



LITERATURE AND POLITICS IN CROMWELLIAN ENGLAND

*John Milton, Andrew Marvell,
Marchamont Nedham*

BLAIR WORDEN



OXFORD

LITERATURE
AND
POLITICS
IN
CROMWELLIAN
ENGLAND

JOHN MILTON, ANDREW
MARVELL, MARSHAMOND
NEDHAM

江苏工业学院图书馆
藏书章

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OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,
and education by publishing worldwide in

Oxford New York

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Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Nairobi
New Delhi Shanghai Taipei Toronto

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Published in the United States
by Oxford University Press Inc., New York

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First published 2007

First published in paperback 2009

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Data available

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Data available

Typeset by Laserwords Private Limited, Chennai, India

Printed in Great Britain

on acid-free paper by

CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham, Wiltshire

ISBN 978-0-19-923081-5 (Hbk.); 978-0-19-923082-2 (Pbk.)

Preface To Second Impression

Where it has been practicable to do so, I have corrected slips and infelicities in the first impression. Since its publication three books have appeared which, while they differ in approach both from my book and from each other, share some of my preoccupations and I hope complement my arguments: Paul Rahe, *Against Throne and Altar. Machiavelli and Political Theory under the English Republic* (New York, 2008); Edward Holberton, *Poetry and the Cromwellian Protectorate* (Oxford, 2008); and Nicholas McDowell, *Poetry and Allegiance in the English Civil Wars. Marvell and the Cause of Wit* (Oxford, 2008).

Forthcoming work by Dr Holberton also has a bearing on my text. Drawing on material in the Swedish National Archives, he proposes a re-dating of Andrew Marvell's poem 'In eandem Reginae Sueciae transmissam', which is addressed, on behalf of Oliver Cromwell, to Queen Christina of Sweden. Holberton's evidence indicates that the poem was written not, as has hitherto been supposed, in 1654, when Cromwell had become lord protector, but around September 1653. If so, a dimension is added to our knowledge of the relations of Marvell and Cromwell. Before Cromwell's elevation at the end of 1653, sovereignty was held by Barebone's Parliament, albeit under his mighty shadow. His relations with Queen Christina were as yet unofficial, a fruit of his semi-clandestine pursuit of a semi-independent foreign policy. Holberton's dating invites us to consider the poem as an endorsement of that conduct, and thus as evidence that the political alignment of the two men, which my book explores in 1654–8, had been established before Cromwell's elevation. Marvell's appointment as tutor to Cromwell's protégé William Dutton earlier in 1653 may reflect the same development.

A belated discovery of my own has consequences for one passage of my book. In Chapter 9 I give an account of Milton's involvement in the composition of the weekly newsbook edited by Nedham, *Mercurius Politicus*.

During that discussion I consider (on pp. 205–6) a passage of an editorial of *Politicus* on 4 March 1652, which vindicates the trial and execution of King Charles I by drawing a series of biblical and historical parallels to it. The writer of the editorial explains that he is repeating ‘what I once published upon another occasion’. One of the parallels, that with the punishment by death of King Amaziah, reproduces material which is distinctively close to a passage of Milton’s work of 1651, *Defensio*. I inferred that, ‘at least in the absence of any alternative candidate’, the allusion to ‘another occasion’ seems ‘inexplicable other than as a reference’ to Milton’s treatise. In fact there is another candidate, with unanswerable claims. The words refer to an anonymous tract of October 1651, *Anglia Liberata*, printed by the printer of *Politicus*, Thomas Newcomb. Published in support of the foreign policy of the republic for which Nedham and Milton worked, *Anglia Liberata* proves to be an addition to the long list of anonymous compositions that were written partly or wholly by Nedham and were re-used in later writings of his. It has a section (on pp. 59–61) from which the relevant portion of the editorial in *Politicus* is taken. So there is now no need of my suggestion that the ‘I’ points us to Milton. None the less Nedham’s indebtedness to Milton on the subject of Amaziah, and its significance for our understanding of the proximity of the two writers, remain. They are underlined by a comparison of the passage of the newsbook with the corresponding one in *Anglia Liberata* the previous year, for in *Politicus* Nedham adjusts his wording so as to bring it closer to Milton’s.¹

I shall explore some aspects of Nedham’s thought in another light in my forthcoming edition of his *The Excellencie of a Free State*, to be published by Liberty Fund.

