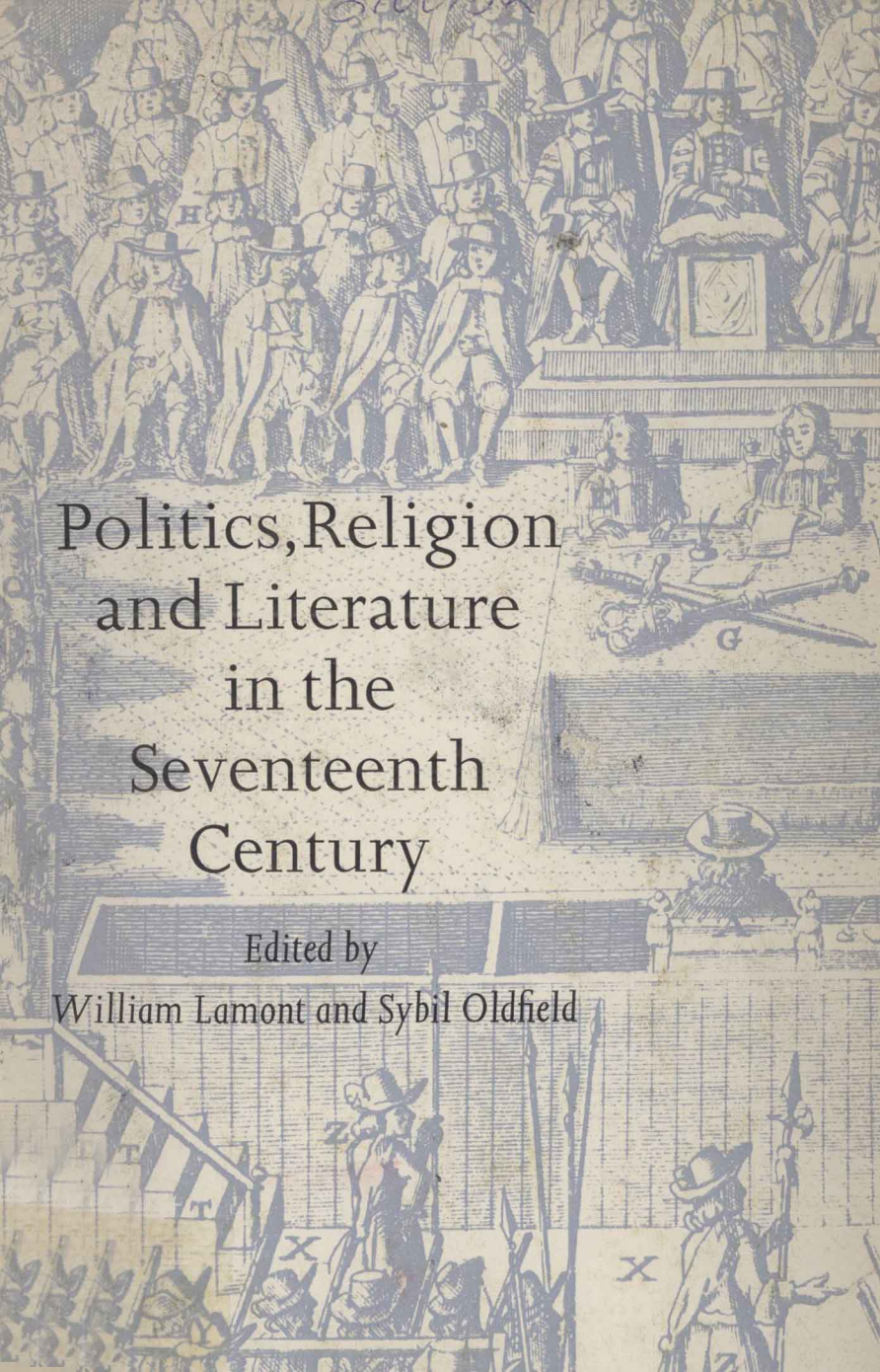

Politics, Religion and Literature in the Seventeenth Century

Edited by

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Preface

For a number of years Sybil Oldfield and I have taught a course at the University of Sussex on 'English Literature and the Civil War'. She is an English specialist and I am an historian; our students were drawn from a number of different disciplines. The idea of this book grew out of that experience. We both felt that we had gained something from looking at literary and historical problems together. Collections of source materials on the seventeenth century, however, tended to keep the literature and the history apart. We hope that this volume will be helpful to other students and teachers who want to bring the two together.

