

SIR JOHN DENHAM  
(1614/15–1669)  
REASSESSED

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The State's Poet



EDITED BY PHILIP MAJOR

ROUTLEDGE

# Sir John Denham (1614/15–1669) Reassessed

*Sir John Denham (1614/15–1669) Reassessed* shines new light on a singular, colourful yet elusive figure of seventeenth-century English letters. Despite his influence as a poet, wit, courtier, exile, politician and surveyor of the king's works, Denham remains a neglected figure. The original essays in this interdisciplinary collection provide the sustained modern critical attention his life and work merit.

The book both examines for the first time and reassesses important features of Denham's life and reputations: his friendship circles, his role as a political satirist, his religious inclinations, his playwriting years, the personal, political and literary repercussions of his long exile; and offers fresh interpretations of his poetic magnum opus, *Coopers Hill*. Building on the recent resurgence of scholarly interest in royalists and royalism, this lively account of Denham's influence questions assumptions about neatly demarcated seventeenth-century chronological, geographic and literary boundaries. What emerges is a complex man who subverts as well as reinforces conventional characterisations of court wit, gambler and dilettante.

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*Cover and frontispiece illustration:* Detail from 'Portrait of an Old and a Younger Man (John Taylor and John Denham)', 1643, by William Dobson (1610–1646), oil on canvas. The Samuel Courtauld Trust, The Courtauld Gallery, London.

**Sir John Denham**  
**(1614/15–1669) Reassessed**  
The State's Poet

**Edited by Philip Major**

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# Abbreviations

Add. MS	Additional Manuscript
Banks, <i>PW</i>	Theodore Howard Banks, Jr (ed.), <i>The Poetical Works of Sir John Denham</i> (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1928, repr. 1969)
BL	British Library
Bodl.	Bodleian Library
Denham, <i>PT</i>	John Denham, <i>Poems and Translations with The Sophy. Written by the Honourable Sir John Denham Knight of the Bath</i> (London: Henry Herringman, 1668)
<i>CCISP</i>	<i>Calendar of the Clarendon State Papers</i> , ed. O. Ogle, W.H. Bliss, W.D. Macray, and F.J. Routledge, 5 vols (Oxford, 1869–1970)
<i>CSPD</i>	<i>Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series</i>
<i>DNB</i>	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
HMC	Historical Manuscripts Commission
<i>ODNB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: From the Earliest Times to the Year 2000</i> , ed. H.C.G. Matthew and B. Harrison, 60 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)
<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
O Hehir, <i>EH</i>	Brendan O Hehir, <i>Expans'd Hieroglyphicks: A Critical Edition of Sir John Denham's Coopers Hill</i> (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969)
O Hehir, <i>HD</i>	Brendan O Hehir, <i>Harmony from Discords: A Life of Sir John Denham</i> (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968)
SP	State Papers, National Archives, London

# Introduction

*Philip Major*

## I

Towards the end of his 'Brief Life' of Sir John Denham, John Aubrey related the following anecdote:

He was generally temperate as to drinking: but one time when he was a student at Lincolne's-Inne, having been merry at the tavern with his camerades, late at night, a frolick came into his head, to get a playsterer's brush and a pott of inke, and blott out all the signes between Temple-Bar and Charing-crosse, which made a strange confusion the next day.<sup>1</sup>

Aubrey's intention was to share a humorous vignette of his subject's youthful years. Yet he also provides a useful analogy for today's early modern student and scholar, who could be forgiven for perceiving that the signs illuminating Denham's life and literary legacy have been similarly obscured. The feeling persists that we have failed adequately to take the measure of 'the state's poet': despite his influence as a poet, playwright, translator, wit, courtier, exile, diplomat, politician, and Surveyor of the King's Works, Denham remains a comparatively understudied figure. This is evidenced by, and derives from, a conspicuous shortage of modern publications: the most recent book-length studies are Brendan O Hehir's biography of 1968, and the same author's critique of *Coopers Hill* a year later; while the newest edition of the poems, edited by Theodore Banks, was first published in 1928.<sup>2</sup>

The metaphorical brush and inkpot concealing Denham from contemporary view is, in part, the historiographical imbalance in seventeenth-century British

1 John Aubrey, 'Brief Lives', *Chiefly of Contemporaries, Set Down by John Aubrey, between the Years 1669 & 1696*, ed. Andrew Clark, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898), i, p. 220.

