

Books Worth Revisiting: In the Court of Charles II

Of all the English kings and queens, Charles II (1660-1685) is one of the most fascinating. Known as the “Merry Monarch” because his court was given over to the pursuit of carefree fun, Charles was nevertheless a pivotal figure in English history and certainly one of its most astute rulers. Charles never forgot the harrowing events that overshadowed his life until he became king, and he never underestimated the lurking dangers of his glittering court. Here are three novels that delve into that volatile world of Restoration England.

Forever Amber by Kathleen Winsor **RC 52434** Kathleen Winsor (1919-2003) published her most famous novel in 1944, and it immediately created a sensation. Deemed very scandalous at the time because of its heroine who stopped at nothing to get what she wanted in a society that seemingly blinked at nothing as long as it was amusing, the novel still remains a vibrant portrait of life in Restoration England. It is also the story of a passionate—albeit mostly one-sided—love affair. Amber St. Clare is a stunningly beautiful fifteen-year-old living in a small country village when she encounters the dashing Bruce, Lord Carlton, and she falls headlong and forever in love with him. Bruce has just returned to England after years of exile following the defeat and execution of King Charles I, and he is not averse to taking up a beautiful and willing companion. Amber, however, soon finds herself alone and pregnant in London, and thus begins her slow and steady climb through the ranks of English society, to her eventual triumph as a mistress of the King. Throughout her varied and amazing adventures, she continues to have frequent encounters with Bruce. Amber’s greatest ambition is to be Bruce’s wife, and she never understands that Bruce’s position in life precludes that ever happening. Amber’s adventures are interspersed with insights into the new king’s private life. Although restored to his throne and publicly enjoying all the perks thereof, Charles II has as much private drama to sort through as any of the many playhouses in his beloved capital. This is a very lengthy novel, but the reader is well rewarded with the picture of both the glory and the sordidness of the Restoration period. Some episodes of violence and many sexual references are scattered throughout the story. The book is suitable for adults and mature young adults. To order this book, call 1-800-252-9605 and ask for **RC 52434**.

Dark Angels by Karleen Koen **RC 64180** Also available as a BARD download. This novel is a prequel to Karleen Koen’s bestselling 1986 novel, *Through a Glass Darkly*. In the chronology of Charles II’s reign, *Dark Angels*

begins at about the same time as *Forever Amber* closes. Charles has been king for ten years and is welcoming to England his beloved sister, Minette, who is married to the French king's brother. Among the accompanying French maids of honor is Alice Verney, a remarkable young Englishwoman who is more interested in court politics and intrigue than in finding a suitable husband. Having fled England in the wake of scandal, Alice has honed her survival skills in the treacherous French court. Soon, tragedy will force her to return home for good, where she finds herself attracted to the devastatingly handsome Richard Saylor. Saylor, in turn, is smitten with Alice's friend Renée de Kéroualle, another refugee from the tragic events in France. Unfortunately for Richard, Louise has caught the fancy of the King, and in the ensuing competition, Richard can only lose. Despite their emotional turmoil, Alice and Richard must match wits with a ruthless assassin named Henri Ange, who has in his sights a prominent member of the Court. Ange, despite his name, is the very devil to cross and has no compunction in removing anyone in his path. The book's period details are excellent and give an unusual look at the darker side of Charles' court, including the pervasiveness of homosexuality in both English and French society. Fear and superstition also are strong undercurrents throughout the book, and scenes of gruesome death may be too intense for some readers. To order this book, call 1-800-252-9605 and ask for **RC 64180** or download it on BARD.

Restoration by Rose Tremain **RC 32365** Rose Tremain's elegiac novel looks at not only the restoration of Charles II to his kingdom but also at the restoration of a wayward man's spirit and sense of purpose. Robert Merivel is a mess—lazy, giddy, easily distracted, and obsessed with color. He also has a remarkable gift for medicine, which interests him not at all. Through a ridiculous quirk of fate, Robert becomes the King's veterinarian, marries one of Charles' mistresses in order to give her a suitable social cover, and then makes the mistake of falling in love with the disdainful young woman. In spite of his anger at Merivel for disobeying his orders, the King also cares enough about his servant to employ tough-love tactics. He banishes Merivel from Court, sending him away with a gift that Merivel thinks is a cruel joke: a set of surgical instruments inscribed with the verse, "Sleepers awake!" Left only with the profession he once despised, Merivel begins his slow return to a life of purpose and thence back to the King's favor. Suitable for adult and mature young adult readers. To order this book, call 1-800-252-9605 and ask for **RC 32365**.