The seventeenth century offers an embarrassing richness of choice. We have organized our material around eight themes. They seem to us to offer a useful perspective for the study of politics, religion and literature in the seventeenth century, but not the only perspective. Other editors might have chosen other themes—and supporting texts—and their choice would have been equally valid. It seemed to us therefore to be a good idea to come clean with our own prejudices: in the literary and historical introductions that follow this preface, Sybil Oldfield and I explain what guided our choice of material for this volume. In all cases the extracts have been taken from the original editions, unless otherwise indicated.

We would never have embarked on this joint enterprise if, in addition to our general interest in inter-disciplinary work, we had not believed that there is a special sense in which history and literature complement each other when we try to understand the English Revolution of the seventeenth century. I know no better exposition of the 'two truths' about the English Revolution than in Professor Laurence

Stone's recent monograph, *The Causes of the English Revolution*. His words are worth quoting at length:

> What was important about the English Revolution was not its success in permanently changing the face of England—for this was slight—but the intellectual content of the various opposition programmes and achievements after 1640. For the first time in history an anointed King was brought to trial for breach of faith with his subjects, his head was publicly cut off, and his office was declared abolished. An established church was abolished, its property was seized, and fairly wide religious toleration for all forms of Protestantism was proclaimed and even enforced. For a short time, and perhaps for the first time, there came on to the stage of history a group of men proclaiming ideas of liberty not liberties, equality not privilege, fraternity not deference. These were ideas that were to live on, and to revive again in other societies in other ages. In 1647 the Puritan John Davenport forecast correctly that 'the light which is now discovered in England . . . will never be wholly put out, though I suspect that contrary opinions will prevail for a time'.

We need to have both truths about the English Revolution. From the literary evidence alone, we have marvellous access to one truth: we can understand Davenport's light; we can see how, as early as the 1630s, armed camps were forming (the theme of Sybil Oldfield's second section); we can see how, as the actual Civil War developed, each side stereotyped—and misunderstood—the other (the theme of her third and fourth sections); we can see how the experience of war affected a generation whose lack of moral fibre was put down by Bishop Wren in the 1630s to an over-long exposure to peace (the theme of her final, seventh, section). But contrary truths need to be asserted, for which the literary evidence is less impressive. There is the truth that Puritans were as devoted to monarchy as their Anglican opponents were, although Milton for propaganda purposes joined his Anglican opponents in the pursuit of the contrary fiction. The theme of my first section is, therefore, King-worship. There is the truth that regicide was an attack upon the man rather than the office: the theme of my fifth section on the execution of Charles I. There is the truth that Cromwell—for and against—invoked a response that was more ambivalent than party propaganda, on either side, would lead us to expect (my sixth section). There is the

truth that the English Revolution of the mid-seventeenth century did less to change the permanent face of English political life than did the 1688 Glorious Revolution. Laurence Stone hints at this in the passage quoted above: it is an argument developed at greater length, and with great conviction, in Professor J. R. Jones's recent study, *The Revolution of 1688 in England*. But that Revolution itself was the product of Protestant *consensus*: it was a Whig *and* Tory Settlement. That consensus might be explained away as a negative reflex—anti-Popery, and nothing much else. I argue the opposite, in my eighth and final section of the book, and through the argument of Thomas Barlow trace a continuity back to the first section of the book. But even if this continuity did not exist, and the consensus were only a negative one, my point would stand unaffected: that Sybil Oldfield's literature of conflict in the early sections of the volume prepared us for the penultimate Protestant conflict of the Civil War, and not for the ultimate consensus of the Revolutionary Settlement. But to rest on that consensus, and to deny Davenport's light, would be to revive Whiggery with a vengeance. We need both truths. Historical pyrrhonism reached the point, in the early nineteenth century, when a popular pamphlet could be written, *Some Historic Doubts Concerning the Existence of Napoleon*. But Napoleon did exist; the English Civil War did happen. And the literature of the time gives a unique insight into the fears and aspirations of the men that fought that war. We need to turn to the historical context to set these fears and aspirations in perspective. And then to go back to the literature again to honour John Davenport's insight.