2 O Hehir, *HD*; idem, *EH*; Banks, *PW*. Academic articles on Denham have continued to be published, albeit sporadically, such as Tanya Caldwell, 'John Dryden and John Denham', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 46.1 (Spring 2004), 49–72, and Jerome de Groot, 'John Denham and Lucy Hutchinson's Commonplace Book', *Studies in English Literature*, 48.1 (2008), 147–63.

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studies, obtaining since at least the 1940s, which has seen parliamentarians and radicals, for a variety of reasons, subjected to consistently closer scrutiny than their (as broadly conceived) monarchy-supporting peers. A corollary of this understandable though ultimately distorted focus has been implicitly to downplay the significance and variety of the conservative opposition to the seismic, revolutionary events of the mid-seventeenth century. Politically, philosophically, and culturally, Denham was an intrinsic part of that opposition, though as we shall see there were moments during the 1650s when his loyalty to the Crown was questioned.

There has been a welcome if belated shift of emphasis in recent years, with Crown followers below the highest levels of the attenuated court now receiving a more equitable level of attention. The growing number of studies on royalism, particularly over the last fifteen or so years, has extended our knowledge and deepened our understanding of the royalist credo and, particularly, the multifarious and multivalent literary responses to defeat and displacement.<sup>3</sup> An appreciably more complex and nuanced picture of royalism is emerging which has made redundant some of the critical framework of previous generations of historians and literary scholars. Thanks to recent scholarship we also have a much better insight into the royalist exile and its cultural manifestations, a topic of direct relevance to Denham,<sup>4</sup> and the same can be said for studies on royalist networks of friendship and patronage, royalist print culture of the Interregnum, and the oppositional nature of Church of England adherence. All told, it is a far more auspicious critical environment for a major study of Denham than has existed for some considerable time.

But if his royalist credentials no longer debar him from scholarly enquiry, why does Denham, in particular, warrant reassessment? There are, after all, features of his life and character which are undeniably unappealing, ostensibly giving credence to the familiar label of shallow and disreputable cavalier. Neither Banks nor O Hehir resorted to hagiography; both revealed the congenital gambling and consequent habitual debt (notwithstanding an early essay against gambling, *The*

3 See, for example, Robert Wilcher, *The Writing of Royalism, 1628–1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), and idem, *The Discontented Cavalier: The Work of Sir John Suckling in Its Social, Religious, Political, and Literary Contexts* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007); Andrew Lacey, *The Cult of King Charles the Martyr* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2003); Hero Chalmers, *Royalist Women Writers, 1650–1689* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004); Jason McElligott and David L. Smith (eds), *Royalists and Royalism during the English Civil Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), and idem, *Royalists and Royalism during the Interregnum* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010); John Stubbs, *Reprobates: The Cavaliers of the English Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Philip Major (ed.), *Thomas Killigrew and the Seventeenth-Century English Stage* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

4 See Geoffrey Smith, *The Cavaliers in Exile, 1640–1660* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003); Christopher D’Addario, *Exile and Journey in Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Philip Major (ed.), *Literatures of Exile in the English Revolution and Its Aftermath, 1640–1690* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), and idem, *Writings of Exile in the English Revolution and Restoration* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

*Anatomy of Play*), the alleged syphilis, the blatant preferment enjoyed at the Restoration, and, perhaps more pathetically, the temporary madness (announcing to Charles II that he was the Holy Ghost), and the humiliation of his role as public cuckold, when his young second wife, Margaret Brooke, became the mistress of the Duke of York. Putting to one side his literary accomplishments, Denham has been described as an ‘ineffective warrior, temporizing conspirator, uninspired surveyor general, and dutiful Member of Parliament’, his character ‘grouped under three general heads: impetuous generosity or loyalty; irresolution and weakness of will; and self-regard in its various forms of self-preservation, self-indulgence, and self-aggrandizement’.<sup>5</sup> For Herbert Berry, he was a ‘systematic if a rather well-meaning and repentant wastrel’.<sup>6</sup>

