



Force or Fraud: British Seduction Stories and the Problem of Resistance, 1660-1760

Toni Bowers

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Force or fraud - rape or seduction? This book examines the development, between the Restoration of Charles II in 1660 and the accession of George III in 1760, of the peculiarly modern habit of making that distinction on the basis of female responsive agency. It tells the story of how rape and seduction came to be distinguished according to measures of women's resistance and consent in low-brow "amatory" writing, and how at the same time amatory fictions interrogated the implications of their own procedures, implications still very much with us today.

The amatory tales of Aphra Behn, Delarivier Manley, Eliza Haywood, and Samuel Richardson - early pioneers in British prose fiction - were immensely popular in their day. But they were also scandalous and controversial, not least because they so often depicted innocent young women under assault from men in positions of legitimate authority over them. Focusing on an ideologically-inflected strategy it calls "collusive resistance," *Force or Fraud* uncovers the paradoxical means by which formulaic late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century seduction stories wielded a surprising degree of power and influence - not only over female imaginations, publication lists, and leisure time, but also over the interpretation of one of the age's most troubling problems, the problem of constructing virtuous resistance to those in authority. Stories about the ambiguous seductions of young women helped British political subjects negotiate a period of dramatic change and uncertainty, and to imagine newly legitimate forms of resistance.

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