

A still greater degree of ambiguity informed eighteenth-century print culture, which featured a dynamic interplay between belief and skepticism about ghosts. Various writings could be considered true relations or mere entertainment—an uncertainty that allowed for multiple reader responses unified only by an abiding curiosity about the afterlife. Here, Seeman finds, lies a wellspring for the nineteenth-century “cult of the dead, a religious complex that in the early nineteenth century emerged from Protestantism but contained lay- and especially female-driven elements distinct from mainstream Protestantism.”

Thomas Keymer. *Poetics of the Pillory: English Literature and Seditious Libel, 1660–1820*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2019. xviii + 323 pp. + 31 illus. \$35. Review by NIALL ALLSOPP, UNIVERSITY OF EXETER.

Thomas Keymer’s excellent new book is a combined history and critical study of the ways in which conditions of censorship shaped English literature during the long eighteenth century (1660–1820). The book began life as the Clarendon Lectures given at the University of Oxford in 2014–15; these have been expanded with rich archival and critical detail, without sacrificing the energy and lucidity of the lectures (including retaining the use of contractions).

Keymer’s central claim is that indirect censorship via the threat of post-publication retribution proved “a crucial determinant of eighteenth-century authorship” (21). The pillory, memorably described by Daniel Defoe as the “hieroglyphic state machine,” was in reality neither so “wholly indecipherable” as a hieroglyph (7), nor so relentlessly systematic as a machine. Keymer is at pains to warn us against a “totalitarian fallacy” (13), specifically fingered as “Foucauldian” (7), which imagines censorship as a monolithic or coherently-articulated structure. The pillory was a piece of street theatre, a spectacle of “publike terror” (12), which sometimes became an occasion for mob violence, but which could also be converted by its wilier victims into a “festival of defiance” (5). And it was only one component in a larger web of retributive tactics including “extra-legal harassment” and “sleazy

pecuniary methods” meant to intimidate and deter seditious writers (20). Retribution was applied in an “arbitrary and alarmingly unpredictable” fashion (23)—Keymer highlights one pamphleteer, William Jones, whom the government awarded a knighthood for his services while simultaneously prosecuting for his “seditious, treasonable, and diabolical” writings (14). The climate of anxiety and uncertainty created by this regime, Keymer contends, provided an “enabling discipline” (22) which spurred writers to brilliant heights of technical skill in developing strategies of “irony, indirection, and encoding,” or as Jonathan Swift put it, writing “with Caution and double Meaning, to prevent Prosecution” (24).

Seventeenth-century specialists will recognize in Keymer’s argument the influence of Annabel Patterson’s classic study *Censorship and Interpretation*, first published in 1984. Patterson argued that practices of complexity and polyvalence, which we think of as hallmarks of literary writing, evolved in the seventeenth century as what she called “functional ambiguity,” methods for circumventing censorship. While acknowledging the sustained critique that has challenged and refined Patterson’s thesis, Keymer adapts and applies it, seeking to bridge from the English civil wars, across the eighteenth century, into the Romantic period, where parallel arguments about seditious speech have been developed by scholars like John Barrell and Jon Mee. Throughout this period, Keymer argues, the threat of retribution produced an “internalized check” (19) of self-censorship, but also enabled new kinds of literary skill. These techniques, in turn, required a new kind of discipline on the part of readers, which Keymer describes with a phrase borrowed from Paul Ricoeur: a “hermeneutics of suspicion.” This involved a “suspicion of surface meaning,” analogous to the frame of mind with which official prosecutors were presumably scrutinizing questionable writings, a constant “vigilance” towards possibly “criminal subtexts” (25). Many writers felt this hyper-attentive state resulted in better readers—Keymer has some fun by citing such unlikely bedfellows as Roger L’Estrange and William Blake unwittingly agreeing with one another that a good “Train of Mystery and Circumlocution” is “fittest for Instruction, because it rouzes the faculties to act” (25).