A relative paucity of portraiture has not helped Denham’s cause, a situation possibly created, and probably perpetuated, by the intermittent physical effects of syphilis: Pepys recalls that, ‘among others, Sir J. Denham he told me he had cured it after it was come to an ulcer all over his face’.<sup>7</sup> Aubrey’s assessment of his physical appearance is ambivalent at best:

He was of the tallest, but a little incurvetting at his shoulders, not very robust. His haire was but thin and flaxen, with a moist curl. His gate was slow, and was rather a stalking (he had long legges) [...] his eie was a kind of light goose-gray, not big; but it had a strange piercingness, not as to shining and glory, but (like a Momus) when he conversed with you he look’t into your very thoughts.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, few would dispute that Denham also displayed the redeeming features acknowledged in this book: survivability, an infectious love of life, and humour. To his single elegist, Christopher Wase (who had enjoyed with him the patronage of the Earl of Pembroke), he was the consummate court wit; hence the absence of further poetic commemoration was incomprehensible:

What means this silence, that may seeme to doome  
Denham to an undistinguished tombe?  
Is it astonishment? or deep respect  
To matchlesse witt? It cannot be neglect.  
What e’er th’ excuse, it must not be allow’d  
In loathed oblivion so much worth to shrowd.<sup>9</sup>

5 O Hehir, *HD*, pp. 1, 195.

6 Herbert Berry, ‘Sir John Denham at Law’, *Modern Philology*, 71.3 (February 1974), 266–76 (p. 266).

7 Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, ed. Robert Latham and William Matthews, 11 vols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971–83), v, p. 242.

8 Aubrey, ‘*Brief Lives*’, i, p. 222.

9 SP 29/270, fols 329–30.

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It is Denham's protean nature, his ability to reinvent himself, which most commands our attention. Within royalist circles, at least, he may not have possessed the charisma of Killigrew, or commanded the loyalty shown to Carew, but Denham's life was unusually full, even for the times in which he lived. Studying at Lincoln's Inn may have been a conventional route to have followed for the son of a judge,<sup>10</sup> but thereafter few figures—much less poets—can lay claim to have been a political satirist, captured and lost a castle in the civil war, been High Sheriff of Surrey, acted as a personal confidant, envoy, and courier of Henrietta Maria, Charles I, and Prince Charles, undertaken a diplomatic mission to Poland, been sent on royalist spying assignments (resulting in banishment from London), gone temporarily insane, and, as Surveyor General, organised the coronation of Charles II, and recommended the appointment of the nation's most celebrated architect, Christopher Wren. Moreover, though an MP at the Restoration for a notorious rotten borough, he sat on numerous commissions, including the Council of Plantations, which was influential in furthering the interests of British foreign trade.

The common thread is his loyalty to the Crown: Aubrey asserts, probably correctly, that Denham was 'much beloved by King Charles the First, who valued him for his ingenuity'.<sup>11</sup> But just how significant a figure he was within royalist circles is a moot point. O Hehir claims that he was 'not a very prominent cavalier', while Hilton Kelliher states that he 'occupied in political terms a moderately distinguished place'.<sup>12</sup> Even mid-ranking courtiers, however, are worthy of scholarly attention, and there are aspects of Denham's loyalism which are noteworthy in their own right. As a royalist political propagandist he was in and out of prison in the mid-1640s and -1650s, and considered important enough to be named as one of those persons 'to be removed from His Majesty's Counsels, and to be restrained from coming within the Verge of the Court' in the peace negotiations of November 1644.<sup>13</sup> In 1648 he was sent on a mission to treat with the Committee of States on the king's behalf, and, though William Crofts receives most of the credit for it in the surviving sources,<sup>14</sup> his mission to Poland in 1650—with Crofts—to raise money for the exiled Prince Charles was a huge financial success, cryptically celebrated in his poem, 'On My Lord Croft's and my Journey into Poland, from whence we Brought 10000 L. for his Majesty by the Decimation of his Scottish Subjects There'. As a royalist agent in England, it has been claimed that he formed a clandestine group as a successor to the Sealed Knot,<sup>15</sup> and, after services