1975 W. M. LAMONT

Literary Introduction

This anthology of selections from seventeenth-century controversy assaults the reader's inner ear with a multitude of differing voices—some uplifted in hope for mankind, some bitterly disillusioned, some mocking, some indignant, some querulous, some ferocious, some resigned. 'The subjective, not the objective, alone is true,'[1] maintained Kierkegaard, and Blake insisted that 'everything possible to be believed is a portion of truth.'[2] What we are concerned with here are the multitudinous subjective truths in the phenomenology of men and women in seventeenth-century England. Each extract, therefore, necessarily presents a different perspective, and if at first we are bewildered, perhaps it is a healthy bewilderment, for we may then in fact be closely approximating to the state of mind of a mid seventeenth-century Englishman. Implied in this approach is a scepticism regarding the possibility of ever attaining to any absolute objective insight into the truth about the past. Did Charles I sneer at his accusers or did he gaze imperturbably on them? Was Cromwell a hypocrite or not? Which was the dragon and which the dragon-slayer in this whole central conflict of the 1640s? In other words was the Civil War a case of 'Damnè'd Treason' or was it 'The Good Old Cause'? The answers in every case are inseparable from the people who try to answer—both then and ever since.

Poets do not usually feature very largely in collections of historical documents, but because this book is concerned not only with what *did* happen, but with what people felt about what they thought was happening, poets with their exceptional skill at rendering the truth of their own feelings have contributed very largely to the volume—not least because they felt impelled during this period to write about

the great public events, not just about their mistress's eyebrow.

Having admitted that this book contains a welter of conflicting testimony, is it possible to make any generalizations at all about the reactions of these individuals to their time?

What first emerged in preparing this book was the sheer obsessiveness of the recurrent subject of religion and the forms of worship. Coarse ballads, innumerable mock-litanies, even the chapbooks of jokes of the period, all focus on religion.

Secondly, it emerged that many of the witnesses here assembled did not hold a simplistic, black and white view either of the issues or of the men engaged on either side. The Nonconformist leader Richard Baxter, for example, loved the poetry of the Anglican George Herbert and was deeply suspicious of Cromwell; Sir Edmund Verney, the King's own standard-bearer, believed his master to be in the wrong in his championing of episcopacy; Marvell's ambivalent attitude to the issues is still the subject of critical argument and uncertainty, whilst it is to the Puritan Lucy Hutchinson that we owe a devastating portrait of two bogus Puritans:

> Sir John Gell . . . had . . . so highly misdemeaned himself that he looked for punishment from the parliament; to prevent it, he very early put himself into their service . . . no man knows for what reason he chose that side; for he had not understanding enough to judge the equity of the cause, nor piety or holiness; being a foul adulterer all the time he served the parliament, and so unjust, that without any remorse, he suffered his men indifferently to plunder both honest men and cavaliers. . . .[3]

Another regrettable ally was the 'libidinous goat' Chadwick, who pretended to sanctity,

> cutting his hair, and taking up a form of godliness, the better to deceive. . . . Never was a truer Judas, since Iscariot's time, than he, for he would kiss the man he had in his heart to kill . . .[4]

