“Willing Victims” and “Innocence Unguarded”: Ambiguous Volition, Perishable Promises, and Disavowed Consent in Fielding’s *Amelia*

Nicole M. Wright  
*The University of Chicago*

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*Abstract*

This paper examines Henry Fielding’s novel *Amelia* (1751) as a prescient literary contemplation of the temporality of consent. The novel’s preoccupation with impulsive consent and fluctuations of intention is set against a background of shifting legal standards concerning the imperishability of consent. Characters feel bound by norms discouraging the retraction of consent. *Amelia’s* private sexual episodes prepare the reader to deliberate over crises of accountability in non-sexual public settings (the criminal justice system, the gambling den, Vauxhall, and elsewhere). Modern-day legislation and university sexual codes enshrining the stepwise gauging of consent derive from such early reappraisals of the duration of consent.