

INTRODUCTION

Fifty years ago, Charles Mish expressed his doubts about the contemporary appeal of the stories he had selected for his anthology of Restoration fiction (xiii).¹ His hesitation was understandable because, except for a few works such as John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), and Richard Head and Francis Kirkman's *The English Rogue* (1665-1671), Restoration fiction has rarely been reedited ever since.² Traditionally it has been relegated by literary historians to marginal sections (mainly focussing on Bunyan and Aphra Behn, with poetry, drama, and non-fiction prose as prominent genres). Yet, as James Grantham Turner has argued, the years after the Plague and the Great Fire, between 1666 and 1670, "proved momentous for the history of the novel, even though no major English novels appeared. We find instead fascinating experiments with the romance genre, prefaces that promote the self-conscious author and conduct lively theoretical debates over the nature of fiction, translations of canonical works [...], and a general move towards realism, loosely defined."³ Indeed, throughout the last decades of the seventeenth century, there was an astonishing increase in new titles (many of them imports from France), in addition to reprints of both native and continental classical fiction. We find French heroic romances (decaying soon after the Restoration), a revival of chivalric romances, allegorical romances and quests, anti-romances, satires, jest books, popular fiction, criminal biographies, picaresque and rogue fictions, moral tales, didactic fiction, spiritual memoirs, imaginary voyages, utopian fiction, *nouvelles galantes* and *historiques*, Italian *novelle*, scandalous chronicles, epistolary modes of fiction, and oriental tales, to mention some of the broad categories or sub-genres.

From the 1980s onwards, renewed interest in the origins of the English novel, and more particularly in late-seventeenth-century female authors and gender-related subjects (often as part of the so-called long eighteenth century), encouraged by the rise of women's studies, definitely promoted academic research on Restoration (and seventeenth-century) fiction to a degree that Mish could never have imagined. In fact, Margaret Cavendish, Aphra Behn, Delarivier Manley, and Eliza Haywood (though not only for their novels) have recently achieved the same critical appeal as Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding. However, few scholarly books

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25145/j.recaesin.2019.79.01>

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 79; November 2019, pp. 9-11; ISSN: e-2530-8335



are exclusively devoted to exploring the specific development of fiction during this period. Curiously enough, though Restoration literature, culture, and history are relatively well researched, further knowledge is required about, among other aspects, the ways in which fiction addressed the anxieties and profound transformations of every kind, the configuration and evolution of narrative genres, their malleability and hybridisation, self-conscious experimentation, the gradual separation of the narrator from the authorial voice as a distinctive entity, the growth of verisimilitude and characterisation, as well as reception and reading habits. This special issue of *Revista canaria de estudios ingleses (RCEI)* on “Restoration Fiction (1660-1714)” hopes to contribute to further discern the achievements of this traditionally neglected period of the English novel.

The choice of 1714 (coinciding with the death of the last Stuart monarch) to close the temporal span under focus may be problematic. However, for the study of fiction, it seems a suitable option considering the persistence of late-seventeenth-century types of fiction in the early eighteenth century, and the effects of important cultural and political changes, such as the first copyright Act (The Statute of Anne, passed in 1710) and the 1715 victory of the Whigs, who would remain in power for many decades. The period 1660-1714 covers several phases of the development of the English novel. The mid-seventeenth-century narrative continued for a few years after 1660, but by 1665 there was a noticeable transition from the genres prevalent during the Interregnum to new modes of storytelling, mostly imported from France. The 1680s witnessed a new impetus, a notable increase in new titles and the publication of Aphra Behn’s works, among them, *Oroonoko* (1688), often regarded as the first English novel, while many of the new voices in the 1690s are associated with Augustan literature. All these stages are represented in the monograph section and offer a glimpse into the literary richness and potential of mid- and late-seventeenth-century fiction.

The opening essay by Gerd Bayer and Jaroslaw Jasenowski examines epistolary journalism in two case-studies (in John Dunton’s *Athenian Mercury* and Peter Motteux’s *Gentleman’s Journal*) to “demonstrate how these periodicals make use of the supposed reliability of epistolary writing in order to undermine the truth-claims that attach to the format.” It is followed by Jorge Figueroa Dorrego’s analysis of misogyny in three novels of prostitutes, *The Crafty Whore* (1658), Head’s *The Miss Display’d* (1675), and *The London Jilt* (1683), stories associated with picaresque and roguish narratives but with a moral aim in mind. A quite different type of women, nuns, is the subject of Sonia Villegas-López’s contribution. By addressing

¹ Charles Mish, *Restoration Prose Fiction, 1666-1700. An Anthology of Representative Pieces* (U of Nebraska P, 1970).

² Nowadays, most are available online through *EEBO* (*Early English Books Online*, launched in 1998, and providing access to c. 132, 600 titles, as of December 2018).

³ James Grantham Turner, “Cross-Section (3). 1666-1670,” *Prose Fiction in English from the Origins of Print to 1750*, ed. Thomas Keymer (Oxford UP, 2017) 73-88. 73.

the coincidental significance of nuns and seraglio women in Restoration fiction as symbols of secluded femininity, exoticism, and unbounded sexuality, Villegas-López's essay explores the ways in which Behn forwarded this similarity in *Oroonoko* (1688) and *The History of the Nun* (1689). Adelaide Serras's article on Neville's *The Isle of Pines* (1668) sets the story in the context of the age of discoveries to examine the gradual undermining of the *eutopian* space founded by George Pine and four women (one of them an African slave) on an uninhabited island off Australia, after having survived a shipwreck. Closely linked with Neville's story is María José Coperías-Aguilar's analysis of de Foigny's *A New Discovery of Terra Incognita Australis, or the Southern World* (1693), the sole representative of translated fiction in this collection, to highlight its relevance in the traditions of travel literature and utopian fiction, and its influence on the eighteenth-century novel. Patricia Rodrigues explains Gildon's *The Golden Spy* (1709), "the first, fully-fledge it-narrative [or novel of circulation] in English," by examining the complex relationship of both companionship and rivalry between the coin-narrators, and how the object-narrators both parody and satirically observe human behaviour. Finally, my own contribution aims to introduce Pordage's *Eliana* (1661), a romance overlooked by scholarly criticism, and in the process to suggest some innovatory aspects regarding narrative form, treatment of history, and gender.

I would like to express my gratitude to the board of the *RCEI* for giving me the opportunity to edit the present collection of articles, the authors for their willingness to publish their research in *RCEI* and for their excellent contributions, and the referees –especially the non-ULL– for their generous acceptance to assess the essays, and for their sharp observations and insightful comments.

The monograph section on Restoration Fiction (1660-1714) is a publication conducted within the framework of the research project "Orígenes de la novela en Inglaterra, 1660-1700: base de datos y edición de textos" (ENEID), funded by the Spanish Ministerio de Economía, Industria y Competitividad (MINECO), "Convocatoria de Proyectos de Excelencia, I+D+i," Ref. FFI2017-82728-P.



