the violence of rape takes place not at the time of the rape itself but before and after in its citation of sex.

[14] See my discussion of Mary McAlpin and Helen Constantine in chapter three.

[15] This example is an old one, but to a large extent still a dominant one. I am particularly intrigued by the more recent edited volume dedicated to rape in literature, *Feminism, Literature, and Rape Narrative*, edited by Sarcha Gunne and Zoe Brigley Thompson in 2011, in which the editors explain the project as "build[ing] on the feminist critiques of the 80s and 90s, developing the trajectory of such volumes as *Rape and Representation*" (3).

[16] In the first volume of *Histoire de la sexualité*, Foucault critiques the discourse of sexuality that produces sex as an object of knowledge in modernity. In his argument, sex is not a natural (if concealed) given but emerges through the very discourse of sexuality which purports to unveil sex's truth. The (sexual) subject who comes into being through the discourse of sexuality is revealed thus to be founded on the phantasm of sex produced by the knowledge discourse of sexuality rather than sex's truth.[16] Foucault's historicization of sexuality and discovery therein of the knowledge discourse of sexuality teaches or should teach us of the problematic foundations of the liberal subject qua the bearer of a sexual truth. The sexual subject is not problematic insofar as it can only be founded on a phantasmatic sexuality, but insofar as it strives to evade and conceal its groundlessness through its claims to truth.

If we follow Foucault's argument, not only would our positive understandings of the "truth" of our sex be a product of the discourse of sexuality, but our understanding of the acts that deny our access, expression, and agency over it would also be a product of the discourse of sexuality. The discourses of sexuality, which make sexuality the central aspect of a subject, also arguably produce sex as a privileged site of subjective violation. I do not mean that the discourse of sexuality gives rise to or cause sexual violence in the sense that they make people commit acts of sexual violence (through repression, pathologization, etc., though these things might be the case), but instead that the discourse of sexuality which *makes* one's sex the most intimate aspect of the self, which grants to sex this symbolic metonymy for the whole person, has the effect of producing the very possibility of the experience of sexual violation as the greatest affront to the self. Critically and frequently missed, this does not undermine or weaken these experiences. They are no less "real" than other human experiences insofar as all human reality would be the complicatedly produced of discourses of knowledge (which themselves transform in light of the experiences they produce).

[17] In "Etude historique sur le rapt de seduction," Leon Duguit locates the conflict between the church and state for authority over marriage in the conflicting theorizations of marriage as sacrament v. marriage as civil contract. The requirement from parental consent in Roman law, according to Duguit, vanishes after the establishment in the thirteenth century following the adoption of Pierre Lombard's theory of sacrament, in which a marriage takes place in the moment in which the spouses consent to their indissoluble union. Indeed, the language on the Henri II's 1556 edict "sur les marriages clandestines" does not annul marriages contracted without parental consent, but rather simply suggests that they are potentially invalid civil contracts. The 1556 edict proclaims that children married without parental consent might be

married in the eyes of the church (and God), but that they may forfeit their rights of inheritance and may be handed down other pecuniary punishments. Like Hanley, Duguit argues that the 1556 edict marks a profound extension of state authority, one which begins a century-long struggle to reconcile church and state interests.

According to Duguit, the consideration of marriage as a sacrament is precisely what marks its removal from the convention of Roman law and shift to that of canon. Duguit explains that, born in Rome, the church initially adopts Roman customary laws on a range of issues including marriage. At this point, marriage is not yet a sacred act—a sacrament—but a convention, that is ultimately—after many disagreements—deemed in Roman law to depend upon parental consent. However, with the emergence of a cohesive canon law, beginning in the twelfth century and culminating in the thirteenth, marriage becomes distinct sacrament, one that follows the doctrine of the sacraments: "Comme dans tout sacrament, on y distingue la matiere et la forme; la matiere qui est l'element exterieur du sacrement, la forme qui est la parole prononcee; comme tout sacrement, il produira un effet salutaire, il confera une grace" (599).

"[Q]and le mariage est devenu un vrai sacrement, soumis aux regles de la theorie sacrementelle, il ne peut plus en etre ainsi [soumis au consentment des parents]: le consentement des deux epoux etant echange, la matiere et la forme du sacrement sont realiseees, le signe visible de la chose invisible est accompli; la grace sanctifiante est conferee; et le sacrement, reunissant tout ses elements existe avec tous ses effets. Sans doutes on exigera pour la solennite du mariage le consentement des parents: mais on ne peut l'exiger a peine de nullite, il ne rentre en effet ni dans la matiere ni dans la forme du sacrement. Et le *Corpus juris canonici* resume toute cette doctrine dans un texte d'une energeique concision: "*Quod matrimonium in veritate contrahitur per legitimum viri et mulieris consensum* [For marriage in truth is contracted by the legitimate consent of the man and woman]" (600).[17]

Sacramental theory undergoes a great transformation between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Most theologians begin with Saint Augustine's definition of sacrament as "a visible sign of invisible grace," the relationship between the visible sign and the invisible grace. For Hugh of St. Victor, for example "a sacrament is a sign of a sacred thing, whose external form resembles the internal thing (*res*) or divine power (*virtus*) contained within the sacrament […] The two new generic keynotes of the sacrament that are important for Hugh are thus the fact that they do not merely signify; they effect what they signify. Also, they do so not merely because the physical medium bears a resemblance to its inner *significatum* but because of the express biblical institution of the sacraments" (Colish 523-4). For Hugh, the sacrament does not merely represent—they are not merely signs—but they effect what they signify.

Similarly for Lombard, whom Duguit places at the center of the canon law that proves unacceptable for the French state, the sacraments are unique (and different from Old Law rites) in that they both signify and *confer* grace. Lombard's understanding of the relationship between sacramental efficacies is based in Augustinian sign theory in *De doctrina christiana*. Augustine differentiates natural and conventional signs: smoke indicates fire, whereas language and non-verbal communication mean by way of convention, by common agreement. However, neither natural nor conventional signs are identical with its *significatum* or productive of it. This is where the sacraments differ. While the material medium of the sacrifice does resemble its inner spiritual content—like a natural sign—"the power of the sacrament is given, not an automatic consequence of that resemblance. Its given power, in this case, is not a function of conventional understanding imparted to it by its uses but as a consequence of its divine institution. It is the

divine institution that empowers a sacrament to effect what it signifies. This is the basis on which it is different from a sign, which merely signifies but does not sanctify" (Colish 529).

When it comes to the theory of the sacrament of marriage, however, what exactly constitutes the material medium, the external form that effects grace is not agreed upon by medieval theologians and canonists. There are two schools of thought in the sacramental marriage debates in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries: consent advocates and consummationist. The advocates for consent as the external manifestation of the internal grace argue that the couple's consent in the marriage is the sacrament, the consummation either not mattering (652) or serving as the less virtuous aspect of the union (Abelard). A case that consent advocates use to bolster their position is the marriage between the Virgin Mary and Joseph, a marriage that is never consummated. On the other hand, consummationist argue that because what differentiates marriage from other forms of living together is the sexual relationship, and the production of offspring (new disciples), the external form of the sacrament of marriage is the sex act. These rival positions illuminate a problem of *when* a marriage should be said to have taken place at the heart of the debates.

It is Pierre Lombard's solution that is ultimately adopted by Pope Alexandre III and which reigns up to the sixteenth century. Lombard is among the first theologians to argue that consent is the base of the sacrament, while also taking into account the arguments put forth by the consummationists. He in fact argues that "a standard marriage…is sacramental in a twofold sense, since both the union of the souls and the union of the bodies stand for a *res sacramenti"* (652). This argument stems from the twofold bond of Christ to the church. "Consent signifies the bond of charity joining Christ and the church by will, while the sexual union of the spouses signifies Christ's union with the church by nature, in that He Himself too on the nature of man and continues to make Himself available to man in modes that can be appropriated physically in the ecclesiastical dispensation" (651).[17] This theory of the marriage sacrament has important implications for the subject of clandestine marriage. By basing the sacrament in the consent of the spouses, Lombard admits the validity of clandestine marriages, separating from the *res sacramenti* the ceremonies surrounding it, including parental consent, the formal handing over of the bride to the groom, and the priestly blessing. Though for Lombard these conventions should be observed, their lack by no means invalidates a marriage.

[18] Georges Vigarello's *Historie du viol* does a tremendous job of demonstrating the disconnection between the legal and literary understandings of rape. By reading both in his history of rape, Vigarello demonstrates that there is precisely no single and unified definition of rape or seduction that we might appeal to when looking at rape in past centuries, any more than there is one single and unified definition of rape today. A look to the vast range of laws treating rape within the United States—a question treated at the state level—today demonstrates quite well this fact.

[19] In the case of date rape, I am interested in the ramifications of this question for Sharon Marcus's work on rape scripts. Marcus proposes in her article "Fighting bodies, fighting words" that we seriously sit down and write out all the scripts that lead to a rape situation. The problem would be that while there might be a finite number of underlying scripts, the determination of when to *begin* would seem to plague this endeavor. *Therein lies* my projects interest in what are called date rapes and acquaintance rapes. In case of a rape by a family friend, for instance, we would be hard pressed to find *the* moment where the rape script might begin. This deferral of the moment of the beginning of the rape (for Marcus argues that the rape begins before the act of

physical violence) would be of tantamount importance to the question of rape's deferred temporality. In the case of rape's repetition in sex, we might turn to MacKinnon, for whom this is captured by the frequency with which rape victims identify the similarities between rape and sex after an attack (rather than knowing the difference) and must be taken seriously as we theorize rape. Ann Cahill cites MacKinnon's argument on this point in her book *Rethinking Rape*: "The convergence of sexuality with violence, long used at [sic] law to deny the reality of women's violence, is recognized by rape survivors with a difference: where the legal system has seen the intercourse in rape, victims see the rape in intercourse. The noncoercive context for sexual expression becomes as elusive as the physical acts come to feel indistinguishable" (37).

Chapter 1

Misunderstood Experience: *Lettres portugaises* and the Violence of Seduction

Today, rape is largely defined as a nonconsensual sexual act, where nonconsent can be either attitudinal or performative, that is, can be either a state of mind or an expressed position. Attitudinal consent, in particular, poses problems for the prosecution of sexual violence in the courts. The possibility that a person can think "no" but never expresses that position raises the question: What evidence can be brought to trial that would *prove* that a given sexual act was sex or that it was rape? How will judges and juries determine if a given sexual act is consensual or non-consensual, agreed upon freely or "forced," when we broaden the definition of rape to include cases in which there is no physical struggle, no spoken statement of a "no"? How will we know a rape when we precisely cannot see it, when it can happen without leaving any empirically verifiable traces, when it can simply be an unwitnessable cognitive or emotional experience? What sort of hermeneutic will suffice for the interpretive problems the modern definitions of rape present for law?[1]

Much scholarship on rape sees these questions as an urgent call to clarify, define, and delimit consent in order to safeguard the modern, legal definitions of rape and sexual assault. According to this model, the objective is to establish the truth of a rape allegation by establishing a verifiable line between consent and nonconsent, and in turn between sex and violence. Rather than adjudicate on the difficult question of mental states and the complexity of human sexual desires—questions that are central to modern conceptions of what rape violates—courts seek to determine whether or not a rape has taken place according to the legal definitions of situations to

which the law has determined a victim can or cannot legally consent, situations that are *de jure* sexual offenses. A consequence of this response is that modern understandings of sexual violence are determined according to the demands and the *limits* of the law, rather than according to the complexities of sexual violence itself. What if rather than shift our understandings of sexual violence in order to make it verifiable in the courtroom, we were, at least for the length of this chapter, to leave the realm of law and search for extra-legal understanding and figurations of sexual violence? Could such a departure perhaps help us to better understand the specific violence of sexual violence?

This is what I will aim to do in this chapter by turning to *Lettres portugaises*, a seventeenth-century "literary" text that upsets simple distinctions between rape and sex by interrogating the effects of seduction's belated temporality on the category of consent. In my reading of *Lettres portugaises*, the end of an affair with a French sailor devastatingly reveals to Mariane her absolute inability to know the lover's intentions. Mariane does not even know for certain that she was seduced. Rather than a clear narrative of seduction as the shift from ignorance to knowledge, the letters present seduction as a violence which reveals to the victim the radical unknowability of another's intention. In the letters, this violence cannot be contained in the event of the affair but disseminates, undoing Mariane's entire system of knowledge. Staging Mariane's struggle to locate not only her lover's intentions but also her own (re: the status of her consent), the letters show the truth of consent to be a mask behind which we hide the fiction of sexual offense, violently effacing a key aspect of what is violent about sexual violence.

Part I: Seduction, or Sexual Violence

The enigmatic epistolary *Lettres portugaises traduites en François*, today known simply as *Lettres portugaises* and generally attributed to Gabriel de Guilleragues, was published in Paris in 1669 under what remain mysterious circumstances. The text contains five "love letters" written by a Portuguese nun, Mariane, to her French lover following his return to France at the conclusion of his military service in Portugal.[2] The letters do not narrate the affair or its end in a linear manner; rather, they disjointedly relate the seduction story through the nun's impassioned yearnings, questions, and regrets addressed to the lover from the frenzied state in which she finds herself after his departure from Portugal. Their prose twists and turns in endlessly enjambed sentences, never condensing into a single, unified narrative of what causes "l'état dépolorable" to which the affair and its conclusion reduces Mariane, but instead offering only conflicting and partial narratives that remain to be brought to bear on the figuration of sexual violence in *Lettres portugaises* (82).

Before turning to the ways that the letters figure sexual violence, we might consider the fact that no criticism on the text discusses sexual violence. Despite the numerous references to violence in the letters,[3] and although literary criticism commonly identifies the narrative sequence of events pieced together from the letters as a seduction—one of the most prosecuted sexual offenses in seventeenth-century France—none of the criticism of the letters brings up either the question of sexual offense or sexual violence in relation to the seduction at the heart of the text.

This critical lacuna should perhaps not be entirely surprising. Contemporary readers may not readily associate seduction with sexual violence.[4] Although seduction was the most prosecuted sexual offense in seventeenth-century France and even the US until the mid-nineteenth century, the term is rarely used in sexual offense law today.[5] Seduction is even

frequently taken to name the opposite of a forced sexual act. Unlike the rapist who is indifferent to the victim's will and desire (or, desires to commit a sexual act precisely without the victim's consent), the seducer aims to elicit the victim's desire, inciting consent where it was initially lacking.[6] In this understanding, seduction's quest for consent through erotic excitation marks its difference from violent force.[7]

Mariane's experience, indeed, does not measure up to the contemporary ideal of that of a victim of a sexual offense.[8] She consents. She admits to foreseeing even before the lover's departure that "[il] me rendr[ait] malheureuse" (80). She makes no reference to ruses, trickery, or fraud used by the lover to convince her to have sex with him but instead admits to have "[senti] les premiers effets de ma Passion malheureuse" after only seeing the lover from afar, before they had ever spoken a word or exchanged a glance (93). The letters are replete with such examples of Mariane's complicity in the affair.

In *Mimesis and Metatextuality in the French Neo-classical Text*, Mary Jo Muratore uses Mariane's admission of consent in her case against the nun, arguing that not only the remorse but also the suffering expressed in the letters function as "a linguistic mask" hiding the nun's hypocrisy:

> This egocentric perspective is in conflict with the victimized pose she labors to strike, however, and Mariane's unremitting shuttle between imperialist arrogance and masochistic martyr creates the schizophrenic disarray that, in the view of some, endows the letters with their psychological realism. On closer scrutiny, their shifting perspectives reveal less the internal torment of an impassioned lover than the fundamental hypocrisy of a writer unable to sustain what is essentially an inauthentic pose of self-sacrificial altruism. The selfless magnanimity that Mariane so carefully articulates is but a linguistic

> mask that continually shifts to reveal traces of the underlying vitriolic self. These glimpses of Mariane's instinctual aptitude for violence and revenge are covered immediately upon exposure, however, buried beneath a mask of prosaic self-abnegation and victimized innocence. (80)

The "hypocrisy"—the disconnection between inner states and actions—characteristic of the letters is named a fundamental quality of Mariane's person, rather than, as she repeatedly claims, an aspect of the "état Malheureur" to which the seduction reduces her. However, we will see, it is arguably by presenting Mariane as precisely an *uncertain* (hypocritical?) victim of an *uncertain* seduction that *Lettres portugaises* pushes current understandings of sexual violence, rooted in consent-based definitions of sexual offenses founded upon the authentic self.

While the conflict between Mariane's expressed consent to her seduction and the modern consent-based understandings of sexual offenses can perhaps account for the fact that scholars have not brought up the subject of sexual violence in their readings of *Lettres portugaises*, the prevalence of seduction as a prosecutable sexual offense in seventeenth-century France makes this absence somewhat surprising. Seduction, also referred to as *subornation,* was again among the most prosecuted sexual offense in seventeenth-century France. While seventeenth-century seduction certainly names acts that one might consider seductions today—for instance, the use of false statements of love and intention to marry or false identities to gain consent in sexual acts to which a person would not otherwise consent—sexual acts that today would fall under the category of rape or sexual assault were also frequently named seductions.

In early modern France, historian Georges Vigarello explains,

> [t]he word 'seduction' itself had many meanings, including acts committed freely and acts committed under duress: the decisions of two independent adults, for example, but

also consent extracted by pressure or force, blackmail, or lying. Fournel's definition ran: 'A victory won over a woman's propriety by criminal maneuvers and odious means.' (51) The overlap between consensual acts and those committed with violence results, in part, from the fact that the offense legally committed in seduction was not against the seduced person, but against that person's (typically male) guardian. Sexual offenses in early modern France were, legally speaking, economic crimes against the father's proprietary rights over his children: not crimes against the body or sexual autonomy of a person, but crimes against property similar to thefts.[9] The offense of seduction was often placed above that of rape in seriousness for its ability almost completely to "steal" a child away from his or her parents. Insofar as seduction debauched the mind, while rape only the body, "was it not more dangerous, and even more irreparable? Did it not create a distance even greater because it was voluntary?" (Vigarello 52). The crime was considered so threatening that the 1579 Ordinance of Blois called for capital punishment for those found guilty of seduction: "We wish that those who are found to have suborned a woman or a girl aged under 25 on pretext of marriage or other colour, without the express agreement, knowledge, wishes or consent of the fathers, mothers and guardians, are punished by death without hope of mercy or pardon" (qtd. in Vigarello 52).[10]

The understandings of sexual offenses dominant at the time of the letters' publication might explain the intensity of Mariane's reaction to the belated realization of the crime she committed. Her pleasure ceased, Mariane is left to face the consequences of the affair. In her case, the seduction would have been only more severe insofar as the father from whom Mariane is seduced was not only her terrestrial father, but the divine father—God. In fact, the last narrative explanation of events that Mariane puts forward in the letters cites nearly perfectly seventeenth-century seduction law:

> Je demeure d'accord que vous avez de grands avantages sur moi, et que vous m'avez donné une passion qui m'a fait perdre la raison, mais vous devez en tirer peu de vanité ; j'étais jeune, j'étais crédule, on m'avait enfermée dans ce couvent depuis mon enfance, je n'avais vu que des gens désagréables, je n'avais jamais entendu les louanges que vous me donniez incessamment, il me semblait que je vous devais les charmes et la beauté que vous me trouviez, et dont vous me faisiez apercevoir, j'entendais dire du bien de vous, tout le monde me parlait en votre faveur, vous faisiez tout ce qu'il fallait pour me donner de l'amour ; mais je suis, enfin, revenue de cet enchantement, vous m'avez donné de grands secours, et j'avoue que j'en avais un extrême besoin. (105)

Figuring herself as the innocent victim, whose inexperience made her an easy target for the chevalier's methods, Mariane can also admit the gravity of the offense: "mon remords me persécute avec une rigueur insupportable, je sens vivement la honte des crimes que vous m'avez fait commettre, et je n'ai plus, hélas! La passion qui m'empêchait d'en connaître l'énormité" (105). The insertion of the narrative of seduction borrowed from early modern sexual offense law seems to settle the question—how to name "cette absence"—which drives the writing of the letters and in turn to explain their cessation after letter 5. Mariane can stop writing once she has identified the truth of her experience by aligning it with contemporary understandings of the sexual offense of seduction.

However, the last line of the letters undoes this narrative containment. Mariane asks her lover, "suis-je obligé de vous rendre un compte exact de tous mes divers mouvements?" (177). The question of obligation once again recalls the nun's uncertainty surrounding her lover's infidelity. With the question, she asks again for clarification, for him to tell her the truth of his desire. The return of uncertainty, which undermines in the text even the early modern legal

interpretation of the event, gestures towards the ways in which the violence of seduction in the letters lies precisely in the failure of narrative to domesticate it.

What is perhaps most surprising about the absence of sexual violence from criticism on letters is what has instead preoccupied critics. In the critical history of the letters since their publication in 1669, the unknown provenance of the *Lettres portugaises* has served as the central focus. When the letters were first published, publisher Barbin labeled them "found letters," translated from Portuguese into French. Neither the identity of the addressee nor that of the translator were known:

> J'ai trouvé les moyens avec beaucoup de soin et de peine, de retrouver une copie correcte de la traduction de cinq Lettres Portugaises qui ont été écrites à un Gentilhomme de qualité, qui servait en Portugal… Je ne sais point le nom de celui auquel on les a écrites, ni de celui qui en a fait la traduction, mais il m'a semblé que je ne devais pas leur déplaire en les rendant publiques. (73)

Although Barbin never insists that the letters are really by a Portuguese nun (the "*on* les a écrites" seems actively to avoid making such a claim), the "Au Lecteur" and the letters' singular style convinced many seventeenth-century readers that they really were written by a Portuguese nun in the throes of her impassioned suffering. This initial hypothesis does not settle but only inaugurates centuries-long debates as to the true author of *Lettres portugaises*.[11]

Were the letters really written by the Portuguese nun Mariane, after she was seduced and abandoned by her French lover? Or are they the work of a literary genius, eventually identified as Guilleragues? Do they attest to the true tormented passion of a seduced woman? Or do they reveal, as Leo Spitzer claims, a "signification artistique," structurally comparable to that of classical tragedy in their unity, use of the first person and "l'arrière-plan," and exploration of the

human condition? The assumption that we must know the true identity of the author in order to know how to read the letters has suspended criticism over an abyss, an abyss which the letters themselves textually and thematically confront, though, as we will see, on a different front and to quite different conclusions.

In her contribution "Writing Like a Woman" to *Women and Language in Literature and Society,* Peggy Kamuf turns to the debates surrounding the author of *Lettres portugaises* in her effort to instruct fellow feminist literary critics on the risks of basing their understanding of "women's writing" on a tautology—as she puts it, "the reduction of the literary work to its signature and to the tautological assumption that a feminine 'identity' is one which signs itself with a feminine name […] Women's writing is writing by women" (285-6). Rather, through her reading of the literary debates that have surrounded *Lettres portugaises*, Kamuf will perform what she argues feminist criticism should be: "a way of reading texts that points to the masks of truth with which phallocentricism hides its fictions" (286). In the case of the letters, the mask of truth will be the author's name and the index of sexual identity.

Kamuf observes that "literary hermeneutics has found itself principally concerned—and not only in the instance we are considering—with grounding any system of interpretation in the presence of an author at the conception of the work" (289). To this extent, Kamuf argues, critics are concerned simply with who the author was, rather than "whether this text, or any text, can claim such a legitimate and traceable ancestry" (289). The search for a true author, Kamuf argues, leads Leo Spitzer not to a definitive (or indisputable) truth, but instead to a probable explanation that parades as truth. Analyzing this "probability" along the seventeenth-century aesthetic demand for *vraisemblance*, Kamuf brilliantly demonstrates how Spitzer's argument, which sets out to correct the naturalist criticism—re: contextual, referential, or historical—, by

an analysis of the letters' stylistic profile, in fact uses the literary criteria to make claims about a non-literary singular instance. Spitzer arrives at his conclusions of what *we would expect* a real nun to do and not to do through the logic of *vraisemblance*, which seeks "the universal principles of things where they are protected from the corruption of the materials and the singular"—(Kamuf citing Genette 292). However, the literary convention of *vraisemblance* precisely does not deal with what is really possible and impossible in the singular instance but with what is probable and proper. "Historical reality is not the model for *vraisemblance*," nor we might add is *vraisemblance* the model for historical reality (292).[12] Unable to establish the true father of the letters through pure formal literary analysis, Spitzer's contorts both literary categories and historical reality to make them serve his "naturalist" or referential argument about the author.

Kamuf asks, "insolently," if critics overlook such "logical distortions" because "the contrary hypothesis of 'authentic' letters offends not their sense of logic but their sense of propriety," a term which she links with probability through *vraisemblance* (294). Does, that is, the Guilleragues hypothesis serve to maintain and legitimize Spitzer's critical distance, protecting his authority as critic, from "*whatever* is shocking or scandalous in this text written (possibly) in a woman's hand" (294 [emphasis added])? "It is by placing a mediator—Guilleragues—between themselves and the Mariana of the letters that [critics] can confine or defuse *whatever* elements remain too unmediated" (294 [emphasis added]).

At stake in the critical debates over the letters is the very definition of the literary, the relationship between text and reality. Kamuf challenges Spitzer with another understanding of the literary than the "literary" by which he can claim to get to the truth, or rather, to ground the letters in a tradition and thereby to bestow them with legitimacy, truth, and final meaning. For Spitzer, the "force causant" is the author, who uses language as a tool to make the meaning he

intends. For Kamuf, on the other hand, a text must precisely be able to exceed an author's intended meaning in order to be able to mean at all. Language only means because it is able to be moved, graphed, cited, and repeated in what Jacques Derrida calls the radical or absolute absence of the author.[13] For Kamuf, it is not the author who uses language as a tool, but *language* that effectively uses the author as a tool in its machinic production of meaning. It is this that the provenance debates around the letters seek to conceal:

> To affix a signature—a determinate intentionality—to a text, whether as we read or as we write, is to attempt what Spitzer tries to do with this essay: contain an unlimited textual system, install a measure of protection between this boundlessness and one's own power to know, to be this power and to know that one is this point. (297)

Spitzer's claim to discover Guilleragues to be the true author of the *Lettres* serves to protect his own desire and claim to be the legitimate producer of truth. By fighting for another father's rights over his speculative progeny, Spitzer seeks not simply to protect Guilleragues, but also to protect and extend his own: the father of literary meaning, he who bestows upon a text that very status as literary. Kamuf's claim, on the other hand, is of and for the literary not as a determinate and self-enclosed system as Spitzer would have it be, but instead as a force that precedes both the critic and the author. What is scandalous in any text, and what makes any text the potential object of literary (in Kamuf's sense) analysis, is its ceaseless revelation of the unfoundedness of authority.

As Kamuf underscores at several moments, her argument about the excess of a text to any signature extends beyond *Lettres portugaises*. Kamuf's article utilizes the rich example of the provenance debates of *Lettres portugaises* to illustrate this general argument. However, it is to the extent that the letters serve as an example for Kamuf's generalizable deconstruction of the

belief that the intentions of the author can proffer or contain a text's meaning that Kamuf also misses "whatever is shocking and scandalous in *this* text (possibly) written by a woman's hand" (my emphasis). Kamuf does not elaborate on the specific ways that *Lettres portugaises* threatens by calling into question the legitimacy of the father, the author.

This leaves reader to wonder: Why have the *Lettres portugaises*, *in particular*, become caught up in the question of authorial truth? If, as the persistence of the enigma of the letters' provenance and Kamuf's arguments about the unlimited textual system demonstrate, no text can ever be proven absolutely to be the creation of an author and meaning always exceed the intentions of an author, why has the event of their writing become such a point of obsessional return? What specific limits or boundaries do the letters transgress that make their mysterious provenance particularly disconcerting and such a point of critical return? What is shocking and scandalous about them?

If the letters endlessly taunt readers with the question "How do we know who wrote a text and on what grounds can we claim to know this?" I would argue, they confront readers with this question of empirical verifiability not simply through the mystery enshrouding their author, but also through the story of seduction they tell. In the case of *Lettres portugaises,* the subject of the text—seduction—and its troublesome implications for our understandings of sexual violence intensifies the desire for an absolute truth. Significantly, the authorial debates surrounding *Lettres portugaises* parallel the problems of determining consent in modern sexual offense law. The impossible search for the true author correlates with that for consent in sexual offense law. In both cases, scholars search for absolute knowledge of an inner state: the intention of author and mental disposition a victim of sexual violence. In each case, this information is critical for determining the "signification exacte" of a text and a sexual act. In both instances the

impossibility of ever accessing such "truths" and the possibility that such truths cannot be said simply to *exist* is evaded by reducing the enigmatic inner state to external signs of it. Kamuf demonstrates how the example of the letters shows the truth of the author to be a mask behind which "phallocentricism hides its fictions." I will now point to the ways that the letters also show the truth of consent to be a mask behind which we hide the fictions of sexual offense.

