
In a 2002 review essay, James Grantham Turner observed how “emergent scholars feel the pressure to theorize, to philosophize, to psychoanalyze, to politicize, which often leads to feverishly exaggerated theses” (*SEL* 42 (2002), 173). In her *Politics of Rape*, Jennifer Airey has succumbed to this pressure. Airey has read widely in the political propaganda from the Interregnum and Restoration, focusing on depictions of rape and other forms of sexualized violence. From this cache of documents, she distills six character types that she believes appear frequently in Restoration tragedies: the demonic Irishman, the debauched Cavalier, the poisonous Catholic bride, the demonic Dutchman, the ravished monarch, and the cannibal father. She proposes to demonstrate her claims by examining plays by Orrey, Howard, Shadwell, Rochester, Dryden, Lee, Settle, Crowne, and Ravenscroft, among others, as well as poems by Marvell and Milton. Her claim is that both sides of the political divide—Whig and Tory—availed themselves of images of atrocity to score political capital. For Airey, “[a]n examination of the period’s rape plays exposes the extent to which playwrights drew upon, responded to, and interacted with the offstage culture of political propaganda pamphlets” (217).

Unfortunately, Airey’s study is flawed in both conception and execution. Her organization of material is inefficient: she details incidences of sexual violence in her first chapter and then proceeds to draw on them throughout the book, demanding that her readers have particularly good memories for unpleasantries. In chapter three we are told unhelpfully that “Brutus’s use of Helen and Lucrece mirrors the use of rape in propaganda as described throughout this study” (129). Conceptually, after reading the Yale edition of *Poems on Affairs of State* and John Harold Wilson’s edition of *Court Satires* is anyone really unaware that early modern polemicists slung the same mud at one another over the fence? For that matter, it seems almost like a truism by now that political attacks were carried out indirectly by calumniating a person’s sexuality: essays from the 1970s by John
H. O’Neill and Reba Wilcoxson made this point very clear. As far as Restoration drama goes, more than a few readers will be put off by her easy slippage between stage and pamphlet: plays become “political acts[s],” and “acts of rape provided a consistent, emotionally charged set of tropes to guarantee some form of political response” (46, 217).

One may well wonder how many early moderns were familiar with Airey’s tropes? It is a well-known and lamented fact that we possess little contemporary information about the reception of Restoration drama. This dearth of evidence, however, does not deter Airey: we are informed that “Shadwell’s play might have resonated in the minds of The Rover’s audience” (102)—then again it might not have: Airey provides no evidence to support her qualified speculation. And what of the authors? We also learn that “Rochester and Lee are both interested in the process of propaganda making on a metatheatrical level and … in the broader realm of political rhetoric” (115). No supporting documentation describing such interests is offered for either man, other than Airey’s readings of their plays.

I was dumbfounded by the number of times scholarly hocus pocus transformed one subject into something else: Elkanah Settle “Reconfigures the trope of the poisonous Catholic bride into an attack on Charles’s poisonous Catholic mistresses” (22); “Orrey transforms the trope of the debauched Cavalier into the trope of the debauched usurper” (43); “Atreus has … become the dramatic embodiment of Locke’s cannibal father (albeit one who forces other fathers to eat their young, rather than indulging in cannibal acts himself)” (173); in Ravenscroft’s adaptation of Titus Andronicus, Airey over-ingeniously “blend[s] the rape of Lavinia with Eucharistic ritual … transform[ing] her, perversely, into the Host” (176). Hey Presto! Airey never met an example that her argument could not “reconfigure.”

Airey’s method is unsophisticated. A lot of furniture gets shuffled around, but Airey never provides any new insight into the drama. Indeed, if you know which political pamphlet she is discussing, then you know what her reading of the play will be—it is a foregone conclusion, as all formulas are. Her plug-n’-chug thesis is carried out with dogmatic insistence, usually to the detriment of her evidence, when evidence is provided, that is. The analysis she provides is usually nothing more than limp paraphrase. When she discusses a play, she starts at the
prologue and works her way through to the end, without ever really trimming the unnecessary bits. Slow wind-ups abound throughout.

Her approach lacks focus: for example, “this chapter explores the prevalence of rape and cannibal imagery as metaphors for political and religious disruptions in the drama and propaganda of the late 1670s and 1680s” (150; my italics). A professor of mine used to write “Andy-Pandy” next to sentences loaded with “ands” in which I could not make up my mind about what my main idea was; the above quotation is for an entire chapter! Is it any wonder that some of Airey’s paragraphs have weak organization? That they swell with unrelated pieces of information? (See the paragraph on 161-62 for an example.)

