

## European Contexts for English Republicanism

Edited by  
Gaby Mahlberg and Dirk Wiemann

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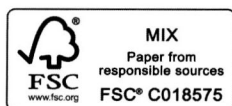
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EUROPEAN CONTEXTS FOR ENGLISH  
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# POLITICS AND CULTURE IN EUROPE, 1650–1750

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Focusing on the years between the end of the Thirty Years' War and the end of the War of the Austrian Succession, this series seeks to broaden scholarly knowledge of this crucial period that witnessed the solidification of Europe into centralized nation states and created a recognizably modern political map. Bridging the gap between the early modern period of the Reformation and the eighteenth century of colonial expansion and industrial revolution, these years provide a fascinating era of study in which nationalism, political dogma, economic advantage, scientific development, cultural interests and strategic concerns began to compete with religion as the driving force of European relations and national foreign policies.

The period under investigation, the second half of the seventeenth century and the first half of the eighteenth, corresponds with the decline of Spanish power and the rise of French hegemony that was only to be finally broken following the defeat of Napoleon in 1815. This shifting political power base presented opportunities and dangers for many countries, resulting in numerous alliances between formerly hostile nations attempting to consolidate or increase their international influence, or restrain that of a rival. These contests of power were closely bound up with political, cultural and economic issues: particularly the strains of state building, trade competition, religious tension and toleration, accommodating flows of migrants and refugees, the birth pangs of rival absolutist and representative systems of government, radical structures of credit, and new ways in which wider publics interacted with authority.

Despite this being a formative period in the formation of the European landscape, there has been relatively little research on it compared to the earlier Reformation, and the later revolutionary eras. By providing a forum that encourages scholars to engage with the forces that were shaping the continent – either in a particular country, or taking a trans-national or comparative approach – it is hoped a greater understanding of this pivotal era will be forthcoming.

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Berlin and Newcastle, May 2012  
The Editors

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# Introduction

Gaby Mahlberg and Dirk Wiemann

Books are no absolutely dead things, but doe contain a potencie of life in them ... they are as lively, and as vigorously productive, as those fabulous Dragons teeth; and being sown up and down, may chance to spring up armed men.<sup>1</sup>

Milton's oft-quoted eulogy of the 'unlicens'd' printed word's vitality and prolificness emblematically captures the high hopes of a historical moment in which a liberalized public sphere and polity appeared to engage in the many-authored project of what David Norbrook has persuasively called 'writing the English republic'. This 'collaborative building',<sup>2</sup> however, had fissures and contradictions inherent to it, as Milton not only anticipated but emphatically endorsed: 'when every stone is laid artfully together, it cannot be united into a continuity, it can but be contiguous in this world'.<sup>3</sup> While this architectural imagery emphasizes how the republic – precisely because it is a cooperative endeavour – cannot be written into a perfected closed 'text', the organicist equation of book and seed underscores that the English republic was not only written but also read. In the age of the word's mechanical reproduction, the unforeseeable and uncontrollable trajectories of reception constitute an open-ended process without guarantees. Released into the public and in principle available to anyone, writing becomes 'fatherless', 'stealing away to wander aimlessly without knowing who to speak to or who not to speak to',<sup>4</sup> and traverses spatial, political and temporal boundaries. Wherever the 'vigorously productive' book is received, it elicits acts of reading that are by no means simple internalizations of an inert given text. Rather, reading consists of creative and 'dynamic interactions between text and reader ... that defy total control by the text itself'.<sup>5</sup> As any introduction to postmodern text theory will have it, 'every reading is always a rewriting'<sup>6</sup> since the text at hand

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<sup>1</sup> John Milton, 'Areopagitica', in Ernest Sirluck (ed.), *Complete Prose Works of John Milton* (10 vols, New Haven, 1959), vol. 2, pp. 480–590; p. 492.

<sup>2</sup> David Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric and Politics, 1627–1660* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 367.

<sup>3</sup> Milton, 'Areopagitica', p. 555.

<sup>4</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (London 2004), p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> This is Wolfgang Iser's classical formula for the creativity of reading in *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore, 1978), pp. 107–8.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics: The Basics* (London, 2002) p. 200.

can be 'realized' only by the 'decisive collaboration on the side of the reader',<sup>7</sup> who thus becomes a virtual co-author. The text therefore exists simultaneously in 'two historical situations':<sup>8</sup> that of its production as well as that of its reading where it is appropriated into, and articulated with, the horizon of understanding and expectation of the recipient. Proceeding from this general assumption, this volume on *European Contexts for English Republicanism* focuses on the multiple and often surprising readings and rewritings that were involved in the articulation and reception of English republicanism in networks of transfer, translation and interaction with continental European thinkers during the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

