

Narrative Transvestism

Rhetoric and Gender in the
Eighteenth-Century
English Novel

M A D E L E I N E K A H N

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MADELEINE KAHN

"Kahn's thesis is a powerful and original one that will compel readers to turn promptly to their *Roxana* and *Clarissa* to rethink their interpretations of the early history of the novel. The writing is always lucid and engaging, the readings of the novels strong and fresh."—Felicity Nussbaum, Syracuse University

Many of the earliest canonical novels—including Defoe's *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* and Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa*—were written by men who assumed the first-person narrative voice of women. What does it mean, Madeleine Kahn asks in this challenging and penetrating book, for a man to write his "autobiography" as if he were a woman? What did early novelists have to gain from it, in a period when woman's realm was devalued and woman's voice rarely heard in public? How does the male author behind the voice reveal himself to readers, and how do our glimpses of him affect our experience of the novel? Does it matter if the woman he has created is believable as a woman? Why does "she" inevitably rail against the perfidy of men?

Kahn maintains that the answers to such questions lie in the nature of "narrative transvestism"—her term for the device through which a male author directs the reader's interpretation by temporarily abandoning himself to a culturally defined female voice and sensibility and then reasserting his male voice.

In her innovative readings of key eighteenth-century English novels, Kahn draws upon a range of contemporary critical approaches. Lucid and witty, *Narrative Transvestism* will serve as a model of analysis for readers interested in issues of gender in narrative, including feminist theorists, students and scholars of the eighteenth-century novel, and critics interested in the applications of psychoanalysis to literature.

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