¹ Whereas *Politicus* repeats, in parallel wording, the contentious view expressed in *Defensio* that Amaziah was punished by a judicial process, *Anglia Liberata* leaves that question open. The background to the publication of *Anglia Liberata* can be inferred from the text itself and from *Mercurius Politicus* 10 July 1651, p. 915; 24 July 1651, p. 939; 7 August 1651, p. 972; 9 October 1651, p. 1124. The title of the tract complements that of the poem *Anglia Victrix*, which appeared in *Politicus* in 1653 and which is discussed below, p. 132.

Preface

This is an exercise in literary biography, but with a difference. Lifetimes of exact investigation have been devoted to the recovery of John Milton's career. Though less can be learned about Andrew Marvell's, it too has attracted rigorous attention. My book could not have been so much as conceived without those labours, and could not hope to emulate their scale or distinction. Yet something has been missing, at least since the heroic biography of Milton by the Victorian author David Masson, the pioneer of the documentary approach, who wrote before the academic pursuits of literature and history were divided. Literary scholars have begun with what in Milton's case have been called 'life records' – the documents that mention the name of an author, or fix him in time and place, or illustrate his social or professional relationships – and have worked outwards to the evidence around them. The further they have travelled from them, the less comfortable they have been. If the relationship of writers to their times is to be more amply illuminated, an alternative method is needed. We need to reconstruct the wider life of politics or society or ideas: the life to which literature has belonged, and which it can illuminate, but which in main measure can be examined independently of it. That principle is increasingly understood in the scholarly branch of literary studies, where much historically sophisticated work is now done. Yet habits of mind have a way of surviving the undermining of their foundations. Besides, biographical stories can sometimes be reconstructed or deduced from sources outside the biographical records. The prominence of my third writer, Marchamont Nedham, in Marvell's career has gone unnoticed, while his friendship with Milton has rarely seemed more than a curiosity. His significance in their lives and writings becomes apparent only when we reconstruct the political context within which the three men wrote, and when we thus move beyond biography to history.

I ask the forbearance of experts when, for the sake of non-specialist readers, or of readers on one or other side of the academic frontier between history and literature, I provide background information that for some scholars will be superfluous. Some details of presentation should be explained. I have converted quotations (though not the titles of books) into modern spelling and punctuation, except when the sense would suffer. Where I do not indicate otherwise, Marvell's poems are quoted and cited from Nigel Smith's edition; Milton's verse from that by John Carey and Alastair Fowler; Milton's English prose from the Yale edition; Ben Jonson's writings from the edition by Herford and Simpson; James Harrington's from that by J. G. A. Pocock. For texts of classical Latin I have used the Loeb editions. Milton's Latin prose is normally quoted from the Columbia edition, where the original text and a modern translation conveniently face each other, as they do in the Loeb volumes. The discussion of Latin texts in a post-Latinate age poses problems. John Aubrey called Marvell 'a great master of the Latin tongue', and declared that 'for Latin verses there was no man could come into competition with him'. Milton's Latin prose dazzled his contemporaries. Languages differ from each other not only in their rules and vocabularies but in their contours of thought. It is not the fault of the translators if, in English equivalents of Marvell and Milton, the stature of the original has largely to be taken on trust. My own struggles with Marvell's Latin have been valiantly and expertly helped by Rodney Allan, David Hopkins, David Levene, and Tony Woodman, though they must not be implicated in my decisions.

I am lucky to have written after the appearance in recent years of Smith's edition of Marvell's verse; of Nicholas von Maltzahn's *An Andrew Marvell Chronology*, which now complements Gordon Campbell's volume on Milton in the same series; and of David Norbrook's *Writing the English Republic*. My points both of concurrence and of respectful disagreement with Norbrook's volume, a magisterial work that has transformed its field, are too many to be particularized more than occasionally in my own text. Other debts are hard to state succinctly, for I have been sustained by that blessed form of comradeship where friendship and scholarly enquiry merge. I have in mind the encouragement and advice of Martin Dzelzainis, Paulina Kewes, Timothy Raylor, Susan Wormell, and especially of Professor von Maltzahn, whose vigilant and magnanimous guidance has kept me in heart. I am also grateful for the help of Rosanna Cox,

Frances Henderson, Edward Holberton, Mark Knights, Joyce Macadam, and Nicholas McDowell.