In a number of case studies, the contributors to this collection assess the different ways in which English republican ideas were shaped by the rewriting not only of the thought of the ancients but also of contemporary authors from all over Europe, such as Hugo Grotius, Petrus Cunaeus, Carolo Sigonio or Christoph Besold. Yet, English republican thinkers did not only dialogically respond to continental authors and scholars; their ideas were in turn subjected to unforeseen rewritings in manifold European contexts. Received, translated, transformed and put to new uses – in short, rewritten – by thinkers in France, Italy, the Netherlands and Germany, English republicanism 'spoke to' unexpected European audiences and found its way into a variety of continental political debates from the period of the English Civil Wars to the French Revolution and beyond. Far from being an exclusively transatlantic affair, as much of the established scholarship suggests, the impact of English republican thought has its own European dimension, where Milton's and Nedham's, Harrington's and Sidney's 'Dragons teeth' hibernated and from time to time sprang up, not necessarily armed men, but more writing to be read and rewritten. In an attempt to revise a one-sided approach to English republicanism and to widen the scope of study beyond linguistic and national boundaries by looking at English republicans and their continental networks and legacy, this collection of essays brings together a range of fresh and original chapters by British and European scholars in the field of early modern intellectual history and English studies.

### **English Republicanism, Transatlantic and Continental Connections**

The study of English republicanism and its transatlantic incarnations has seen a boom over the past 30 to 40 years. This development is not least due to the continuing appeal of James Harrington and the work of his foremost scholar J.G.A. Pocock, who argued in the 1970s that Harrington, not John Locke, should be seen

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<sup>7</sup> Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Indianapolis, 1979), p. 39.

<sup>8</sup> James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago 1998), p. 37.

as the major influence on the American Constitution.<sup>9</sup> Pocock and many other scholars before him and since have explained to us the influence of Harrington, Marchamont Nedham, John Milton, Henry Neville, Algernon Sidney and other thinkers of the English Revolution of the 1640s and 1650s on the American struggle for independence.<sup>10</sup>

While studies of the Atlantic republican tradition have their established place in histories of early modern political thought, it is only comparatively recently that historians and literary scholars, such as Blair Worden and Rachel Hammersley, have begun to pay more attention to the European connections of English republicans in the seventeenth century and beyond, despite obvious links to the continental revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>11</sup> This collection on *European Contexts for English Republicanism* intends to show that there is more evidence yet to be explored to illuminate the nature and intensity

<sup>9</sup> J.G.A. Pocock, 'Machiavelli, Harrington and English Political Ideologies in the Eighteenth Century,' in the same (ed.), *Politics, Language, and Time: Essays in Political Thought and History* (New York, 1971), pp. 104–47, p. 107; the same, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, 1975), chapter 15; and Pocock's edition of *The Political Works of James Harrington* (Cambridge, 1977), pp. 147ff.

<sup>10</sup> Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman: Studies in the Transmission, Development and Circumstance of English Liberal Thought from the Restoration of Charles II until the War with the Thirteen Colonies* (Cambridge, MA, 1959); Hugh Francis Russell-Smith, *Harrington and his Oceana: A Story of a Seventeenth-Century Utopia and its Influence in America* (New York, 1971); Alan Craig Houston, *Algernon Sidney and the Republican Heritage in England and America* (Princeton, 1991); Paul Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern* (3 vols, Chapel Hill and London, 1994); David Wootton (ed.), *Republicanism, Liberty and Commercial Society, 1649–1776* (Stanford, 1994); Michael P. Zuckert, *Natural Rights and the New Republicanism* (Princeton, 1994); Annabel Patterson, *Early Modern Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1997); Bernard Vincent, *The Transatlantic Republican: Thomas Paine and the Age of Revolutions* (Amsterdam, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> See Rachel Hammersley, *The English Republican Tradition and Eighteenth-Century France* (Manchester, 2010); and the same, *French Revolutionaries and English Republicans: The Cordeliers Club, 1790–1794* (Woodbridge, 2005). Also Blair Worden, *Roundhead Reputations: The English Civil Wars and the Passions of Posterity* (London, 2001); Worden's edition of Edmund Ludlow's *A Voyce from the Watch Tower* (London, 1978), and his 'Whig History and Puritan Politics: The *Memoirs* of Edmund Ludlow Revisited', *Historical Research*, 75 (2002), pp. 209–37. For an earlier engagement with Harrington's influence in France, see S.B. Liljegren, *A French Draft Constitution of 1792: Modelled on James Harrington's 'Oceana'* (Lund, 1932). On the influence of English republican thought on the revolutions of 1848, see Roland Ludwig, *Die Rezeption der Englischen Revolution im deutschen politischen Denken und in der deutschen Historiographie im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* (Leipzig, 2003) and the same, 'Die Englische Revolution als politisches Argument in einer Zeit des gesellschaftlichen Umbruchs in Deutschland', in Heiner Timmermann (ed.), *1848 Revolution in Europa: Verlauf, politische Programme, Folgen und Wirkungen* (Berlin, 1999), pp. 481–504.

of Anglo-European republican networks in the seventeenth century and the legacy – through multiple translations and adaptations – of English republican thinkers on the Continent.<sup>12</sup> Naturally, this collection is much indebted to the two volumes of *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage*, edited by Martin van Gelderen and Quentin Skinner, which appeared in 2002.<sup>13</sup> However, while Skinner and van Gelderen aimed to bring together a variety of European conceptions of republicanism in their own national contexts,<sup>14</sup> this present collection focuses more narrowly and specifically on English republican ideas and how they were shaped both by contemporary and ancient European impulses as well as impacted on political thinkers across Europe.