Part II: Experience and Constitutive Misunderstanding

Although all criticism on the letters assumes them to be clear case of seduction, this conclusion is in fact not one of which Mariane herself is ever completely convinced. Rather than complain of the lover's certain infidelity, the letters struggle to name what has happened, which Mariane identifies in the first letter only as "cette absence, à laquelle ma douleur, toute ingénieuse qu'elle est, ne peut donner un nom assez funeste" (75). Although initially "cette absence" seems to refer to the physical absence of the lover, over the course of the letters Mariane progressively determines the absence from which she suffers to be that of the missing knowledge of the truth of the lover's intentions and feelings. "Si je pouvais connaître bien certainement que vous m'eussiez tout à fait oubliée," Mariane explains, she would be able to heal herself (84).

The absence of knowledge of the lover's intentions sets off and sustains the nun's writing. Over and over again, Mariane asks her lover *why*:

> Pourquoi n'y voulez-vous pas passer toute votre vie [à Portugal]? (77)

> Pourquoi vous vous êtes attaché à m'enchanter, comme vous avez fait, puisque vous saviez bien que vous deviez m'abandonner ? Et pourquoi avez-vous été si acharné à me

rendre malheureuse ? que ne me laissiez-vous en repos dans mon Cloître ? vous avais-je fait quelque injure ? (78)

Ah ! j'envie le bonheur d'Emanuel et de Francisque; pourquoi ne suis-je pas incessamment avec vous, comme eux ? (81)

Pourquoi faut-il qu'il soit possible que je ne vous verrai, peut-être, jamais ? M'avez-vous pour toujours abandonnée ? (82-83)

Pourquoi ne m'avez-vous point écrit ? (89)

Vous n'étiez point aveuglé, comme moi, pourquoi avez-vous donc souffert que je devinsse en l'état où je me trouve ? (90-91)

Pourquoi exercez-vous tant de rigueurs sur un cœur, qui est à vous ? (91)

Qu'est-ce que j'ai fait pour être si malheureuse ? Et pourquoi avez-vous empoisonné ma vie ? Que ne suis-je née en un autre Pays ? Adieu, pardonnez-moi ? Je n'ose plus vous prier de m'aimer ; voyez où mon destin m'a réduite ? (97)

Pourquoi m'avez-vous fait connaître l'imperfection et le désagrément d'un attachement qui ne doit pas durer éternellement, et les malheurs qui suivent un amour violent, lorsqu'il n'est pas réciproque, et pourquoi une inclination aveugle et une cruelle destinée

> s'attachent-elles, d'ordinaire, à nous déterminer pour ceux qui seraient sensibles pour quelque autre. (101)

The letters ask the lover why he has left, why he is treating Mariane so harshly, why he hasn't written, and why, knowing he would leave, he let her fall so completely in love with him. Though some of the questions in the letters are rhetorical, many more seem to be posed in earnest, as Mariane's attempt to make sense of what has happened, to understand what she belatedly realizes she 'missed' in the affair. The lover, according to Mariane's references to his letters, does not answer her questions, which incites only more questions still: "vous avais-je prié de me mander sincèrement la vérité?" (100).[14] How ought Mariane's obsession with knowing the lover's true intentions during and after the affair inflect our understanding of the violence of seduction in the letters?

Mariane certainly suspects that she has been seduced—suspects that the lover's true intention was to deceive her. However, the hypothesis that the lover acted in bad faith is notably first put forward not by Mariane herself but by "ma mauvaise fortune" in an apostrophe to Mariane early in the first letter:

> Cesse, cesse, Mariane infortunée, de te consumer vainement, et de chercher un Amant que tu ne verras jamais; qui a passé les Mers pour te fuir, qui est en France au milieu des plaisirs, qui ne pense pas un seul moment à tes douleurs, et qui te dispense de tous ces transports, desquels il ne te sait aucun gré ? (76)

The cause of the chevalier's departure is not familial obligation, as he claimed, mauvaise fortune speculates, but his desire to be rid of Mariane: he has fled her; he is not thinking of her; he is not grateful to her. Her current suffering is the result of his deception, his bad faith.

The mauvaise fortune apostrophe in the first letter is remarkable insofar as it calls attention to the effects sought by the address to the lover throughout the letters. In "Apostrophe," Jonathan Culler cites P.B. Shelley's assertion that the objects posited by apostrophe "are not signs of any actual difference subsisting between the assemblage of thoughts thus indicated but are merely marks employed to denote the different modifications of one mind" (148). The "internalization" of objects "brought together by apostrophe…as nodes or concretizations of states in a drama of mind" locates the apostrophized objects in a "special temporality which is the set of all moments at which writing can say 'now'," in the illusion of a detemporalized present of writing, the "temporality of discourse" (149). This sets apostrophe against "narrative and its accompaniments: sequentiality, causality, time, teleological meaning," against "referential temporality" (148, 150). As Culler explains, "apostrophe resists narrative because its *now* is not a moment in a temporal sequence but a now of discourse, of writing" (152).

Apostrophe's capacity to make the temporally absent object seem timelessly available to the poem, Culler argues,

> can be seen as the generative force behind a whole series of lyrics. One might identify, for example, as instances of the triumph of the apostrophic, poems which, in a very common move, substitute a fictional, non-temporal opposition for a temporal one, substitute a temporality of discourse for a referential temporality. In lyrics of this kind a temporal problem is posed: something once present has been lost or attenuated; this loss can be narrated but the temporal sequence is irreversible, like time itself. Apostrophes displace this irreversible structure by removing the opposition between presence and absence from empirical time and locating it in discursive time. The temporal movement

from A to B, internalized by apostrophe, becomes a reversible alternation between A' and B': a play of presence and absence governed not by time but by poetic power. (149-150)

Apostrophe can make reversible the irreversibility of referential time, make what is irreversibly lost present.

Several critics read the function of the lover in the letters along these lines. Linda Kauffman argues that the letters recount Mariane's progressive realization that the lover is a figure for her own desire. Produced as the apostrophic object, the chevalier externalizes a "modification of [Mariane's] one mind," her self-estranged desire. But, "[b]y the end of this second letter, the nun's desires have become more and more detached from the actual object… By the fourth letter the nun no longer need even to mail what she writes…By her fifth letter, she has so exorcised him that Mariane can clearly distinguish between the chevalier and her passion" (112-113).

Indeed, throughout the letters, Mariane locates the cause of her suffering not only in the actions or intentions of her lover, *but also* in her own inclination, her desire. She is not coerced or forced into compliance with the chevalier's desire; she enthusiastically partakes, seeking her own pleasure—the word "plaisir" appears 28 times in the letters.[15] Mariane herself goes so far at moments as to place the birth of her passion anterior to any instigation of the lover: "Je vous ai destiné ma vie aussitôt que je vous ai vu : et je sens quelque plaisir en vous la sacrifiant" (75-76).[16] In letter 2 she writes that though the lover consumed, inflamed, and charmed her, her own violent inclination seduced her: "Vous m'avez consommée par vos assiduités, vous m'avez enflammée par vos transports, vous m'avez charmée par vos complaisances, vous m'avez assurée par vos serments, *mon inclination violente m'a séduite*" (90 [emphasis added]). Even to the

suffering that follows the end of the affair, Mariane repeatedly consents in order to prolong her passion:

> Je vois bien que je vous aime, comme une folle : cependant je ne me plains point de toute la violence des mouvements de mon cœur, je m'accoutume à ses persécutions, et je ne pourrais vivre sans un plaisir, que je découvre, et dont je jouis en vous aimant au milieu de mille douleurs. (92)

> Je connais dans le moment que je vous écris, que j'aime bien mieux être malheureuse en vous aimant que de ne vous avoir jamais vu; je consens donc sans murmure à ma mauvaise destinée, puisque vous n'avez pas voulu la rendre meilleure. (87)

> Je vous remercie dans le fond de mon cœur du désespoir que vous me causez, et je déteste la tranquillité, où j'ai vécu, avant que je vous connusse. (88)

She famously wishes not for relief from but for more suffering (and from it, pleasure) still:

> Aimez-moi toujours ; et faites-moi souffrir encore plus de maux. (78)

> [J]e voudrais du meilleur de mon cœur, avoir couru pour l'amour de vous de plus grands dangers, et que j'ai un plaisir funeste d'avoir hasardé ma vie et mon honneur ; tout ce que j'ai de plus précieux, ne devait-il pas être en votre disposition? (86)

In fact, in letter 4, Mariane consents not only to the suffering wrought by the lover's departure belatedly but recalls announcing to her lover her anticipation of her current suffering and taking

only more pleasure from self-sacrifice: “Je me souviens pourtant de vous avoir dit quelquefois que vous me rendriez malheureuse: mais ces frayeurs étaient bientôt dissipées, et je prenais plaisir à vous les sacrifier, et à m'abandonner à l'enchantement, et à la mauvaise foi de vos protestations” (80).

In Kauffman’s reading, the letters record a process of self-discovery—Mariane’s discovery of her own desire. Recovery (the literally cessation of her epistolary enterprise) comes when Mariane can reintegrate the desire into herself, rather than externalizing (apostrophizing) it in the lover. The problem was never his feelings, Mariane realizes through writing, but her own. Mariane, Kauffman argues, “finally discovered that [the lover] did not invent her or her beauty; he possessed her, but the traits he found in her were there all along… Mariane simultaneously achieves her desire for recognition and recognizes her desire” (116). However, in this reading, the truth of Mariane’s desire is precisely her *desirability*. Of course, one can desire to be desired. However, in Mariane’s case, if her desire is indeed to be desired, rather than “recovery,” her discovery of her true desire would send Mariane back to the unresolved question of lover’s true desire: his feelings and intentions during and after the affair.

In order to arrive at a unified narrative of the letters qua Mariane’s self-discovery, Kauffman must in fact resolve an irresolvable problem that the seduction unleashes and overlook the traces the irresolution of seduction leaves in the text. The persistent vacillation between Mariane’s figurations of herself as victim and enthusiastic participant underscores the ways in which the impossibility of assessing the lover’s intentions, of knowing for certain whether she was in reciprocal love or was seduced, makes it impossible for Mariane to know how to remember the affair, how to *have* experienced it, how to relate to the feelings—even her own—and the events that she only belatedly realizes she *may* have mis-understood. Mariane does not

even know if she was, *in fact*, seduced and her inability to classify the affair as either ill-fated love or seduction prevents her from relating to the affair as either a participating, desiring subject or an abused victim.[17] To relate to her own desire, Mariane insists, she must know the truth of another's.

If we read the apostrophe to the lover in light of Mariane's search for true knowledge of his intentions, the extended apostrophe to the lover in the letters might be an attempt to internalize the lover, thus collapsing the gap of difference between self and other. The letters, lyrical apostrophes to the other, strive through the fiction of writing to make the temporality of seduction—the irreversible movement from presence to absence (both physical and mental)—reversible. What seems to be the hopeless address to a real, irreversibly lost lover would actually be the creation of him, an apostrophic prosopopeia that through which Mariane would gain full access to the other's presence (both physical and mental) that the seduction reveals she never had in the first place. The apostrophe, in these readings, would serve to cure Mariane of her suffering by rhetorically mastering unknowable desire. Through apostrophe, Mariane can produce for herself certain, if fictional, knowledge of the lover's intentions and subsequently give a name to "cette absence:" seduction.

However the second apostrophic speaker in the first letter, mauvaise fortune, works against this reading by calling Mariane's attention to its fiction. Although in the apostrophe's subfiction Mariane is the object rather than the speaker—a projection or internalization of her bad fortune—the voice of *mauvaise fortune* is Mariane's own. Not only is Mariane the "true" author of the mauvais fortune, but even within the fiction of the letter, mauvaise fortune in fact translates its warning from Mariane's sighs, which return from their search for the lover empty-handed: "J'envoie mille fois le jour mes soupirs vers vous, il vous cherche en tous lieux, et ils ne

me rapportent, pour toute récompense de tant d'inquiétudes, qu'un avertissement trop sincère que me donne ma mauvaise fortune, qui a la cruauté de ne souffrir pas que je me flatte" (76). The sorrowful sighs that Mariane sends into "cette absence" echo back to her. Unlike Narcissus, who only hears the voice of another in his own echo, Mariane suspects the echo to be the return of her own expression of suffering and not that of another.[18] The absence, which produces the echo, inscribes itself on the echo, taunting Mariane with the difference that divides not only her and her lover, but herself.[19]

By making herself both the subject and object of apostrophe, Mariane figures for herself the fictional nature of the knowledge of the lover's intentions that she might discover by apostrophizing him. Mauvaise fortune reveals to Mariane the mechanism by which she attempts to internalize the lover, collapse the gap of their radical difference, know his inner states, and in turn locate and experience the event of seduction. The mauvaise fortune apostrophe figures for Mariane the fictional status of the apostrophic project of the letters. In this way, mauvaise fortune's apostrophe, and in turn the apostrophe to the lover in the letters more generally, fails to produce a compelling fiction of the lover's intentions for Mariane. The apostrophe fails to produce the truth Mariane needs to end the seduction's violence.

When Mariane returns as the speaker of the letter after the apostrophe by mauvaise fortune, she indeed rejects the fiction she has set about producing, insisting that seduction—if it is indeed predicated on the lover's bad intentions—cannot be proven in this way. Responding to mauvaise fortune only indirectly, shifting the address back to the lover, Mariane explains that she still lacks true knowledge of her lover's intentions:

> Mais non, je ne puis me résoudre à juger si injurieusement de vous, et je suis trop intéressée à vous justifier: Je ne veux point m'imaginer que vous m'avez oubliée. Ne suis-

> je pas assez malheureuse sans me tourmenter par de faux soupçons ? Et pourquoi ferais-je des efforts pour ne me plus souvenir de tous les soins que vous avez pris de me témoigner de l'amour? J'ai été si charmée de tous ces soins, que je serais bien ingrate, si je ne vous aimais avec les mêmes emportements, que ma Passion me donnait, quand je jouissais des témoignages de la vôtre. (76)

The pronominal verbs *se résoudre* and *s'imaginer*, of which Mariane is both the subject and object, underscore the extent to which any conclusion of seduction produced by the letters would not give her access to the actual intentions of the lover, but result from Mariane's own creative, interpretive act. Why should she "[faire] des efforts pour ne me plus souvenir de tous les soins que vous avez pris de me témoigner de l'amour?" And more troubling, how, when she no longer knows how to remember them?

Curiously, the expression "je vois bien que…" appears at the head of Mariane's subsequent attempts to posit the truth of her situation:

> [J]e vois bien que la moindre excuse vous suffit, et sans que vous preniez le soin de m'en faire, l'amour que j'ai pour vous vous sert si fidèlement, que je ne puis consentir à vous trouver coupable. (90)

> [J]e vois bien que vous êtes aussi facile à vous laisser persuader contre moi, que je l'ai été à me laisser persuader en votre faveur. (91)

> [J]e vois bien que je vous aime, comme une folle. (92)

> [J]e vois bien que vous demeurerez en France sans de grands plaisirs, avec une entière liberté ; la fatigue d'un long voyage, quelque petite bienséance, et la crainte de ne répondre pas à mes transports, vous retiennent : Ah ! ne m'appréhendez point ? (94)
>
> [J]e ne sais pourquoi je vous écris, je vois bien que vous aurez seulement pitié de moi, et je ne veux point de votre pitié. (86)
>
> [J]e vois bien le remède à tous mes maux, et j'en serais bientôt délivrée si je ne vous aimais plus : mais hélas ! quel remède ; non, j'aime mieux souffrir davantage, que vous oublier. (80-81)

Like the mauvais fortune apostrophe, what Mariane can "see very well" does not arrest the compulsion to posit more truths, does not put an end to the missives she passionately fires off at her lover. Instead, the infelicitous repetition of the rhetorical "je vois bien que" points to the experiential crisis that the seduction produces. The very possibility that the external signifiers (particularly visual sights) can determine the truth of mauvaise fortune's seduction hypothesis—the hypothesis of the lover's bad faith—has been called into question by the seduction. How is Mariane to determine whether the lover's "témoignages" were, as they seemed, the manifestations of true transports or mere counterfeits when she precisely cannot witness the difference, when the two can look identical?

If, during the affair, Mariane believed in the absolute correspondence of insides and outsides—believed that the lover's perceptible acts reflected the truth of his inner state—after her lover's departure, the fictional nature of this correspondence is made apparent. The lover's prior "témoignages," which Mariane took to be indicative of his love are shown to be *also*

indicative of his betrayal. Rather than a new intended meaning, Mariane is faced with multiple meanings. Her perceptions—from the seemingly loving gestures to the returned sounds of the lonely echo of her own sighs and the visual absence of the lover—are shown to have no "natural" relationship with the inner state of the one from whom the proceed. The words and acts that Mariane thought to be clear indications of *an* intention are retroactively shown to be floating signifiers, capable of taking on multiple and conflicting meanings. Appearances cannot even be said to have definitively mislead Mariane, but only at best to have *apparently* misled her.

The impossibility of assessing the lover's intentions through external signs significantly precipitates the undoing of Mariane's entire understanding of the relationship between her perceptions and "reality" and marks, in the text, a key aspect of the violence of the seduction. Her discovery of her absolute inability to know her lover's inner state contaminates her certainty of her own inner state. Mariane becomes incapable of knowing even herself: "Je ne sais, ni ce que je suis, ni ce que je fais, ni ce que je désire : je suis déchirée par mille mouvements contraires" (85).[20] Her inner state, which the reader might at first assume she can know, is made just as vulnerable to retrospective constructions as she discovers the lover's to be. The conflict between past and current appearances introduces a crisis not only as to what the Chevlier's true intentions were, but as to whether, behind each act, there *is* such a thing as a singular true intention.

The effects on Mariane of seduction's destruction of intentions leave traces throughout the text. These traces are, interestingly, inscribed in narrative temporality. In the opening to letter 4, Mariane posits again her lover's mistreatment, when a reference to seeing him resolved to leave her occasions a slip into the *passé simple*, followed by shift to self-recrimination:

> [V]ous ne devriez pas me maltraiter, comme vous faites, par un oubli, qui me met au désespoir, et qui est même honteux pour vous; il est bien juste au moins, que vous souffriez que je me plaigne des malheurs, que j'avais bien prévus, quand je vous *vis* résolu de me quitter; je connais bien que je me suis abusée, lorsque j'ai pensé, que vous auriez un procédé de meilleure foi, qu'on n'a accoutumé d'avoir. (79)

In this passage, *voir* takes the *passé simple* while the past-tense verbs around it are in the *passé composé*. The *passé simple* in French is today referred to as the historical, or literary past, a written but not spoken tense similar to the *passé composé*, or the simple past in English.

In "L'Épistolaire, à la letter," Gérard Ferreyrolles points to the use of *passé simple* in Mme de Sévigné's seventeenth-century letters to write "avec la distance de l''historienne'" (8). "Mais quand elle parle en témoin," he explains,

> elle emploie le parfait […] La forme autobiographique […] recourt par excellence, dans la relation des événements passés, au parfait, qui établit un contact entre le fait advenu et le présent de son évocation. Le parfait, dit Benveniste, est "le temps que choisira quiconque veut faire retentir jusqu'à nous l'événement rapporté et le rattacher à notre présent", ce qui est la posture primordiale de l'épistolier au moment où il entre en récit. (8)

In "Nouvelles données sur la concurrence du *passé simple* et du *passé composé* dans la littérature épistolaire," Philippe Caron and Yu-Chang Liu argue similarly that although the *passé simple* can be used in cases in which the action bears on the present, the use of the *passé simple* seems, in the letters they analyze, to mark a distancing of the event from the present moment of writing : "Or le français classique offrait encore au *passé simple* l'occasion de se déployer jusque dans les

genres embrayés : il s'agissait de procès passés ressentis par le locuteur comme appartenant à un temps révolu" (41).

The use of the *passé simple* in the phrase "que j'avais prévu quand je vous vis résolu de me quitter" signals a greater temporal distance between Mariane and what she sees here and the other events described in the *passé composé* in this scene. Although initially the reader assumes that Mariane refers to the moment when the lover actually left, the temporal distancing of the *passé simple* shifts emphasis away from *quitter* and onto *résolu*, away from a perceptible, temporal event onto imperceptible and detemporalized intentions. The *passé simple vis* underscores that Mariane herself did not *see* that the lover *intended* to leave her, did not and could not directly witness this: she can only witness the act, his actual leaving. The temporal decoupling of the lover's intention to leave her from the present of writing underscores Mariane's inability to locate the seduction in a past sensual experience. This inability is syntactically figured in the shift from the positing of the lover's intentions to self-recrimination, from "vous ne devriez pas me maltraiter, comme vous faites" to "je connais bien que je me suis abusée."[21]

That the seduction is textual marked as unexperienced places it in relation to experience that is conceptualized in the modern period as trauma. In Freud's theory of trauma, traumatic neurosis—the experience of repetitive hallucinations, dreams, flashbacks, and other "revivifications" of a threatening event—does not in fact result from the *experience* of the threatening event. Instead, Cathy Caruth explains in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, trauma results when the experience of a threatening event is *missed*. The trauma causing event is missed not because of the quantity of the stimulus (its violence or force), but because "the threat is recognized as such by the mind *one moment too late*. The shock of the

mind's relation to the threat of death is thus not the direct experience of the threat, but precisely the *missing* experience, the fact that, not being experience *in time*, it has not yet been fully known (Caruth 62). To this extent, the symptom of traumatic neurosis, the reliving of the threatening event, "is not the signal of the direct experience but, rather, of the attempt to overcome the fact that it was *not* direct, to attempt to master what was never fully grasped in the first place" (62). Because the experience of the threat is missed, trauma does not so much name the first instance as the later experiences that repeat, in various ways, the missed and missing of experience. In an interview with Caruth, Jean Laplanche explains that "trauma, in order to be psychic trauma, never comes simply from outside. That is, even in the first moment it must be internalized, and then afterwards relived, revivified, in order to become an internal trauma. That's the meaning of [Freud's] theory that trauma consists of two moments" (Caruth interview with Laplanche 1994, my italics).

Mariane might indeed be said to suffer from traumatic neurosis, a term which, incidentally, first arose in relation to childhood sexual abuse. In this reading, the letters would not serve to prolong the affair and deny the lover's certain rejection, as critics often assume, but instead to "to overcome the fact that" the seduction "was *not* direct, to attempt to master what was never fully grasped in the first place" (Caruth 62). A scene in which Mariane recounts the experience of being "frappée par un souvenir cruel" during a walk with Dona Brites suggests the specific ways in which the experience of seduction might be understood as missed in the letters.

In this scene, Dona Brites has persuaded Mariane to leave her bedroom (where, she has confined herself so as to dwell in the space in which she experienced her Passion). The two take a walk around the convent, which comes to an abrupt halt on a balcony overlooking Martola (the famous balcony that "external" research on the text utilizes both to prove and disprove the "real

nun" hypothesis). During her walk with Dona Brites, Mariane is struck by the cruel memory of watching her lover from the balcony before they had met. It was on the balcony, Mariane explains, where she felt the first effects of her ill-fated passion:

> Dona Brites me persécuta ces jours passés pour me faire sortir de ma chambre, et croyant me divertir, elle me mena promener sur le Balcon, d'où l'on voit Mertola ; je la suivis, et je fus aussitôt frappée d'un souvenir cruel, qui me fit pleurer tout le reste du jour : elle me ramena, et je me jetai sur mon lit, où je fis mille réflexions sur le peu d'apparence que je *vois* de guérir jamais: ce qu'on fait pour me soulager aigrit ma douleur, et je retrouve dans les remèdes mêmes des raisons particulières de m'affliger: je vous *ai vu* souvent passer en ce lieu avec un air qui me charmait, et j'étais sur ce Balcon le jour fatal que je commençai à sentir les premiers effets de ma Passion malheureuse : il me sembla que vous vouliez me plaire, quoique vous ne me connussiez pas : je me persuadai que vous m'aviez remarquée entre toutes celles qui étaient avec moi, je m'imaginai que lorsque vous vous arrêtiez, vous étiez bien aise que je vous visse mieux, et j'admirasse votre adresse, et votre bonne grâce, lorsque vous poussiez votre cheval, j'étais surprise de quelque frayeur lorsque vous le faisiez passer dans un endroit difficile : enfin je m'intéressais secrètement à toutes vos actions, je sentais bien que vous ne m'étiez point indifférent, et je prenais pour moi tout ce que vous faisiez. (93-4)

Shifting from the more prevalent monologue style of the letters to a narration of the walk and the memory of seeing the lover, the letter makes a (nearly) systematic shift from the present and *passé composé* to the *passé simple*.[22] Using the *passé simple*, Mariane recounts the event not as direct experience—as memories—but "avec la distance de l''historienne'," as if the experience belonged to someone other than herself.

The *passé simple* with which Mariane narrates the walk she takes with Dona Brites significantly continues into the narration of the memory: "le jour fatal que je *commençai* à sentir les premiers effets de ma Passion malheureuse." Rather than shifting into the *passé antérieur*, the tense which would indicate that the fatal day took place prior to the day on which Mariane was walking with Dona Brites, the narration of both the walk and the *souvenir cruel* instead remain in the same past time. It is as if the events recounted in the memory, despite the fact that they are called a memory, themselves took place in the very same time as the walk, and at the same remove from Mariane's own memory of her experience. The memory's force is equated with a sudden physical assault; the verb *frapper* literally means to hit, or to beat. In this way, the memory takes a form and temporality similar to a traumatic flashback, which is not experienced as the memory of a past events, but as the living of the event itself in the present. It is not temporally differentiated as an anterior recollection, but collapsed into the very past present of the narration.[23]

However, one component of the "souvenir cruel" stands out, and it stands out insofar as it seems to be the only thing Mariane recounts from her own experience: "je vous ai vu souvent passer en ce lieu avec un air qui me charmait." The verb *voir* again occasions a temporal shift in the letters: the recollection of the sight of the lover shifts the text from the detemporalized *now* of writing (notably occasioned by the shift to present when Mariane "vois" "le peu d'appearances …de guérir jamais) back to the referential time of narrative. *J'ai vu*, however, marks not only a shift back to the past, but also of Mariane's relation to the past. The sight of the lover returns the narrative not only to the past, but to another modality within it: *voir* is conjugated in the *passé composé*, *j'ai vu*, rather than in the *passé simple*, *je vis*, or, more likely given the "souvent," in the *imparfait*, *je voyais*. Unlike the missed experience of seeing the lover *resolved* to leave her

implied by *passé simple* in "je vous *vis* résolu de me quitter," the *passé composé* "je vous ai vu en ce lieu avec un air qui me charmait" recounts seeing in "la forme autobiographique […] qui établit un contact entre le fait advenu et le présent de son évocation" (Ferreyrolles 8).

Having discovered through the flashback an event which, the *passé composé* suggests, she *did* experience—the sight of her lover that first charms her prior to the seduction—has Mariane discovered the truth of her own desire, a moment in which she can locate the truth of her desire *before* its undoing that constitutes the violence of her seduction? In what follows, Mariane indeed attempts to locate temporally, and thereby experience the missed experience of seduction. However, the attempt to locate the seduction within experience, in the referential time of narrative that follows, precipitates a shift back into the *passé simple*. Placing her direct experience of seeing the lover's natural charm, an experience thought to be *before* the seduction, in the proximity of seduction's detemporalizing, disruptive force reveals that Mariane's passion was already *malheureuse*, already unhappy. The experience of seeing is *reduced* to seeming, persuading, and imagining: "Il me sembla que vous vouliez me plaire," "je me persuadai que vous m'aviez remarquée entre toutes celles qui était avec moi," "j'imaginai que…vous étiez bien aise que je vous visse mieux." Already, Mariane's *inclination* is caught up with her lover's intentions in being seen by her. Critically, the intentions and feelings from which the *passé simple* distances Mariane in this scene are not only those of her lover, but also her own: "le jour fatal que *je commencai* à sentir les premiers effets de *ma* Passion malheureuses."

Indeed, the lover's desire is made prior to Mariane's own: "vous m'aviez remarquée" is in the plus-que-parfait, the anterior past. In this way, when Mariane concludes by explaining, "je prenais pour moi tout ce que vous faisiez," we might read this to mean not only that she thinks everything he does is for her, or that she takes possession of everything he does as her own, but

also that she mistakes (méprendre) all that he does *as* her. The specific trauma of seduction, this scene suggests, is a not only a moment missing from experience, but an impossible experience of the mis-understanding consitutive of experience.[24] Seduction in the letters is depicted not only as both a violation by another and by the self, but also a violation of the notion of truth upon which self and other are founded. Mariane does not discover the truth of her lover's past intentions and desires, or even the truth her own; rather, she discovers an absence, a constitutive uncertainty with which reconciles herself in the final letter: She entreats her lover in the final letter, "Ne m'ôtez point de mon incertitude; j'espère que j'en ferai, avec le temps, quelque chose de tranquille" (100).

To this extent, the end of the text might not be a certain sign of Mariane's recovery, as Kauffman and others claim, but her abandonment of a strategy that is shown from the very start to be incapable of providing Mariane the knowledge she needs to recover, to recover her belief in truth. Uncertainty persists to the letters' end as both the cause and the only hopeful remedy to Mariane's suffering. Rather than a resolution to the problem of intention through a determination of the lover's true intentions, the letters figure the narrative (experiential) interruptions that result from Marine's discovery of the unknowability of intention.