I am indebted to the Duke of Northumberland and the Marquess of Bath for permission to make use of manuscripts in their ownership. Although most of the book is freshly written, it makes some use of articles published elsewhere. I am grateful for permission to reproduce material from the following essays: 'John Milton and Oliver Cromwell'; 'Milton and Marchamont Nedham'; 'Milton, *Samson Agonistes*, and the Restoration'; 'The Politics of Marvell's Horatian Ode' (all Cambridge University Press); '"Wit in a Roundhead": The Dilemma of Marchamont Nedham' (Manchester University Press); 'Harrington's "Oceana": Origins and Aftermath' (Stanford University Press). Sometimes, too, I have made use (though I plan to make more elsewhere) of material from the Carlyle Lectures which I was privileged to give at Oxford in 2002.

I owe more than he knows to the support and encouragement of Andrew McNeillie at Oxford University Press.

Abbreviations

AMC	Nicholas von Maltzahn, <i>An Andrew Marvell Chronology</i> (Basingstoke, 2005)
BL, Add.	British Library, Additional [manuscript]
Bodl.	Bodleian Library
Cal. SP Dom.	<i>Calendar of State Papers Domestic</i>
Case	Marchamont Nedham, <i>The Case of the Commonwealth of England, Stated</i> , ed. Philip A. Knachel (Charlottesville, Va., 1969)
CP	D. M. Wolfe <i>et al.</i> , eds, <i>Complete Prose Works of John Milton</i> , 8 vols. (New Haven and London, 1953–82: the ‘Yale edition’)
CW	F. A. Patterson, ed., <i>The Works of John Milton</i> , 18 vols. (New York, 1931–8: the ‘Columbia edition’)
Darbishire	Helen Darbishire, ed., <i>The Early Lives of Milton</i> (London, 1932)
Excellencie	Marchamont Nedham, <i>The Excellencie of a Free State</i> (1767 edn.)
French	J. Milton French, <i>The Life Records of John Milton</i> , 5 vols. (New Brunswick, NJ, 1949–58)
Lewalski	Barbara Lewalski, <i>The Life of John Milton: A Critical Biography</i> (Oxford, 2000)
Ludlow, ‘Voyce’	Edmund Ludlow, ‘A Voyce from the Watch Tower’, Bodl., MS Eng. hist. c. 487.
Ludlow, <i>Voyce</i>	Edmund Ludlow, <i>A Voyce from the Watch Tower 1660–1662</i> , ed. Blair Worden (Camden Society, 1978)
Margoliouth	H. M. Margoliouth, ed., <i>The Poems and Letters of Andrew Marvell</i> , revised by Pierre Legouis with E. E. Duncan-Jones, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1971)
Masson	David Masson, <i>Life of John Milton</i> , 7 vols. (1859–94)
MC	Gordon Campbell, <i>A Milton Chronology</i> (Basingstoke, 1997)
MP	<i>Mercurius Politicus</i>
NA	National Archives
Nickolls	J. Nickolls, ed., <i>Original Letters and Papers of State ... addressed to Oliver Cromwell</i> (1743)

ODNB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
Parker	William Riley Parker, <i>Milton: A Biography</i> , 2 vols., continuous pagination, revised by Gordon Campbell (Oxford, 1996)
PWAM	Annabel Patterson <i>et al.</i> , eds., <i>Prose Works of Andrew Marvell</i> , 2 vols. (New Haven, 2003)
Smith	Nigel Smith, ed., <i>The Poems of Andrew Marvell</i> (London, 2003)
TSP	Thomas Birch, ed., <i>A Collection of the State Papers of John Thurloe</i> , 7 vols. (1742)

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Introduction

John Milton and Andrew Marvell are immortal writers, read and loved by people who know little if anything of the background of civil war and political strife against which they wrote. We can choose, if we wish, to be indifferent to that background. But if we are interested in the relationship of their writing to it, we must recover, even as we respect the enduring properties of their work, the pressures, the opportunities, the calculations, and the uncertainties of their mortal lives. The embalming of their works in modern editions, often volumes of high and invaluable scholarship, distances them, through no fault of the editors, from the ephemeral context of debate and publication to which much of their writing originally belonged.