Thirdly, one is struck time and again by the extraordinary *contemporary* relevance of very many of the arguments, temperamental divisions and issues of the mid seventeenth century. Speaking of the Thirty Years War, 1618–1648, Professor Golo Mann has written recently: 'All periods resemble one another, but this one resembles our own more

than others.'[5] For instance, the perception that 'extremes meet', familiar to us from the many analogies drawn between Communist and Fascist authoritarian intolerance, was already intuited in seventeenth-century comparisons between Puritans and Papists. Both allegedly shared an equal indifference as to the ethics of the means necessary to attaining their fanatical ends:

> From Papists on one hand, and Phanatick
> o'th other,
> From Presbyter Jack, the Popes younger
> brother, . . .
> Libera nos.[6]

and Cowley's *The Puritan and The Papist* begins:

> So two rude *waves*, by stormes together throwne
> Roare at each other, fight, and then grow *one*.
> Religion is a *Circle*; men contend,
> And runne the round in dispute without end.
> Now in a *Circle* who goe contrary,
> Must at the last meet of necessity.
> The Roman to advance the *Catholicke* cause
> Allowes *a Lie*, and calls it *Pia Fraus*.
> The Puritan approves and does the same,
> Dislikes nought in it but the *Latin name*.[7]

Then again the insurmountable gulf in taste between the ascetic George Fox and the Shadwell who wrote, 'The Delights of the Bottle are turned out of doors/By Factious Fanatical sons of dammn'd whores',[8] is familiar in our own time when what is 'art' or a 'freely exploratory life-style' to some is seen as 'sickening indecency' by others. More important, many of the issues raised during the Civil War period are still as pressing and as unsolved now as they were then. We may no longer care about the power wielded by Anglican bishops (and Anglican bishops may themselves now be advocates of revolution), but we still ask ourselves: what is a Just Society? How is it to be realized? Can mutually exclusive ideologies possibly be tolerated within one society?

Instances of hatred, of unprincipled 'Trimming', of triumphing over the defeated—whether a Laud or a Hugh Peters—of steadfastness under oppression and genuine self-devotion to an altruistic cause are all to be found in the following pages. Examples of quite unforgettable personal statements—

nakedly emotional, subjective and unashamed—also abound in the period before 1660:

> 'And for this I will spend and be spent, and be puld in ten thousand pieces; before I will in the least deny my God.'
>
> (Lilburne, *Come out of her my People.*)

> 'To say, Sir that there hath not been a strife in me, were to make me less man than, God knoweth, my infirmities make me.'
>
> (Strafford's last letter to Charles I.)

> 'I have no quarrell to any man, either for unbeleefe or misbeleefe, because I judgeth no man beleeveth any thing, but what he cannot choose but beleeve.'
>
> (William Walwyn, *A Still and Soft Voice*, 1647.)

> 'I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken. . . . There may be a *Covenant* made with Death and Hell.'
>
> (Cromwell, letter no. 136 to the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland.)

> 'What I have spoken, is the language of that which is not called amiss "The good old Cause:" . . . Thus much I should perhaps have said, though I was sure I should have spoken only to trees and stones; to tell the very soil itself, what her perverse inhabitants are deaf to. Nay, though what I have spoke should happen . . . to be the last words of our expiring liberty.'
>
> (Milton, *A Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth*, 1660.)

But 'Human-kind cannot bear very much reality',[9] and this also goes for the reality of naked emotion. After 1660 it is a truism of English literary history that satire, already of course an important part of the literature of the 1640s and 1650s, became the *dominant* literary mode—satire dressed in its god-like robes of wrathful or mocking judgment. Satire is denunciatory and therefore implies a maximum of moral distance between the writer and his subject; its emotional range is deep but narrow, encompassing only different shades of anger or contempt. For it to carry conviction at all as possessing general relevance it must assume a *mask* of generalized objectivity, to quash accusations of merely personal spite. With the exception of an aberrant 'mad tinker' like Bunyan, English literature had to make do without the

writer's most intimate, unmasked 'I' until the poetry of William Cowper a hundred years later. This flight from subjectivism is often ascribed to the dual influences of the new scientific rationalism and of French neo-classicist aesthetics, but the traumatic phenomenon of the recent Civil War would seem a much more adequate reason for such a profound literary reaction. Would not the individualism of personal faith and opinion now be deeply suspect for its association with sectarian 'anarchy', and the passions themselves be feared as all too easily moved to brutal violence? The fabric of society had been, it was felt, temporarily rent; a civilized state of society had to be reordered, and to this end the range of permissible emotions, opinions and their expression, all had to be restricted. There was, of course, no issuing of a Court edict or a Party directive—the memory of past 'excesses' would be enough to ensure a dominant attitude that 'People don't do such things!' any more.