The modern, simple opposition between rape and seduction, which seems in part to guide the silence on the subject of sexual violence in contemporary literary criticism on *Lettres portugaises*, covers over the complexities of consent that the proximity of seduction and rape pose to our understanding of sexual violence, both within the letters and in real cases of sexual offense. The question that seduction poses to the modern consent-based understanding of rape is precisely what it means to consent. Can one, for instance, really consent to something to which they do not know they are consenting? And if the consent wrought by seduction doesn't quite

"count" as consent, then should the sex attained through seduction be considered legal or illegal sex? And when this possibility is shown, as it is in the letters, to be generalizable, should all sex be illegal? The seduction in *Lettres portugaises* does not propose a solution to these modern legal dilemma seduction presents to consent-based sexual offenses. Rather, the letters speak to the experiential problems that consent, intentions, and desire present for victims. Mariane's determination to maintain her "incertitude" perhaps suggests the violence of the legal pursuit of truth and the reasons why we may want to reconsider how we translate into sexual offense law the disseminative violence of sexual violence.

Rather than insist, as we might find in modern conceptions of rape, that consent is a knowable or delineable truth, the violence that this text figures as a sexual violation is first and foremost an attack on the very temporal locatability of the experience of its violation. The peculiar sexual violence at issue in *Lettres portugaises* takes as its central focus a problematizing of intention, which can be neither domesticated according to a legal formula or calculation of consent nor dismissed for its failure to align with reigning conceptions of sexual offenses. Ultimately, the specific reasons for which "knowing what happened" in sexual violence is difficult are not simply because the law is not able to get to the "truth." Sexual violence does not simply suffer from a belated problem of truth but *is* this belated violence that precisely interrupts and disarticulates any narrative attempts to locate its "truth."

The seduction in the letters, on this point, while aligning with Jean Baudrillard's post-modern reflection in *De la seduction* also gesture towards a certain violence that lurks behind the celebratory tone. In seduction, Baudrillard argues, "[t]here is no active or passive mode […], no subject or object, no interior or exterior: seduction plays on both sides, and there is no frontier separating them. One cannot seduce others, if one has not oneself been seduced" (81). It is

because of this that Baudrillard celebrates seduction as the force that "takes from discourse its sense and turns it from its truth" (57). Seduction's revelation that there is only surface, only "the superficial abyss of appearances," topples "the shroud of hidden meanings and of a hidden excess of meaning" (57).[25] However *Lettres portugaises* suggests that insofar as the violence of seduction is one against the violence of truth discourses, the resulting irreducible uncertainty has devastating consequences for the self, a problem which plagues a seventeenth-century Portugeuse nun and late-capitalist subject alike.[26]

Lettres portugaises illuminates the ways in which modern understandings of sexual violence, when reduced to legal sexual offenses, domesticate its violence by producing a fiction in which the violence takes place in a discrete and locatable event. The distinction I am drawing here is between sexual violence and sexual offences. I am, as such, not arguing that there is no such thing as sexual violence, but that sexual violence exceeds sexual offenses, particularly as they are currently anchored in consent. In legal sexual offenses, the inability to determine whether a sexual act was consensual or nonconsensual is an interpretive problem. As the letters show, however, the difficulties of "locating" the event of sexual violence is not secondarily imposed on it by the limits and demands of the law but is instead a defining element of its specific violence. Though we may decide for the time being to retain the truth and consent-based understanding of sexual violence in the law, we must also consider the ways that sexual violence exceeds such legal determinations of it and consider how other understandings of the specificity of sexual violence might impact our legal, social, and medical responses to sexual violence in the future.

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[1] Faced with the dismal answer to this question—that there is no physical evidence that can prove in each case if an act was sex or rape— cultural feminist and legal theorist Robin West has recently argued in "Sex, Law, and Consent" for a restricted definition of rape. West argues that

the broad understanding of rape as sex without consent, independent of questions of the use of physical violence, has resulted in an unprosecutable crime.

[2] Although the letters make reference to trite responses from the lover, his letters are not included in the collection.

[3] The word "violence" and its adjectival forms appear nine times in the letters; "malheur" and its adjectival forms twenty-seven times, "souffrir" sixteen times, "douleurs" eighteen times, and "peine" six times. They open with Mariane's certainty that the discovery of the seduction will result in her death: "Hélas ! [mes yeux] sont privés de la seule lumière qui les animait, il ne leur reste que des larmes, et je ne les ai employés à aucun usage, qu'à pleurer sans cesse, depuis que j'appris que vous étiez enfin résolu à un éloignement, qui m'est si insupportable, qu'il me fera mourir en peu de temps" (75). Her suffering is not only internally imposed, Mariane explains, but externally as well: "j'ai perdu ma réputation, je me suis exposée à la fureur de mes parents, à la sévérité des lois de ce Pays contre les Religieuses" (86).

[4] For more on the prosecution of seduction in nineteenth-century US, particularly the relationship between the prosecution of sexual offenses and liberalism, see Pamela Haag's *Consent: Sexual Rights and the Transformation of American Liberalism*.

[5] The state of Michigan stands as an exception to the exclusion of seduction from sexual offense laws. In Michigan (as well as a few other states), charges of seduction have recent been used to pursue the prosecution of sexual offenses outside of the criminal court. However, these laws are anything but progressive. Michigan's *still active* tort seduction law reads: "Any man who shall seduce and debauch any unmarried woman shall be guilty of a felony, punishable by imprisonment in the state prison not more than 5 years or by fine of not more than 2,500 dollars; but no prosecution shall be commenced under this section after 1 year from the time of committing the offense."

[6] I will return to this conception of the seducer in my discussion of *Les Liaisons dangereuses* in chapter 3.

[7] This does not necessarily mean that seduction is not potentially harmful. Instead, seduction would seem to point to the limits of the consensual/nonconsensual distinction in the law conception of sexual violence. Work by both legal and queer theorists has been heading in this direction of sexual offense law reform. See in particular Janet Halley's *Split Decisions: How and Why to Take a Break from Feminism*.

[8] Although absolute innocence is not a legal requirement for the prosecution of sexual offenses in modern law, it certainly increases the odds of a conviction.

[9] Intriguingly, this was the case just as much for men as for women in early modern France. Cases of abduction, seduction, and rape are brought against women and men by guardians who claimed that their child was led astray. One remained under the charge of a parent until 18 for women and 20 for men, until 1556 when the ages were raised to 25 and 30, respectively.

[10] The crime of seduction was similarly treated in early modern Portugal. See Darlene Abrue-Ferreira's *Women, Crime, and Forgiveness in Early Modern Portugal*.

[11] Readers from Madame de Sevigné, the seventeenth-century *épistolaire* extraordinaire, to Canadian actress Miriam Cyr, author of a 2002 quest to uncover the true Portuguese nun, have been convinced that the self-abandonment, desperation, masochism, and sheer passion expressed by the letters could only result from true feelings. But other readers, particularly Leo Spitzer in his 1954 article "Les *Lettres portugaises*," have found in the letters not a chaotic search for self-expression but instead a calculated work of fiction, constrained even in its excessiveness, deftly exploring the passions of the human psyche, but always at the safe remove of fiction, in which

the five letters—five acts?—complete the dialectical movement, sublimating self-abandon into self-knowledge. The literary criticism on the *Lettres* since the early 1900's has approached the enigma of the letters' provenance from two directions relative to the text: external and internal.

The external research seeks to determine the author of the letters through historical analysis: by making pilgrimages to Portugal to confirm their few geographical references to the convent and by poring through the military and Church archives, first editions copies of the letters, and the Privilèges du roi for the text. Both the "real nun" and "Guilleragues auteur des *Lettres portugaises*" hypotheses have found support in external historical documents. In 1669 the lover was identified as Noel Bouton, the Chevalier de Chamilly and the translator was identified as Guilleragues. In 1810, the nun's name was discovered in a copy of the first edition of the letters; she was Mariana Alcoforada and had lived at the Convent of the Conception in Béja, Portugal during the time when the affair would have taken place. On the other hand, in "Who Was the Author of the Portuguese Letters?" published in 1926, F.C. Green underscored inconsistencies between the letters and the "facts" that had been discovered. He notes, for instance, that one cannot see Metrola from the balcony on the Convent of the Conception in Béja, as the letters claim. But the strongest evidence in favor of "Guilleragues auteur des *Lettres portugaises*" was Green's discovery of the original Privilège du roi at the Bibliothèque nationale, which named Guilleragues the author and not the translator of the letters.

The "external" research severed only to deepen the enigma surrounding the letters' provenance; the "internal" scholarship seemed unsurprised, arguing that neither the existence of the nun, the name of the lover and the identification of the convent from which she wrote nor the inconsistencies in the external references or the Privilège du roi would ever supply absolute proof as to whether a nun or Guilleragues wrote the letters.[11] As Frederic Deloffre and Jacques Rougeot explain in their "Histoire des *Lettres*" which precedes their 1972 publication of the text,

> Il est vrai qu'à un certain égard une enquête menée de l'extérieur et dans une perspective uniquement historique ne pouvait aller au-delà d'un certain point. Même si on découvrait un document ancien désignant formellement Guilleragues comme l'auteur et non le traducteur des Lettres—ce qui advint un peu plus tard, comme on l'a vu, par la mise au jour du texte de Bruzen de La Martiniere—, il restait toujours possible d'arguer qu'il n'avait fait qu'exploiter des lettres authentiques. (83)

If literary research is based only on an exterior, historical study of a text, no certainty can be achieved. There is, "internal" research argues, only one way to halt the speculation. It is only by shifting critical attention away from the contingency of historical analysis towards "la signification exacte" of a text "qui nous permettra de remontrer aux forces causants" (Spitzer 94, cited by Deloffre and Rougeot).

The "internal" research establishes the "exact meaning" of the letters by examining them alongside Guilleragues' other published and unpublished works, both of which are notably "éclairés par ce que nous savons de leur auteur." This research, Deloffre and Rougeot triumphantly announce,

> [d]ésormais, laissent transparaitre les traits que les contemporains avaient observés en Guilleragues, érudition et gout, humour et sensibilité, tandis que les constantes de syntaxes, de vocabulaire et de rythme relevés dans son style *suffiraient à elles seules* à lui faire reconnaitre la paternité des *Lettres portugaises*. En un mot, la convergence de tous les critères externes et internes, jointe à l'absence de tout indice divergent, permettent de conclure, comme l'avait fait M. Antoine Adam des 1962: "Guilleragues auteur des *Lettres portugaises*: il n'est plus permis d'en douter." (93)

The internal study will reveal, Spitzer, Deloffre, and Rougeot claim, the unity of a "force causant," the signature of an artist that hides behind every work of art. Internal analysis will thereby allow us to rise out of the text and into the external reality of its creation. It is to this extent that internal research on the letters shares with external research the ultimate goal of transcending the letters themselves to rise (*remonter*) to their external causes (*force causant*).

The research on the letters, whether external or internal, and the importance it places on knowing the identity of the author assumes a causal relationship between an author's intentions and a text's meaning. If the letters really were written by a real nun, then they are "real" and not fiction; this will shape how they should be read. On the other hand, if the letters really were written by Guilleragues then they are literature; and this will shape how they should be read. It is on this point (how the designation of the author should shape both reading practices and the meanings attributed to texts) that the debates surrounding the letter's provenance come into view of feminist literary critics. Are the *Lettres portugaises* to be counted, despite their enigmatic provenance, as "women's writing?"

[12] For an excellent study of the role of *vraisemblance* in absolutist ideology (particularly with respect to the convergence between the probably and the proper), see Thomas DiPiero's *Dangerous Truths, Criminal Fictions*.

[13] For Derrida's argument concerning writing, context, and authorial intention, see "Signe Evénement Contexte."

[14] One wonders however, given the absence of the chevalier's responses, whether any clear statements as to his intentions would have been able to arrest her uncertainty in the affair.

[15] For another perspective on desire in *Lettres portugaises*, see Kamuf's *Fictions of Feminine Desire*.

[16] Kauffman points to Mariane's inconsistency as to when her passion first arises: "In retrospect, she establishes a beginning, middle, and end to the affair: it becomes a story. She declares, 'From the moment I first saw you my life was yours, and somehow I take pleasure in sacrificing it to you' (339). The nun has turned her first view of the chevalier into an event, a scene that is 'fiction' in both senses of the word, a story and a lie, for a few pages later she contradicts herself by noting that, although she was charmed when she first saw the chevalier, the 'first stirring of …passion' came not on that first day but later (345). Thus the phenomenon of love at first sight is an invention after the fact" (101).

[17] Of course, these are not, ultimately the only two options and these positions are not mutually exclusive. However, throughout the letters, Mariane waivers between these two positions, never reconciling them, but only showing them to be suspended in so far as they are rendered undecidable by the seduction.

[18] On this point, one might be more hesitant than many critics have been to call Mariane's love "Narcissistic." What Mariane searches for, at least in this opening scene, is the lover's difference.

[19] On this point, the letters engage what Ovid's version of the myth of Narcissus in Claire Nouvet's reading both reveals and conceals. Nouvet's reading of the myth reveals a defensive concealing of an originary difference that is quite pertinent to the violence of seduction in *Lettres portugaises*.

"Narcissus and Echo" in Book 3 of *Metamorphosis* is not Ovid's own invention, but a reprise of a popular myth in an endeavor to prove poetic mastery. Like Echo's "repetition" of Narcissus's speech—which transforms his questions into her responses, his negations into her affirmations—

Ovid's repetition of the myth of Narcissus alters the previous versions. Nouvet explains that the sedimentation of an echo into the character Echo is a mark of Ovid's own inflection on the myth: "Ovid, culminating a long poetic tradition which had progressively personified the echo, finally incarnates it in the person of Echo to whom he gives a story [*histoire*], and even a love story [*histoire d'amour*]" (54). Narcissus's rejection of Echo is preceded by Ovid's own ejection of the menacing echo from the voice. Through the accomplished personification of the echo in the character Echo, Nouvet argues, the constitutive alterity of the echo—the echo attaching one to one's voice as well as separating one from one's voice—becomes domesticated, pacified, and reified as the character Echo. Just as Ovid seeks to make himself autonomous from his echoes by finally personifying Echo, his story of Narcissus and Echo attempts to make Narcissus's voice autonomous from the echo by personifying it in Echo.

The echo that Ovid (r)ejects, however, is never simply the empirical voice returned to the subject, but also the repetition that is a condition of possibility of all language. Insofar as this possibility of repetition haunts any singular enunciation, it threatens the singularity of the very enunciation it makes possible.[19] In defense against the resulting multiplicity of meanings and against the fact that the echo does not simply supplement but doubles, divides, and supplants the voice, Ovid turns the intimate alterity always haunting the voice into something fixedly outside of and different from it. Ovid, Nouvet argues, tries to stabilize and thus do away with the oscillation between echo as unwieldy sound and Echo as another desiring subject. When Ovid incarnates the echo as the character Echo, "la voix étrangère" is subjected to an even greater control: "The echo is no longer 'hideously motiveless' because it is henceforth attached to a desire" (54-5). The wound that Ovid conceals and tries to contain in his *Metamorphoses* is consequently that the echo is a condition of (im)possibility of all speech, an originary and constitutive alterity. E/echo's split from Narcissus in "Narcissus and Echo" transforms a temporal difference— the deferred echo of Narcissus's speech— into the spatial and sexual difference between Echo and Narcissus. Nouvet's explanation of the work accomplished by this split in Ovid's myth elucidates a tendency to defensively conceal and forget an originary difference in the self by converting that difference into a dichotomy between two selves.

[20] As Kauffman notes, the word *mouvements*, recurring 17 times in the letters, "designated [in seventeenth-century France] the passions, the spontaneous impulses, the ecstasies, the desires that escape the control of the will and even the conscious mind" (101). Kauffman, discussing another occurrence of the word, argues that "the act of writing about these *mouvements*, therefore, is a conscious attempt to relive and recover spontaneous desires that were initially unconscious." However in this instance, and arguably even in the passage Kauffman analyzes, the *mouvements* are not past experiences which Mariane subsequently takes up, and masters, through the act of writing. It is instead writing that "mouvements contraires" destroy precisely to the extent that their contradictions make bringing them to consciousness impossible.

[21] This shift, as I discuss above, is frequently overlooked when critics label the letters a seduction narrative or when they assume that because Mariane consents, there is no sexual violence.

[22] Elsewhere in the letters, we find examples of shift into the passé simple. However, this scene serves as the only sustained used of the tense in the letters.

[23] In the final letter, Mariane attests to the traumatic assault her memories inflict on her when she fantasizes "que j'aurai de plaisir de pouvoir vous reprocher vos procédés injustes après que je n'en serai plus si vivement touchée, et lorsque je vous ferai connaître que je vous méprise, que je parle avec beaucoup d'indifférence de votre trahison, que j'ai oublié tous mes plaisirs et toutes mes douleurs, et que je ne me souviens de vous que lorsque je veux m'en souvenir!" (105).

[24] See Jean Laplanche's *Théorie de la seduction généralisée* for the psychoanalyst's conception of the "enigmatic signifier" which he places at the heart of experience.
[25] As Michel Foucault similarly argues, modernity is marked by a rise in discourses which seek to penetrate the surface to reveal the truth hidden in the deep recesses of the self. In the case of sex, for example, the discourse of sexuality drives the individual to discover the truth of his or her sexuality—the dark, sinful desires. But, the truth that is discovered is actually the product of the discourse of sexuality: what it purports to discover, it fact, produces.
[26] For its capacity to undo the active/passive binary, seduction has become a privileged figure in post-structural and post-modern thought. See in particular Shoshana Felman's *Scandal of the Speaking Body* for a suggestive contemplation of the relationship between the violation of the promise and the violation of the body.

Chapter 2

Rape Doubled, Divided, and Disseminated: Madeleine de Scudéry's *Clélie, histoire romaine*

Arreste, arreste-toy Lucrece,
Ta main commet un crime, en le pensant punir:
Quel dessein t'oblige à finir?
Est-ce le remors qui te presse?
Le crime est en la volonté,
Et la tienne respond de ta pudicité.

Femmes illustres 207

The rape of Lucretia is one of the most contested rape narratives in the Western tradition. According to the historical accounts, Lucretia commits suicide after she is forced to "yield" to rape by Sextus, the son of the tyrant Tarquin Superbus in 508 BCE. Outrage following her rape and suicide sparks the revolution that overthrows the monarchy and establishes the Roman Republic. However, after the smoke has cleared, the rape and suicide are reinscribed in a complex question of intention: as Madeleine de Scudéry asks Lucrèce in her *Femmes illustres*, "Quel dessein t'oblige à finir?" (207). Scudéry's open-ended question frequently becomes more polarized, as it does in my epigraph. Did Lucretia commit suicide to prove her innocence during the rape or to atone for her complicity (*remors*) in it? Was Lucretia an innocent victim of Sextus's coercion or a participant who willingly commited an act of adultery? For Philippe Bousquet, it is this ambivalence that leads seventeenth-century writers to return to her story again and again. When it comes to seventeenth-century France, Bousquet insists, "Un constant préliminaire s'impose: le XVIIe siècle est gêné par la figure de Lucrèce" (185).

Indeed, around fifty seventeenth-century French texts deal in some explicit way with Lucretia's story (Bousquet 183). Four tragedies take the story as their principle subject: Urbain Chevreau's *La Lucrese romaine*, Pierre Du Ryer's *Lucrèce*, Nicolas Pradon's unprinted *Tarquin*, and the anonymous manuscript *Tragédie sur la mort de Lucresse*. Scudéry's *Clélie, histoire romaine*, written between 1654 and 1660, makes the list as the only work of prose fiction to take the Lucretia story as its main subject. Bousquet argues that each of these seventeenth-century rewritings is an attempt to deal with the ambivalent cause of Lucretia's suicide by accounting for its motivation. The rewritings "tendrait en effet toujours à rendre comprehensible le crime ou le suicide" by instilling it with a psychological rationale through its inscription in a diachronic fiction (184). Literature is the mode in which Lucretia's ambivalent act of suicide comes to be defined as definitively deplorable or admirable.[1]

However, I will argue that Madeleine de Scudéry's *Clélie* invites us to consider Lucretia's story *through* its ambivalence—her version capitalizing on the very features of the story that other rewritings seek to silence and comprehend. Briefly, *Clélie* entangles the decisively fictional love story of Clélie and Aronce with both the infamous history of the rape of Lucretia by Sextus Tarquin and the gallant history of Cloelia's escape from hostage.[2] Following the adventures of young Roman nobles as they battle tyranny and their passions (and the tyranny of their passions), *Clélie* nests these two historical events within an arch-marriage plot that opens and closes the text. Frequently treated as a *roman à clef* and a relic of seventeenth-century *préciosité* for these additions, *Clélie*'s radical rewriting of the Lucretia story and its potential import to modern understandings of rape remains to be given serious scholarly attention.[3]

This is not to say that criticism has simply neglected to attend to the subject of sexual violence in the *roman*. In fact, many scholars have considered Lucrèce's rape in *Clélie*.[4] What is

missing, however, is an interrogation of the ways that sexual violence functions on a broader tropological and narratological level in *Clélie*. In this chapter, I will point to the ways that *Clélie* does not simply represent a single rape (Lucretia's) but more subversively puts forth a literary thinking of rape, one in which rape is not contained in a single moment or event. In *Clélie* the event of rape is absent—or, divided and spread throughout the rest of the narrative. Rape is nowhere and everywhere; it is figured as violent insofar as the "event" is irrecoverably or originally missed.

Part I: Livy, Lucretia's Suicide, and the End of Reading

In order to appreciate the ways in which *Clélie*'s rewriting of Lucretia's story is exceptional, it is important to understand how other versions of the rape of Lucretia attempt to securely bring together, *comprehend* to borrow Bousquet's term, Lucretia's action with its motivation or intent in order to arrest once and for all the spiraling of reading, interpretations, and rewritings of her story. And there is no better place to begin than with one of the story's originators: Livy.

As Livy narrates the story at the end of the first book of *The Early History of Rome*, a debate among a group of soldiers during a siege of Ardea over whose wife is the most virtuous sparks Sextus's brutal desire for Lucretia, who is awarded the title when she is found to be the only wife who eschewed pleasure in the absence of her husband. [5] Sextus plans and executes an attack on her virtue, beginning with his arrival at Collatia, Collatinius and Lucretia's home, where he requests hospitality for the night. When night falls, Sextus sneaks into Lucretia's room and confesses his desire to her. When his pleading that Lucretia yield willingly prove to be in vain, Sextus resorts to threats: if Lucretia does not yield to him, he will kill her, place a dead and

naked slave in her bed, and tell all of Rome that he killed her in a fit of rage after discovering her committing adultery. After this threat of public dishonor, Lucretia yields to Sextus. The next day, Lucretia calls for her husband and father to return to Collatia. When they arrive, with Brutus in tow, they find Lucretia agitated and disheveled, a state that she explains is the result of the terrible offense she has suffered. Upon revealing Sextus to be "the adulterer" who violated her in "body only," Lucretia pulls a knife from the folds of her dress and stabs herself (Livy 1.58). Lucretia's dishonored and bloody body is carried throughout Rome, and with it Brutus rouses the Roman people to revolution. The rape of Lucretia by the heir to the throne marks the final trespass of the Tarquin monarchy against its own people and precipitates the overthrow of the monarchy and the founding of the Republic of Rome.[6]

But even Livy, Diane Moses explains in "Livy's Lucretia and the Validity of Forced Consent in Roman Law," records his version of Lucretia's rape and suicide and the founding of the first Republic of Rome in *The Early History of Rome* nearly 500 years after the date attributed to it and in the midst of a heated debate concerning the new *lex Julia de adulteriis coercendis* of 18 B.C.E. The *lex Julia* attempt to differentiate legally between two types of *stuprum*—(the Latin word used by Livy which means approximately "the use of another to attain sexual gratification outside of sanctioned sexual relationships")—namely, between consensual *stuprum* and *stuprum per vim*, or *stuprum* by means of force.[7] The new difference resolves the previous ambivalence within *stuprum* between consensual and forced sex. Under the *lex Julia*, to have been forced to commit *stuprum* or to be 'guilty' of *stuprum per vim* exculpates passive participants.

With this exculpation comes the possibility that one could avoid the negative consequences of consensual sexual misconduct by arguing that the *stuprum* was *per vim*.[8] As the

difference between consensual and forced *stuprum* is increasingly rooted in the victim's intention —in his or her willingness or unwillingness to engage in elicit sex—the truth of such claims grows increasingly unverifiable and suspect. In the case where one argues innocence by claiming forced *stuprum*, the judgment comes to depend on the victim's claimed intention in the *stuprum*, communicated by his or her verbal account of the events (and, of course, one's social standing both in Roman society and in relation to the aggressor, which first and foremost determine whether one is even capable of being the innocent victim of *stuprum per vim*).[9]

Livy implicitly critiques the legal changes to *stuprum* under the *lex Julia*, specifically the new importance of the victim's intention in determining which crime took place, Moses argues, through his invention of the debate among Lucretia, her father, her husband, and Brutus that takes place just before her suicide in *The Early History of Rome*.[10] Lucretia says, "As for me, I am innocent of fault, but I will take my punishment. Never shall Lucretia provide a precedent for unchaste women to escape what they deserve" (Livy 1.58). After arguably contradicting herself in claiming both innocence and guilt, Lucretia's final line alludes to the possibility that people guilty of *stuprum* will be acquitted by falsely claiming to have been the innocent victims of *stuprum per vim*. The final words Livy attributes to Lucretia underscore what Livy fears the new law introduces: a victim who was raped might look just like a willing participant of sex.[11] If the difference between rape (*stuprum per vim*) and consensual illicit sex (*stuprum*) depends upon an intention, upon one's willingness or unwillingness to have sex wherein that unwillingness is greater than its manifestation in resistant physical acts (i.e. putting up a fight, biting, scratching, screaming), then the two positions could appear identical. The new legal difference constitutively threatens the legal difference between illicit sex and rape, between guilt and innocence.

To overcome this crisis Livy's text attempts in effect to erase the invented legal difference such that all victims, no matter how forced, would be guilty if they accept the favor of the faulty law. But in so doing, the text also threatens to nullify the very difference that provides for Lucretia's innocence. How can Lucretia be innocent of adultery without the notion of *stuprum per vim*? In lieu of a legal defense, Livy secures Lucretia's innocence with the figure of suicide. In Livy, Lucretia commits suicide in order to save herself from appropriation by unchaste women who seek to avoid punishment. The intention vested in the figure of suicide attempts then to compensate for the legal impossibility of finally determining intention, consent, and in turn responsibility with respect to the rape. Suicide conceals the absence of knowledge of Lucretia's intention during the rape behind her absence in death.[12] In both Livy's and Bousquet's readings of the story, the attention given to suicide is charged with both determining once and for all Lucretia's intention in the rape and concealing rape's excess to that determination.[13] The suicide reins in the proliferations of interpretation—the dissemination of meaning—introduced by the consent-based definition of rape. The suicide, the literal absence of Lucretia in her death, substitutes for this originary and self-effacing absence by replacing it with a more easily readable absence.

In Livy's account in the context of the *Early History of Rome*, the rape is further narrative contained through its function as a violent and unfortunate event that nonetheless leads, in a dialectical fashion, to a desirable end. Before the rape, Livy describes the Romans' ambivalent attitude toward their tyrant Tarquin, an ambivalence obstinate to the many offenses Tarquin had already committed against them (1.57). But after the rape and Lucretia's suicide, the Roman citizens unite to overthrow their tyrant not only to avenge Lucretia's offence but also because they discover that "[e]ach had his own complaint to make of the wickedness and violence of the

royal house" (1.59). It takes the rape of Lucretia for the Roman people to unite their interests and finally overthrow their oppressor (1.59). Not only does the rape call for the revolution, but, in Livy's narration, the revolution calls for the rape, for an event to serve narratively as *the* precipitating event. According to Livy, the aesthesis or image—which is usually thought to represent rather than to invent—in fact gives face to, constitutes and consolidates—the revolution as a "real" event. The revolution, gains its referentiality through the pleasure of its narrative sublation of the rape. The figure of rape in Livy, then, is not only itself contained by a discrete, violent event—the suicide—but is subsequently domesticated as the discrete, violent event that functions to consolidate the Tyrant's disseminated and diffuse violence.

Given the narrative role of the rape of Lucretia in justifying—in giving reality to—the overthrow of monarchy in the ancient sources, it is no little wonder that the rape poses particular concern for seventeenth-century thinkers, writers, and artists, producing their works under the French absolutist monarchy of Louis XIV. It is not only the ambiguity at the heart of Lucretia's suicide, but the traditional means by which this ambiguity has been resolved that draws attention to the story of Lucretia.

