



Review of Matthew C. Augustine and Steven N. Zwicker, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Restoration Literature*

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Matthew C. Augustine and Steven N. Zwicker, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Restoration Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025. xxxvi + 763 pp. \$210.

In their introductory essay, Matthew C. Augustine and Steven N. Zwicker lament the scholarly tendency for the Restoration, “a distinct period of literary and cultural history,” to be incorporated into or elided by the grander narratives of early modernity, on the one end, and the “long eighteenth century,” on the other (4). In what can only be construed as an act of resistance to these expansionist periodizing schemes, *The Oxford Handbook of Restoration Literature* weighs in at more than seven hundred pages. Its thirty-nine erudite, eclectic, and occasionally eccentric chapters form not so much a continuous argument as a continuous claim for space and attention. Refusing the period’s reduction to a handful of major figures, such as Milton, Marvell, and Bunyan (a triumvirate whose members are already the subject of single-author handbooks from Oxford), the volume sets out to present a panoramic and populous vision, from “the ditch” to “the sky” (6). The ambition is to enact nothing short of a restoration of the Restoration as an exceptional and integral period of literary activity, returning it to the forefront of the contemporary scholarly consciousness. In this laudable aim, the *Handbook* deserves a wide and enthusiastic readership.

The *Handbook*’s chapters are organized into nine thematic groupings of varying lengths. Framing the collection are clusters devoted to the idea of the Restoration, both as this idea was represented, legislated, and contested during the 1660’s (part II) and as the idea has been variously received and reconceived in the decades and centuries since (part IX). This final cluster moves from the so-called Glorious Revolution of 1688 to the present day. It includes a rich description of Jacobite literature by Paul K. Monod, valuably foregrounding Irish and Scottish voices, and an excellent concluding chapter by Paul Davis, whose Swiftian taxonomy of “short restorations” and “long restorations” returns to the periodizing questions raised by the volume’s second part and introduction. Within these framing sections, the reader will find two larger groupings (composed of seven and nine chapters, respectively) and four smaller ones (composed of three or four). The first of the larger clusters focuses on key cultural institutions, such as the reopened public theatres and the print marketplace. The second features significant writers, each creatively paired with a rival, collaborator, or predecessor. The shorter clusters take up a number of disparate topics, “bodies politic,” “Restoration spiritualities,” “philosophy and natural science,” and “border-crossings.” In the last of these, the reader will find contributions that draw a defiantly English literary culture into fractious conversation with French novelists and playwrights (in an illuminating essay by Line Cottegnies) and with the nation’s imperial worldmaking (Rajani Sudan).

There are challenges to organizing a volume of such wide-ranging scope and the editors are to be commended for not conscripting chapters into a more formulaic or predictable design. Still, their organizing logics, which eschew more straightforward claims to generic affiliation, lead to some potentially confusing separations: chapters by Nigel Smith, on the correspondence between John Locke and Lady Damaris Masham, and by Martin Dzelzainis, on the private-professional verse-letter and letter-writing practices of Andrew Marvell and George Etherege, might better belong with those by Kate Bennett, on life writing, and Michael Mascuch, on diary keeping. It is, additionally, curious to find David Parry's chapter on Baxter and Bunyan missing from the section on "Restoration Spiritualities," or Mordechai Feingold's account of the troubled early history of the Royal Society outside of the section on Restoration institutions. There is also a considerable amount of repetition, requotation, and retreading of ground. The reader is treated to two discussions, albeit developing different emphases, on the appearance of women and changeable scenery in the reopened playhouse (the late Robert D. Hume and Julia H. Fawcett), the period's print culture and book trade (John Barnard and Margaret J. M. Ezell), the metaphor of the body politic (Niall Allsopp and Thomas A. King), and the relation between experimental practice and literary expression (Helen Thompson and Claire Preston, with Preston's chapter offering the clearer introduction). This reader would be glad never to encounter again the opening lines of Rochester's "A Satyr on Charles II," quoted in several chapters (454, 470–71, 647), although the poem doesn't appear in Katherine Mannheimer's compelling reading of Rochester and Behn.