Keymer’s periodization is not simply a function of tradition or convenience, but a central plank of his argument—showing the

continuity of concerns with censorship throughout this period. He debunks the long-lived assumption, still prevalent in works like Geoff Kemp and Jason McElligott's landmark anthology *Censorship and the Press, 1580–1720*, that the lapse of the Licensing Act in 1695 marked a sea-change in British censorship. Instead, Keymer highlights the continuing attempts to reassert punitive press controls successfully in cases like the Succession to the Crown Act of 1707 or the Stage Licensing Act of 1737, and through the expansion in post-publication prosecution for seditious libel. Because seditious libel resided in common law rather than statute, the new regime could be considered tougher than the old Licensing Act, offering greater latitude to censors, and hence greater hazard to authors. The concept of seditious libel was nebulous—dangerously or productively so, depending on one's point of view. Its true significance, Keymer contends, can be glimpsed in the facility with which it bled into the neighbouring categories of blasphemous and above all obscene libel. Sedition was elder cousin to sodomy, which together with the other crimes punishable by pillory, including blasphemy and fraud, represented the “violation or perversion of officially sanctioned norms” (8).

Centred though it is around the eighteenth century, the book contains much to interest a seventeenth-century specialist. Keymer's starting point, perhaps the best-known literary pillorying of all, took place in 1637: William Prynne's ears severed, nose slit, and skin branded, at the hands of Archbishop Laud. Although, as Keymer notes, the gruesomeness of that occasion was in fact surpassed by the mutilation of James Naylor under Cromwell in 1656, it was Prynne who set the pattern that echoed throughout the ensuing century and a half. What had been planned as a “spectacle of exemplary punishment” was met by Prynne with a display of brave resistance, if self-serving then forgivably so under the circumstances. Notwithstanding his loathing of theatre, Keymer suggests, Prynne grasped the inherent theatricality of the pillory, which he transformed into the stage of his own martyrdom. The Earl of Clarendon, writing with hindsight, recognized that the affair proved counterproductive and “treasured up wrath for the time to come” (12). Men more radical than Prynne were galvanized by his fate—John Milton felt himself “pluck'd ... by the ears.” Milton was spared retribution when Clarendon was swept

to power in 1660—in an effort, Keymer suggests, to avoid repeating the mistake made with Prynne (he might have added that, by this time, Prynne had wholly reconciled with the monarchy). If the regime was keen to avoid reliving the Prynne affair, the event still played out repeatedly in literary memory. It resurfaces famously in Pope's *Dunciad*, applied to an even more slippery literary troublemaker: "Earless on high, stood un-abash'd Defoe." As Keymer's deft reading shows, Pope's six words manage to insult Defoe in multiple ways: the implied comparison with Prynne; both mutilated and senseless; "earless" rather than "fearless"; instead of the more properly Miltonic "undaunted," merely "un-abash'd" (101). The memory of Prynne shows how the pillory functioned as a productive literary symbol, in Pope's case, of retribution and abashment, but in Defoe's case, a centre of festive resistance. Defoe wrote a song to accompany his own pillorying in 1703, the *Hymn to the Pillory*, which was printed and distributed to the crowd (though Keymer pours cold water on the legend that they also festooned him with flowers).

Keymer's sole chapter devoted to seventeenth-century matters is rich and suggestive. We meet only briefly with Milton (Keymer refrains from adding much to the literature on *Areopagitica*, suggesting that it properly belongs to the earlier era of pre-publication licensing, rather than post-publication retribution). Andrew Marvell, Edmund Waller, and Aphra Behn, among others, are met with in passing. The central focus is on John Dryden, a choice not so counterintuitive as it may initially seem. Dryden was acquainted with the prosecutorial side of press censorship through his long alliance with his fellow Tory propagandist L'Estrange. But he was also on the receiving end of an act of post-publication retribution, albeit of an unofficial kind, a nocturnal cudgelling in Rose Alley in 1679, and was regularly in fear of more—"I hope the only thing I feard in it, is not found out," he noted of a later work (37).