This book places Milton and Marvell beside a writer for whom no one would claim the same kind of immortality, and to whom the tactics and techniques of instant print were second nature. The writing of Marchamont Nedham, which may at first seem infinitely remote from theirs, was intimately bound to it. He occupied a unique place in the lives of both men during the Interregnum of 1649–60. As far as we can tell, no other contemporary was so close to the composition of Milton's political writing or, before the Restoration, of Marvell's. His relations with the two men will not circumscribe our investigation of their politics. Often our argument will move away from him. Yet he will repeatedly work his way back.

Like Milton and Marvell, Nedham was a poet. Most of his verses were satires, which at their best have earned comparison with Dryden's¹ (though it was from an elegy that Dryden took one of Nedham's couplets). Yet his name was not made by his poetry. He earned fame, or notoriety, in the capacity in which we shall mainly observe him: as a journalist, the most successful practitioner of the first age of political journalism. In

1. Joseph Frank, *The Beginnings of the English Newspaper 1620–1660* (Cambridge, Mass., 1961), 344–6; *idem*, *Cromwell's Press Agent: A Critical Biography of Marchamont Nedham* (Lanham, Md., 1980), 60–3, 171.

1640–1 the breakdown of Charles I's government, and of the machinery by which the press had been restricted under it, brought novel opportunities for controversial publication, for which the intense public interest in the political upheaval created a large and lively market. Nedham's prose, witty, cheerful, spirited, direct, lucid, and combative, cornered a sizeable portion of it, and did much to shape the genre. It was a genre to which the writings of Milton and Marvell could come nearer than the familiar categorizations of literary purpose allow us to expect.

Even to glance at Milton's career is to see the central place of the Puritan Revolution in it. Three times it transformed his life. The first transformation came in 1641, when he was aged 32. Before then he was knowable only as a scholar and poet, who had been prepared for a life of learning by the encouragement of his father, a well-to-do London scrivener, and by his education at St Paul's School in London and at Cambridge University. Having left Cambridge, he lived privately, studying and writing, in the family's homes in Hammersmith and Buckinghamshire, until his visit to Italy in 1638–9 to explore its culture and literature. He intended to become a clergyman, but abandoned that plan, apparently in revulsion at the ceremonialism and the pastoral deficiencies of the Church under Archbishop Laud. In 1641, when the Long Parliament was breaking the machinery of Charles I's rule, it seemed that a Puritan overhaul of the Church might be achieved. With that prospect before him Milton entered the world of polemic and public controversy. His tracts of the 1640s demanded the reform not only of the Church but of education, of the divorce laws, and of the regulations that restricted the press. The second transformation came in 1649, when King Charles I was tried and executed and the monarchy was abolished. Now Milton became an employee of the state, as Latin Secretary or Secretary for Foreign Tongues. Hitherto his tracts had been written on his own initiative, or anyway without official sanction. Now he wrote on behalf of his new employer, the republic, in defence and celebration of the deed, the regicide, that had brought it to power. For the remainder of the Interregnum, that turbulent era, his works responded to the rapid fluctuations of its politics. The third transformation was the Restoration in 1660, when the religious and political causes he had served were shattered. In the last fourteen years of his life he had to live with that calamity, which, no less than the earlier course of events, is reflected in his writing.

Milton's entry into polemical debate in 1641 occurred around the time of Marvell's twentieth birthday. Marvell, the son of a clergyman in Hull,

was likewise educated at Cambridge. He played no part in the civil wars of the 1640s, and instead spent some years on the Continent, though he was back in England by late 1647. Soon thereafter he was writing political poetry. Whereas Milton rejoiced in the regicide, Marvell's sympathies were royalist. Yet by the winter of 1654–5 they had become Cromwellian. By 1657 he, too, was an employee of the Puritan state, where he worked, as Milton did and as Nedham also did, in the office of Cromwell's secretary of state John Thurloe. He had been launched on a political career which would survive the Restoration and last for the remainder of his life.