10 For the judge Sir John Denham (1559–1639), see *ODNB*.

11 Aubrey, 'Brief Lives', i, p. 218.

12 O Hehir, *HD*, p. 119, f.n.; Hilton Kelliher, 'John Denham: New Letters and Documents', *British Library Journal*, 12 (1986), 1–20 (p. 1).

13 *Journals of the House of Lords*, vii, p. 55.

14 For the most comprehensive account of the mission in English, see Andrew B. Pernal and Rosanne P. Gasse, 'The 1651 Polish Subsidy to the Exile Charles II', *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, n.s., 32 (1999), 1–50.

15 David Underdown, *Royalist Conspiracy in England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), pp. 303–04. The claim gives added piquancy to the lines from *Coopers Hill*, 'Some study plots, and some those plots t'undo, / Others to make 'em, and undo 'em too'.

rendered as Surveyor General at Charles II's coronation, which impressed Pepys,<sup>16</sup> the king created him knight of the Honourable Order of the Bath.

This is not to say—chiming with recent studies emphasising the contingency of monarchical allegiance—that Denham's support for the monarchy was always consistent or unqualified. Denham's father supported Judge George Croke (1559–1641) in his deprecation of the Crown in the hugely contentious Ship-Money disputes of the 1630s, and the poet saw fit to write an admiring 'Elegy on the death of Judge Croke'.<sup>17</sup> The self-preservation identified by O Hehir is adduced not least by Denham's friendly relations with members of the Council of State during the Interregnum: he was the 'sort of man who would always fraternize with the enemy'.<sup>18</sup> And the epithet of 'the state's poet', this volume's subtitle, has an ambivalent provenance: coined by a Cromwellian spy in Paris in a letter to Thurloe, it may suggest a rueful, if misplaced, perception on the part of the royalists with whom the spy was mingling that Denham had returned to England to become the de facto poet laureate of the Commonwealth.<sup>19</sup> Even the ardour of the royalism in *Coopers Hill* has been contested, with at least one critic claiming it betrays a poet who was far from being a divine right ideologue.<sup>20</sup>

Ultimately, it is Denham the writer to whom we return.<sup>21</sup> His literary reputation has always rested chiefly on his celebrated topographical poem, *Coopers Hill*, written on the eve of the civil war, though subsequently republished in various iterations. It is a work which, attested by this book, continues to intrigue and captivate literary scholars,<sup>22</sup> and to generate divergent critical responses. In *Carmen Votivum* (1665), the Jesuit and author Maurice Newport termed it Denham's most beautiful poem ('pulcherrimo poemate'), its author the richest talent ('detissimus ingeni').<sup>23</sup> Dryden thought it 'the exact Standard of good Writing',<sup>24</sup> and high praise was also forthcoming from Herrick, Pope, and Addison. Of lines 189–92, Johnson wrote,

so much meaning is comprized in so few words; the particulars of resemblance are so perspicaciously collected, and every mode of excellence separated from its adjacent fault by so nice a line of limitation; the different parts

16 *Pepys Diary*, 23 April 1661.

17 Banks, *PW*, pp. 156–58.

18 O Hehir, *HD*, p. 195.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 100.

20 See Wilcher, *The Writing of Royalism*, p. 76.

21 Another tale from Aubrey gives an initial, mostly misleading impression of literary diletantism. According to Aubrey, when the poet George Wither was imprisoned during the civil war, 'Sir John Denham went to the king, and desired his majestie not to hang him, for that whilst G.W. lived he should not be the worst poet in England'. Aubrey, '*Brief Lives*', i, p. 221.

22 James Loxley, for example, has described it as a 'masterly piece of map-making'; *Royalism and Poetry in the English Civil Wars: The Drawn Sword* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1997), p. 85.