Keymer contends that some of Dryden's greatest poetry was written in "moments of uncertainty and hazard" (37). In a curious way this undersells the chapter, which shines brightly on poems which are assuredly not among Dryden's greatest. "Upon the Death of Hastings" was the eighteen-year-old Dryden's contribution to a volume, *Lachrymae Musarum*, in which a glittering collection of poets including John

Denham, Robert Herrick, and Andrew Marvell attempted unconvincingly to cloak their outrage at the regicide behind a confection of grief at a minor nobleman's death from smallpox. Keymer reads Dryden's effort as a competitive exercise in the "art of political encoding," in which he takes on and actually surpasses his more senior rivals in "communicating dissonant meaning within a framework of permissible or deniable utterance" (43). It is practically the first time I have seen a convincing case for this as, if not quite a good, then at least an interesting poem, on literary rather than merely biographical grounds. It also reveals to us a shiftier, riskier Dryden who went on to write one of the greatest but shiftest poems of all, *Mac Flecknoe*. Keymer reads *Mac Flecknoe* memorably as a kind of "holiday from allegiance ... as though Dryden had written a Whig poem in his sleep" (62). I found this line of argument strikingly complementary to John West's book *Dryden and Enthusiasm* (also from Oxford University Press, but missing from Keymer's bibliography, presumably because it was published only shortly beforehand). Both Keymer and West quote Samuel Johnson describing a Dryden who "delighted to tread upon the brink of meaning" (49), producing a dangerous poet who could contain both the histrionic adulation of Stuart monarchy, and the radical energies of dissent. Future scholars hoping to understand Dryden's dynamic and contradictory attitudes, as well as his prodigious skill, will need to read West and Keymer's work carefully in conjunction.

Subsequent chapters carve up the period from 1700 to 1820 into roughly equal chunks. Each draws on a wide and colourful range of print and manuscript sources to trace both the workings and representation of the pillory, while maintaining a thread of close critical analysis of central literary figures in the assigned years—Pope and Defoe for the early eighteenth century, Johnson and Henry Fielding for the middle years, and Robert Southey for the Romantic period. The book concludes in 1820, when outspokenly revolutionary poems like Percy Shelley's *The Maske of Anarchy* appeared, if still facing "discernible legal inhibition," nevertheless enabled by a "decisive shift in the borderlines of what could be uttered," which offered "if not immunity, a degree of security" (285). Keymer concedes that a whiggish story about the gradual decline of censorship is "impossible to avoid" (18). However, he significantly revises the whiggish story by demonstrating

that the liberation of the press did not result from a sudden discovery of Enlightened tolerance among the ruling elites, but rather from the sheer practical difficulty of containing an “exuberant, diverse, endlessly innovative print culture” (21). This rather consoling conclusion may have political relevance today.

Brent S. Sirota and Allan I. Macinnes, eds. *The Hanoverian Succession in Great Britain and its Empire*. Woodbridge, Suffolk, United Kingdom: The Boydell Press, 2019. x + 222 pp. \$115. Review by CHRISTOPHER N. FRITSCH.

Understanding past events is often difficult. The aftermath of the Glorious Revolution, specifically the Protestant Succession, is a good example of a complex problem. Studies of the Revolution of 1688 and its aftermath are often very diverse and just as complex. The editors, Brent Sirota and Allan Macinnes, argue that the arrival of William and Mary was far less important than the changes that ensued. They see an “evolving politics” of individuals, groups, organizations, and nations. For the authors of this volume, Great Britain was anything but stable and on a sure footing in the wake of the Revolution of 1688.

The essays, then, reflect the multitude of changes within “four nations,” the overseas ventures of Great Britain and Scotland, and their intellectual, commercial, and diplomatic relations with the Continent. These include controversies arising from the last Stuart monarchs and political moves to consolidate both the Protestant Succession and the power of Parliament. At a certain level, each of the essays provides insight into the plethora of arguments and debates as responses to the events of 1688 and those since the revolution. These include controversies arising from the reign of the last Stuart monarchs. This leads to a discussion of the continuing existence of a Catholic Stuart line and their Jacobite and French Catholic support. Larger questions of continental and imperial conflict follow, leading to more theoretical issues involving the impact of industrialism and the Enlightenment.

Contradicting J. H. Plumb’s standard work, *The Growth of Political Stability in England* (1967), Daniel Szechi begins by positing a Britain that was highly Tory and hence unstable due to the Hanoverian Succession.