In fact, when the story of Lucretia's rape is reprised by seventeenth-century French literature, the narrative shifts away from the rape's role in aestheticizing (narrating) the transition between political regimes towards its role in soldering aesthetic pleasure to the morality of the absolutist regime. The rape is withdrawn from the explicit political sphere of the ancient sources and is placed instead solidly within a particular political ideology, that of French absolutism. In seventeenth-century France the rape of Lucretia serves as a negative event that teaches readers of the pleasure of the triumph of virtue over vice.

Pierre du Ryer's 1638 tragedy *Lucrece* exemplifies the purification of the Lucretia story of its ties to republicanism, which du Ryer accomplishes by placing the story in the service of seventeenth-century *bienséance*. *Bienséance* names the aesthetic demand which requires that a work of fiction not only *not* offend readers with violent, immoral, or lascivious content, but also, and more importantly, that it provide them with an edifying moral, a moral that is always in the service of the state. As Madeleine de Scudéry's brother Georges explains in the preface to his sister's 1641 novel, *Ibrham*, "[q]ue si de la vraisemblance et des inclinations exprimées par les paroles, nous voulons passer aux mœurs; aller du plaisant à l'utile, et du divertissement à l'exemple: j'ai à vous dire, Lecteur, qu'ici la vertu paraît toujours récompensée, et le vice toujours puni" (Preface to *Ibrham*). Vice and virtue are not pregivens of a text, but precisely what each rewriting will determine through its allocation of reward and punishment.

Du Ryer's *Lucrece* is about when a rape is a rape—a question it explores by extending into a five-act tragedy what in the ancient sources is a brief attempt by Sextus to seduce Lucretia. To establish the "truth" of the rape for the tragedy, du Ryer noticeably amplifies the challenge to Lucrece's chastity with lies about her husband's infidelity and with the sovereign dissolution of virtue as mere "fable" and "faux Dieu." After Lucrece rises above his efforts to elicit her consent, Sextus himself names her a self-guarded and impenetrable fort, a saint, and the virgin goddess Diana, who is never for even a moment tempted by his many ruses. Through this extended treatment of the temptations of Lucrece, du Ryer's tragedy "resolves" the unresolvable problem of her intention in the rape—unresolvable, as *Lettres portugaises* demonstrates, insofar as the other's intention is radically unknowable—narratively establishing Lucretia's innocence. Lucretia's rape, the tragedy assures spectators, *is* a rape.

Yet it turns out that even here the rape is not *only* a rape. The rape is also a figure for tyranny. Brutus's final speech which closes the tragedy, the speech which will galvanize the Romans to rise together against their oppressor, insists that the rape (*viol*) merely repeats a previous *crime*: the theft (*vol*) of the throne. By writing the narrative of the rape, we discover in the final lines of the play, du Ryer has also written that of tyranny. And to this extent, Brutus's speech appeals not to the rape as justification for the expulsion of the Tarquins, as to the other crime, to the anterior crime of throne theft, which according to Jean Bodin's theory of sovereignty is the only justified reason to overthrow a monarch. The moral of Du Ryer's tragedy, the triumph of Lucretia's virtue and the punishment of Sextus's vice, becomes an allegory of the moral story of the punishment of power usurpers and the triumph of the true and rightful king. In the seventeenth-century political allegory told by du Ryer through the narrative of the rape of Lucretia, the rape is yet again the negative that will allow for the emergence of the positive, not the extra-legal legitimization of Republic, but the Absolutist's right to rule.

Both of these ways of dealing with Lucretia's rape use the rape's violence to convey a greater, more important story. The "rape of Lucretia" thus becomes, in some of the most central texts that transmit it, the story of the rape's assimilation to narrative purposes that in fact contain, rather than communicate, its violence. The history of "the rape of Lucretia" becomes the history of its narrative domestication, and in particular, its political narrative domestication.

This conclusion seems, perhaps, to line up perfectly with the critique of literary treatments of rape offered by feminist literary theory. In *Rape and Representation*, for instance, Editors Lynn Higgins and Brenda Silver argue that rape has been compromised by (male) authors and critics who treat rape as a metaphor, as a figure. As I discuss in my introduction, Higgins and Silver propose to reread rape "literally." "The insistence on taking rape literally,"

Higgins and Silver explain, "often necessitates a conscious critical act of reading the violence and the sexuality back into texts where it has been deflected, either by the text itself or by the critics: where it has been turned into a metaphor or a symbol or represented rhetorically as titillation, persuasion, ravishment, seduction, or desire (poetic, narrative, courtly, military)" (4).[14] By reading rape literally, they will restore to rape the "physical, sexual violation," "reclaim[ing] the physical, material bodies of women from their status as 'figures'" (4). Ultimately, the volume proposes to "undo the metaphor"—in particular the metaphor of rape as "a founding event of art" through a doubled artistic and critical gesture: "outward to an analysis of context—historical, theoretical—and back to close reading that brings social and textual/critical practices together" (7).

However this method of reading rape—of getting to its literality, its truth—falls prey to some of the very appropriative gestures it aims to rectify. To illustrate the extent to which the project of "literally" reading rape fails to in fact deal with rape's violence, I will turn to *Clélie, histoire romane*, written between 1656 and 1660 by Madeleine de Scudéry. *Clélie's* rewriting of rape of Lucretia, I will argue, illuminates the ways that the *figure* of rape violently interrupts narrative, and not just its narrative appropriation by politics and figure, by men and text. *Clélie* will show how rape's specific violence also interrupts the very literal "rape narratives" desired by Higgins and Silver (and as we saw, Mariane): the narrative of the referential event that might be accessed through narrative. If rape exceeds and interrupts narrative, it is not simply because that narrative belongs to a particular ideology (patriarchy), but because of a more fundamental narrative interruption that is central to sexual violence.

Part II: After Shock

In *Clélie,* the rape of Lucretia is not sublated into revolution, and it is not sublated into the political moral of absolutism. What then is *Clélie* doing with and to the narrative of the rape of Lucretia? By turning to an earthquake scene which opens *Clélie*, I will argue, we can begin to understand how the text itself teaches us to read *Clélie*'s peculiar narration of rape—or, more precisely narrative figuring of rape as the interruption of narrative.

However, in order to understand the allegorical significance of the earthquake in *Clélie*, we must first examine another disaster, a flood, which first delayed the marriage, and which is also recounted in *Clélie*'s opening scene. While the action narrated by *Clélie* "begins" with an earthquake that delays Clélie and Aronce's marriage, even before this delay, the wedding day had already been delayed by a flood. Clélie opens in the wake of this flood.

Though at first it seemed to have destroyed everything, the flood ultimately revealed more ambiguously "d'étranges désordres dans cet aimable pays" (1: 50). Although the flood destroyed buildings, uprooted trees and changed the face of the country, in the postdiluvian landscape,

> ce qu'il y eut de remarquable, fut que lorsque cet orage fut passé, on vit que le ravage des eaux avait déterré les ruines de divers tombeaux magnifiques, dont les inscriptions étaient à moitié effacées; qu'en quelques autres lieux, il avait découvert de grandes colonnes toutes d'une pièce, plusieurs superbes vases antiques d'agate, de porphyre, de jaspe, de terre samienne et de plusieurs autres matières précieuses de sorte que cet endroit au lieu d'avoir perdu quelque chose de sa beauté, avait acquis de nouveaux ornements. (1: 51)

The pre-narrative flood serves as a near perfect allegory for the rape of Lucretia. The allegorical reading would go like this: the waters rise as Tarquin's offenses escalate. The moment of overflow, when the river becomes a flood, is the moment it begins to *ravage* the land. The flood

water wants, takes, and forces itself on the land, which itself has no means of resistance—which cannot possibly consent; Tarquin rapes Lucretia. The pivotal moment takes place as the negative act of rape and the coming of revolution, when the vaginal vases and phallic columns, intermix as the *tombeaux*, which refers to both the cavernous tomb and the phallic tombstone.

The flood, as an anterior, completed event, signifies *both* the water's overflow *and* its receding, its masking and its revealing. It is both the violent crime (the rape) and the just punishment of vice (the revolution). Collapsing the unjust violation into the just revolution, the figure of the flood sublates destruction into revelation. In this way, the flood doesn't simply allegorize the rape of Lucretia. More precisely, it allegorizes the sublation of the rape of Lucretia into the Republic and Absolutist morality**.**

Yet *Clélie* does not in fact "begin" with this environmental allegory of the conclusive, reconciliatory telling of the rape; the flood is anterior to the beginning of *Clélie*. The action of the narrative begins with a second violent disaster, the *tremblement de terre* or earthquake; it is in fact this disaster that is central to the text. Narratively, the earthquake causes *Clélie* by deferring the marriage between Aronce and Clélie. Whereas the flood's violence improves the land by making it more beautiful for having been ravaged, thereby counteracting and concluding its own violence, the earthquake on the other hand unleashes an uncontained, unlimited, and constitutive violence into the narrative.

Before the beautiful and magnificent ruins unearthed by the flood, Aronce and Clélie meet on the eve of the second day that was to be their wedding day when the landscape erupts:

> [U]n tremblement de terre effroyable, où ce pays-là est si sujet, commença tout d'un coup, et commença avec une telle impétuosité, que la terre s'entrouvrant entre Aronce et Clélie, avec des mugissements aussi effroyable que ceux de la mer irritée, il en sortit en

un instant une flamme si épouvantable, qu'elle les déroba également à la vue l'un de l'autre. (52)

While the flood allegorizes the versions of the rape of Lucretia that contain and conclude it; the earthquake would appear to allegorize the rape of Lucretia to a radically different end—or rather, *to no end* at all. Whereas the *nouveaux ornaments* concealed the gaps left by the flood, nothing fills the openings created when the land tears *itself* apart. The physical holes in the land produce only more holes in the imagination and meaning: "cet abime qui s'était s'entrouvert entre Clélie et [Aronce] […] avait quelque chose de si terrible à voir, que *l'imagination ne saurait se le figurer*" (1: 52 my emphasis). Nor do the objects which erupt from the chasms compensate or conclude the earthquake's violence. "Les flammes ondoyantes," "les mille tonnerres souterrains qui faisaient encore de nouvelles ouvertures à la terre," "une fumée épaisse et noire," "les mille pierres embrasées" and "une si prodigieuse quantité de cendres embrasées" each add to the disorder that threatens to "remettre la nature en sa première confusion" (53).

Rather than from the fire, stones, smoke, or the shaking of the earth—the most immediate effects of the earthquake—the earthquake's most terrifying destruction comes from the ash. The figure of the ash disperses the rape's violence temporally and spatially: the ash does not come, as it would logically, from the fire but emerges "tout d'un coup," and in such a prodigious quantity as to kill those near the site of the earthquake and "aux lieux où la terre ne trembla point" (1: 52). These unaccountable ashes interrupt not only in the present narration of the earthquake, but also in its future, as "l'air, la terre, et le fleuve, en furent presque entièrement ou remplis, ou couverts." The ash covers the river, the air, and the land—the very conditions of a future flood, of future sublation. In the allegory of the earthquake, the violence of the rape is not

contained by a discrete and delimited event, but is a disseminated violence, which takes place before *Clélie*'s own narration of the rape of Lucretia as its narration.

The earthquake allegorizes the rape's violence as the narrative disarticulation of narrative. And to this extent, *Clélie* refuses to offer a narrative by which to comprehend, referentially or narratively, the rape. Rather, *Clélie* places rape's excess to and interruption of narrative at the very heart of its violence. The violence of the rape, *Clélie* insists, is not only physical or psychological but also narrative. Through the earthquake, *Clélie* proposes that the violence of rape is not necessarily apparent in the directness of its narration or experience, but in the manner in which it is disseminated, displaced, and repeated throughout a narrative, throughout the very experience of a personal or social history.

Part III: Maps and Riddles, Rape and Seventeenth-century Rhetoric of Virtue

This allegorical disarticulation of the narrative attempts to contain the violence of the rape seems, however, to be undermined by the very narrative that follows it. For although Scudéry takes the rape of Lucretia and the expulsion of the Tarquin's as the historical setting of her *roman*, it is a marriage arch that structures her text. The completed marriage 'ends' this seemingly endless text, bring to a close the abductions, murders, wars, and rapes intervening between its promise in book one, part one, and fulfillment in book five, part three. The marriage restores order; and through it, love and virtue prevail over violent passions and tyranny. As Anne Duggan points out in "*Clélie*, *histoire romaine* or Writing the Nation" this inclusion of the marriage (or love story) in *Clélie* "functions as the overarching cause of events, creating a logical connection between the accidental, disordered, and sometimes illogical elements constitutive of

'true' or description history" (73). The love story, it seems, structures the *histoire romaine* about Lucrèce and Clélie, narratively containing the illogical and contingent sexual violence.

However, love is not only an ordering principal and cause of narrative action in *Clélie*; it is the subject of conversation and reflection among the characters within the narrative. The ordering principal of the historical *roman* becomes part of the very story it orders. Pivotally, during these self-reflexive conversations about love, the progression of the narrative is interrupted. Little happens; conversation supplants action. As we will see, it is through these pauses of narrative progression that we again glimpse *Clélie*'s absenting, spreading, and dividing of sexual violence.[15]

If *Clélie* begins, through its allegorical rewriting, by opening the story of Lucretia to readings that other writers attempt to foreclose, it performs a similar maneuver on the notions of rape it inherits from seventeenth-century France. *Clélie* confronts seventeenth-century conceptions of rape through two discussions that deal with the relation between womanly virtue and rape, conversations which interrupt narrative progression through their elliptical figurations of sexual violence. Surprisingly, neither moment will be Scudéry's rewriting of the rape of Lucrèce by Sextus. In fact, as I alluded above, *Clélie* does not figure the rape itself. Rather, the text treats the subject of sexual violence almost everywhere else, but in ways that are not immediately apparent. The first conversation I will examine serves as the narrative origin of the famous *carte de Tendre*.[16] The second serves as the narrative grounds of one of Scudéry's more scandalous deviations from Livy's text: the addition of a love story between Brutus and Lucrèce. Both of these discussions partake in an ongoing, though discontinuous and implicit, debate in *Clélie* regarding just how Clélie and Lucrèce ought to manage the sexual violences to which they find themselves again and again vulnerable.[17]

The *carte de Tendre*, which has surpassed the text for which it was created in renown, finds its narrative source in a discussion among Clélie and her companions about the affinity between romantic love and a virtuous sentiment known as tenderness.[18] *La tendresse*, Clélie explains is "[u]ne certaine sensibilité de cœur" found "presque jamais souverainement, qu'en des personnes qui ont l'âme noble, les inclinations vertueuses, et l'esprit bien tourné" (1: 118). This virtuous disposition "fait que, lorsqu'elles ont de l'amitié, elles l'ont sincère, et ardente, et qu'elles sentent si vivement toutes les douleurs, et toutes les joies de ceux qu'elles aiment, qu'elles ne sentent pas tant les leurs propres" (1: 118). Tenderness is marked by a sincerity that demands an abdication of the self for the friend, by a sympathy for and feeling with the friend's pain and joy that eclipses one's own feelings. For Clélie, these virtuous inclinations spring from friendship and not love: she "n'[a] jamais entendu dire une tendre amour" (1: 115).

In the context of the discussion this definition aims to justify Clélie's exclusion of love from tenderness (and her determination never to marry).[19] However, Aronce hears in it the necessity of a *tendre amour*. Were there not tender love, he argues, love would not only be in excess of reason, but would turn utterly violent:

> [J]e dirai hardiment que la tendresse est une qualité encore plus nécessaire à l'amour, que à l'amitié. Car il est certain que cette affection, qui naît presque toujours avec l'aide de la raison, […] pourrait quelquefois faire agir ceux dans le cœur de qui elle est, comme s'ils avaient de la tendresse, quoique naturellement ils n'en eussent pas; mais pour l'amour, Madame, qui est presque toujours incompatible avec la raison, et qui du moins ne lui peut jamais être assujettie, elle a absolument besoin de tendresse pour l'empêcher d'être *brutale*, *grossière*, et *inconsidérée*. (1: 119 [emphasis added])

Whereas friendship's affinities with reason can produce the illusion of tenderness in a heart from which it is lacking, love being in excess of reason has no limit except in tenderness. Love without tenderness leaves only "des désirs impétueux, qui n'ont ni bornes, ni retenue" (1: 119). The lover "qui porte une semblable passion dans l'âme, ne considère que sa propre satisfaction, sans considérer la gloire de la personne aimée" (1: 119). Reiterating Clélie's own explanation, Aronce explains that "un des principaux effets de la véritable tendresse, c'est qu'elle fait qu'on pense beaucoup plus à l'intérêt de ce qu'on aime, qu'au sien propre" (1: 119). Love's violence can only be checked by tenderness, which transforms the impetuous and violent desires of the lover by making one think more of the beloved than oneself. Set in relief by an unchecked love that seeks to seize and consume the love object with immediacy, tenderness protects love by delaying it, or perhaps more radically, by eradicating possession of the beloved as love's *telos*.

Coming from the lips of a suitor, Aronce's evocation of the affinities between love and sexual violence could easily be dismissed as his attempt, perhaps a perverse one, to win Clélie's heart. The temptation to set aside his argument is further bolstered by Clélie's residual resistance towards tender love and her refusal to acknowledge Aronce's warning of love's potentially violent excess in the *carte de Tendre* (see fig. 1). However, upon further interrogation, the map betrays a disavowed anxiety over the violence of love.

The map presents three ways to arrive at each of the three towns of *Tendre*: *Inclination* (the most direct route), *Esteem*, and *Reconnaissance*. Hopefuls who choose to deviate from these three routes risk ending up in the towns of *Orgueil* or *Oubli* or at the *Lac d'indifférence*. Impetuous 'friends' who try to go beyond the tender towns to the *Terres inconnues* must first cross the treacherous *Mer dangereuse*. By naming and excluding the *Terres inconnues* as such, the narrator explains, Clélie "a trouvé lieu de faire une agréable morale d'amitié, par un simple

jeu de son esprit, et de faire entendre d'une manière assez particulière, qu'elle n'a point eu d'amour, et qu'elle n'en peut avoir" (1: 184-185).

Figure 1. François Chauveau, *La Carte de Tendre*, 1654, Engraving.

Despite Clélie's stated intention, the topographical rendering of the map attests to a contamination between *amitié* (*Tendre*) and *amour* (*Terres inconnues*) even as it establishes a physical distance between them. The *Fleuve d'inclination*, the most direct route to the towns of Tender, empties into the *Mer dangereuse*, into the dangerous excess and violence of the sea that divides *and* links *Tendre* and the *Terres inconnues*. At the northernmost point on the map, the *Terres inconnues* serve as the map's culminating point, the final destination that voyagers seek.

That all the features of the map of Tenderness together take the form of the female reproductive anatomy only further undermines Clélie's refusal to acknowledge the contamination between friendship and sexual desire. Behind the facade of the ideal program for how men and women ought to conduct themselves in matters of the heart, the map conceals the pervasive threat of sexual violence. In fact, it might be more than a threat. Violent sexual desire is not restricted to the *Terres inconnues*, but saturates the entire map from its origins in the *Conversation sur la naissance de l'amour*.[20] Rather than acknowledge and deal with this uncontainable threat, Clélie takes cover under ignorance, claiming neither to have nor know love.

A companion scene to the discussion of tenderness features a conversation among Lucrèce and her companions. This conversation continues the contemplation of love, virtue, and sexual violence by again interrupting the narrative progress of *Clélie*. In its reprisal, this conversation challenges the strategy laid forth by the conversation on tenderness and Clélie's map in which one avoids becoming the victim to another's violent sexual desire through ignorance or exclusion of love and the regulation of the acceptable directions and distances the lover might go. In so doing, this second conversation opens the narrative, and its Lucrèce, to the very ambivalence that most other rewritings of the story seek to settle.

Lucrèce and her troupe are in the midst of a debate over a question quite similar to that of Clélie and her companions. However, in this conversation the stakes are made explicit. In lieu of Clélie's "manière assez particulière" of relating her virtuous ignorance, Lucrèce and her troupe take up the question head on: does a woman's virtue consists in having an unaffected heart until her sanctioned marriage or in resisting temptation in the face of unsanctioned love? The conversation begins with the Prince de Pometie's assertion that "la véritable vertu d'une femme ne consistait pas à ne pouvoir avoir le cœur touché, et qu'au contraire une dame ne pouvait

jamais être tout à fait assurée d'elle-même si elle n'avait eu une violente affection dans l'âme" (2: 130). The true test of virtue, the Prince de Pometie insists, is not resistance to what one has not felt or cannot feel, but resistance to what one feels acutely, even violently. Not only do these lines critique Clélie's exclusion of sexual desire from the land of Tender, but they also offer an intratextual argument for Scudéry's rebellious addition of the love story between Lucrèce and Brutus introduced narratively by this discussion.[21]

Provocatively, the Prince's argument (and Scudéry's rewriting of Lucretia's story) goes against one of the most prevalent means by which writers have secured Lucretia's innocence. By giving Lucrèce a lover—i.e., sexual desire—Scudéry explicitly opens her Lucrèce to the very ambivalence that other authors seek to overcome by rewriting Lucretia's story. The group's conversation explicitly acknowledges this risk. Valérie gives voice to the vulnerability to which desire opens women:

> Je pense pourtant, Seigneur, répliqua modestement Valérie en souriant, qu'il est bon de ne songer pas toujours à donner cette marque de vertu, de peur qu'en commençant d'aimer innocemment, on ne vînt enfin malgré soi à aimer quelqu'un plus que sa gloire. (2: 131)

Despite oneself, Valérie warns, one might love the lover more than one's own glory, one's chastity. It is telling that Valérie opposes the Prince's position not simply because she thinks there is greater virtue in rejecting love (the position Hermilie takes: "En mon particulier, […] je pense qu'il est encore plus glorieux de résister à l'amour, que d'en avoir, quelque innocente qu'elle soit"), but "de peur que," for fear that, what begins innocently might be uncontainable (2: 131).

Lucrèce, on the other hand, is seduced immediately by the Prince de Pometie's proposal of a virtuous love, of a virtue that requires love. But when she is asked in turn to give her thoughts on the role of love in feminine virtue, she demurs—like Clélie does through the strategic naming of the *Terres inconnues*—, insisting that her ignorance on the subject prohibits her from contributing. When her companions finally convince her that she can nonetheless have an opinion on the question, she proffers it, like Clélie, on paper. As Lucrèce looks for a tablet on which to write, she encounters instead her hidden admirer, Brutus, who has been listening in on the conversation. Brutus offers her a tablet and joins the group as Lucrèce writes the following words: "*Toujours. l'on. si. mais. aimait. d'éternelles. hélas. amours. d'aimer. doux. il. point. serait. n'est. qu'il.*" (2: 132). Assuming that what she has given is void of meaning, her company accuses her of a malicious ruse, to which she replies,

> Je sais bien […] qu'il n'appartient qu'aux Dieux de parler obscurément: mais après tout puis qu'une fantaisie de modestie m'a obligée de ne dire pas mon avis clairement sur une chose dont je ne saurais pas parler trop à propos, il faut que vous expliquiez mes paroles, ou que vous ne m'entendiez pas. (2: 132-133)

As soon as Brutus sees Lucrèce's riddle, he decodes it as two jumbled lines from the verse of Phocilides which read: "Qu'il serait doux d'aimer si l'on aimait toujours./ Mais hélas il n'est point d'éternelles amours" (2: 135). Her explanation of the use of a riddle reveals her to be not ignorant of all things amorous, like Clélie, but doubtful of their existence in reality. Her fantasy of modesty—not a true ignorance—is based in a familiarity with love, particularly with its limits and failures.

The riddle is, like Clélie's map, self-undermining. Brutus underscores the ambivalence of Lucrèce's position when he responds to her riddle in kind. He writes two more lines of the poem,

also scrambled and divided by periods, below hers on the tablet: "*Moi*. *nos*. *verrez*. *vous*. *de*. *permettez. d'éternelles. jours. qu'on. peut. merveille. amours. d'aimer. voir*." (2: 135). In Brutus's riddle response, Valérie, Collatine, Hermilie, and the Prince de Pometie again fail to see any meaning. Only Lucrèce decodes in Brutus's reply his intelligence and promise of tender love: "Permettez-moi d'aimer, merveille de nos jours,/ Vous verrez qu'on peut voir d'éternelles amours" (2: 136). Brutus's message does more than promise Lucrèce the eternal love she seeks to deny; the two jumbled lines are in fact lines from the very same poem by Phocilides quoted by Lucrèce. In this way, Brutus's response calls attention to the fact that the poem Lucrèce uses to argue against the possibility of eternal love contains both her position and its opposite.

While it might seem that Brutus merely offers Lucrèce positive proof of the existence of tender love and her own unconscious belief in it, his repetition of her scrambling and use of periods to produce the riddle from the poem calls attention to her insertion of something into the lines. Lucrèce and Brutus do not merely cite the poem: they rearrange it and cut it up with periods. Just as the conversations on love divide and delay the narrative from arriving at its happy conclusion in love (Aronce and Clélie's marriage), the periods divide and delay syntactical meaning, preventing the reader from comprehending the words as anything more than a string of meaningless signifiers. Only once the periods are erased and the words put back in a syntactically meaningful order can the reader leave the ignorant company of Valérie, Collatine, Hermilie, and the Prince de Pometie, and join Lucrèce and Brutus in their understanding. But in doing so, the reader risks, with Lucrèce and Brutus, forgetting the periods, which, taken in the larger narrative context of *Clélie*, prefigure the penetrative (rape) and cutting (suicide) acts that will soon be inflicted on and by Lucrèce. Once withdrawn from the poem, the periods become a string of ellipses. In this text that figures the rape only as an absence, these disseminated ellipses

serve as the perfect mark of the sexual violence. Like the map, the ellipses conceal as they reveal a troubling excess of sexual violence to meaning, to narrative inscription.[22]

Both this scene and that of the *carte de Tendre* confront the prevalent seventeenth-century belief that victims (women) might avoid sexual violence through their virtuous comportment.[23] Read in the context of the fate of each woman from the historical narratives, one is tempted to read Scudéry's juxtaposition of Clélie's and Lucrèce's positions vis-à-vis sexual desire and virtue as a moralizing rewriting that takes its place in the history of debates set on establishing Lucretia's guilt or innocence.[24] Schematically, this reading would go something like this: Scudéry presents two female protagonists, Clélie and Lucrèce, each given an opposing view on the place of desire in virtue. Clélie virtuously rejects love; Lucrèce on the other hand is more tempted by love, not by her love for a particular lover, but by her love of virtue. The moral of the story is legible in each woman's fate: Lucrèce is raped and ends her life; Clélie is the triumphant and virtuous heroine who happily marries her beloved. Clélie's absolute rejection of desire from virtue would then be the valorized position prescribed to the female readers of *Clélie*.

Yet in Scudéry's rewriting of the historical narratives neither woman is ultimately safe from violation because, as we will see, in *Clélie* there is only the delay of rape; rape is always put off, and as we will see happens precisely in its not happening. Virtue does not protect either woman from rape; instead the text subtily figures the ideology of virtue as the very suppression or repression of the dispersal of the violence of rape. *Clélie* will ultimately shows how love of virtue blinds both Lucrèce and Clélie from recognizing that rape and violation are always around the corner by demanding that they look inward for threats rather than outward.

We have seen two scenes in which figurations of rape interrupt the progress of the *roman* from which rape is conspicuously absent. Sexual violence "emerges" in these conversations as an

absent but determining anxiety over the potentially violent side of sexual desire, which both conversations seek to contain and erase through discourses on love. The map and the riddle each figure rape not as a temporally and spatially located event, but as an uncontainable violence that has both never and already happened. Both the map and the riddle seek to conceal the pervasiveness of sexual violence that also they bring to light.

Part IV: Repeated Rape Effaced

The structure of the narrative in fact facilitates the reader's recognition of the blindness imposed by a fixation on virtue. The duration of the discussion of the *carte de Tendre* is haunted by Aronce's insistence on the consuming violence of love and the reader's knowledge that Horace's "love" turned violent when he abducted Clélie in during the chaos of the earthquake that opens the *roman*. So too the reader's knowledge of Sextus's threat to Lucrèce's honor, which is narrated first in the text, haunts Herminius's long account of the Lucrèce and Brutus love affair in "Histoire de Brutus." The narrative relates the contest over wifely virtue at the camp of Ardea when Sextus determines—or more accurately, is persuaded—to pursue Lucrèce (instead of Clélie) before retrospectively recounting the story of Lucrèce and Brutus. This play between prolepsis and deferral structures the narrative temporality of *Clélie*: the *histoires* have both "already happened" in the chronology of events and been radically missed to the extent that they only appear in the narrative after the fact as *histories* or as the narrative's antecedent action. Foresight into the future throughout the *histoires* affords the reader a privileged position from which to see the ultimate futility of the attempts to combat threats of rape with virtue, thus bringing to the fore the characters' tragic blindnesses to the threats of rape to which they will be

repeatedly returned. The reader is for instance only all too aware that the *carte de Tendre* and the story of the love affair between Lucrèce and Brutus narratively serve *both* to precipitate *and* to defer (to literally delay the narrative from arriving at) Lucrèce's rape by Sextus.