23 M.N. Anglo [Maurice Newport], ... *Carmen Votivum* (London, 1665), pp. 2, 108, note c.

24 Anthony Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, ed. Philip Bliss, 4 vols (London, 1813–20; repr. New York: Johnson Reprint Society, 1967), iii, p. 825.

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of the sentence are so accurately adjusted; and the flow of the last couplet is so smooth and sweet; that the passage, however celebrated, has not been praised above its merit. It has beauty peculiar to itself, and must be numbered among those felicities which cannot be produced at will by wit and labour, but must rise unexpectedly in some hour propitious to poetry.<sup>25</sup>

Of his later compositions, Denham's Preface to his *Poems and Translations* (1668) downplays, in formulaic fashion, his literary responses to the 'arguments' given to him by Prince Charles in Holland and France 'to divert and put off the evil hours of our banishment, which now and then fell not short of your Majesties expectation'. Yet, as this study will affirm, there was more to Denham's literary output than one poem. Coterminous with *Coopers Hill* is *The Sophy* (1642), a politically allusive verse tragedy centred on the reign of Shah Abbas I of Persia, a play whose contemporary popularity is reflected in Edmund Waller's remark that, upon its publication, Denham 'broke-out like the Irish Rebellion—threescore thousand strong before anybody was aware'.<sup>26</sup> Translations of Book 2 of the *Aeneid*, published as *The Destruction of Troy*, and of Corneille's *Horace*, followed, as well as multiple verses, many satirical, such as his eight contributions to *Certain verses written by severall of the authors friends*, a collection of hostile responses to Sir William Davenant's *Gondibert* (1651). Denham's Preface goes on to privilege his non-literary services to the king:

when men are young, and have little else to do, they might well vent the overflowings of their Fancy that way, but when they were thought fit for more serious Employments, if they still persisted in that course, it would look, as if they minded not the way to any better.

However, along with his *A Version of the Psalms of David* (1714), these 'overflowings of [...] Fancy' make up a body of work which, written during a momentous period of British history, is eminently worthy of re-examination through modern critical lenses.

## II

Established and emerging academics have helped this volume give shape to 'a curiously indistinct figure'.<sup>27</sup> To varying degrees, each has employed critical frameworks developed in recent scholarship, allowing for fresh thinking about and approaches towards influential Crown supporters of the mid-seventeenth century. For example, the malleability and instability of language under the pressure

25 Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets: With Critical Observations on Their Works*, 2 vols (London: P.C. and J. Rivington, 1821), i, p. 57.

26 Aubrey, 'Brief Lives', i, p. 217.

27 Banks, *PW*, p. 1.

of defeat and exile, and the contingency of royalist notions of loyalty, find full expression throughout the volume. It is to be hoped that these ten chapters, individually and collectively, not only open new windows onto Denham himself, repainting the ‘signes between Temple-Bar and Charing-crosse’, but also pave the way for further studies which consider the nuances of civil war and Restoration royalism, and its impact on seventeenth-century letters.

In the opening chapter, John Stubbs considers Denham as a ‘cavalier’. If Denham has been and probably always shall be classified as a ‘cavalier poet’, what does this term actually mean? In thinking of cavaliers, most will picture the heroes of the royalist campaigns—the Marquess of Newcastle, Sir Ralph Hopton, and above all Prince Rupert. Yet when London gangs first taunted members of the king’s unofficial bodyguard as ‘cavaliers’ in 1641, they had in mind a figure of another stamp. The term was associated often with the poet Sir John Suckling, who became notorious during the 1630s for his gambling and frequent lapses of gallantry, and who in a public letter on the parliamentary crisis declared that the ‘people are naturally not gallant, nor much cavalier’. This, it was felt, was high talk from a ‘roaring boy’, a boaster famous for declining to fight a duel and arranging for assassins to dispatch his challenger. As Stubbs argues, the word ‘cavalier’, connoting courtesy, chivalry, and refinement, thus became tied up with its anti-type, and assigned as an ironic honour to the king’s private militia. Thus, paradoxically, Hopton, Rupert, and company were never true cavaliers in its original partisan sense. On the other hand, Denham was—to a certain extent. His military career was manifestly more Sucklingtonian than Rupertian. Yet, as with many of his fellow literary royalists (including Suckling), the cavalier profile provides a useful key to understanding Denham in the ways he did and did not match it. This chapter discusses the matches as a means of drawing more sharply his idiosyncrasies, poetic and personal.