Historical Introduction

Towards the end of this volume will be found excerpts from a remarkable pamphlet by an Anglican bishop (8.5). Thomas Barlow wrote *Popery* in 1679. He offered his readers a potted history of English religion and politics in the seventeenth century. Where others had found discord, he found harmony. What united English Protestants, argued Barlow, was their imperial faith. England was an Empire, governed by one Supreme Head: this is what the preamble to the Act in Restraint of Appeals had asserted; it was for this belief that the martyrs, in John Foxe's great work, had given up their lives. The Gunpowder Plot, Archbishop Laud, the Civil War, the Protectorate, the Clarendon Code and now the Popish Plot (Barlow was writing in defence of Titus Oates) were all ruthlessly fitted into Barlow's pattern of history. In different ways they represented the continuation of that sixteenth-century struggle between the Christian Emperor and the Papal Antichrist chronicled first by Foxe and Jewel. This struggle was seen in apocalytic terms. Much was obscure in the Book of Revelation—had the millennium already happened, or was it to take place in the future? Was the Pope *the* Antichrist or merely *an* Antichrist? But one thing at least was clear: England, the Elect Nation, was locked in a momentous struggle with Roman Catholicism. And in that struggle the Royal Supremacy was the Catholic target, the Protestant shield.

There is a lot to be said against the Barlow view of seventeenth-century history. The man himself was a shameless turncoat. The work was a crude piece of propaganda: Barlow wanted to show Protestants why they should believe Titus Oates's preposterous stories of a Popish Plot. Most damaging of all, his thesis ran counter to common sense. The one safe generalization that can be made about English Protestantism

in the seventeenth century is that it was hopelessly divided. The English Civil War was a *Protestant* Civil War. Recent research has destroyed the myth that English Catholics were, in the main, enthusiastic Royalists.[1] They chose neutralism; when they did depart from this position, it was mainly a defensive response to attacks *on them* initiated by the Roundhead Army. Nor was this Protestant division an aberration of the 1640s. It had been a long time coming. Sybil Oldfield rightly calls her second chapter, dealing with the 1620s and 1630s, 'the coming storm': and her next two chapters show how Civil War strengthened, for each side, the dehumanized image of the other, the flattering image of self. The execution of the King in 1649 is the logical end to this story of conflict.

But 1649 is not the end of the seventeenth century. Nor have we made it the end of our volume. Had we done so we would have saddled ourselves with at least three unacceptable propositions. One would be that what happened after 1649 is of little intrinsic value. It has taken two good recent studies of the Rump Parliament and the Protectorate, for instance, to rescue those institutions from the shadow cast by the regicide and for their true contribution to be recognized.[2] Another falsity would be to accept the events of 1649 at the cosmic valuation given them by the authors of *Eikon Basilike* and *Eikonoklastes*. And a third would be to see English Puritanism in the early part of the seventeenth century as a closed spiritual brotherhood, preparing itself for the Revolution and the regicide. All these propositions will be challenged in the following sections, but the last is the most plausible, and is worth refuting immediately.