Her lack of precision in scholarly practices extends to word choices, in particular “vampire.” The word appears throughout the book; indeed, it is such an important theme for Airey that she includes it in her index. Never mind that the word was not used in our sense until 1734. A search of EEBO for “vampire” and variant spellings yielded zero hits. I don’t mind using a modern word to describe an early modern idea or practice, but when Airey claims that the Catholic Church “is … explicitly a vampire,” I threw up my hands (149). The word she wants is “parasitic,” “barbarous,” or “savage.” Just because someone drinks blood does not make him a vampire, especially when such behavior is described otherwise: in discussing Nathaniel Lee’s *Mithridates*, Airey explains that “Ziphares becomes his father’s ‘Bosom-wolf’ who vampiristically ‘laps my dearest blood’” (163). Why “vampiristically”? Why not “wolf-like,” or, if you must have a supernatural creature, why not “like a werewolf”? Lycanthropy was a well-known condition; at least such a stretch would have been historically appropriate.

This semantic peccadillo takes on greater seriousness when Airey uses vampirism to explain the following passage from Lee’s *Lucius Junius Brutus*:

> Behold, you dazled Romans, from the wound
> Of this dead Beauty, thus I draw the Dagger,
> All stain’d and reeking with her Sacred blood,
> Thus to my lips I put the Hallow’d blade,
> To yours Lucretius, Collatinus yours, …
> kiss the Ponnyard round. (1.1.434-39),


which Airey explains thusly: “Brutus’s use of Lucrece’s knife is a less obvious but no less definite act of blood drinking than that of the royalists … That Brutus, like his hated son, participates in an act of vampirism suggests that the republicans may be no better than the royalists they replace” (128-29). Airey is not the first scholar to see in this passage a parallel to the blood-drinking ritual that occurs in the play, but she certainly stresses its “vampiric” associations. Unfortunately this conclusion is no more than a fevered expression of an overheated imagination. The keyword in this passage is not “blood” but “Hallow’d.” The phrase “kiss the Ponnyard” is a variation on the phrase “kiss the book,” which was used in the period to confirm an oath, which makes sense in its context. For example, in Behn’s The Rover, we find the following humorous use of the phrase:

*Helena.* Nor then neither, unless you’ll swear never to see that lady more.

*Willmore.* See her!—Why, never to think of womankind again.

*Helena.* Kneel—and swear—

*Kneels, she gives him her hand.*

*Willmore.* I do, never to think—to see—to love—nor lie—

with any but thy self.

*Helena.* Kiss the book.

*Willmore.* Oh, most religiously.

*Kisses her hand.* (3.1.249-55)

I can discern no signs of vampirism in Lee’s passage other than the blood; kissing a bloody dagger is not the same as drinking blood, and it is not the main point of the action anyway: swearing an oath is. This unfamiliarity with the language of the period casts considerable doubt on Airey’s “suggestion” about republicans and royalists.

To return to Turner, he asks, “why do we need to make grandiose claims for the materials we have unearthed, to adopt the guise of psychohistorians or social anthropologists or grand theorists of identity?” (178). Airey had a compelling topic: her work on pamphlet propaganda would have stood on its own, and I regret that no one advised her to work solely on this topic. In Politics of Rape, she lacks the capacity to extend her research into the realm of drama and still make a plausible case that contributes to our understanding of Restoration drama. And by force-fitting her tropes to the plays, she
minimizes what truly would have been a legitimately interesting study on material that is unfamiliar yet important.


Scholars have long acknowledged that the events of the English Revolution forced many men and women into exile, but it is only in recent years that historians and literary critics have begun to devote significant attention to the effects of such displacement on the literature and culture of the second half of the seventeenth century. Philip Major has assembled an interdisciplinary collection of essays that examine the full range of these effects by presenting new approaches to the historiography of exile during and after the English Civil Wars. Published as part of Ashgate’s Transculturalisms 1400-1700 series, *Literatures of Exile in the English Revolution and its Aftermath, 1640-1690* has two main goals: to contribute to the ongoing project of recuperating a history of the royalist exiles and to expand the traditionally Anglo-centric focus of existing scholarship on the Revolution to include English engagements with the continent as well as with the New World. As Lisa Jardine notes in her foreword to the collection, scholars must account for these transcultural exchanges if we are to fully understand “the intellectual and cultural history of the British Isles in the second half of the seventeenth century” (xviii).

The historiography of exile during this period has presented a number of methodological challenges, many of which are outlined by Timothy Raylor in the first essay in the collection. As Major fully acknowledges in his introduction, it is somewhat jarring to read an opening essay that seems to critique the larger project of the collection in which it appears, but it is nevertheless an important perspective that sets the tone for a volume that demonstrates a deep commitment to discussing methodology and identifying new areas of research. For Raylor, the difficulties stem first from what he calls “problems of definition” (20). The category of “exile,” narrowly defined in political terms,