In *Clélie*, Lucretia's rape, or the sequence of events that make up the rape in the historical narratives (a threat, the rape, and death), is further deferred by another repetition of that very same sequence: a threat that forces Lucrèce to consent to forced sex (rape), as a result of which she commits (a figurative form of) suicide. However unlike the rape by Sextus, which serves as the "real" and "historical" moorings for the text's *vraisemblance*, this rape that comes before *the* rape is a product of Scudéry's own narrative. Unlike the rape by Sextus that is superimposed on Scudéry's text from without as its historical setting, this rape is more difficulty intertwined with the contingency of the narrative.

Ascribed the task of bringing the retrospective story of Brutus's life back to the present of the narrative, Herminius narrates the accident that reveals the love affaire between Lucrèce and Brutus to Lucrèce's father, Lucretius, and accounts for her marriage to Collatin. Although their communication goes unnoticed for six months, "il n'est pas possible d'avoir toujours un soin si exact " (2 :196). One day "il arriva malheureusement que Lucrèce en traversant la chambre de son père, laissa tomber de ces petites tablettes que ie vous ai dit que Brutus avait fait faire exprès pour luy écrire" (2 :196). Opening the letter "avec précipitation, quoiqu'il ne crût pas absolument y trouver rien qui le dût fâcher, [Lucretius] fut fort surpris d'y trouver un billet qui s'adressait à Lucrèce, et de voir que c'était un billet d'amour" (2 :196). Upon reading the purloined note trafficked between the lovers, Lucretius is outraged to learn that his daughter has not only a lover who "fût un amant aimé," but what is worse a lover who "tramait quelque chose contre Tarquin" (2 :197). Lucretius is loyal to the Tarquins and to this point had favored a marriage between his

daughter and Collatin, nephew of King Tarquin, in order to strengthen the bond between his and the royal family. Lucrèce's mother, who died before Lucretius discovers the note, had resisted the marriage and set about convincing her husband to allow Lucrèce to choose her own husband.

Lucretius confronts his daughter with what he thinks is his discovery of her guilt and the identity of her lover. To her father's insistence that she reveal her lover's identity or suffer the consequences, Lucrèce responds, "Tout ce que je vous puis dire Seigneur, répliqua Lucrèce, c'est que je suis plus malheureuse que coupable, et que si j'ai souffert l'affection de celui dont vous avez un billet entre les mains, ç'a été par le commandement de la plus vertueuse mère du monde" (2 :199). In this contest of wills between father and daughter, Lucretius recognizes Lucrèce's victory and makes recourse to threats: "[il] lui dit les choses du monde les plus rudes, pour tâcher de lui donner de la crainte. Mais voyant qu'elle avait une fermeté inébranlable, il prit la résolution de la *forcer* à épouser Collatin: car il y avait long temps qu'il avait remarqué qu'elle y avait de l'aversion" (2 :200 [emphasis added]). In order to protect Brutus, Lucrèce agrees to the forced marriage to Collatin. Her emotions fluctuate from relief for the safety of Brutus to hopelessness upon seeing herself forever separated from the man she loves by a forced marriage to a man (and royal family) she despises. Ultimately seeing no way out besides "des choses extrêment fâcheuses, elle souhaita la mort comme le seul remède aux maux dont elle était accablée. (2: 201)

In fact, until the retrospective "Histoire de Brutus," Lucrèce's conspicuous absence from the text marks her as narratively 'dead:' absent from the social world of conversation that gives life to the bourgeoise Romans of *Clélie*.[25] But if Lucrèce dies before her death in suicide, it is arguably a response to a rape that preceeds her rape by Sextus. A repetition of the sequence of threat, rape, and death—the events that comprise the rape of Lucretia in Livy—double and divide

the "moment" of the rape of Lucrèce in *Clélie*. Guided by the repetition of the series of events that make up her rape in the Roman historical accounts, Lucretius's threat of her lover's death is made legible as the first threat used to make Lucrèce comply to another's will (the second being Sextus's that he will brand her an adulteress if she does not agree to be one which the reader anticipates according to Livy's historical account). Similar to what Sextus's threat extorts from Lucretia in the historical narrative, Lucretius's threats demand Lucrèce give her body to a man she would otherwise refuse. There are at least two rapes that seem to be part of Scudéry's figuration of *the* rape of Lucrèce. In *Clélie*, Lucrèce's rape is not limited to the sex to which Sextus's threat forces her to consent, but includes the sex with Collatin to which her father's threat forces her to "consent."

At the same time, this 'first' figuration of the rape of Lucrèce is also missed in the narrative to the extent that the scene of forced *marriage* does not constitute rape according to ancient Roman or seventeenth-century French law.[26] Lucretius's action is sanctioned; as Lucrèce's father, he has the right to marry her to whomever he chooses. As such, the sex Lucrèce is forced to have with Collatin (and not only once) is by definition not *stuprum*, not rape, but marriage. It is difficult to not see the suppression of the violence of Lucretius's threat as somehow even more violent than the anticipated and canonized violence by Sextus. Even if the rape by Sextus is contained and effaced by its effects—sublated into the founding of the Republic—that rape remains legible as a violence. Scudéry's addition of this narrative account of Lucrèce's forced marriage to Collatin, inflects Lucrèce's withdraw from her vibrant social life with a pathetic ravishment concealed behind legality.

What, then, are readers to make of the fact that despite its preoccupation with what I have argued is an absent, divided, and spread sexual violence, *Clélie* ends with the "end" to sexual

violence, with marriage. In a historical period in which marital rape is impossible, insofar as—legally speaking—rape is the theft of property and a husband cannot steal his own property, is it a stretch to think that rather than marking a shift away from the sexual violence, the concluding marriage might also be read in light of it?[27] In other words, does the marriage between Aronce and Clélie end sexual violence, or does it further spread sexual violence after *Clélie*? Although marriage seems to put an end to sexual violence according to laws of the period and its coincidence with the literal end of the text, it might rather be read as another trace of its effaced, absent figuration in *Clélie*.[28]

Part V: From Sublation to Effect

We can read this other rape of Lucrèce in *Clélie* as rape only to the extent that we recognize it as a repetition of the threat-rape-death sequence that comprises the "real" rape of Lucretia by Sextus. That is, the rape of Lucrèce by her father and husband depends upon the real empirical rape of Lucretia for its meaning. What happens to the legibility of either rape if the "real" rape of Lucretia is demoted from the status of empirical reality and historical fact to a narrative effect of the story of Clélie and Aronce? This is, in fact, what happens in *Clélie*: the rape of Lucretia by Sextus is made a narrative effect of the story of Clélie and Aronce. To trace the ways that the rape of Lucrèce by Sextus is a consequence of the narrative in Clélie, I will turn to *Clélie's* most explicit rewriting of historical account of Lucretia's story as we find it recounted by Livy.

As in Livy, the story begins at the camp, where "Sextus introduisit […] une espèce de vie plus voluptueuse qu'à Rome": "[il] mêlait toujours l'amour à toutes choses, les conversations qui suivaient ces festins étoient ordinairement ou de la beauté, ou de l'humeur des femmes, soit en

les louant, ou en les blâmant (1 :507-508). The camp serves as a meeting ground for Clélie and Lucrèce's stories. Aronce joins Collatin and Sexus in this location where he suspects that Tarquin is holding Clélie prisoner. One night, after the men have dined together, Sextus "se mit à faire la guerre à Collatin, de ce qu'on ne voyait point sa femme, quoiqu'elle eût la réputation d'être la plus belle femme de Rome" (1 :508). Sextus argues that "bien que Collatin soit neveu du roi mon père, et que par conséquent Lucrèce soit d'une qualité à être connue dans Rome jusques aux plus vils esclaves, elle n'est presque connue de personne que par sa réputation qui paraît établie par enchantement" (1 :508). Offering a commentary on Scudéry's rewriting of the story of Lucretia (a commentary on the very story of which he is a character), Sextus calls attention to Lucrèce's conspicuous absence from the text, prompting the account of Lucrèce in the "Histoire de Brutus."[29]

Sextus is of course quite right. Up until this point in the narrative, Lucrèce has only appeared in name a few times as the well-reputed and dutiful wife to Collatin to whom Clélie is compared in beauty and virtue. Thirsty for vicarious knowledge of Lucrèce, Sextus instructs Collatin to "dispense de cette bienséance ordinaire" and "sans penser que vous êtes mari de Lucrèce" to tell "s'il est vrai qu'elle approche de la beauté de cette belle captive" (1 :510). The "belle captive" to whom Sextus asks Collatin to compare his wife is none other than Clélie, with whom Sextus fell in "love" at first sight. At this first crossing of Lucrèce and Clélie begins *Clélie*'s most explicit rewriting of the story of Lucretia's rape as it is told in *The Early History of Rome*.

Through the critique of Collatin's protection of Lucrèce and the comparison of Lucrèce to Clélie, Sextus receives his invitation to Collatia. But the trip is instigated not only by Collatin in defense of his own honor, but also by Aronce and his company "dans l'espérance qu'il eut que

peut-être l'inclination qu'il avait pour Clélie, devienrdait-elle plus faible s'il en pouvait avoir pour Lucrèce" (1 :512). Aronce and his company are aware and fearful of the threat Sextus's passion poses to Clélie's safety to such an extent that they proceed to put out his passion for Clélie by fanning that for Lucrèce. They are pleased that after visiting Lucrèce and encountering her beauty "avec tout son éclat," " [Sextus] se sépara de Lucrèce avec tant d'estime pour elle que tous ceux qui étaient avec lui, à la réserve de Collatin qui n'y prenait pas garde, connurent qu'elle avait touché son cœur" (1 :512, 515).

For Sextus *un cœur touché* is not an unusual occurrence and one expects that he might very well vacillate between Clélie and Lucrèce until he has had his way with either or both, or until another unfortunate woman captures his attention. But rather than leave this to chance,

> [E]n s'y en retournant, Artémidore, Amilcar, Zénocrate, et Célère, qui avaient envie de mettre Lucrèce dans le cœur de Sextus, afin d'en chaser Clélie, qui ne faisait que d'y entrer, ne firent autre chose que louer la beauté de Lucrèce, et qu'estimer Collatin heureux. Ils disaient même tout bas à Sextus, qu'assurément Lucrèce avec toute sa vertu, étoit d'un tempérament passionné, ajoutant que cela se voyait en ses regards, et qu'elle ne se serait pas si difficile à vaincre que Clélie, qui était une personne plus froide. Si bien que Sextus qui était d'un naturel impétueux, abandonnant son cœur à la beauté de Lucrèce, sans en chasser tout à fait Clélie, s'en retourna au Camp: sans savoir bien précisément s'il était plus touché de la beauté brune que la beauté blonde. (1 :515)

The four men make it their task to chase from Sextus's mind the image of Clélie with that of Lucrèce. They convince Sextus to go for the easier prey, which they argue is Lucrèce based on the temperament predicted by her hair color. Clélie's protection thus comes at the cost of

Lucrèce's (not from Clélie's own virtue or for that matter Lucrèce's allure). Sextus's preference for Lucrèce only comes with a certain impetus from Clélie's admirers.

In this narrative wherein Clélie might be saved from Sextus but only at the cost of Lucrèce, *even* the infamous rape by Sextus is made a narratological consequence of the protection of Clélie. Rather than a historical event that produces the republic and *Clélie*, the rape becomes an effect of the *roman*'s narrative logic.[30] At first glance, *Clélie* seems to be a fiction anchored in a real event that took place in 508 BCE; and yet, it is precisely the fictional elements in *Clélie* that ultimately account for the rape. In rewriting the "rape of Lucretia," Scudéry draws the rape back into the messiness of interpretation and reading by not only refusing to sublate the rape into the republic and thereby domesticate, locate, and redeem it, but also by figuring the rape as susceptible to rewriting, by marking the incompleteness of reference rather than the certainty and fixedness of an extratextual past event.

In fact, when we go to read *the* rape in *Clélie*, when we look for it in the narrative, we find it absent, or exceeding its happening, wandering throughout the text such that rape is "itself" only to the extent to which it exceeds itself. We have already seen how in *Clélie* the rape of Lucrèce is divided between her forced marriage to Collatin—structured upon the repetition of the threat-rape-suicide structure—and the "real" rape by Sextus, which ultimately is drawn back into the narrative as a consequence of Aronce's protection of Clélie. Despite its repetition in the other rape scene, the reader nevertheless awaits and expects Scudéry's figuration of *the* rape of Lucrèce in her bedroom by Sextus—his threat and her submission to rape that will lead to her suicide, the origin of threat-rape-suicide sequence. However, Scudéry deviates from the historical sources and many other versions of the story of Lucretia by excluding the bedroom scene—the threat and rape—from her text.

Lucrèce's rape by Sextus is not represented in *Clélie*. Instead, Sextus's journey to and from Collatia and the fifteen pages that separate his coming and going from the camp and Collatia substitute for the infamous bedroom scene. The narrator remarks only in passing on Sextus's departure from the camp at Adrée and the reader will understand only after the fact that Sextus's departure from the camp implied the rape of Lucrèce. Not even Brutus, returning to the camp at Ardée as Sextus leaves, is attentive to what Sextus's departure forebodes: "[Brutus] s'en alla au camp, où il arriva comme Sextus en venait de partir, sans qu'on sût où il était allé" (2 :477).

As if complicit in Sextus's plot to rape Lucrèce, the narration grants Sextus's movements refuge in the movements of several other characters, including Aronce (who is in hiding at Collatia with his companions), Clélie, Collatin, Lucretius and Tarquin. As one of many journeys, Sextus's journey takes cover in the web of movements that the reader is at pains to keep straight. Further, because the scene of the first visit to Collatia when Sextus's lust for Lucrèce first blossoms was nearly two thousand pages before, Sextus's movements by no means announce themselves as indicative of the rape. The sheer volume of pages and events that divide the two events obscure the connection.

Like his departure from Ardée, Sextus's movement away from the direction Collatia seems a casual occurrence. Brutus, Collatin, and Lucretius discuss the odd sighting of Sextus as they make their way to Collatia:

> Mais ne vois-je pas Sextus, qui traverse ce grand chemin, et qui sans être suivi que d'un esclave seulement, semble vouloir éviter notre rencontre? - C'est luy sans doute, respondit Lucretius, mais puisqu'il ne veut pas êter vu ne le voyons point; car il est ieune, insolent, et capricieux; et il ne faut assurément pas faire semblant de le voir, puisque ce

> n'est pas son intention. - Mais d'où peut-il venir, reprit Lucretius? - Les princes de son humeur, répliqua Collatin, ont tant d'affaires obscures, qu'il ne faut jamais demander d'où ils viennent. (2 :481)

While Collatin and Lucretius quickly agree to yield to Sextus's desire to go unseen by them, Brutus "sentit dans son cœur ce qu'on ne saurait exprimer" (2 :482). The anxious lover's fears prove justified when the three men encounter a slave sent by Lucrèce to hurry them to Collatia where she awaits them in a state of disarray. It is at this moment in the narrative that the reader realizes—after the fact—that the rape has been "taking place."

With Lucretius, Collatin, and Brutus, the reader awaits Lucrèce's explanation of what has happened between Sextus's now-revealed coming and going from Collatia. She responds to this duty by first and foremost refusing it, explaining "en levant une seconde fois les yeux au ciel, comme pour lui demander protection, si le malheur qui m'est arrivé se pouvoit dire, il ne serait pas aussi grand qu'il est" (2 :484). Lucrece insists here as she will in what follows that it is not only modesty keeps her from stating explicitly her offense. It is not only the fact that the *malheur* ought not be spoken, but also that it cannot be spoken that makes her suffering so great. The incommensurability of the offense to any word constrains Lucrèce to render it *completely* comprehensible, communicable, and meaningful.[31] Like Scudéry's excision of the scene from the narrative, Lucrèce's revelation to her husband, father and lover confronts the reader with rape's excess to a scene or a word, offering only another blank where one anticipates, even desires, the comfort of a violence that, having been excised from the narration, can at least be identified by a name.

Even as she elaborates on her *malheur*, the violence is not named but rather passed over in silence, marked only by the spaces and the blanks that link her paratactic statements: "[M]ais

tout ce que la modestie peut souffrir que je vous en dise, c'est que l'infâme Sextus est venu dans ma chambre, qu'il est le plus criminel, et le plus insolent de tous les hommes, et que je suis la plus malheureuse personne de mon sexe, quoique je sois la plus innocente" (2 :484).[32] The unnamed offense connects without explicitly connecting Sextus journey from Adrée and Collatia, his scoundrelness and insolence, to Lucrèce's misfortune and innocence. In her penultimate speech in *Clélie*, Lucrèce strings together several moments in the text that divide the rape. She cites her first complaint against her father (the first time she is "la plus malheureuse personne"). She illuminates the implications of Sextus's movements to and from her Collatia. In doing so, Lucrèce insists that multiple moments are the cause(s) of her offence. The rape is left unnamed, anticipated and assumed, but never finally or satisfactorily identified or located; the rape is figured not simply as absent but absent to the extent that it is disseminated.

Part VI: Violent Returns

Although Lucrèce commits suicide after her *malheur* at the hands of Sextus, like Lucretia in Livy, to ensure that "il ne sera jamais dit que Lucrèce ait appris aux Romaines par son exemple, qu'une femme peut vivre sans gloire" her suicide in *Clélie* does not offer the same satifying substitution of the absence in death for the referential absence of rape that we saw at play in Livy (2 :485).[33] Not only does Lucrèce's rape and suicide not end the narrative (which is after all the story of Clélie and Aronce's successful matrimony) or the cycle of threatened rapes in the narrative, but it also fails in *Clélie* to arrest even threat of rape by Sextus.

Advancing in the narrative to Part V, Book 2—the last volume of Clélie's exhaustive *histoire*—we find Clélie and nineteen other Roman women in the hands of Porsena, after they were selected as hostages securing a peace treaty between Clusium and Rome. They are, as

Clélie later names them, “des victims publiques, qu’on sacrifiait à la paix” (5 :325). Although Clélie has previously escaped the advances of both Sextus and his father Tarquin through the gallant plotting of Aronce—the very plotting by which he trades Lucrèce’s honor for Clélie’s—she finds herself returned to a perilous situation when she is within reach of a newly desirous Sextus. The Tarquin’s have been expelled from Rome, but found shelter in Clusium. Lucrèce raped and dead, Clélie finds herself once again the object of Sextus’s impetuous desire. But unlike in Livy’s Roman history, Lucrèce’s physical death in suicide does not serve as her final appearance Scudéry’s *histoire romaine*.

While held hostage by Porsena, father to her beloved Aronce, Clélie is visited by the specter of Lucrèce:

> Imaginez-vous, reprit Clélie, que comme mes chagrins m’occupent étrangement l’esprit, je ne dors jamais que par lassitude… En cet état je ne sais si mon accablement m’a forcée de dormir, ou si j’était effectivement éveillée, mais je sais bien qu’il m’a semblé voir une assez grande lumière, qui avait pourtant quelque chose de sombre; un moment après Lucrèce m’a apparu plus belle que je ne la vis jamais, ses cheveux étaient négliés, elle était couverte d’un grand manteau blanc, et elle tenait un poignard sanglant à la main. (5 :322)

At first, Clélie is reticent to confess the visitation to her companions Plotine and Valérie for fear that they will suspect her “d’avoir l’esprit un peu faible,” but the disturbing message Lucrèce brings compels Clélie to share it with her company. Lucrèce has returned from the grave to warn Clélie of an imminent threat to her virtue: “Fuyez, Clélie, fuyez, m’a-t-elle dit, mais fuyez promptement, car je vous avertis que le tyran qui me fit avoir recours à ce poingard, en veut à votre gloire, comme il en voulait à la mienne. Ayez donc recours à la fuite, et ne vous mettez pas

dans la nécessité d'être obligée d'avoir recours à la mort" (5 :322). To combat Sextus's advances, Clélie, Lucrèce explains, must counteract Sextus's movements with her own.

After she recounts the visit by Lucrèce and the warning of her impending violation by Sextus to her companions, a guard suddenly enters the tent, and addressing Clélie directly, echoes Lucrèce's message:

> [J]e m'adresse à vous pour vous avertir que Sextus vous enlèvera si vous n'y prenez garde. Je n'ai pu savoir si ce doit être cette nuit, ou la nuit prochaine, mais je sais avec une certitude infaillible qu'il a pris toutes les mesures pour cela, que plusieurs de mes compagnons doivent le servir, que celui qui nous commande est à lui, qu'il a des bateaux retenus, et qu'il doit assister lui-même à cette violence. (5 :323)

With this repetition of the warning, Clélie resolves to flee from Porsena's camp, knowing that "Rome dira que nous violons le traité" (5 :325). She compels her fellow women hostages to join her flight in a speech that demands that they, like Lucrèce before them, not fear death more than the loss of their honor and warns them that the threat against her honor is a threat against theirs. If they doubt this, Clélie apprises them of the certain proliferation of rape: "ce malheur ne regarde que moi, tous ceux qui servent un ravisseur, sont des ravisseurs, eux mêmes, et je ne doute pas que l'infâme Sextus ne vous ait promises à ceux qui le doivent servir à un criminel dessein" (5 :324).

Clélie's explanation of the proliferation of rape not only arouses fidelity and fear in her companions but also underscores the doubling, division, and dissemination of the threat of rape throughout *Clélie*, here in a most pragmatic way. Sextus's abduction of Clélie will cost the sacrifice of her companions, who will serve as payment to the men who facilitate the satiation of his desire. Rape is doubly contagious: first to the extent that the men are accomplices in one rape

and second to the extent that they literally will become rapists themselves. They will commit a second crime as they collect the payment for their first.

Although the historical narratives fixate exclusively on Sextus's violence against Lucrèce and attempt to put it to rest by equating rape to the supposed retribution for her rape in the overthrow of Sextus's family, Scudéry's addition of the motivation for Clélie's flight from hostage refuses the illusion that the expulsion of the Tarquins could possibly curtail the violence of the rape. The women flee in order to protect their honor, to die "avec plus de gloire que Lucrece, puisque ce sera pour éviter un malheur, après lequel elle ne voulut plus vivre" (5 :325). However, *Clélie* rejoins the historical accounts as Clélie and her companions arrive in Rome to the admonishment of Publicola. Since Clélie instigated the flight to avoid the imminent threat to her honor, she must justify her action to Publicola:

> Seigneur […] si ce que mes compagnes et moi avons fait, ne vous semble pas raisonnable, je vous conjure de ne vous en prendre qu'à moi, car elles n'ont simplement fait que me suivre, et si le Sénat trouve que j'ai faille, je suis prête d'en recevoir telle punition qu'il lui plaira de m'ordonner, car je ne crains ni les supplices, ni la mort, je ne crains que l'infamie. (5 :329)

The Roman Senate of *Clélie*, with that of Roman history, determines to send the hostages back to Porsena despite the imminent threat of rape that prompted their escape. This action hardly amounts to the punishment requested by Clélie. The return of the hostages undoes their movements, refusing to grant their flight any effect. They will be returned to certain violation as if they had never left Clusium.

In the context of *Clélie*'s interweaving of Lucrèce's story with Clélie's, in particular in light of the text's addition of the return of Lucrèce's ghost, which pivotally connects their stories

at this point, the attempts to contain Lucrèce's rape behind her suicide or the revelation of republic are exposed as not only ideologically driven, but also as failures. Through its iteration of Livy, its repetition with a spectral difference, *Clélie* underscores the incongruency between Lucretia and Cloelia: the Romans, given the opportunity the to prevent the repetition—potentially multiplied by twenty—of Sextus's violence, refuse to engage in another conflict in order to save the group of virtuous women. By making Clélie's motivation for the flight from hostage another threatened rape by Sextus, Scudéry's text insinuates that the revolution hardly had anything to do with an outrage over a rape. In the repetition, protecting against rape is deemed less important than maintaining a peace treaty, whereas previously a rape demanded an entire overthrow of the government. When Sextus threatens to rape another virtuous Roman woman (and potentially nineteen other women to achieve that end) and when this woman escapes his threat, she is sent back to the enemy hands that abet the dethroned Prince, the hands that assist him in his plot to abduct and violate her. Clélie's insistence that "tous ceux qui servent un ravisseur, sont des ravisseurs, eux-mêmes" comes unexpectedly to indict her own country's senate (5 :324).

Clélie's addition of a motivation for Clélie's escape furthermore calls attention to the desire by authors and critics of the story of Lucretia's rape to contain the rape by making it the cause of the revolution, by inscribing the rape in a dialectical narrative of progress. Not only does Scudéry figure rape as doubled and dispersed throughout *Clélie*, but her text also figures the complimentary violence of attempts to define simply or pinpoint rape in time and space. Often overlooks as merely the *précieux* advocating for platonic friendships and compliance with the aesthetic constraints of *bienséance*, the absence of rape in *Clélie* becomes the text's figure for the disseminated violence of rape. By subverting the narrative attempts to lay to rest the rape in

favor of the promise of the Republic or the Absolutist king's right to rule, *Clélie* offers readers a glimpse of the ways in which the rape does not simply begin and happen, and in turn does not simply end.

So what is the significance of the narrative unsettling of narrative, the allegorical and narrative *dislocations of narrative by rape* in *Clélie*? What new demands of thinking and responding to the reality of rape emerge in light of it? The possibility of this reading, I would argue, points to some of the advantages of considering sexual violence not only legally but also literarily, particularly when dealing with texts from the early modern period. As we saw in my opening discussion about the debates concerning Lucretia's intention in her rape and suicide, many literary texts do join in the juridical impulse to determine guilt or innocence, in pursuing answers to legal, moral, or ethical questions raised by Lucretia's rape. Scudéry, on the other hand, gives us to think a literary conception of sexual violence that not only does not seek to determine guilt or innocence or to answer unanswerable questions, but that also demonstrates how an overemphasis on the question of a victim's intention in an event fails to consider the extent of rape's nefarious violence, as well as the potential violence of such juridical determinations.

I would argue that the unsettling of narrative in this one case, extends beyond the history of the Lucretia story. The unsettling of narrative by rape that we discover in *Clélie* has implications for the way we think about the central role of narratives of rape in both law and activism. Perhaps, through *Clélie* and a literary thinking of rape more generally, we can begin to take into account the ways that the elision of rape is not necessarily proof of the "falsity" of a victim's claims or of rape's misogynistic suppression. Rather, we might begin to read the

enmeshing of rape and narrative itself as part of the domestication of rape's violence, a domestication which comes at the cost, rather than to the aid, of victims, survivors, and even perpetrators of sexual violence.

[1] Indeed, we find in the seventeenth century rewritings of the story of Lucretia a frequent attempt to portray her as either the virtuous victim or the adulterer. Bousquet focuses on securing Lucrèce's innocence. For the opposite aim, see Alexandre Hardy's *Lucrece ou l'adultresse punie*, or Fontenelle's *Dialogues des morts*.

[2] Cloelia's and Lucretia's stories come to us from four main sources: Books I and II of Livy's *The Early History of Rome*, Dionysius of Halicarnassus's *Roman Antiquities*, Pliny's *Natural History*, and Plutrach's *Parallel Lives*. Scudéry, though a reader of neither ancient Greek nor Latin, would have had access to Du Ryer's 1653 translation of Livy, *Les Décades historiques*, and Amyot's 1572 translation Plutarch, *Vie de Publicola* (Godenne 246). Because we find direct traces of Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Pliny's versions of the story of the rape of Lucretia in *Clélie*, René Godenne and Robert Nunn suggest that Scudéry employed the service and knowledge of her friends, especially Paul Pellisson in order to access the untranslated sources (Godenne 247). However, if we follow Joan DeJean's caution in *Tender Geographies* against assuming a single author for the texts attributed to Scudéry and consider *Clélie* to be the product of collaborative salon writing resulting from *le samedi*, then we might be less concerned with establishing which exact texts Scudéry *herself* could or could not have read (DeJean 120).

I have briefly explained the story of the rape of Lucretia above. Cloelia's story is told in Livy's *The Early History of Rome*, Book II. After the Roman Republic is formed, the Etruscans launch a siege against the city. A peace treaty is forged demanding Rome send Cloelia and a group of other hostage men and women to Clusium in order to end the siege. For no reason identified in the classical sources of the story, Cloelia initiates a flight to Rome, which violates the peace treaty. The women arrive safely in Rome but are immediately sent back to Clusium by the Romans at Porsena's request. When Cloelia returns to Porsena's camp, the King is so impressed by her gallantry that he frees her and a group of hostages of her choosing. Rather than select the other hostage women, Cloelia chooses a group of virile men hostages to replenish the Roman forces of war. For her gallantry, a statue of Cloelia on horseback is erected and placed in Rome.

Although the preference for the heroic Cloelia over the violated Lucretia might be explained by the demands of seventeenth-century *bienséance*, as we will see, this explanation does not exhaust the impact of Scudéry's revision of the story of Lucretia or how this iteration comes to figure rape. Both how these two stories intertwine through Scudéry's narrative and how the demands of seventeenth-century *bienséance* affect her treatment of the rape of Lucretia are points of great significance for how *Clélie* reads and writes of rape.

