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0521810051 - The Power of the Passive Self in English Literature, 1640-1770

Scott Paul Gordon

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Challenging recent work that contends that seventeenth-century English discourses privilege the notion of a self-enclosed, self-sufficient individual, *The Power of the Passive Self in English Literature* recovers a counter-tradition that imagines selves as more passively prompted than actively choosing. This tradition – which Scott Paul Gordon locates in seventeenth-century religious discourse, in early eighteenth-century moral philosophy, in mid-eighteenth-century acting theory, and in the emergent novel – resists autonomy and defers agency from the individual to an external “prompter.” Gordon argues that the trope of passivity aims to guarantee a disinterested self in a culture that was increasingly convinced that every deliberate action involves calculating one’s own interest. Gordon traces the origins of such ideas from their roots in the nonconformist religious tradition to their flowering in one of the central texts of eighteenth-century literature, Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa*.

Scott Paul Gordon is an Associate Professor of English at Lehigh University. He has published numerous articles on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century subjects.

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To my parents and my grandmother

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This study begins by investigating Calvinist writers who, as David Little wrote, perfected the logic by which authors credit others for what is worthy in their work. When I inspect my own work, I (like them) am pleased to find the presence of others.

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