Next, Geoffrey Smith examines the wide range of experiences Denham underwent between the end of the civil war and the Restoration that shaped both his career and his writing. He endured periods both in prison and in exile, where he travelled extensively and where at different times he was attached to three different Stuart households, those of Queen Henrietta Maria, of the Prince of Wales, later Charles II, and of James, Duke of York. He was employed as a courier in the king’s cause, as an envoy with William Crofts on a money-raising mission to Poland, and became involved in royalist conspiracies in England. These experiences considerably widened the range of Denham’s friends and acquaintances while at the same time involving him in the factional rivalries that constantly tore at the unity of the king’s party.

As Smith reveals, at different times during this period Denham was drawn into the company of significant noblemen like the Duke of Buckingham, the Marquess of Ormond, and the Earl of Oxford; of courtiers in the queen’s favour like Lord Jermyn, John Ashburnham, and Sir John Berkeley; of fellow poets like Edmund Waller, Sir Richard Fanshawe, and Abraham Cowley; of convivial hard drinking and gambling ‘good fellows’ like Sir John Mennes, Sir John Poley, Thomas Killigrew, Crofts, William Murray; and of ‘professional’ conspirators

like Daniel O'Neill, Humphrey Boswell, and members of the Sealed Knot and Lord Mordaunt's Great Trust. Smith's analysis of Denham's relationships during this period shines a torch on some of the significant elements in his career, how these helped to shape his reputation, and the insights they give us into his character.

In the following chapter, Marcus Nevitt re-reads one of the most famous documents in Restoration theatre history in order to cast new light on some of the conflicts and collaborations which helped shape the theatre of the early 1660s. The Lord Chamberlain's order of December 1660, granting Sir William Davenant and the Duke's Company exclusive performance rights to eleven old plays, has, until now, only ever been read for what it says about the status of Shakespeare and other Jacobean dramatists in the re-modelled theatrical culture of 1660. No commentator has hitherto considered the place of Denham's sole unperformed play, *The Sophy*, in Davenant's astonishingly modest list of plays. This essay puts Denham's play back into that document and explores the ways in which the Restoration theatrical settlement was influenced by royalist literary culture during the Interregnum, in particular the relationship of Denham and Davenant, whose rivalry during the 1650s was notorious. Through an analysis of a variety of manuscript and printed texts by these authors, Nevitt argues that the competition amongst theatre companies amid the well-documented scramble for plays in 1660 was intense but hardly fresh; it had its origins in long-standing cavalier conflicts. In the process, the chapter raises an important methodological issue, suggesting that an interdisciplinary approach to the drama of the period, a willingness to think across chronological boundaries and turn to different kinds of historical and literary record, is the surest way to render the stubborn silences of Restoration theatre history more meaningful.

The next chapter examines *The Sophy* from a more conspicuously Persian perspective. Here, Amin Momeni argues that though an explicit and direct parallel between Denham's Shah Abbas I and Charles I is elusive, there are nonetheless references in the play which remind us of Charles's strategic misjudgements as king. He suggests that Denham seeks to allude to Charles through the dramatisation of two different royal Islamic Persian figures: Shah Abbas and his son Mirza. These two characters function in combination as the embodiment of mistakes made by Charles during his reign. Denham was not the only playwright in the period to draw such parallels: Robert Baron's tragedy *Mirza*, entered in the Stationers' Register in 1655, also invites its reader to draw comparisons between the tragic Persian prince, Mirza, and the deposed and executed Charles I. In essence, then, Momeni's reading of *The Sophy*, through its focus on Denham's representations of Islamic Persia and Persians in the play, aims to cast into bolder relief the play's commentary on contemporary affairs, and, at the same time, situate Denham's play in the broader context of the politically allusive theatre of the civil wars and Interregnum.