[3] I would argue that *Clélie* does not explore violence in spite its function as a *roman à clef* and product of a *précieuse*, but precisely by way of these commitments. These classical classifications contribute to the particular writing of violence that comes to pass in *Clélie*. See Joan DeJean's *Tender Geographies*, especially her chapter devoted to the salon writing associated with Scudéry, and Nicole Aronson's *Madeleine de Scudéry, ou le voyage du pays de Tendre*.

[4] Among others, see Robert Nunn "The Rape of Lucretia in Madeleine De Scudéry's Clélie," Sharon Diane Nell's "Salon Ethics: Lucretia in the Land of *Atê*," and James Gaines' "Lucrèce, Clèlie, and Junie: Burdens of Female Exemplarity."

[5] Livy's *The Early History of Rome* holds a special place in *Clélie*. As Robert Nunn's dissertation *Clélie* demonstrates through a comparative analysis of Scudéry's text and the sources of Lucretia and Cloelia's stories, several of the passages in *Clélie* are almost direct quotations from Du Ryer's translation of Livy.

[6] Scudéry's Brutus, drawn from Livy's *The Early History of Rome* and other classical sources, finds himself orphaned after Tarquin kills his father and brothers for opposing his tyrannical rule. Brutus manages to save himself from a similar fate by hiding his *esprit* behind a guise of stupidity, his bruteness, and awaiting the moment to take his revenge.

[7] Moses offers more extended and nuanced analysis of the array of meanings that constellate around the term *stuprum* in ancient Rome than I can include in this brief synopsis, see especially 43-49. Most importantly, Moses explains that "*Stuprum* did not itself mean forcible sex. While the meaning of *stuprum* was not antithetical to the use of force to procure the sex, it did not include it either; rather, the idea of force had to be supplied through other words and phrases, such as the phrase "per vim," some derivative of "violo," or some form of "rapio," when such a meaning was intended. On the other hand, the term *stuprum* did not *exclude* the possibility that force was involved, either—the word was neutral as to the details of the circumstances under which the sex occurred, probably because the aspect of the act that imparted shame to the victim was his or her having been used; whether the victim had consented to being thus used was irrelevant" (48-49).

[8] To further flesh out the source of this anxiety, we find in the *lex Julia* liberal interpretations of what counts as *vim*. One such interpretation that Moses claims caused great anxiety was the law's insistence that all *stuprum* enacted by the enemy during times of war was *stuprum per vim*. Shakespeare's narrative poem *Lucrece* might be seen as securing his Lucrece's innocence by figuring her as at war with Tarquin, who s described as invading her body and bed, figured by land metaphors (her breasts as mountains, her pillow as a bed of moss). Francis Ferguson's "Rape and the Rise of the Novel" both brings to light and interrogates the tendency of rape law to secure rape victims' innocence by foreclosing the possibility of consent, rather than dealing with the undecidability that intent opens into meaning, interpretation, and truth. My readings of Livy are both indebted to Moses's and Ferguson's elucidations of ways in which the tradition attempts to deal with rape, precisely by doing away with rape's conditions of (im)possibility.

[9] See Moses. In ancient Rome under the *lex Julia*, those who are already considered impudicae (impure) or excluded from the privileges of the citizen cannot be forced to have sex, either because (as in the case of prostitutes) they are already tainted or because they are deprived of will (as in the case of slaves). What is nevertheless interesting about this law, exclusionary as it may be, is that it marks an early attempt to do what rape law frequently does today: to base law on intention. Livy's text both announces and seeks to overcome the ramifications of a legal system so dependent upon the narrative reconstitution of intention.

[10] This debate is notably something Livy adds to his version of the rape of Lucretia. For instance, there is no such scene in the *Roman Antiquities* of Dionysius of Halicarnassus.

[11] For instance, although rape law in the United States is determined state by state, there is a generalized difficulty with providing sufficient proof for the prosecution of rape. Taking for instance the rape accusations against Dominique Strauss-Kahn, the reputation of the alleged victim and the presence or absence of signs of struggle were used to "disprove" the claim. Although law will certainly require that the burden of proof be met, that rape seems to take place precisely in a hazy beyond of the empirical command of law demands that we rethink rape with this in mind.

[12] We might here also consider how the impossibility of ever finally knowing Lucretia's intention and the risk that opposite intentions might look identical might be carefully brought into consideration with the possible absence of "true" intention. The problem of knowing poses problems not only to the law, but also to the victims of violence who themselves struggle with the imperative to have fully known one's own intention and what is more to have fully expressed those intentions. Such problems might be thought through with regard to victim blaming and to anxieties over false rape accusations.

[13] Georges Vigarello introduces his *Histoire du viol: XVIe-XXe siècle* with a similar expression of the difficulties the problem of intention and consent lend to sexual violence: Moving form earlier demands for "indices matériels," without which "le non-consentement de la femme" does not exist, Vigarello arrives at the ways that similar challenges of rape persist to today: "L'histoire du viol est alors celle des obstacles au desaisissement d'une liaison trop immédiate entre la personne et ses actes: la lente reconnaissance qu'un sujet peut être 'absent' des gestes qu'il est condamné à subir ou à effectuer. Ce qui suppose une crise en compte très particulière: l'existence d'une conscience distincte de ce qu'elle 'fait'"(9). I read Vigarello's scare quotes as indicative of his generalization of the means that we seek to delimit intention just as much as action, though admittedly, this might be a bit of a coercion of his text. Nevertheless, looking to the history of 'proof' of rape, throughout Vigarello's history, proves to be particularly useful for an understanding of rape as at once one and many: rape seems to be, at its base, about consent and intention. And yet, the difficulties of proving intention, both to another and to oneself, are exasperated in a circumstance where the imperative is to *know* what one wanted then, at the *very instance*.

[14] This example is an old one, but to a large extent still a dominant one. I am particularly intrigued by the more recent edited volume dedicated to rape in literature, *Feminism, Literature, and Rape Narrative*, edited by Sarcha Gunne and Zoe Brigley Thompson in 2011, in which the editors explain the project as "build[ing] on the feminist critiques of the 80s and 90s, developing the trajectory of such volumes as *Rape and Representation*" (3).

[15] In an interview with Cathy Caruth, Geoffrey Hartman discusses his notion of "pausal reading," which Caruth describes as "a paradoxical link between something that interrupts and something

that continues" (222). Although I encountered this interview after writing this chapter, Hartman's "pausal reading" with "overspecified ends and an absent middle" certainly resonates with my readings of sexual violence throughout this project.

[16] There have been many rich discussions of *la carte de Tendre*. See especially Jörn Steigerwald's "L'Oiconomie des plaisirs, La praxéologie de l'amour gallant: à propos de la *Clélie*," Anne E. Duggan's "Lovers, Salon, and State: La Carte de Tendre and the Mapping of Socio-Political Relations," James Munro's *Mademoiselle de Scudéry and the "Carte de Tendre,"* Gloria Feman Orenstein's "Journey through Mlle de Scudéry's Carte de Tendre: A 17th Century Salon Woman's Dream/Country of Tenderness," and Jeffery Peter's *Mapping Discord*. For an overview of the role of allegorical maps from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century, see Peter's *Mapping Discord* and Franz Reitinger's "Mapping relationships: Allegory, gender and the cartographical image in eighteenth-century France and England." For a consideration of the map independent from its narrative context in *Clélie*, see Lacan's *Seminaire XVII: L'envers de la psychanalyse*.

[17] By this, I am not suggesting that women are biologically or physically more vulnerable to sexual assault but rather that in *Clélie* the perpetual return of the threat of sexual violence marks a pervasiveness and endlessness that is a peculiar aspect of Scudéry's treatment of it.

[18] For an image of the map, see *Clélie* vol. 1, p 179. In "L'Oiconomie des plaisirs: La praxéologie de l'amour galant à propos de la *Clélie*," Jörn Steigerwald also examines the narrative sources of the famous *carte de Tendre*, but with an emphasis on the ways that it lays out an ethic of gallantry. Although he also cites several of the passages that I will cite below, his reading of this *Conversation sur la naissance de l'amour* makes no mention of violence. Steigerwald emphases the positive and prescriptive gallant ethic offered by this conversation and the map at the expense of a reflection on the violence that narratively provokes it.

[19] Steigerwald rightly notes that Clélie does not, in fact, define *tendresse*, but instead explains its effects.

[20] In *Salonnières, Furies, and Fairies*, Anne Duggan explains that "[O]rgeuil connoted in the seventeenth century both amour proper and a sense of military aggressiveness. It should come as no surprise, then, that the name of the most demonized character in the novel, Tarquin Superbe, can be translated as 'Tarquin l'Orgeuilleux' ['Tarquin the Proud']" (71). Significantly, Scudéry's Tarquin will attempt to rape Clélie after she is forgotten by Sextus in favor of Lucrèce. In utilizing *Orgeuil* as one of her town names, Scudéry places the very French adjective that would translate Tarquin's Latin name, Tarquin Superbus, not only on the map, but within the territory of *l'Amitié*. She thereby demonstrates the ways that violent sexual desire cannot be excluded from friendship, as Clélie claims it to be. Although, as Duggan points out, the town of *Orgeuil* is at the farthest remove from *Tendre* as possible—further even from *Tendre* than the *Terres inconnues*—it nonetheless makes up part of the *carte de Tendre*.

[21] This addition is particularly surprising since the way that most other rewritings of the story of Lucretia secure her status as innocent victim is by raising her to the level of a passionless goddess. For an example of this tendency, see Pierre Du Ryer's 1638 *Lucrece*.

[22] The ellipsis has, in fact, been traced by literary scholars on sexual violence as a sign that frequently (and enigmatically) marks the omission of rape in literature. Famously, Heinrich von Kleist employs an ellipsis to mark the absence of the rape scene in *Die Marquise von O*. For a discussion of the ellipsis in Kleist, see Susan Winner's "Marquise's 'O' and the Mad Dash of

Narrative" in Higgins and Silver's *Rape and Representation*. See also Gunn and Thomson's edited volume, *Feminism, Literature, and Rape Narratives: Violence and Violation*, for a discussion of the ellipsis and rape in other rape narratives.

[23] See the introduction to Riley's *A Lust for Virtue: Louis XIV's Attack on Sin in Seventeenth-century France*.

[24] We find in the seventeenth century rewritings of the story of Lucretia, for example, a frequent attempt to portray her as either the virtuous victim or the adulterer. I have already discussed Du Ryer's attempt to establish Lucrèce as "une autre Diane" (59). For the opposite aim, see Alexandre Hardy's *Lucrece ou l'adultresse punie*, in which the Lucrece character only shares her name with the Roman heroine, or Fontenelle's *Dialogues des morts*, between Lucrece and Barbe Plomberge, where Lucrèce's suicide was a ruse to gain fame rather than prove her innocence. Saint Augustine emphasizes the double bind of Lucretia's position in his *City of God*, but ultimately deems her guilty in the eyes of God. He demonstrates through Christian morality that she is "guilty" in the eyes of God one way or another: she is either a guilty adulteress who rightly punished herself with death, or she is a murder who killed an innocent. Much of the tradition surrounding Lucretia is preoccupied with how establish her responsibility once and for all.

[25] Lucrèce appears only once in *Clélie* prior to this story in a scene which recounts the famous nighttime visit by the soldiers to Collatia when she becomes the object of Sextus's lecherous desire. The very title of the retrospective tale that recounts her story excludes her name from its title: "Histoire de Brutus." In "Salon Ethics: Lucretia and the land of Atê" Sharon Nell names Lucrèce's absence from the narrative the equivalent of a death. Nell attribures her first death to the marriage to Collatin, after which Lucrèce withdraws completely from the society of conversation.

[26] For more on rape law in seventeenth-century France see George Vigarello *L'Histoire du viol* and Catherine Orenstein *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked*. As Orenstein's explanations would lead us to conclude, the forced sex Lucretius forces on Lucrèce is not rape in seventeenth-century France. Rape, according the laws and customs of the period, would have taken place if she had consensual sex with her beloved Brutus against her father's consent: "French law made no distinction between a woman's willing elopement and her violent rape" (150).

[27] Not only is rape a crime against a father or husband, rather than the victim, but in the seventeenth century, "French law made no distinction between a woman's willing elopement and her violent rape" (Orenstein 150). For more on rape law in seventeenth-century France see George Vigarello *L'Histoire du viol* and Catherine Orenstein *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked*.

[28] In fact, marriage between the rapist and the victim is a common way that rape was rectified in the seventeenth century. See Vigarello, *L'Histoire du viol.*

[29] Though chronologically before the rape by Sextus, Scudéry's additions of Lucretius's threat, Lucrèce's forced marriage to Collatin, and her resolution of a life of solitude (death) follow and thereby echo the conversation that initially turned Sextus's lascivious eye to the unfortunate Lucrèce, that is the contest over whose wife is most virtuous at camp during the siege of Ardée. Sextus's prodding in this way sets the groundwork for several key events: his first visit to Lucrèce's home at Collatia, Scudéry's deviation in Lucrèce and Brutus's love affair, the entwining of the story of Clélie with that of Lucrèce, and Sextus's rape of Lucrèce.

[30] According to seventeenth-century *bienséance*, particularly *bienséance* as it is described by the author of the preface to *Ibrham* (see note above), the rape might have a place in Scudéry's *roman* if it is ultimately made to punish vice. Whether this would mean as a punishment for Lucrèce or

a punishment for Sextus would depend on the narrative context of the rape. However rape in *Clélie* seems to refuse, if only by seeming to comply with, the rules of *bienséance* as it refuses to be sublated into a lesson for the reader.

[31] Even when the text purports to name the rape explicitly, rape is still absent. For example, in order to convince the men of the validity of Lucrèce's request for vengeance, "une fidèle esclave de cette belle affligée, racontait en deux mots à Lucretius le crime de Sextus, et cette terrible aventure que toute la Terre a sue" (485; vol. 2). Even here, the rape is only named by the euphemism "en deux mots."

[32] The confession of her offense echoes the first confession Lucrèce made to her father, that "je suis plus malheureuse que coupable" after he discovers a letter that reveals to him that she has a lover who is against Tarquin (199; vol. 2).

[33] Portuguese Nun Mariane in *Lettres portugaises* and Cécile Volange in *Les Liaisons dangereuses* will also name the violence that is inflicted on them by their seductions *malheur*.

Chapter 3

Between Rape and Seduction: The Indetermination of Intention in *Les Liaisons dangereuses*

Dated January 14, 17**, over two weeks after the penultimate letter of the collection, the final letter of Pierre Choderlos de Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses* fills this narrative gap with Madame de Volanges's summary of the tragic outcome of the past six month: La Présidente de Tourvel and le Victomte de Valmont are dead. Young Cécile Volanges has been force by the shamefulness of her circumstances to enter a convent. Le Chevalier Danceny has moved to Malte, fleeing his heartbreak in Paris. And la Marquise de Merteuil is bankrupt and disfigured such that "son âme était sur sa figure" (508).

Although the novel's *scélérats* Merteuil and Valmont, who orchestrate the plots that culminate in this tragic conclusion of the letters, have been revealed and punished, a sense of dread lingers in the concluding letter. [1] The letters, de Volanges warns, cannot be used to prevent a similar series of events from befalling innocence next time: "ces réflexions tardives n'arrivent jamais qu'après l'événement" (513). The reflections that, if they had arrived in time, might have kept Cécile chaste until marriage, Danceny honorable, and Tourvel alive can only ever arrive too late, after the damage has already been done. After all who would not, given the chance, flee a seducer?

> Qui pourrait ne pas frémir en songeant aux malheurs que peut causer une seule liaison dangereuse? et quelles peines ne s'éviterait-on point en y réfléchissant davantage! Quelle femme ne fuirait pas au premier propos d'un séducteur? Quelle mère pourrait, sans trembler, voir une autre personne qu'elle parler à sa fille? (513)

But alas, "[s]ans doute," the "editor" to the collection agrees, "les mêmes causes ne manqueraient pas de produire les mêmes effets" (71).[2] An educational hysterone proterone, the moral of the letters can only be learned once it is too late to have learned it.

The warnings by Madame de Volanges and the Editor, warnings that extend the deception and violence recounted in the letters beyond its pages—beyond the intentions of the characters Merteuil and Valmont—hover on the periphery of the text, one preempting its beginning as the fictional framing of the "found letters," the other marking and unmarking its end. Placed before and after the plot of the novel, the warnings address the reader, rather than any of the characters of *Les Liaisons dangereuses*. They break the narrative framing of the epistolary; they risk losing its hard earned *vraisemblance* to convey the message that precisely cannot be conveyed by a *roman en lettres*, that eludes the narrative frame. The warnings, that is, subtly alert the reader of another seduction still in the works: the seduction of the reader by the illusion of "semiotic superiority" (Ray 340).

The immediacy of expression and the illusion of omniscience produced by the epistolary form flatter readers with the belief that, unlike any of the characters, they know "what has really happened," and, in turn, that they have learned their lesson. As William Ray has pointed out, and as the warnings inscribe in the text itself, the epistolary works to blind the reader from recognizing the extent to which the letters do not simply conceal or dissimulate one truth, but fundamentally destabilize truth:

> [W]e the readers know, as none of the characters can, what is 'really' happening in the plot. Or at least this is what the epistolary mode tempts us into assuming […] The narrative seduces us into a delusion of detached mastery akin to that of its protagonists,

only to suspend us in a proliferation of meanings which resist the closure they invite. (340)

Although the multiple writing produced by the structure of the *roman en lettres* seems to allow each characters' true intention to come to light, in fact, this appearance serves as the novel's greatest deception: "ludicrously enough, we identify with the viewpoint of a character whose every move is calculated to discredit identification; we take at face value the statements of someone who delights in deceit" (344). Against the teachings of the novel, we "lend greater truth value to letters that deny sincerity of emotion, simplicity of expression, and moral honesty" (344). Indeed in *Les Liaisons dangereuses* even deception remains uncertain. What the letters reveal and conceal is that we, the reader, simply do not and cannot know, cannot locate finally, the truth. This undermining of all truth—even the truth of untruth—is precisely the "vérité" which remains muffled, know and yet unknowable to the letters end: "l'une des plus importantes vérités, comme aussi peut-être des plus généralement reconnues, reste étouffée et sans usage dans le tourbillon de nos mœurs inconséquentes" (513-514).

Ray's reading of the text focuses on the ways that "the dynamic epistolary structure with its multiple, conflicting frameworks of interpretation" produces and undermines the illusion of the reader's ability to know the true (deceitful) intention of the seducers. However less critical attention has been given to the specific ways and consequences of the fact that the epistolary form calls into question the reader's ability to locate the true intentions of two of the seducers' victims: Tourvel and Cécile. A false confidence in the reader's knowledge of or ability to determine Tourvel's and Cécile's true intentions, in fact, comes to play in some recent criticism on the letters concerning whether to name the sex acts depicted in *Les Liaisons dangereuses* seductions or rapes.

To answer this question provoked by *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, criticism on the text has tended to make recourse, though not always explicitly or intentionally, to a simple distinction between rape and seduction based on an uncritical application of contemporary consent-based understandings of rape to the eighteenth-century *roman en lettres*.[3] While this approach means to do justice to the serious issue of sexual violence, it not only inadvertently reproduces many of the real world failures to deal with sexual violence but it also, as we will see, fails to appreciate the ways in which the figuration of sexual violence in *Les Liaisons dangereuses* undermines the very truth of intention upon which modern, legal definitions of sexual offenses are based. In this chapter I will argue that sexual violence in *Les Liaisons dangereuses* is figured, in ways at once similar to and different from *Lettres portugaises,* as first and foremost a violation of the very experience of violation.

Part I: Naming Rape, Losing Sexual Violence

Published in 1782, *Les Liaisons dangereuses* is comprised of a "selection" of letters exchanged between a group of noble French men and women over six months, from August 3,[4] 17** to January 15 17**. The 175 letters, which are claimed by the "author" *dit* "éditeur" *dit* "rédacteur" to be found objects, revolve around the relationships—*liaisons,* dangerous to various degrees—between their authors: le Vicomte de Valmont, la Marquise de Merteuil, Cécile Volanges and her mother, Madame de Volanges, la Presidente de Tourvel, and le chevalier Danceny. The seductions narrated and enacted within and between the letters abound; I will focused on three. The first is Valmont's seduction of ingénue Cécile under the direction of Merteuil. The second is Valmont's seduction of the pious Presidente de Tourvel by Valmont. And the third is the enigmatic seduction that circulates between Merteuil and Valmont, former

lovers, who have agreed to rekindle their past affair if Valmont succeeds in the improbable seduction of the Tourvel.

Although it seems to go without saying that *Les Liaisons dangereuses* is about seduction—both a self-identification on the part of the text and an exceedingly prevalent subject in eighteenth-century literature—precisely what type of sex the letters depict has come under scrutiny.[5] Although both characters Cécile and Tourvel ultimately assert their will to have sex with Valmont—Merteuil retracting her promise to have sex with him although he has succeeded in the seduction of Tourvel—the narrative circumstances under which Valmont first "vanquishes" each victim strike modern readers as less than "freely agreed upon" (*U.S. Code*, Title X).[6]

Indeed, acknowledging the politically, historically, and epistemologically problematic nature of the sex figured in the text has become something of standard practice in literary criticism of the text.[7] Does Valmont actually get Cécile and La Présidente to "se donner" or does he "les prend"? Is *Les Liaisons dangereuses* about seduction or about rape? In the case of the letters, the rape/seduction distinction is not simply imposed from without, but serves as the point of disagreement between the seducers that will drive the action in the novel. Merteuil asks, goading Valmont for his insistance that Tourvel *se donner*, "Dites-moi donc, amant langoureux, ces femmes que vous avez eues, croyez-vous les avoir violées?" (98).

In her introduction to a recent English translation of the *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, Helen Constantine succinctly resolves the question of whether the epistolary is about rape or seduction. Describing the text's movement from Part III to Part IV as "leading us up to a scene of seduction (or, more properly, rape)," she identifies the sex that Valmont has with an unconscious Tourvel to be a rape, saying no more about the matter (xvii [emphasis added]). The swiftness with which

Constantine resolves the seduction/rape question in the text makes the identification of rape seem obvious: we, of course, all *know* that sex with an unconscious person is *de facto* rape. [8] As the *U.S. Code* clearly states, "A sleeping, unconscious, or incompetent person cannot consent" (Title X).

However, when considered in both the historical context of *Les Liaisons dangereuses* and narrative context of the seduction of Tourvel, the obviousness of Constantine's "or, more properly, rape" parenthetical begins to wane. What does Constantine mean when she says that Tourvel's seduction is *more properly* a rape? Is Constantine's "more properly" the retroactive extension of modern definitions of rape to the eighteenth-century epistolary (i.e. a sexual act without consent, unconsciousness necessitating nonconsent)? Or, does she mean the seduction is more properly rape according to eighteenth-century sexual offense laws? Or, finally, is the seduction more properly rape within the internal logic of the novel itself, as it exceeds (even if it depends upon) historical or legal determinations of sexual offenses? Where does her "proper" get it force?

As I discussed in chapter 1, in early modern France, the difference between *le viol* and *la séduction* ostensibly depended upon the victim's intention to commit or not to commit an illicit sexual act, as it would today.[9] What made both seduction and rape sexual offenses—illicit sexual acts—according to early modern French law, however, was not the status of the victim's intention in it, but that both lacked the consent of his or her guardian. All sexual offenses in *Ancien régime* France were, legally speaking, economic crimes against the father's proprietary rights over his children: not crimes against the body or sexual autonomy of a person, but crimes against property similar to thefts.[10] The difference between rape and seduction did not determine whether a prosecutable crime had been committed or not, as it likely would today, but whether

the *victim* in the offense was a victim or a criminal. If the victim was *thought to* have desired to commit an illicit sexual act then the crime was labeled seduction and he or she was held responsible for the crime with the seducer. If that person, on the other hand, was thought to have steadfastly refused to commit a sexual act (and, critically, to have refused all sensations resembling pleasure, which included becoming impregnated, while the sexual act was committed) the crime was labeled rape, and he or she was freed from punishment (though if the victim was a woman, not from public dishonor).

By and large, however, the problems introduced by a difference predicated on intention were evaded in prosecutions of sexual offenses: an "overwhelming conviction that the woman had yielded voluntarily silently prevailed" (42).[11] The only way that a charge of rape would not be converted into that of a seduction, Georges Vigarello explains in *Histoire du viol*, was if empirical evidence could be presented to corroborate the victim's claimed intention. In early modern French legal prosecutions of sexual offense, this entailed the presence of witnesses (aural or visual), the crime taking place in a location that would guarantee no witnesses and thus 'prove' the perpetrator's intent, visually perceptible signs of the use of extreme violence, or the virtuous reputation of the victim.[12] Even when presented with such 'evidence', however, the presumption that the women willed the sexual act frequently triumphed. As Rousseau puts it in Book 5 of *Emile, ou de l'éducation*:

> Si l'on cite de nos jours moins d'acte de violence [sexuelle], ce n'est surement pas que les hommes soient plus tempérants, mais c'est qu'ils ont moins de crédulité, et que telle plainte, qui jadis eut persuadé des peuples simples, ne ferait de nos jours qu'attirer les ris des moqueurs ; on gagne davantage de se taire. (469)

When possible, Rousseau advises, concealment of a sexual offense a victim's best option. Indeed, Rousseau's advice was often followed. In *A Certain Emancipation of Women*, Tracy Rizzo cites numerous cases in which female victims of rapes and seductions sought to conceal their "offense" (and resulting pregnancies and children) in order to maintain an honorable reputation.

According to this sketch of early modern sexual offense law, Tourvel's virtuous reputation (rather than her unconscious state) *may* have freed her from culpability, determining the sex Valmont has with her to be a rape. However, given that Tourvel remained at the Château with a known scoundrel—against de Volanges warnings that to do so would cast doubt on her virtue—that she agreed to be alone with Valmont, that she never cried out to prevent the sex from happening, that she, having recovered from her after the first, unconscious sexual act, joined him in "l'ivresse […] complète et réciproque," it would be much more likely that the entire affair would be named a very successful seduction (408).

In her own letter on the subject, Tourvel suggests, though indirectly and retroactively, that the sex Valmont had with her was not a violation of her will but an enactment of it: "Tout ce que je puis vous dire, c'est que, placée par M. de Valmont entre sa mort ou son bonheur, je me suis décidée pour ce dernier parti" (413). Tourvel *decided* to make Valmont happy; when she learns that the completion of the sexual act accomplished this, she accepts it as "simplement ce qui est" and gives herself entirely to him (413). To the extent that Tourvel claims as her own *decision* the sex Valmont has with her—even though it happens while she is unconscious, a point to which I will return below—the critical redefinition of the event as a rape would risk undermining or denying Tourvel's own agency to defining the event.[13]

Perhaps all of this narrative and historical complexity surrounding the sexual act in question accounts for the fact that in Constantine's introduction a sexual act that would definitely be a rape by modern standards is named such in the rather indefinite form of a parenthetical. The sex between Tourvel and Valmont is first named a seduction, the term rape is only secondarily and parenthetically ascribed to it.[14] The rhetorical gesture that seeks to mark a "proper" difference between rape and seduction in Constantine's introduction, serves at the same time to bring them problematically back together.[15] Rather than convey the ease with which readers can distinguish between rape and seduction—can identify Tourvel's true intentions—Constantine's parenthetical ends up introducing the reader to the very contingency, violence, and precarity of such determinations.

Even when sexual violence in *Les Liaisons dangereuses* has been treated at greater length in criticism, we find the same tendency to resolve the rape/seduction problem by applying uncritically the modern definitions of sexual offenses. In "Rape and the Triumph of Love in *Les Liaisons dangereuses*," Mary McAlpin insists that Cécile Volanges is raped, not seduced. She offers the following analysis as evidence:

> [W]here Valmont's "seduction" of Cécile is concerned, one fact stands out, and argues most strongly in favor of this event as a rape. Cécile does not willingly allow him to enter her room—does not, that is, knowingly put herself in a situation in which he will be able to 'force' her to have sex with him. (5)

Presumably guided like Constantine by the modern understanding of rape as sex without consent, to prove that Cécile was raped, and not seduced, McAlpin looks for a moment in which Cécile is clearly *not intending* to have sex with Valmont—the sine qua non of modern legal definitions of rape. However, perhaps because the scenes in which the sexual act itself is narrated nonconsent

cannot be so simply pinpointed, a point to which I will return, McAlpin instead rests her case on a moment prior to the sex act, a moment in which Cécile *unknowingly* provides Valmont with the key he will use to enter her bedroom and force her to have sex with him. Knowledge or lack of knowledge of self-exposure to rape, to the threat of sexual violence, according to McAlpin's argument, implies subsequent *willingness* and *unwillingness* to be *forced* to have sex. The sex that Cécile is forced to have with Valmont would not be a rape but only a seduction, McAlpin implicitly argues, if Cécile had in the past *known* that she was putting herself in a position in which Valmont would be in the future "able to *'force'* her to have sex with him" [emphasis added].