Despite these, perhaps inevitable, retracings, there are many pleasures to be taken, and valuable knowledge to be gained, in the re-encounter with writers and works across the *Handbook*. It is salutary to meet Dryden's *Aeneis* (1697) first in a discussion of Jacob Tonson and the entrepreneurial practice of publishing by subscription (201), then in the company of other Virgils—what Henry Power usefully calls the "Augustan Virgil of 1660" and the "uncertain Virgils of the 1640s and 1650s" (625)—once more as part of a Jacobite epic canon (714), and finally as the last of the period's imagined epics, Dryden's translation serving here as a weary instance of the unending project not of national foundation but of its perpetual renewal and restoration (736–37). Another fortuitous series of repeated encounters involves the religious poet Jane Barker, who is first introduced in a chapter on Catholic writing (Alison Shell). Barker will be found recast in the role of an experimental poet-philosopher, adapting Spenser for her perambulation around the interior of the human body (in Preston's chapter, "Empirical Description") as well as paired with Anne Finch as a poet of exile and retirement (in Monod's chapter, "Jacobite Literatures"). Examples could be multiplied of the ways in which the *Handbook* rewards a wandering reader, happy to find and to follow the many smaller pathways that crisscross its pages.

Of course, books, and especially handbooks, of literary criticism are seldom read from cover to cover. Most readers will pick and choose among chapters, based either on their own interests or on the interests temporarily and tendentiously assigned to them by a course instructor or syllabus. Scholars of Marvell will especially enjoy the intricately layered essays by Dzelzainis, on scribal culture and masculine sociability, and James Loxley, on Marvell as a satirist and follower of John Cleveland. They will enjoy, too, Elizabeth Sauer's wide-ranging discussion of nonconformist aesthetics and the animadversion, that "work-horse" genre of Restoration ecclesiastical controversy of which Marvell was such an inventive and "genre-defying" practitioner (489, 502). For the nonspecialist or student reader, essays by Fawcett, Erin Murphy, Mannheimer, Laura J. Rosenthal, and Tessie Prakas combine informative overviews with examples of sensitive, original close reading. Rosenthal's essay is notable, as well, for its focus on Restoration visual culture, suggestively pairing portraits of Nell Gwyn and Louise de Kéroualle that feature enslaved African children. Two of the more theoretically ambitious contributions, Thomas A. King's chapter on biopolitics and Helen Thompson's dense yet fascinating account of the speculative knowledge systems linking Royal Society experimentalists to the Royal African Company's merchants and factors, also make good on the *Handbook's* avowed goal of engaging with questions of race and empire. And it would be remiss not to note that there is a slimmer, if still compendious, handbook of Restoration drama to be assembled out of this handbook's pages.

Given such abundance, it may seem unfair to offer criticism about what has not been included. The editors appear to have made a pragmatic, although to this reader surprising, choice not to engage the close ties among Restoration England, colonial North America, and the wider Atlantic world. Indeed, with the exception of Prakas's discussion of Anne Bradstreet ("Women, Prayer, and Prophecy"), there is little attempt to think about English-speaking writers and readers living outside of Britain, including those in Barbados and the Caribbean. The not infrequent enlistment of Behn's prose romance *Oroonoko* and Dryden's heroic drama *Amboyna* speaks to this comparative narrowness, as well as to the broader and unhelpful separation of the academic fields of early American and early modern English literature. Yet if there is a missed opportunity, here, this in no way detracts from the important scholarly work that *The Oxford Handbook of Restoration Literature* is admirably performing. In pushing back against the encroachment of a "long eighteenth century" and in reaffirming, in ways that are sharp and subtle, the many continuities between the Restoration and the early seventeenth century, the *Handbook* gives us a new old Restoration for our present moment.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

