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Force or Fraud: British Seduction Stories and the Problem of Resistance, 1660-1760, by Toni Bowers. (Review)

Rachel Carnell
Cleveland State University, r.carnell@csuohio.edu

Toni Bowers

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Scholars have long known that Aphra Behn, Delarivier Manley, and Eliza Haywood, writers of popular amatory fiction in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, were Tory. However, exactly how the tales of rape and seduction written by this “fair triumvirate of Wit” expressed a Tory ideology has, until now, only been partially understood. Toni Bowers’s new book admirably fills in this scholarly gap by explaining how in the aftermath of the Glorious Revolution, Tories articulated their delicate political position through a discourse of “collusive resistance.” For Bowers, the style of Toryism that developed after 1689 offered a “nuanced view of the fallen king [James II] as at once victimized *and* culpable, responsible for his own tragedy and at the same time the hapless object of fraud, deceit, and usurpation. The monarch himself, in the new-tory view, could best be understood as one ‘seduced,’ neither entirely innocent nor exclusively guilty” (46). Within this political context, it is not surprising that the many seduction narratives of this period were often about a woman both “submissive to patriarchal authority yet capable of complex resistance *and* sexual delight, coerced by male desire while full of desire herself, compromised and complicit, yet still virtuous” (23).

Roger l’Estrange’s 1678 translation of Vicomte de Guilleragues’s *Lettres Portugaises* is typical of seduction stories written before 1685, in which “a woman’s sexual victimization can be constructed as her own responsibility whether or not she actively pursues her desire: desire itself is enough” (71). Such a clear-cut assessment of desire, however, shifted in 1685 with the many narratives about Monmouth’s Rebellion: “Monmouth was always simultaneously guilty and wronged, beautiful and abhorrent, manly and profoundly feminized, heroic, tragic, foolish, and lost. . . . The fallen duke became his age’s paradigmatic victim of seduction, a glorious, shameful embodiment of culpable yet irresistible collusion” (95). Bowers makes the crucial link between accounts of Monmouth and “the seduction stories of Behn, Manley, and Haywood, and [Samuel] Richardson,” which foregrounded “many

similarly ambiguous moments, interrogating the sexual ‘falls’ of fictional heroines as instances of precisely the sort of guilty victimization and already corrupt innocence in which Monmouth had been caught up, to his great cost” (101).

Bowers’s careful historical contextualizing of the way seduction narratives were deployed politically in the aftermath of Monmouth’s Rebellion and the Glorious Revolution leads to new and original interpretations of the works of Behn, Manley, Haywood, and Richardson. Political tensions about collusion and resistance raised by Monmouth’s trial are evident in Aphra Behn’s depiction of the abduction of Henrietta Berkeley in her *Love Letters between a Nobleman and His Sister*. We find thematic unity in Delarivier Manley’s often seemingly incoherent Tory secret histories when we examine them through the recurrent leitmotif of women who are shown to be partially “complicit” in their own sexual “loss of innocence” yet are nevertheless depicted as “virtuous.” This discourse of collusive resistance also sheds light on the evolution of Eliza Haywood’s Tory and sometimes Jacobite sympathies across her three-and-a-half-decade career as a prolific writer of seduction narratives. Samuel Richardson’s phenomenally popular epistolary novels about rape and seduction have always been hard to classify as purely Whig or purely Tory. It has likewise been difficult for readers over the centuries to agree about the protagonists’ degree of complicity in their own fates. Bowers resolves this long-standing hermeneutical quandary by offering a “third way” of viewing Richardson’s heroines: as both resisting and colluding with the men who pursued them. As Bowers explains of *Clarissa*, the novel clearly demonstrates that the heroine “went off against her consent *and* as a result of her own collusion. She was ‘over-persuaded’ by Lovelace even as she was propelled by the cruelty of her family *and* by her own misconceptions, self-delusions, and unacknowledged desire” (275).

One small shortcoming in this impressive study is that Bowers does not position the seduction stories she examines against the category of the political secret history. As Tory writers of secret memoirs and letters, Behn, Manley, and Haywood were clearly working against the proliferation of Whig secret histories written in support of the Glorious Revolution. Even Manley’s quasi-autobiographical *Adventures of Rivella* was marketed as a secret history on the title page of the first two editions. However, exploring this broader question of genre at any length would have burst the seams of an already rich and lengthy monograph. Readers of Bowers’s first book, *The Politics of Motherhood*, had every reason to expect another incisive, original, and historically nuanced work of scholarship; this new book will more than satisfy those expectations.

Rachel Carnell, Cleveland State University