This argument flirts dangerously with what anti-rape activism calls "victim blaming," the idea that if a victim places herself in the position to be raped (whether because of her clothing, willingness to engage in some sexual acts, or past relationship with a perpetrator) *the victim* is responsible for—even consenting to—the rape. The eradication of such beliefs from rape prosecutions has been the objective of recent rape reform, which prohibits the introduction of information about the victim's prior sexual behavior in rape prosecutions in order to focus attention exclusively on the victim's consent at the time of the sexual act itself.[16] The claim that the difference between seduction and rape hinges on a victim's knowledge of the possibility of rape prior to the sexual act itself would be adamantly refuted by critics of "rape culture" and "victim blaming," and, I assume, given her intention in the article, McAlpin herself.[17]

We might correct McAlpin's argument to be more in line with contemporary anti-rape discourses by focusing on the status of Cécile's consent only at the moment of the sexual act, or correct Constantine's to name the sex that the unconscious Tourvel has with Valmont only rape to align with modern sexual offense laws or only seduction or consensual sex to grant Tourvel

agency. Each revision would work to better align criticism with the modern conceptions of rape in law and anti-rape activism.

But a more fundamental problem with this approach is that by imposing modern definitions of rape on the text, we assume that *Les Liaisons dangereuses* has nothing to say about sexual violence. We attempt to correct *Les Liaisons dangereuses* by translating the misguided novel into modern terms, declaring how the sex in it *ought* to be named, according to all sorts of complicated impositions of modern notions of intention and sexual offenses. To do so, we must not only assume that Cécile and Tourvel had hidden, true intentions, but also that we, the reader, can know those intentions, a problematic assumption taken up in a debate staged between seducers that I will discuss below.

By treating sexual violence in *Liaisons dangereuses* as exclusively the violation of known intentions, criticism has overlooked the challenge the literary text itself presents to this modern consent-based understandings of rape. In spite of, or in light of, a historical, legal situation in which the unverifiability of intention is always threatening to efface the violence of sexual violence, Laclos' *Les Liaisons dangereuses* stages an investigation of the very difference that sexual offense laws appeal to but can never get a hold of, namely the difference between consent and non-consent. Actively rewriting a rape as a seduction (Cécile) and a seduction as a rape (Tourvel), the characters in *Les Liaisons dangereuses* directly interrogate the very tenuous division between rape and seduction, or sex in which one gives oneself (*se donner*) and sex in which one takes the other (*la prendre*).[18] Pivotally, the co-contamination of rape and seduction in *Les Liaisons dangereuses* does result in the eradication or the effacement sexual violence. Ultimately, I will argue, the epistolary asks not how to arrest this movement between rape and seduction, how to definitively know intention, but calls into question the very possibility of a

stabilization. The letters ask, what does the possibility of converting a rape into a seduction, or a seduction into a rape teach us about the specific violence of sexual violence and experiences of it?

In the remainder of this chapter, I will trace the contours of the figuration of sexual violence in the letters—their literary thinking of sexual violence—by bringing the theory of seduction laid out by seducers Valmont and Merteuil together with the undecidable rapes/seductions of Tourvel and Cécile.

Part II: "La Brouille entre Valmont et Merteuil"

Whereas in his notes on *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, Baudelaire points to the death of Tourvel at Merteuil's hands as "la brouille entre Valmont et Merteuil," an earlier conflict arguably gives rise to this eventual dénouement of the text (631). A disagreement over the possibility of rigorously distinguishing between a rape and a seduction—between taking a victim (*la prendre*) and a victim who gives herself (*se donner*)—in fact drives the action in *Les Liaisons dangereuses* and pits seducers Valmont and Merteuil against one another from the very start of the novel. The conflict begins with a disagreement between Valmont and Merteuil over who will be the next victim of Valmont's seduction.[19] Merteuil proposes Cécile Volanges; Valmont, la présidente de Tourvel.[20] As we will see, Merteuil and Valmont's disagreement over the proper victim of seduction will be put to the test when the seductions are enacted.

In Letter II Merteuil introduces Valmont and the reader to "l'Héroïne de ce nouveau Roman [qui] mérite tous vos soins" (83). Cécile is, according to Merteuil, the perfect victim of seduction: one who already possesses the passion to be seduced. Her certain regard langoureux […] *promet* beaucoup" (83 [emphasis added]). "C'est le bouton de rose"; Valmont has only to

shine his light for her to bloom (83). However, in response to Merteuil's proposal that he play the hero in Cécile's *romanesque* seduction, Valmont explains that he has higher aspirations than to achieve what "vingt autres peuvent réussir comme moi" (85). Rather than author the seduction of "une jeune fille qui n'a rien vu, ne connaît rien; qui, pour ainsi dire, me serait livrée sans défense; qu'un premier hommage ne manquera pas d'enivrer, et que la curiosité mènera peut-être plus vite que l'amour," Valmont sets in his crosshairs an "ennemi digne de moi": la Présidente de Tourvel, and "sa dévotion, son amour conjugal, ses principes austères" (85).

Merteuil chides Valmont in turn for his poor selection: a *prude* and a *dévote* whose improbable seduction will result in little glory if he succeeds, and great shame if he fails. And, she assures Valmont, his seduction of Tourvel can only fail: Tourvel will never satisfy him because she is too fully indoctrinated by morality and honor to completely abandon herself to Valmont (and, for that matter, to her own desire): "cet entier abandon de soi-même, ce délire de la volupté où le plaisir s'épure par son excès, ces biens de l'amour, ne sont pas connus d[es prudes]" (88). Against Merteuil's warnings of both shame and certain failure, Valmont defends his choice of Tourvel. He insists that to succeed with Tourvel, his success must in fact be uncertain: "[p]our que je sois vraiment heureux, il faut qu'elle se donne" (92). Valmont must accept the possibility of never having Tourvel, resolving never to make recourse to *heureuses témerités*. The seducer, Valmont insists, must accept failure if he fails to elicit the desire of the victim.

The difference (*la prendre* v. *se donner*) that Valmont implicitly introduces and his adherence to it after she has explained its *déraisonnement* ruffles Merteuil. For Merteuil sees that with his gallant talk about the honor of failure—"Et si de l'obtenir je n'emporte le prix/ J'aurai du moins l'honneur de l'avoir entrepris"—Valmont has effectively imposed intention as a

constitutive limit of seduction.[21] This line, which the seducer must not cross lest he be no longer a seducer, Merteuil instantly recognizes as the line that for morality and law distinguishes between seduction and rape. She makes explicit this logical consequence of Valmont's distinction between receiving and taking a victim when she ask,

> *[i]l faut qu'elle se donne*, me dites-vous: eh! Sans doute, il le faut; aussi se donnera-t-elle comme les autres, avec cette différence que ce sera de mauvaise grâce. Mais pour qu'elle finisse par se donner, le vrai moyen est de commencer par la prendre. Que cette ridicule distinction est bien un vrai déraisonnement de l'amour ! […] Dites-moi donc, amant langoureux, les femmes que vous avez eu, croyez-vous les avoir violées? (98)

With her question, Merteuil not only underscores Valmont's hypocrisy—he didn't care about the difference between *se donner* and *la prendre* in his past seductions—, but also the interpretive impossibilities entailed in an essential difference—a difference inherent to the act—between taking and giving. There is, quite literally no way that Tourvel can give herself to Valmont without him, in response taking her. Nor would Tourvel, devout prude that she is, likely offer herself to Valmont without some initiation—some "taking of liberties" or "taking the bull by the horns"—on his part, as his own use of combat metaphors in his letter introducing Tourvel suggest.

But what troubles Merteuil most in Valmont's imposition of an essential difference between being taken and giving oneself, between rape and seduction, is that according to her libertine principles the difference is precisely not an essential one. The difference is a matter of narrative framing. For Merteuil, taking and giving is a fictional, moral and legal difference that is fundamentally reversible. Rather than revealing anything essential to or true about a sexual act in and of itself, the taking and giving difference fluctuates according to what ends one seeks to

achieve through a given narration.[22] Placing narrative mastery at its heart, Merteuil's understanding of seduction aligns with what William Ray identifies as the central stake of libertinage *Story and History: Narrative Authority and Social Identity in the Eighteenth-Century French and English Novel*. Over and above sexual mastery, Ray argues, "The libertine takes possession of his or her victim by recounting his/her deeds and those of the victim, by fashioning a private account of the self with which to beguile the weak, and a public account of one's triumph with which to humiliate the victim and dazzle one's rivals" (324-325).[23] For the libertine, it matters little (or perhaps not at all) what "really" happened, but only what he or she has the power make happen (and make to have happened) through narration. This power is not limited to its effects on narrative reality but spreads into "experienced reality through reading—[…] the facts depicted in a story are assimilated into the world of the reader's lived experience merely by virtue of being read repeatedly" (326).[24]

The undecidability between rape and seduction is, according to Merteuil, the very life source of *libertine*'s—the libertine woman's—narrative mastery. The undecidability between between being taken and giving oneself, between the pounding of a fearful and a desiring heart, between real resistance and feigned, provides the ambiguity by which *libertines* dissimulate their desires precisely in order to enjoy them. Apparent force, "l'aire de céder," is the most *commode* pretense to which a dishonorable intention can make recourse. But to the extent to which resistance is the prescribed response to all sexual acts that have not been sanctioned by the father, state, and God, it is not a *real* resistance, or one that marks *certain* lack of desire on the woman's part. Resistance, according to Merteuil, simply secures for a woman a future excuse (narrative mastery) which allows her to engage in illicit sex without sacrificing the image or reputation to being good and virtuous.[25] The goal for all women, and Merteuil's great success, is

to steal away narrative mastery from the religion, morality, and law by mastering the narrative substitutability between rape and seduction for herself.[26]

A more implicit aspect of Merteuil's argument against Valmont's essential difference between rape and seduction is her assumption that although all sex has the potential to look like both a rape and a seduction depending on how the sexual encounter is narrated, all sex is in fact seduction. Merteuil assumes—notably in her response to Cécile following her seduction/rape by Valmont—that a woman's desire for sex is betrayed by the successful act. Whether this is due to some sort of materialist logic (wherein the sex act produces sexual desire) or a libertine feminism (in which all women desire sex but for extrinsic reasons must deny their own desire) matters less for the purposes of this chapter than the consequences of her position for the debate: Merteuil equates intention to the successful completion of the act. *All sex will have been desired*.[27]

In Valmont's new distinction between sex in which a victim gives him/herself and sex in which he/she is taken, on the other hand, this *libertine* emphasis on a fictional, narrative difference between rape and seduction is supplanted by the moral and legal difference between rape and seduction—a metaphysical difference grounded in the belief in and search for true intentions.[28] In lieu of narrative mastery achieved through intricate plotting, Valmont *claims* authority as a reader, who can decode the true inner experience of his victims through their external manifestations.[29] He, that is, assumes both that there is some essential relationship between external signs and inner states and that he possesses the ability to read them. Indeed, he insists in his second letter that he knows "assez que [le] coeur [de Tourval] avait palpité d'amour et non de crainte" (91).

For Merteuil, Valmont's insistence on an essential distinction between rape and seduction and his certainty that *he* can read it in external signs underscore not only his failure to recognize

it as a fictional narrative told by morality and law, but also his failure to recognize—or worse, his attempt to annihilate—the other author in his seductions: his "victim," who maintains a rival narrative mastery.[30] By thinking that *he* can tell rape (*prendre*) from seduction (*se donner*), Valmont denies his "victims," including Merteuil, the *libertine* honor they are due.[31]

What is perhaps most interesting about the rape/seduction debate between Valmont and Merteuil is that it sets *Les Liaisons dangereuses* up *as a debate*. The letters begin with a conflict: Is the difference between rape and seduction essential or narrative, real or fictive? And the epistolary mode seems uniquely capable of resolving matters. Through the enactment of the seductions, a third voice can emerge to corroborate Valmont's argument, or to prove, with Merteuil, his distinction to be a delusion of love. However, in the figurations of the rapes/seductions, a third voice precisely does not emerge, or emerges in ways other than this debate anticipates. For when the seductions/rapes are figured, the contiguity between will and act, act and narrative, and narrative and knowledge—the connection between the will and one's knowledge of it— comes undone. In the enacted seductions, as we will see, the victims' intention is missing at the critical moment in which it must be there to resolve Valmont and Merteuil's argument and satisfy the desire of the reader to know "what really happened." Despite the absence of intention—the absenting of intention—an ineffable violence nonetheless leaves its traces on the text. It is to these traces that we now turn.

Part III: Metonomy of Desire and Belated Intention

Through a series of masterful deceptions, Valmont convinces the reluctant Présidente that her devotion has inspired in him such a deep love and admiration that he has given up his libertine ways and no longer seeks to be near her in order to seduce her but only to learn from her

how to lead a devout and honorable life. This ploy earns him not only Tourvel's trust, respect, and, it seems, love, but also a private meeting with her, which he expects to culminate in his victory. Although he is nearing the prize, Valmont insists in his letter to Merteuil that he remains steadfast in his determination that Tourvel "se donne." With Tourvel, if not with his past victims, Valmont is careful not to cross the line: "J'étais fort éloigné de vouloir prendre" (404).[32]

Although the narration seems to be leading up to a scene of Tourvel's total and complete self-abandonment to Valmont, at the very moment when Tourvel seem ready to give herself intentionally, she instead comes into Valmont possession *without intention*: she faints, her unconscious body falling into Valmont's arms:

> [E]lle se précipita ou plutôt tomba évanouie entre me bras. Comme je doutais encore d'un si heureux succès, je feignis un grand effroi ; tout en m'effrayant, je la conduisais, ou la portait vers le lieu précédemment désigné pour le champ de ma gloire ; et en effet elle ne revint à elle que soumise et déjà livrée à son heureux vainqueur. (405-406)

Tourvel throws herself/faints into Valmont's arms and he leads/carries her to "le théâtre de [sa] victoire," an ottoman.

Even in Valmont's narration of the event, a narration framed by his cries of victory—"[d]ans la foule des femmes auprès desquelles j'ai rempli jusqu'à ce jour le rôle et les fonctions d'amant, je n'en avais encore rencontré aucune qui n'eut, au moins, autant d'envie de se rendre, que j'en avais de l'y déterminer"—a doubled writing of the scene marks its ambivalence, its legibility as both a rape and a seduction (400).[33] Indeed the letter recounts two incompatible versions of the event simultaneously. In one, Tourvel *throws herself* into Valmont's arms and he *leads* her to the site chosen for his victory. In the other, Tourvel *falls*, *unconscious* into Valmont's arms and he *carries her off* to the site chosen for his failure.[34] The narration matches

both the narrative of seduction and that of rape. But insofar as the narration contains both, it matches neither. It is both a seduction and a rape, and to this extent neither a seduction nor a rape. Intention, the differating factor between rape and seduction, is missing.

Paradoxically, the very narrational gesture that introduces the undecidability of the scene—its excess to the determination of either rape or seduction insofar as it is narrated as both and neither a rape and a seduction—achieves this effect through its narrative attempts to do away with this ambivalence. Valmont's narration leads the reader to lean towards an understanding of the scene as either a rape *or* a seduction, rather than to recognize the ways that the double writing in fact forecloses the possibility of such a determination. On the one hand, the narrative framing of the event explicitly instructs readers—particularly the reader for whom the letter is destined, Merteuil—to interpret it as a seduction: "c'est une victoire complète, achetée par une campagne pénible, et décidée par de savantes manœuvres" achieved precisely as Valmont set to achieve it: "[j]usque-là, ma belle amie, vous me trouverez, je crois, une pureté de méthode qui vous fera plaisir" (400, 406).

However, against this "intended meaning" that Valmont asks his reader to take as *the* meaning of his text, the reader notices instead all the signs that Valmont is lying—more specifically, he is lying to himself. We note the uncertainty of "je crois," the ambiguity of "jusque-là." Does Valmont really *believe* that he used a purity of method, or does the "je crois" reveal his self-doubt? Does *jusque-là* mean up to and including, or just up to the sex he has with the unconscious Tourvel? But over and above uncertainty and ambivalence, we note the "plutôt," "ou plutôt tomba évanouie" (400, 406). The reader, that is, notes not simply the unintentional uncertainty betrayed by the letters, but notes and *believes* an opposite certainty. The reader seems to know a truth other than the one of which Valmont attempts to persuade us. And we *feel* we

know it precisely because it is *not* what Valmont wants us to believe, not what Valmont himself wants to believe. We know the truth Valmont doesn't want to admit but what he cannot help but convey—he stepped over the limit; he raped Tourvel.

In contrast to this "truth effect" produced by the doubled writing of the event in Valmont's letter, Tourvel's letter does not only fail to corroborate this version of events legible in Valmont's narration of events, her letter ellides it.[35] In measured tones, Tourvel describes to Madame de Rosemonde her new state of existence: "un autre est le possesseur [de mon existence]: et cet autre est M. de Valmont… Tout ce que je puis vous dire, c'est que, placée par M. de Valmont entre sa mort ou son bonheur, je me suis décidée pour ce dernier parti." Calling attention to the manipulations at play almost everywhere else in the letters, Tourvel insists that her letter makes no attempt to harness narrative mastery for herself or her reader: "Je ne m'en vante, ni m'en accuse: je dis simplement ce qui est" (413). Unlike Valmont and Merteuil who tell not what is, but what they want others to believe (*se vanter*) or what others want to hear (*s'accuser*), Tourvel insists that she tells "simplement ce qui est," the truth of what *is*. Tourvel's letter effaces the truth effect produced by Valmont's letter with *truth*, with her account of "simplement ce qui est."

Tourvel's truth claim produces a narrative contradiction between letters that the reader, having only just read Valmont's narration of the event, is quick to spot. For, as we have just seen, the truth effect in Valmont's letter—the thing that comes to seem true not because of anything Valmont means says in his letter but because of what he does not mean to say—is at odds with Tourvel's version of the events. The reader's truth is at odds with Tourvel's. Whereas Valmont's letter unintentionally convinces the reader that he has raped Tourvel, Tourvel's letter tells the reader that this impression is wrong. The sex she has just had with Valmont is not a

violation of her will, but an enactment of it: “je me suis décidée pour ce dernier parti.” While we might, as the letters compel us to do, yield to the reader’s truth, and thereby do violence to Tourvel’s, I suggest instead that we linger on this narrative inconsistency in order to explore how it in fact serves as a figure of sexual violence in the text.

The choice between Valmont’s death and his happiness gives us a temporal point of contact between the letters. In Valmont’s letter, death and happiness divide the time before Tourvel faints from the time after. Before she fainted, Valmont was threatening to kill himself (“Hé bien! la mort!”) if he could not have Tourvel (404). After she regains consciousness, Valmont’s assurance that “vous avez fait mon bonheur” brings Tourvel fully back into consciousness. Her first utterance after the event is “Votre bonheur” (407).[36] Death and happiness are synchronous in Touvel’s letter, diachronous in Valmont’s letter. Death and happiness mark two temporal differences: between the moments before and after Tourvel’s unconsciousness, before and after Valmont has sex with her; and between the narrative temporalities of Tourvel and Valmont’s accounts.

In Valmont’s narration of this interval between death and happiness, Tourvel does not “se décider,” but “se précipiter” or “tomber évanouie.” As we have seen, in his narration and despite his narrative, the fainting (rape) version of events—which receive a slight preference in Valmont’s narration through the “plutôt”—triumphs over the self-abandonment (seduction) version of events in the larger narrative frame of the text—the seduction of the reader by the “semiotic superiority” effect of the epistolary form. However Tourvel’s *se decider*, and her insistence that she is telling “simplement ce qui est,” are in conflict with this truth effect of Valmont’s letter. The specific physical act, *tomber évanouie*, that Valmont’s narration comes to preference is mutually exclusive with the cognitive act Tourvel names, *se décider*.

There is, in fact, a second moment in Valmont's letter when his death and his happiness are put in opposition. When we reread Valmont's letter in light of Tourvel's, we find though that Valmont does not in fact place Tourvel between his happiness and death, before she faints, but between *his possession of her* and his death: "vous posséder ou mourir" (403). However, before Valmont produces this "serment," Tourvel herself, according to Valmont's letter, introduces his happiness as the alternative to his death. In response to his threats of suicide, Tourvel offers him the assurance, "[j]e désire votre bonheur" (403). In Valmont's letter, the choice between his happiness and his death is not *imposed* on Tourvel by Valmont, but produced between Tourvel and Valmont. It is not until after the completion of the sex act that Valmont reveals to Tourvel the metonymic relationship that he assumes and enforces between her "je désire votre bonheur" and his "vous posseder." That is, Valmont reveals belatedly to Tourvel with his question, "vous êtes au déspoir, parce que vous avez fait mon bonheur," that her desire for his happiness entailed her desire to be possessed by him.

What is most surprising, and critically overlooked, is that this works. Metonymically substituting Tourvel's desire to make him happy with her desire to give herself to him, Valmont crafts the intention he seeks. Valmont explains though that initially, when Tourvel regains consciousness, she is not yet convinced:

> Je m'attendais bien qu'un si grand événement ne se passerait pas sans les larmes et le désespoir d'usage … Mais je trouvai une résistance vraiment effrayante, moins encore par son excès que par la forme sous laquelle elle se montrait.
>
> Figurez−vous une femme assise, d'une raideur immobile, et d'une figure invariable; n'ayant l'air ni de penser, ni d'écouter, ni d'entendre; dont les yeux fixes laissent échapper des larmes assez continues, mais qui coulent sans effort. Telle était Madame de Tourvel,

pendant mes discours; mais si j'essayais de ramener son attention vers moi par une caresse, par le geste même le plus innocent, à cette apparente apathie succédaient aussitôt la terreur, la suffocation, les convulsions, les sanglots, et quelques cris par intervalles, mais sans un mot articulé. Ces crises revinrent plusieurs fois, et toujours plus fortes; la dernière même fut si violente que j'en fus entièrement découragé et craignis un moment d'avoir remporté une victoire inutile. (406)

The unconsciousness that provides Valmont the gap in Tourvel's intention extends into her conscious state. She sits before Valmont completely still, "une figure invariable." Only his approach, his attempts to physically comfort her, rouses her from her dormant state: "à cette apparente apathie succédaient aussitôt la terreur, la suffocation, les convulsions, les sanglots, et quelques cris par intervalles, mais sans un mot articulé." Tourvel's vacillation between no response and a violent response to what has just happened to her only gives way once Valmont finds a question with which Tourvel makes sense of what has just happened:

Je me rabattis sur les lieux communs d'usage; et dans le nombre se trouva celui−ci: "Et vous êtes dans le désespoir, parce que vous avez fait mon bonheur?" A ce mot, l'adorable femme se tourna vers moi; et sa figure, quoique encore un peu égarée, avait pourtant déjà repris son expression céleste. "Votre Bonheur", me dit−elle. Vous devinez ma réponse. − Vous êtes donc heureux?" Je redoublai les protestations. – "Et heureux par moi!" J'ajoutai les louanges et les tendres propos. Tandis que je parlais, tous ses membres s'assouplirent; elle retomba avec mollesse, appuyée sur son fauteuil; et m'abandonnant une main que j'avais osé prendre : − "Je sens, dit−elle, que cette idée me console et me soulage." (407)

Valmont both rebuilds and reconquers Tourvel (*rebattit*/*rebâtit*) by transforming a gap in desire into her desire. Tourvel's expressions of desire for Valmont's happiness before and after she

faints—"Je désire votre bonheur," and "Votre bonheur" and "je me suis décidée pour [le bonheur de Valmont]"—come to imply and produce her consent to having been possessed by Valmont in the past and to being possessed by him in the future.

However, to this extent, in Valmont's letter, Tourvel's intention to have sex with him is not locatable in the moment when he has sex with her, or even before she faints. Instead, Tourvel's intention is belated produced after the event, in her self-echoing of "votre Bonheur." In Tourvel's letter, the signifier *bonheur* ironically marks and effaces the incongruence between her desire (Valmont's happiness) and what he enforces as a correlate to that desire (having sex with Valmont). Unlike Valmont, Tourvel does not recount her unconsciousness or her despair after she regains consciousness but before she repeats "Votre bonheur." This event is placed, according to her letters beyond her, beyond "ce que je peux vous dire."

In the rape/seduction of Tourvel, Valmont transforms what Tourvel thought her intention was, into what he wanted it to be. However, because Tourvel's letter consents without quite consenting to this metonymic transmutation—taking the congruency between "je désire votre bonheur" and "vous posseder" as "what is"—the violence by which he effects this substitution (both the physical and the linguistic violence) if effaced. In the rape/seduction of Cécile, on the other hand, the very violence of this substitution is brought to light, when the metonymic substitution of *vous possedez* for *votre bonheur* by which Valmont retroactively produces the "truth" of Tourvel's desire and his own "victoire" finds a narrative corollary.

Unlike his concern that he solicit Tourvel's desire—or, rather, that through her desire he produce her belated desire to something other than what she desired—Valmont admits straight away that he has taken no such pains with that of Cécile: "Déjà vous cherchez par quel moyen

j'ai supplanté si tôt l'amant chéri; quelle séduction convient à cet âge, à cette inexperience. Epargnez-vous tant de peine, je n'en ai employé aucune […] moi, rendant à l'homme ses droits imprescriptibles, je subjuguais par l'autorité" (311). That is, he determines this event not as a seduction, but, according to the difference that prompts the rape/seduction debate, as a rape. Like in this case of Tourvel's "seduction, even Valmont's determination of Cécile's "rape" comes undone, this time by way of Merteuil's pen.

The seduction of Cécile Volanges "begins" when Valmont—who had initially rejected Merteuil's proposal of Cécile as the victim of his seduction—returns his attention to the *ingénue*.[37] To put an end to an affair between her daughter and Danceny, Madame de Volanges and Cécile leave Paris to stay at the chateau of Madame de Rosemonde, Valmont's aunt. [38] It is in this context that Valmont, having extended his visit at the chateau in order to pursue his seduction of la Présidente de Tourvel, becomes Danceny's proxy, supposedly advocating for Cécile's admirer in his absence. Valmont feigns difficulty in performing his duty as proxy and writes to Cécile asking that she assist him in obtaining a copy of the key to her bedroom. This key, he claims, will be used to continue her affair with Danceny, first by facilitating the delivery of his letters and then serving as the possible site for a tryst.

In his last letter of Part 2, Valmont instructs Cécile to replace the key to her bedroom that hangs above the fireplace with a false key, which will give him time to make a replica before her mother notices it is missing. But in the first letter of Part 3, Cécile refuses the plan. She insists that not only does she find it too dangerous but that "il [la] semble aussi que ce serait bien mal" (237). Omitting the details about the plan that she rejected—a plan that would put Valmont in possession of a key to her bedroom—Valmont convinces Danceny that Cécile has refused the *simplest* means of facilitating their affair and, as such, proven herself to be a faithless lover.

Distraught by the hopeless assessment of his proxy, Danceny sends Cécile a letter in which he accuses her of no longer loving him, begging her, "ayez pitié de moi! Consentez à me voir, prenez-en *tous* les moyens!" (305 [emphasis added]). Upon this entreaty for *consent*, Cécile resigns herself to Valmont's plan: "puisque tout le monde le veut, il faut bien que j'y consente aussi" (249). Cécile places the plan's realization two days from her letter marked the 28th of September.

On October 1, the letters recommence with Valmont's account of "le succès [qui] a couronné l'enterprise," which fills the two-day narrative gap between this event and Cécile's agreement to make the key (310).[39] He reports moreover that he indeed filled the gap with narration: Valmont's letter narrates not only the scene in which he subjugates Cécile with his authority, but he narrates the narration with which he subjugates her. The authority by which he subjugates Cécile is not, as the reader expects, physical authority to overpower her physical resistance, but narrative authority.[40]

Valmont explains that using the key with which she had furnished him, he sneaks into Cécile's room late at night and finds her asleep. Awaking with a fright, in a scene that recalls Lucretia's nighttime ambush by Tarquin, a confused Cécile struggles to understand Valmont's presence. Realizing that he is not there in his capacity as envoy, she tries to call out for help but her cry is choked back, first by her own tears and then by Valmont's authoritative narration of the scene. As she reaches to ring for her servant, Valmont instructs Cécile to ask herself how it would look if they were discovered:

> "Que voulez-vous faire, lui ai-je dit alors, vous perdre pour toujours? Qu'on vienne, et que m'importe? à qui persuaderez-vous que je ne sois pas ici de votre aveu? Quel autre que

vous m'aura fourni le moyen de m'y introduire? et cette clef que je tiens de vous, que je n'ai pu avoir que par vous, vous chargerez-vous d'en indiquer l'usage?" (254)

Caught by Valmont's question, Cécile halts her call for help. The possibility that, in the future, her past actions have made her complicit renders her unable to act in the present and "la tendre amoureuse, oubliant ses serments, a cédé d'abord et fini par consentir [;…] de faiblesse en reproche, et de reproche en faiblesse, [ils] ne [se sont] séparés que satisfaits l'un de l'autre" (256).

