

**Renaissance and Reformation**  
**Renaissance et Réforme**



**Lewis, Jayne and Lisa Zunshine, eds. Approaches to Teaching  
the Works of John Dryden**

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Volume 38, Number 4, Fall 2015

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1087367ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v38i4.26394>

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Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Caldwell, T. (2015). Review of [Lewis, Jayne and Lisa Zunshine, eds. *Approaches to Teaching the Works of John Dryden*]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 38(4), 206–207. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v38i4.26394>

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**Lewis, Jayne and Lisa Zunshine, eds.**

***Approaches to Teaching the Works of John Dryden.***

New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2013. Pp. ix, 197. ISBN 978-1-160329-126-2 (paperback) \$19.75.

As Dryden in his old age looked back over political turmoil and the decline in cultural standards, he refused to give up faith in future generations: “’Tis well an old age is out, / And time to begin a new” he declares in his final work. Dryden’s optimism in the face of the disintegration of an idealized old world is revived in this fine collection of essays. The authors demonstrate the vitality of his works and his world and their application for the twenty-first century amidst the frightening corporatization of the university and the consequent threat to the humanities, especially in less immediately magnetic areas like the eighteenth century.

In this volume, Jayne Lewis and Lisa Zunshine bring together a chorus of voices that Dryden would have applauded. Lewis and Zunshine presented their team with a long questionnaire about how professors teach Dryden and how students respond. The answers are organized into energetic and inspiring essays that fall into two main sections: “Materials” and “Approaches,” the latter of which is grouped generically. The essays provide a feast of ideas. The eternal vitality of Dryden, the volume makes clear, derives from his versatility to be sure, but what makes Dryden so pertinent in the twenty-first century—as Lewis reiterates, stressing the findings of the participants—is “the internal tensions that govern his work” (17).

What is so inspiring here is not just the innovation in the teaching modes presented but also the evidence that so many aspects of Dryden’s varied works are appearing in various forms and modes in classrooms. The Materials section briefly outlines the many multimedia sources that now enable teaching methodologies as dynamic as Dryden’s works. In terms of primary texts, background materials, and criticism, however, print remains seminal.

At the end of the collection (under Prose and Translation, where perhaps these essays should have gone first under Poetry) Adam Potkay and Philip Smallwood highlight the huge delights and benefits—as well as the difficulties—of introducing students to Dryden’s last but arguably richest works. Scholars have worked assiduously over the last decades to highlight the value of Dryden’s translations, not as secondary works that were a compromise for the aged out-of-favour poet but as dynamic works that transcend politics finally.

Potkay and Smallwood demonstrate how the crucial elements at their core can be made accessible to students.

A major point that comes out of the fine section on Dryden's poetry is both the daunting nature of the contexts surrounding Dryden's works and the tools available for overcoming them. Christopher D. Johnson observes in his discussion of *Absalom and Achitophel* in the classroom that in fact Dryden's world is more similar than different to our students' with its partisanship and media domination. Kirstin R. Wilcox—like a number of authors in the collection—shows how digital tools can work well to make sense of the contexts of such a “difficult” poem. Other essays demonstrate that in a variety of different classrooms, Dryden's Anne Killigrew ode and Oldham elegy especially work well to teach genre and the contexts of Dryden's world.

The drama section highlights the accessibility of Dryden to our students and the dynamic nature of his presence in classrooms. As Diane Dugaw concludes, the “satirical indeterminacy” of his art and “its echoing and pansensory hypertextuality” appeal to students' “mimetic and multimedia imagination” so that they respond to his “kindred sensibility” (117). From Margaret Anne Doody's suggestion that we start with the plays to introduce Dryden and that *Absalom and Achitophel* can thus be “treated as one of his greatest dramas” (87), through J. Caitlin Finlayson's and Elizabeth Bobo's essays on the lessons inherent in Dryden's adaptations at the end, this section reveals Dryden's world brought to life through his plays. In their delightful piece, Thomas F. Bonnell and Katie Sullivan demonstrate that letting students perform a carefully selected play will lead them into Dryden's milieu and offer a compelling experience for all. Anchored by Dugaw's essay that focuses on “Multimedia Dryden,” this section underscores the extent to which the music, painting, performance, and aesthetics of the age can be brought into class through digital means to enable students to experience the contexts and nuances of his works.

The outstanding teachers and scholars whose ideas make up this collection provide evidence, through their own experiences, that Dryden is not only alive and well in scholarship (as we knew) but is crucial still to humanities courses. Much inspiration is offered in these pages even to seasoned teachers of Dryden and the period, and there are many splendid ideas whatever the level of the class or whether it is survey or period or genre based.