In Chapter 5, Victoria Anker offers a fresh analysis of Denham's political satires written during the First Civil War (1642–46). Whilst recent scholarship has sought to emphasise the complexities and legacy of Denham beyond *Coopers*

*Hill*, few have returned to the early years of Denham's career in the king's employ. In addressing this imbalance, Anker situates Denham's satirical works within the contemporary social and political maelstrom; as entering into a dialogue both with fellow royalists and the parliamentary opposition. Two texts come under close scrutiny: the ballads 'A Western Wonder' (1643) and 'A Second Western Wonder' (1643). Whilst evidence suggests these ballads did not appear in print until *Rump Songs* (1662), the author argues that the setting of both works to common tunes facilitated their broad dissemination. Despite the apparently artless lyrics and witty rhymes, Denham's texts reveal an acute awareness of events during the civil war, from military engagements to religious changes. Anker concludes that in these ballads we can see the beginnings of the bald humour that dominated Denham's later works whilst in exile. More importantly, the satires preached the royalist tenets of loyalty, community, and order which many still thought attainable.

Denham's political writing comes under further examination in the following chapter, by Rory Tanner. The parliament of 1640 signalled the end of Charles I's personal rule, and at the same time provoked a crucial debate among MPs as to their responsibilities within a deliberative political assembly. Their attention in the Short and Long Parliaments to matters of debate, rhetoric, and decision-making soon precipitated in popular writing a broader discussion among those who sought to gauge the efficacy of discourse (whether in parliament or in public) within the English polity. As Tanner shows, Denham's writing looms large in this body of work, which enjoyed a two-way relationship with Westminster. The author identifies Denham, both in his shorter, scribally published poems, and in *Coopers Hill*, as a sceptical royalist voice responding to the nascent parliamentary literary culture of the early 1640s, challenging the aims and motivation of those who—ostensibly for the sake of the country—immersed themselves in the new oppositional discourse.

In Chapter 7, I examine the text and context of a long-neglected Denham work, *A Version of the Psalms of David*. The enduring image of Denham's religion is his claim to Charles II, during his short-lived episode of insanity, to be the Holy Ghost. This was considered all the more eccentric because he 'despised religion'. But did he? Clearly, poems such as 'The Progress of Learning' rail against religious enthusiasm. On the other hand, Samuel Johnson wrote that '[Denham] appears, whenever any serious question comes before him, to have been a man of piety, he consecrated his poetical powers to religion, and made a metrical version of the Psalms of David'.<sup>28</sup> This considerable literary undertaking has attracted little modern critical attention, yet it shows a radically different side to the cavalier poet. It also provides additional insight into Denham's little-known charitable works for poor widows, whom he housed in alms houses near his Egham estate; about which, I speculate, he may have written his first poem. As for literary merit, Johnson thought Denham had failed; but Denham's version was deemed

28 Johnson, *The Lives*, i, p. 54.

aesthetically pleasing enough by Samuel Woodford to warrant, in 1668, his composing a poem ‘To the Honourable Sir John Denham upon his New Version of the Psalms’.

Denham’s pre-eminent work, *Coopers Hill*, is the topic of the three remaining studies. In Chapter 8, Timothy Raylor considers the significance of an important allegory in the poem, promoted by ‘J.B.’, the publisher, in his note to the reader of the 1655 edition, as ‘that excellent Allegory of the Royall Stag (which among others was lop’t off by the Transcriber) skilfully maintain’d without dragging or haling in Words and Metaphors, as the fashion now is with some that cannot write, and cannot but write’. O Hehir has exposed as disingenuous J.B.’s implication that this extension of the famous stag hunt scene arose from the re-emergence of missing material, rather than from Denham’s own revision. And further doubts are cast on J.B.’s credibility by the recent discovery of a single copy of an edition dated ‘1653’ which, minus the prefatory note, is almost identical to the 1655 edition. However, the second part of J.B.’s message—the distinction drawn between Denham’s deft control of the stag allegory and that lacking in similar works by poetic rivals—has hitherto resisted explanation.