The literature on English republicanism in the seventeenth century is too extensive to be done justice here, but several key approaches and developments continue to influence the historiography. Pocock's *Machiavellian Moment* and Skinner's two volumes of *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* have uncovered the impact of the ancients as well as of Machiavelli and other civic humanists on early modern English politics.<sup>15</sup> We have learnt to understand republicanism as 'a language, not a programme', and explored the neo-Roman concept of political liberty.<sup>16</sup> Yet, interest in English republicanism is no longer confined to the history of ideas. It is studied by political and social historians and literary scholars alike. The present volume addresses this change of perspective by taking into account new approaches in context.

Patrick Collinson's work on the 'monarchical republic' of Elizabethan England has inspired much new research into a native English brand of republicanism based on political participation and self-government,<sup>17</sup> while intellectual historians

<sup>12</sup> Regarding the distribution of English republican works on the Continent more work is yet to be done on the efforts of the philanthropist Thomas Hollis, who commissioned new editions of seventeenth-century republican works and made book donations to libraries not just in the American colonies, but also across Europe. See Hans Utz, 'Thomas Hollis's Bequest to the Library of Berne', *English Studies*, 40 (1959), pp. 1–10; Urs Leu, 'The Hollis-Collections in Switzerland: An Attempt to Disseminate Political and Religious Freedom through Books in the 18th Century', *Zwingliana*, 38 (2011), pp. 153–73.

<sup>13</sup> Martin van Gelderen and Quentin Skinner (eds), *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage* (2 vols, Cambridge, 2002). More European comparative studies of republicanism have appeared since, e.g. André Holenstein, Thomas Maissen and Maarten Prak (eds), *The Republican Alternative: The Netherlands and Switzerland Compared* (Amsterdam, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> Dario Castiglione, Review Article: 'Republicanism and its Legacy', *European Journal of Political Theory*, 4 (2005), pp. 453–65.

<sup>15</sup> Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*; Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (2 vols, Cambridge, 1978).

<sup>16</sup> Pocock, 'Introduction' to the *Works of Harrington*, p. 15; Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1998).

<sup>17</sup> Patrick Collinson, *De Republica Anglorum Or, History with the Politics Put Back* (Cambridge, 1990); the same, 'The Monarchical Republic of Queen Elizabeth I', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 69 (1987), pp. 394–424; and John F. McDiarmid (ed.), *The*

and literary scholars have explored the relationship between classical humanist and republican writing in Tudor and Stuart England.<sup>18</sup> Both approaches have contributed to a new strand of literature which questions the regicide of 1649 as a political watershed; and a focus on ‘commonwealth principles’ has replaced an older constitutional approach that defines the ‘republic’ as a state not headed by a monarch.<sup>19</sup> Some scholars have come to emphasize the significance of religion in English republican discourse,<sup>20</sup> while others have built bridges between the theoretical and literary works produced by republican thinkers.<sup>21</sup> The chapters in the present collection address all of the above.

While we acknowledge that English republicanism had its roots in much earlier times and that republican ideas were present in the theories of English thinkers long before the regicide of 1649, this volume focuses on the period of the English Revolution and beyond, in which republican ideas actively influenced political practice after the abolition of the monarchy. This period is also the most significant with a view to a transmission (and transformation) of English republican ideas as governments across Europe had to engage with and respond to regime change across the Channel and English republicanism moved into the public eye.

This project was prompted by two related events: the 400th birthday of James Harrington (1611–77) in 2011 – as an occasion for the conference at which these papers were first presented – and Thérèse-Marie Jallais’s recent discovery in the Poitiers University Library of a hitherto unknown English manuscript summary of Harrington’s major works produced by the German orientalist Johann Michael Wansleben (1636–79). Wansleben copied Harrington’s work during a short stay in the northern Italian port of Leghorn in 1665, while staying at the house of an English merchant. This exciting discovery – a manuscript copy of English

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*Monarchical Republic of Early Modern England: Essays in Response to Patrick Collinson* (Aldershot, 2007).

<sup>18</sup> Markku Peltonen, *Classical Humanism and Republicanism in English Political Thought 1570–1640* (Cambridge, 1995); Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic*.

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