Posterity has divided Milton and Marvell from the politics with which their lives and writings were intertwined. In Milton's case it happened from the start. The generations after the Puritan Revolution learned to love his verse, but were appalled by, or else ignored, most of his polemical prose. His vindications of the execution of King Charles I dismayed a society which had been torn apart by civil war and Puritan rule, and which – at least as far as we can tell from the commentary that got into print – dreaded their return. His radicalism did have its champions. In the wake of the Revolution of 1688, extreme Whigs republished and silently copied material from his pamphlets in order to aid the revival of the 'good old cause' of bringing kings to account. But mainstream opinion mostly kept its distance from his prose (though his arguments for liberty of expression and of conscience fared better than his attacks on tyrants and bishops and the divorce laws). His poetry, which was deemed 'sublime', was widely held to have transcended its political context. Thus it was that the writer who had escaped, perhaps narrowly, a hideous execution at the hands of the restored government in 1660 was given, in 1737, an imposing monument in Westminster Abbey. Dr Johnson thought Milton's politics those of a scoundrel, but knew most of *Paradise Lost* by heart.

In the later eighteenth century and during the nineteenth, new forces of political radicalism gave those politics a fresh appeal in some quarters.² Thomas Hollis and Catharine Macaulay celebrated Milton as a fellow republican. Wordsworth and other Romantic poets were drawn to him in the era of the French Revolution and of Napoleon. Victorian Liberals and Nonconformists, conscious of a debt to the Puritan past, found an ancestor in him. To John Bright, *Paradise Lost* was 'the greatest name in English

2. This paragraph draws on my *Roundhead Reputations: The English Civil Wars and the Passions of Posterity* (London, 2001), q.v. 'Milton, John'.

political history'. The Nonconformist George Dawson, turning traditional judgement on its head, praised Milton for having 'left his poetry' during the Puritan Revolution and having 'plunged into the mud, the mire, the dirt, the storm, of politics'.³ (Readers of this book may think that he spoke truer than he knew.) Even so, the Victorian admiration for Milton's political stances was hazy. Not much historical information or biographical exploration informed it, at least until late in the century, when assertions about his career could be tested against the scholarship of David Masson and S. R. Gardiner. In the twentieth century, literary criticism revived earlier preferences. In fact, it extended them, for Milton's political opinions became, what even the Tory Dr Johnson had not found them, an impediment to the admiration of his verse. Disparagers of them took strength from his demotion from the elite of English poets by T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis.

If Milton's verse has been preferred to his views, Andrew Marvell's views, for more than two centuries after his death, were preferred to his verse. In 1659, the year before the Restoration, he became a member of parliament for his native Hull, a post he would fill assiduously until his death in 1678. During the last six years of his life, when fears rose of a return to civil war, he did what the young Milton had done when civil war approached in 1641-2. He wrote political prose. The consequences for posthumous opinion were very different from those of Milton's choice. In 1844 the *Cyclopaedia of English Literature* uncontentiously remarked that Marvell 'is better known as a prose writer than a poet, and is still more celebrated as a patriotic member of parliament'.⁴ The judgement would have been equally uncontroversial at any earlier time since his death. Marvell's poems often conflicted with later tastes: his satires in their impoliteness, his lyric verse in its metaphysical properties. His prose, on the other hand, had a broad appeal. Whereas Milton had rejoiced in the overthrow of kingship, Marvell had had a more respectable theme. He attacked the restored Stuart monarchy, which was toppled by the Revolution of 1688, and which thereafter found ever fewer defenders. His earlier involvement in Cromwellian rule, had it been generally known about, would have dented the esteem in which he was held, but his poems on Cromwell were withheld from publication until 1776. What the eighteenth century admired was Marvell's stand

3. George Dawson, *Biographical Lectures* (1888), 87.

4. Elizabeth Story Donno, ed., *Andrew Marvell: The Critical Heritage* (London, 1978), 166. Donno's valuable collection of documents bears out the point. On Marvell's posthumous reputation see too *AMC*, and the articles by Nicholas von Maltzahn listed there on p. 296.