



Noelle Gallagher. *Historical Literatures: Writing about the Past in England, 1660-1740*

Noelle Gallagher. *Historical Literatures: Writing about the Past in England, 1660-1740*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016. xx, 272 p., ill. ISBN 978071999243. GBP £16.99 (paperback).

Charting important territory in Restoration and early eighteenth-century literary studies, Noelle Gallagher presses the relationship between history and other forms and genres of writing invested in representing the past, particularly the recent past. While scholars such as Ruth Mack (*Literary Historicity: Literature and Historical Experience in Eighteenth-Century Britain*) and Lisa Kasmer (*Novel Histories: British Women Writing History, 1760-1830*) have situated their studies of literary historicity in the mid-to-late eighteenth century, Gallagher examines historical writing in England in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, a period when history was perceived as being in a state of decline. There is room indeed for an examination of histories after the Restoration and before David Hume's *The History of England* (1754-1761) silenced some complaints about the dearth of good history. Gallagher's project of recuperating this period – perceived as a low point in history writing – is successful. *Historical Literatures* – an accessible scholarly monograph suitable for academics and upper-level undergraduate students – is divided into four sections, each treating a genre of historical representation: memoirs, secret histories, satires and panegyrics, and more traditional “histories.” Balancing canonical texts with lesser-known offerings, Gallagher examines works by John Evelyn, Daniel Defoe, Delarivier Manley, and Eliza Haywood, among others.

Gallagher establishes the ways in which alternative histories question the historiographical ideal of the French neoclassical *ars historica*. The author complicates current scholarly notions of the literariness of historical writing in the long eighteenth century not by reading history as literature, but literature as history – as alternative historiography. She examines works outside of history proper – scandal narratives like Manley's *Secret Memoirs and Manners of Persons of Quality* (1709) and Haywood's *Memoirs of a Certain Island Adjacent to the Kingdom of Utopia* (1725) – as historical forms that reflect and at times amplify significant historiographical trends, including the shift in content toward the individual and in style toward the detailed. Her general discussion of Restoration and early eighteenth-century memoirs is clearly argued, making the thought-provoking claim that “historically sensitive biography” (16) was not exclusive to the century's latter half.

This book represents a valuable contribution to an ongoing conversation about “lesser” or



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marginal genres of historical literature that has tended to focus on their value vis-à-vis the novel. The chapter on Colley Cibber's *An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber* (1740), is especially noteworthy, the playwright's significance as a self-conscious historian-memoirist compellingly presented in this case study. Laying claim to "theatre history as history" (35), Cibber participates in the widening of historical writing beyond neoclassical ideas of greatness, a transition usually located later in the century. Gallagher's consideration of secret histories as a historical form is also extremely effective; she observes that histories outside formal neoclassical models differ not simply in style and content, but also in their authorship and readership, and she pays attention to works of historical literature as they are produced and consumed in England's growing literary marketplace.

Historical Literatures is successful in unpacking literary works that challenge conventional historical representation and model new ways of treating the historical subject, but slightly less persuasive in its consideration of "history proper": Gallagher often introduces the former, more experimental works by setting out the general qualities of the prevailing *ars historica*; yet more details from texts firmly within this prevailing historiography would strengthen the case for their divergence from conventions. Though the depth of her research is evident in the book's endnotes, she judiciously limits in-text engagement with prior scholarship to the ideas most pertinent to her thinking. In sum, Gallagher's work is illuminating and readable; her ideas are articulated with clarity and without resort to jargon. Now published in paperback, *Historical Literatures* is an excellent resource for any literary scholar working on the Restoration and early eighteenth century.

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