At first, it seems that Valmont subdues Cécile by simply displaying his narrative authority over *appearances*—that he demonstrates how easily his fiction of apparent or narrated intention can conquer her true intention—while none the less leaving true intention intact.[41] In this reading, Valmont's appeal that Cécile consider the way things could look displays for the cloistered girl the prominent place of appearances in determinations of a women's guilt or innocence (her intention) in an illicit sexual act. He arrests her protests by authoring an interpretation of the past scene—making the key—that could make it *seem* in the future narrations of the event as if Cécile had been complicit or consenting in the sexual act from the point of view of an outside observer. Valmont shows Cécile the vulnerability of intention to narration: she can be made to *have seemed* intending—acting according to self-knowledge of her desire—where she was or is not. The intention that she ought to have been concerned with, Cécile discovers only too late, was not her real or true intention but the tangible and legible appearances and signs of intention by which others will judge her.

However, according to Cécile's own narration of the event, Valmont's threat of the possible future narration of her past intention in making the key has more deleterious effects on Cécile's self-knowledge—her knowledge of what she wanted in the past, what she wants in the

present, and what she will want in the future. In her letter to Merteuil, Cécile names herself "affligée" and "malheureuse," and hopelessly asks her friend: "qui me consolera dans mes peines? qui me conseillera dans l'embarras où je me trouve?" (257). The fragmented confession of her shame in the opening of her letter reads much like Lucretia's confession after her offense by Sextus: "Ce M. de Valmont… et Danceny! non, l'idée de Danceny me met au désespoir…Comment vous raconter? comment vous dire? … Je ne sais pas comment faire. Cependant mon cœur est plein… Il faut que je parle à quelqu'un, et vous êtes la seule à qui je puisse, à qui j'ose me confier" (314). Also like Lucretia before her, Cécile demands her punishment while insisting on a certain innocence. Cécile acknowledges the damning appearances of the situation, but insists despite them, on her *ignorance* to Valmont's plan. Though she did make the key, "[elle] ne prévoyai[t] pas le malheur qui en arriverait" (315).

Significantly, Cécile defends herself with her ignorance to rather than her intention in Valmont's plan. She, in fact, does not make an unambiguous expression of her true intention during her visit by Valmont is expressed in her letter. She does not, like Valmont, determine it as a rape, as a certain violation of her intentions or desire. Rather, Cécile recounts events at a distance, as if from the position of an outside observer. Viewing things from this vantage point, Cécile worries that she did not sufficiently defend herself:

> Ce que je me reproche le plus, et dont pourtant il faut que je vous parle, c'est que j'ai peur de ne pas m'être défendue autant que je le pouvais. Je ne sais pas comment cela se faisait: *sûrement*, je n'aime pas M. de Valmont, bien au contraire; et il y avait des moments où j'étais comme si je l'aimais... (316)

She narrates the events as if she witnessed, rather than experienced them. She is confused by the conflict between what she sees herself doing and what she says—not by what she feels. Cécile is

troubled by the fact that her body acted in ways that suggest that she “aime” Valmont, which *surely*, can’t be so because she loves Danceny. The *sûrement* seeks to convince not only Merteuil, but also Cécile of her ‘true’ intention or desire. The *surely* reads as both an assertion and a question, the phrase’s subordinate status obfuscating the difference that might be attained through punctuation. Instead of a question mark or a period, we have only a comma.

Cécile insists on a certain disparity between what she said and what she did. It is this disparity that troubles her: “vous jugez bien que ça ne m'empêchait pas de lui dire toujours que non: mais je sentais bien que je ne faisais pas comme je disais; et ça, c'était comme malgré moi; et puis aussi, j'étais bien troublée!” (316). Although Cécile *says* no to Valmont's advances, “il y avait des moments où [elle] étai[t] comme si [elle] l'aimai[t],” which leads to a disconnect: “je sentais bien que je ne faisais pas comme je disais.” Her words and actions are disconnected during the attack and it is to understand or perhaps regain command over this disconnection that she seeks out the advice of Merteuil.[42] She asks *Merteuil*, that is, to tell her what her true intentions were and thereby to efface the rape/seductions violation of intention. Not of *her* intention, but of intention itself.

In her response to Cécile's confusion over the encounter with Valmont, Merteuil indeed tells Cécile the truth of her intention. But the true intention Merteuil offers Cécile is not the one Valmont gives as the narration’s narrative frame. Rather, Merteuil, rejecting Cécile’s suggestion that surely she does not “love” Valmont, insists instead—and unsurprisingly given Merteuil’s belief that all sex will have been desired—that she did. Merteuil's response is divided between a sardonic narration of the austere life Cécile has missed by not confessing the night to her mother and a frank pragmatic explanation of why Cécile should “[se] félicit[er] au lieu de [se] plaindre” (344). After all, is Valmont “un méchant homme” for teaching Cécile “ce que [elle meurt]

d'envie de savoir" (343)? Instead of affirming Cécile's sure resistance, Merteuil asks for *un peu de bonne foi*, that is, for Cécile to admit that she is lying:

> Là, ce trouble qui vous empêchait de faire comme vous disiez, qui vous faisait trouver si difficile de se défendre, qui vous rendait comme fâchée, quand Valmont s'en est allé, était-ce bien la honte qui le causait? ou si c'était le plaisir? et ses façons de dire auxquelles on ne sait comment répondre, cela ne viendrait-il pas de ses façons de faire ? Ah ! petite fille, vous mentez, et vous mentez à votre amie ! (344)

By naming Cécile's confusion a lie, Merteuil effaces *for* Cécile the crisis of intention introduced by the disconnection between saying and doing. Merteuil transforms Cécile's confusion—her inability to locate her own intention during her rape/seduction— into a conscious attempt on Cécile's part to ignore or deny the truth of desire her bodily response ought to have revealed to her. Cécile has *lied* about her own desire, which Merteuil equates to her experience of physical pleasure. If she did not defend herself, it is because a *truer* intention, bodily desire, compelled her forward.

Like in Tourvel's rape/seduction, what is most surprising is that together, Valmont's narration of Cécile's future intention in her bedroom and retroactive Merteuil's narration of Cécile's past intention work to produce the very intention they narrate as true. In her response to Merteuil's letter, Cécile even thanks her friend for her advice and attests to its effectiveness in producing what it purported to discover:[43]

> Je vois bien que ce que je croyais un si grand Malheur, n'en est *presque* pas un; et il faut avouer qu'il y a bien du plaisir; de façon que je ne m'afflige *presque* plus. Il n'y a que l'idée de Danceny qui me tourmente toujours quelquefois. Mail il y a déjà tout plein de

moments ou je n'y songe pas du tout! aussi c'est que M. de Valmont est bien aimable! (357)

Cécile adopts Merteuil's narration as her intention and commences the affair with Valmont that will lead to her pregnancy. Following Merteuil's rewriting of the truth of her desire in the rape/seduction by Valmont, Cécile adopts retroactively the very progression Valmont had narrated to Merteuil, ceding converting into consenting, the forced sex of the first encounter into a future consensual affair.

It is at this point that the similarity rather than the difference between Merteuil's and Valmont's theories of seduction come to the fore. Despite the apparent difference between their positions in the debate, the seducers assume that their knowledge of the victim's desire allows them to differentiate a rape from a seduction. For Valmont, the seducer is to lead the woman from indifference or nonconsent toward consent, willingness, and desire. To do so, the seducer must possess the ability to read from external signs (language, behavior, etc.) the other's internal will. Only by this ability to read true intention can Valmont be sure to *cause* it before completing the sexual act, and thereby to keep his seductions from becoming rapes. For Merteuil, the problem of knowing the internal state of the seduced is at once more nuanced and more profoundly simple: everyone *will have* willed it. Merteuil equates intention to the successful completion of the act. She knows the intent of the other because the other necessarily consents to and desires the *completed* sexual act. For both Merteuil and Valmont, intention is knowable. Despite their apparent differences, despite the appearance of a conflict, Merteuil and Valmont unintentionally to agree that the victim's true intention differentiates seduction from rape.

However when the seductions/rapes are carried out, this contiguity comes undone. In the narrations of the rapes/seductions of Tourvel and Cécile intention is figured as radically absent

insofar as it is belatedly produced. To the extent that intention—the line that demarcates not only between rape and seduction, but also between the "I" and "not I"—comes undone in the letters, they present the violence of rape/seduction as a form of abjection. In *Pouvoir d'horreur*, Julia Kristeva explains that:

> One does not know it, one does not desire it, one joys in it [*on en jouit*]. Violently and painfully. A passion. And, as in jouissance whether the object of desire, known as object *a* [in Lacan's terminology], bursts with the shattered mirror whether the ego gives up its image in order to contemplate itself in the other, that is nothing either objective or objectial to the abject. It is simply a frontier, a repulsive gift that the Other, having become *alter ego*, drops so that "I" does not disappear in it but finds, in that sublime alienation, a forfeited existence. Hence a jouissance in which the subject is swallowed up but in which the Other, in return, keeps the subject from foundering by making it repugnant. One thus understands why so many victims of the abject are its fascinated victims—if not its submissive and willing ones. (9)

Kristeva's thinking of the abject brings to the foreground the aporias of the experience of sexual violence, which in today's political and legal context is reduced to the ambivalence between consent and nonconsent. In the rapes/seductions of Tourvel and Cécile, at least for a fleeting moment, a flash of the aporetic experience of sexual violence is figured in the events' momentary ellision and unremarked interruption of the narrative framing of the novel. At least for a moment, both rapes/seductions exceed the narrative of known and knowable intention that frames them. In this between moment—this gap in the narration and narrative—rather than in the prior and subsequent narrative determinations of the events as sexual offenses—*Les Liaisons dangereuses* figures the violence of sexual violence.

In the letters, the production of both victims' discrete desire, rather than their discrete non-desire, effaces the violence of the event. By figuring the ambivalence between rape and seduction *and* the narrative domestication of that ambivalence, *Les Liaisons dangereuses* points to the ways that making sexual violence "make sense," aesthetically and narratively, effaces a central aspect of its violence. And it is to this extent—to the extent that the letters depict sexual violence as exceeding attempts to make it make sense—that the opposite tendency, the tendency to produce discrete non-desire, also comes into question. The demand for and production of a discrete "I did not want it," the letters suggest, is just as violence effacing as the statement "I did want it." Rather than figuring sexual violence as a question of desire/not desire, *se donner* or *la prendre*, *Les Liaisons dangereuses* suggests that being truthful to the violent event, would be paradoxically resisting the narrative of truth that demands that victims narrate their truth. *Les Liaisons dangereuses* does not belying the violence of rape and seduction by aestheticizing, narritivizing it into discrete, recognizable forms of violence, but rather prompts us to face the impossibility of finally experiencing or sufficiently responding to the aporetic violence of sexual violence.

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[1] In his essay on *Cecila*, "Cecilia ou les Memoires de l'héritière," Laclos discusses the utility of the *roman* for its ability to explore and develop better than any other genre the "connaissance de l'esprit et du cœur de l'homme." One of his central critiques to this text is the punishment of vice: "Nous voudrions enfin qu'après les avoir combattues avec les armes de l'indigncation que [les séducteurs] sont accoutumés à braver, on essayât celles du ridicule, plus faites pour les intimider. Nous désirerions surtout que ce triomphe fût remporté par une femme, et Miss Burney nous en paraît digne" (459).

[2] Nancy Miller's argues that the letters indeed unfold just as one would expect in "*Les Liaisons dangereuses* pas à pas."

[3] These two tendencies come to the fore in Francis Ferguson's "Rape and the Rise of the Novel." Ferguson argues that what rape law seeks to evade is precisely this problem of intention through legal definitions (definitions which quite often evacuate the subject of all agency in order to establish verifiable means of determining if a sexual assault too place).

[4] Laclos uses the same date for the first letter of *Les Liaisons dangeureuses* as that which Richardson used for *Clarissa*: August 3.

[5] On several occasions, the events recounted and enacted by the letters are explicitly named seductions at various moments. Valmont himself is named a "séducteur" by Madame de Volanges in her final letter. The nominal forms of séduction/ séducteur appear a dozen times and the verb séduire nearly 30 times.

[6] In fact, Merteuil revokes her promise by calling attention to Valmont's assumption that her silence marks her consent, a point which underscores his acceptance of silence, in the form of unconsciousness, in the culminating scene of the "seduction" of Tourvel.

[7] The necessity of this gesture seems tied to Higgins and Silver's *Rape and Representation* collected essays, in which the editors and contributors insist over and over that literary criticism is wrong to treat rape as a figure, without considering lived experience. Of course, the literary characters who are raped or seduced are just that: literary characters. The tendency to attribute psychological existence and to demand an ethical relationship towards the feelings of fiction victims is one that this project seeks to call into question. I argue that literary rape and seduction, *to the extent that it is not responded to by a psyche*, can offer an instructive terrain on which to rethink sexual violence, in particular to think through the ways that it is *not* fully lived or experiences, but predicated on an iterative structure which exposes the reductivism—on the level of lived experience—of demands by law and anti-rape activism to name, locate, and thus domestic the effects and dissemination of rape.

[8] Modern rape law in fact deals directly with the question of a sexual act committed while a person is unconscious, and includes it among the situations to which one *de facto* cannot consent:

> A sleeping, unconscious, or incompetent person cannot consent. A person cannot consent to force causing or likely to cause death or grievous bodily harm *or to being rendered unconscious*. A person cannot consent while under threat or in fear or under the circumstances described in subparagraph (C) or (D) of subsection (b) (1). (Title X, US Code)

[9] The many *causes célebres* in the period demonstrate that both women and men could be seduced and even raped according to the legal conceptions of these offenses.

[10] For the status of sexual offense laws after the French Revolution, see Vigarello, *Histoire du viol*.

[11] The issue of the law's inability to verify the victim's intention is not a new one. See my discussion in the introduction for a modern equivalent of this problem and chapter 2 (for an ancient one and Livy's solution to it in the case of the rape of Lucretia in *Early History of Rome*).

[12] See James Farr on Roman-Canon Law v. "law of proof,"in *Authority and Sexuality in Early Modern Burgundy*, p 100.

[13] See Janet Halley's *Split Decisions: How and Why to Take a Break from Feminism* for an excellent discussion of the problems, from a queer, legal theory perspective on adjudicating between "good" and "bad" sex. For an analysis of the tendency to supplant actual intention with a legal criteria of consent (i.e. consent is impossible when a person is unconscious, under the influence of drugs, etc.), see Francis Ferguson, "Rape and the Rise of the Novel."

[14] For that matter, if the third section reproduces the movement of the first and is really a rape, what does this mean that the sex that concludes first section? Should we retrospectively read the structural similarities in the plot into the sex scenes depicted at the end of each? And even if we were to accept Tourvel's insistence that the sex she had with Valmont, even though it took place

while she was unconscious, was not a violation of her will but an enactment of it, that it is committed through the use of force: “Tout ce que je puis vous dire, c’est que, placée par M. de Valmont entre sa mort ou son bonheur, je me suis décidée pour ce dernier parti” (413). Valmont’s use of the threat of his death if Tourvel did not yield to him certainly makes the sex he has with Tourvel while she is unconscious coercive,

[15] Constantine never discusses the "seduction" of Cécile by Valmont as a rape. Perhaps this is because that case is a less easily interpreted according to modern rape laws.

[16] See my discussion of mens rea in my introduction for an elaboration on recent rape law reform in the US.

[17] Although McAlpin might be referring to eighteenth-century legal definitions, the lack of historical markers in her formulation is indicative of the tendency to use under- or poorly-developed conceptions of sexual offenses in dealing with literary figures of sexual violence.

[18] I would, in a longer consideration of *Les Liaisons dangereuses* also want to enmesh love into this contemplation.

[19] Indeed, the Latin *seducere* can literally be translated as ‘to lead astray,’ placing the action of seduction in the hands of the one who leads.

[20] That Merteuil wants to exact revenge in this strange anterior time is something that might be reconsidered in light of the belatedness central to the seducer. Is the seducer, first and foremost, the one who exploits deferral?

[21] It is in the active role of the seducer that Valmont insists seduction’s pleasure lies; whereas the certainty of his success over Cécile diminishes his pleasure, the challenge of seducing the Présidente promises him the greatest pleasure he is yet to know. For Valmont, the pleasure and glory of a conquest are inversely proportional to the probability of success. Valmont explains to Merteuil the calculus of pleasure by which he determines a worthwhile seduction: 1/Chance of Success = Glory ∝ Pleasure, “son succès [l’]assure autant de gloire que de plaisir” (22). This inverse relationship fits in nicely with his use of martial (not *marital*, but a propitious metathesis) metaphors: “Voilà ce que j'attaque ; voilà l'ennemi digne de moi;" “j'ai risqué de perdre, par un triomphe premature, le charme des longs combats et les détails d'une pénible défaite;” “J'ai forcé à combattre l'ennemi qui ne voulait que temporizer,” “ (IV, XXII, CXXV).[21] The enterprise is part love, part war: “L’amour qui prépare ma couronne, hésite lui-même entre le myrte et le laurier: ou plutôt il les réunira pour honorer mon triomphe” (L IV, 22). A note to the Pléiade edition of *Liaisons dangereuses* reminds readers that “le myrte est l’emblème de l’amour, comme le laurier, celui de victoire” (833). Seduction, or at least seduction worthy of the name, is the unification of love and victory: inciting love in order to take victory, but also victory over love: “J'ai bien besoin d'avoir cette femme, pour me sauver du ridicule d'en être amoureux” (IV).

[22] The role of narrative in constituting the difference between rape and seduction certainly has contributed to the anxiety that “women cry rape” in order to retaliate. This, I would argue, is however not a grounds upon which to attempt to get rid of (which we cannot) or to repudiate the centrality of narrative in sexual violence for reasons which I have discussed in chapters

[23] The libertine seducer’s task is to attain mastery over history (public record, opinion, narrative): “[p]ower, in such a context, is explicitly narrative, since the destruction of a rival’s reputation automatically brings an enhancement of one’s own. To write another’s story is always also to embellish one’s own” (324).

[24] For more on the stakes of libertinage, see Goldzink. *Le vice en bas de soie ou le roman du libertinage*, McCallam. “Libertine Promises in *Liaisons dangereuses*,” and Meeker. “’All times

are present to her': Femininity, Temporality, and Libertinage in Diderot's 'Sur les femmes'", among others.

[25] Merteuil's seduction of Prévan is *Liaisons dangereuses*'s the perfect example of this strategic play with appearances that seduction affords women. We might also remember Rousseau's insistence that women are given just the right amount of strength to resist sexual advances that they *really* do not desire.

One might also consider the prevalence of this trope in eighteenth-century theater. In Marivaux's *La Fausse Suivante* for example, le Chevalier (a woman disguised as a man) backs la Comtesse into a corner when he refuses to read between the lines of her polite refusal. She nearly breaks with him for is feigned ignorance of the rules which compel women to say, feel, and do drastically opposed things in the quest of obtaining pleasure while retaining honor.

[26] Both Merteuil's entrapment of Prévan and final *coup* against Valmont serve in *Les Liaisons dangereuses* as examples of her narrative mastery. That she recounts the Prévan story to Valmont might be understood as her sustained attempt to save her friend from the unreason of love.

[27] As Voltaire writes in *Prix de la justice de l'humanité*:

> For girls or women who complain of having been raped, all that is needed, it seems to me, is to tell them how, long ago, a queen frustrated an accusation of rape. She took a scabbard and, constantly shaking it, she made the complainant see that it was impossible to put a sword in the scabbard. It is the same with rape as with impotence; there are some cases which ought never to come before the courts. (43, cited by Vigarello)

[28] Though, as we have seen, the unverifibility of a victim's intention not to have sex usually amounted in eighteenth-century French law into the conversion of the crime from a rape to a seduction.

[29] To this extent, Valmont's position aligns with that of critics who claim to know Tourvel and Cécile's true intentions when they name the sex they have with Valmont rape. And like these critics, Valmont will see only what he knows, failing to appreciate the ways that the enactments of his seductions, because they (and their violence) are depicted as precisely the violation of the truth of intention, stand to undermine his entire understanding of seduction. Although Valmont may remain steadfast in his final readings of the scenes, their excess to his reading nonetheless inscribes itself in his letters.

[30] Merteuil's conclusions from the possibility of dissimulation also harken back to Lucretia, who moments before her suicide, insists that her death will keep people from thinking that she deployed such a strategic use of apparent force.

[31] This insult is perhaps one of the driving psychological factors of the novels.

[32] When Tourvel recoils from him, reclaiming from him his hard earned ground:

> [J]e ne fis rien pour la retenir: car j'avais remarqué plusieurs fois que les scènes de désespoir menées trop vivement, tombaient dans le ridicule dès qu'elles devenaient longues, ou ne laissaient que des ressources vraiment tragiques et que j'étais fort éloigné de vouloir prendre. (404)

He recognizes, based on his past experiences, that advancing "hopeless scenes" too quickly results in the embarrassment of the seducer (who fails to elicit the desire of the victim to have sex and has only wasted time) or in the conversion of the seducer into the rapist (who fails to seduce through his recourse to "ressources vraiment tragiques").

[33] This is the scene which Valmont refers to when he writes :

> Dans la foule des femmes auprès desquelles j'ai rempli jusqu'à ce jour le rôle et les fonctions d'amant, je n'en avais encore rencontré aucune qui n'eut, au moins, autant d'envie de se rendre, que j'en avais de l'y déterminer[…] Ce n'est donc pas, comme dans mes autres aventures, une simple capitulation plus ou moins avantageuses, et dont il est plus facile de profiter que de s'enorgueillir ; c'est une victoire complète, achetée par une campagne pénible, et décidée par de savantes manœuvres. (400).

[34] *Tomber évanouie* does not have the idiomatic sense of the English "to fall unconscious" (*s'évanouir*), but instead would be better translated as "to fall, unconscious." The French verb porter, to carry, is more commonly used with things, rather than people.

[35] Madame de Rosemonde's "tardive response" in fact arrived too late to warn Tourvel to resist her desires for Valmont and to enjoy "outre le repos de votre conscience et votre propre tranquillité, la satisfaction d'avoir été la principale cause de l'heureux retour de Valmont" (410)

[36] Although Tourvel regains consciousness before Valmont asks this question, she does not quite "revient à elle" until it. Before this moment, Tourvel is in alternating states of what would best be described as catatonia and automatic self-defense.

[37] I use the notion of "beginning" somewhat difficultly here given the narrational displacements of the rape/seduction of Cécile.

[38] To contextualize for my reader, I will explain briefly the situation in which Cécile comes into Valmont's line of vision. In her first letter, Merteuil suggests the next victim of Valmont's libertinage: Cécile Volange. Cécile, daughter of Madame de Volanges, is betrothed to le Comte de Gercourt, who, an editor's note explains, "avait quitté la Marquise de Merteuil pour l'Intendante de ***, qui lui avait sacrifié le Victomte de Valmont, et que c'est alors que la Marquise et le Vicomte s'attachèrent l'un à l'autre" (18). To avenge herself of the embarrassment cause by Gercourt's rebuff, Merteuil proposes a plot which will embarrass him in turn. "Prouvons-lui donc qu'il n'est qu'un sot: il le sera sans doute un jour; ce n'est pas là ce qui m'embarrasse: mais le plaisant serait qu'il débutât par là," she entreats her partner in crime (18). Merteuil's plan is to have Valmont "form[e] cette petite fille" before she is married to Gercourt so that the latter is cuckolded before he is even a husband, becoming "le fable de Paris" (ibid).

[39] See Lemieux. "A propos de la datation et de la distribution des lettres dans les *Liaisons dangereuses*."

[40] Indeed, Valmont boasts of his own cleverness to use only as much physical force to restrain Cécile as he knew she could resist. When she does make efforts to overcome him, he does not increase the physical force he uses against her, but instead "je la contenais par cette même crainte, don't j'avais déjà éprouvé les heureux effets" (313).

[41] It is too bad that Cécile was not the recipient of her mother's letter 32, in which the latter warns la Présidente of the risks to one's public perception of becoming intimate with the likes of Valmont.

[42] This division between words and deeds in fact is central to literary depictions of seduction. In her reading of the Molière's *Don Juan*, Shoshana Felman asks if it is not a certain failure of acts that marks the success of the performative seduction speech act. Paragraph synthesizing this point, the non-coincidence of actions and words. Perhaps a note on performative speech and Felman? What is it about sex and violence that makes this division, always at play, becomes so intolerable? That domesticates it through the prioritizing of words or deeds, serving as proof of

the victim's complicity or absolute innocence? Why is this division so intolerable at this moment?

[43] In the case of Cécile, the effectiveness of Valmont and Merteuil's seductions is at once undermined and fortified by the fact that Cécile writes to Merteuil to express her agreement with Merteuil's assessment of her intention only after Merteuil has advised her: "Vous voyez bien que, quand vous écrivez à quelqu'un, c'est pour lui et non pas pour vous: vous devez donc moins chercher à lui dire ce que vous pensex, que ce qui lui plaît advantage" (347).

Afterward: Belated Reflections and Anti-Rape Activism

When users go to the website of the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN), a tab suggests the following query as a possible reason for their visit: "Was I raped?" Clicking on this tab, the user is presented with two definitions from the US Department of Justice, the first for rape and the second for sexual assault:

> Rape is forced sexual intercourse, including vaginal, anal, or oral penetration. Penetration may be by a body part of an object.
>
> Sexual assault is unwanted sexual contact that stops short of rape or attempted rape. This includes sexual touching and fondling. (RAINN)

As the user scrolls down, he or she is presented with a question which troubles the force of the preceding definitions. Users, though armed with definitions of the crimes might still wonder, "So how can you figure [sic] if what happened was rape?" This question leads to three sub-questions. These questions in fact reveal quite a bit about the difficulties of determining whether a rape took place or not than the initial definitions might let on. The questions are as follows: "Are the participants old enough to consent?"; "Do both people have the capacity to consent"; and "Did both participants agree to take part?" The movement in these questions between present-tense verbs in the first two questions to the past-tense "did" in the third attests to a deeper division. While the first two questions seem to deal directly with the question of consent—a translation of the question of "force" and "unwanted" in the DOJ definitions of rape and sexual assault—they in fact deal with the situations in which consent is de jure possible or impossible. These questions determine whether or not participants meet the legal criteria for consent with respect to

age, mental capacity, consciousness, and sobriety. Such criteria are external to any instance of sexual contact. They are written in the present tense because they contain questions that can be answered before any sexual act takes place.

On the other hand, the third question, concerning a participant's willingness to take part in a particular act, covers an entirely different question, one that tellingly occasions a shift from the present to the past tense. The third question cannot be answered before a particular event because it deals with the question of whether a person who, though legally capable of consent, chose not to consent in a particular situation. This third question—one that makes no explicit mention of consent—arguably deals most directly with the very difficulties it introduces to determinations of rape v. sex. Unlike the first two questions, which propose generalizeable situations that de jure count as rape, the third question attempts to address a possible participant's intention or will in a particular instance or sex act. In this way, the third question, "Did both participants agree to take part?" opens the discussion of rape to an indeterminacy that the first two questions silence through a technical criterion of consent, through a mechanics of consent. The third question asks not about a formulaic legal possibility or impossibility of consent, but rather if, during a sexual act between two (or more) people who are theoretically able to consent, there was in fact a mental state of willingness. This type of consent is not able to be determined in advance, not able to be decided before, but only after a particular interaction: whence, the past tense "did". Question three is posed in retrospect of an event and its answer does not afterwards become generally applicable to all situations that structurally resemble it.

The difference between questions one and two and question three is taken up again and just as subtly in a third section of this page on RAINN's website. In a collection of "Common Questions," questions again that RAINN suggests might be asked by individuals consulting the

RAINN website to answer the question "Was I Raped?," we find six more questions. The first five attempt to dispel myths about rape, such as the assumption that if you dated the person, it can't be rape. The RAINN website assures potential victims that not showing physical resistance, not remembering the event, and being asleep, unconscious or drunk does not void the possibility of a rape. None of these situations "mean that it isn't rape," or that a rape could de jure not have taken place.

While the first five "common questions" address a rape situation in which a victim might assume that his or her behavior invalidates a claim to rape, the sixth question touches on something else and the website attests to this difference by altering the question potential victims might ask themselves. This time, RAINN suggests the following question: "I thought 'no,' but didn't say it. Is it still rape?" To this question, unlike the preceding ones, RAINN responds with uncertainty in turn: "It depends on the circumstances. If you didn't say no because you were legitimately scared for your life or safety, then it may be rape. Sometimes it isn't safe to resist, physically or verbally — for example, when someone has a knife or gun to your head, or threatens you or your family if you say anything." What has happened between the first five questions and this one? Why do the first five questions ask "does that mean it isn't rape" and the sixth question ask "is it still rape"? As the stable ground afforded by the formulaic notions of consent gives way to a trickier, singular instance of rape, RAINN's website proves increasingly unable to help possible victims discover the answer to the seemingly straightforward question: was I raped?

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