Here, Raylor argues, J.B. is on firmer ground: the expanded passage is indeed a repudiation of contemporary writers who indulge in vogueish ‘dragging or haling in [of] Words and Metaphors’, and who have thereby fallen short of matching Denham’s linguistic effects. In identifying the authors J.B. alludes to, and establishing the reasons for the author’s revision, this chapter not only solves a Denham mystery but also casts the intense debate over poetic reform among sections of the royalist exile community in the late 1640s and ’50s into bolder relief.

The penultimate chapter, by J.P. Vander Motten, assesses an intriguing element in the eighteenth-century reception of *Coopers Hill*. Denham’s late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century reputation is amply illustrated by the biographical accounts and the various editions of his collected works, and, as far as *Coopers Hill* is concerned, its inclusion in numerous collections of British poets, anthologies, and critical essays, in which the poem was almost universally hailed, not least by Johnson, as having set the standard for later Augustan poetry. Imitations followed. Once such, which has hitherto escaped critical attention, was *Cooper’s Well* (1767), published anonymously as a ‘fragment’ by Denham ‘found amongst the Papers of a late Noble Lord’ (title page). A parody of Denham’s poem in its length, verse form, constituent parts, and descriptive nature (though not in its political/philosophical dimension), *Cooper’s Well* is actually an erotic poem in the mode of Lord Rochester, the ‘noble lord’ to whom it is dedicated, substituting the inexhaustible riches of the female body for Denham’s reflections on the natural scenery around Cooper’s Hill. Documenting an episode in the critical fortunes of one of the most anthologised of English seventeenth-century poems, Vander Motten provides a detailed discussion of *Cooper’s Well* and its debt to *Coopers Hill*. In the process, he explores the eighteenth-century poem’s contexts, including John Armstrong’s *The Economy of Love* (1739) and some minor works by Edward Thompson (1738?–1786), to whom the Denham imitation is sometimes attributed.

He also examines the literary ‘uses’ in the satirical or parodic vein to which *Coopers Hill* was put, a century after its inclusion in *Poems and Translations*.

In the volume’s concluding essay, Naomi Howell and Philip Schwyzer’s premise is that *Coopers Hill* has rarely seemed more timely or relevant than it does today. The year 2015 marked not only the four hundredth anniversary of Denham’s birth but the eight hundredth anniversary of Magna Carta, an event with which the Runnymede landscape was indelibly associated. Reading Runnymede as a very English *lieu de mémoire*, this chapter situates Denham’s poem at the hinge of this landscape’s cultural history. The first section examines the generally glancing yet intriguing references to Runnymede and its environs in medieval and early modern literature, in texts including the thirteenth-century *Histoire de Guillaume le Marechal*. The second examines the historical vision of *Coopers Hill*, with a focus on that parcel of the Thames floodplain where ‘was that Charter seal’d, wherein the Crown / All marks of arbitrary power lays down’.

The final section examines the cultural and material reception of Denham’s poem in the memorial landscape of Runnymede and Cooper’s Hill in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The clustering of memorials in this landscape—including the John F. Kennedy Memorial, the Commonwealth Air Forces Memorial, and the American Bar Association’s Magna Carta Memorial—suggests an ongoing contest over the meaning and ownership of the past in this place, a contest much enlivened by the presence, since 2012, of an ecovillage on Cooper’s Hill inhabited by a group of modern-day ‘Diggers’. These are conflicts that Denham’s poem, with its pessimistic vision of national history, might be said to predict. Yet perhaps no lines of the poem seem more prescient than those concluding verses that imagine the river breaking its banks and ‘mak[ing] its power its shores’. In this era of human-made climate change and catastrophic flooding, Howell and Schwyzer argue, nature is less and less the teacher of moderation Denham hoped it would be, and Runnymede seems fated to spend a good part of the years to come underwater.