A number of separate myths are bound up with the myth that English Protestantism was a gymnasium for revolution in the early seventeenth century. *The first myth is that Calvinism is a creed for rebels.* This rests on a simplistic view of Calvin's political philosophy, and upon the way it evolved in different communities at different times. For instance, in France under Coligny Huguenotism was a patriotic, centralizing force (as opposed to the pro-Spanish tendencies of the Guise family). After 1572, and the massacre of St Bartholomew's Day, we see the development of Huguenot tyrannicide theories: but only a decade or so later it is Huguenots who are proclaiming the Divine Right of Kings against the Catholic League.[3] In Holland Calvinists supported the Royal House of Orange and Arminians were the revolutionaries: a point made

against the Arminians by the Presbyterian writer, Thomas Edwards, in 1646.[4] That Arminianism need be no barrier to revolutionary zeal is suggested by the careers of George Fox and his Quakers, John Goodwin and John Milton. Indeed in the eighteenth century Edward Thompson has shown how Calvinist dogma limited the revolutionary potential of Particular Baptism, and the importance of Wesley's Arminian theology to his evangelical success is only beginning to be properly understood.[5]

The second myth is that the English Puritan movement was in its most aggressive phase in the early seventeenth century. Historians would now see the high point of Puritan ideological commitment as being the 1570s and 1580s. The death of Field, and the collapse of the classical movement in the 1580s, marked a change in the character of English Puritanism. It took an inward turn; its great names were now Sibbes and Bolton, Preston and Gouge; its characteristics were a devotion to casuistry, the moral life and individual spiritual experience. It has even been suggested that, in this period of development, the popular mission of the Catholic clergy was more effectively to English Protestants than to English Catholics.[6] Thus the great English Puritan, Richard Baxter, could proclaim his profound debt to 'an old torn book . . . lent my father which was called *Bunny's Resolution* (being written by Parsons the Jesuit and corrected by Edward Bunny)'.[7]

The third myth is that James I alienated the affections of his English Protestant subjects by his absolutist claims for monarchy. This myth rests on two other myths: that James I's views on Kingship were offensive to the majority of his subjects; that he wrecked unity at the Hampton Court Conference. Both of these assumptions are discussed in the first section in this volume.

The fourth myth is that 'Court' and 'Country' were polarized in the 1620s and 1630s. Now it is true that there was nothing like this polarity in the Elizabethan period: even when Field's Presbyterians were developing an abrasive ideology, the Court was dominated by Puritan 'fellow travellers' like Walsingham, Cecil and Leicester. A far cry from Henrietta Maria's 'Popish' Court. Even so, we can underrate the fluidity of 'Court' and 'Country' concepts even in the later period. The struggle for office produced a competitiveness that undercut simple divisions along such lines. The Duke of Buckingham's flirtation with John Preston and his Puritan colleagues did not last long,

but it opened up interesting possibilities of a Puritan 'Court' versus an Anglican 'Country'. It is to this period that we owe some of the most outspoken criticisms of the Royal Supremacy from Anglican sources (see John Cosin's embarrassments: (1.7)). The most recent student of Strafford's correspondence sensibly points out that the woolly rhetoric of the day made changes in political allegiance natural and legitimate. Thus Strafford in opposition may tiresomely play at the role of country bumpkin (1.8), but the real break in his career is not 1628, when he becomes Lord President, but 1630 when he begins the friendship with Archbishop Laud that takes him away from the middle ground of politics.[8]

The fifth myth is that the ideological innovators were, not the Laudians, but their Puritan critics. Only now, in the work of scholars like Dr Tyacke and Professor Bangs, are we beginning to appreciate the importance of Laud's break with his predecessors in an ideological commitment to Arminianism.[9] This claim was linked by Laud and his colleagues, to the parallel claim that bishops existed by divine right, not by virtue of the Royal Supremacy. The two claims are strictly not parallel. High Church Calvinists flourished in the reign of James I: men like Carleton and Downame. They were not extinct in Laud's time —witness Joseph Hall—but they were becoming rarer. The panic felt by English Protestants came from their perception of a twin menace; an assault on their Calvinist faith and on the Royal Supremacy from the same source: Arminian bishops. The Puritan pamphleteer Prynne wrote in 1637 a tract entitled *A Breviate of the Prelates Intollerable Usurpations Upon The Royall Prerogative.* This captures well the worried tone of Protestants at this time: men who saw the settled truths—the Calvinist doctrine of the Predestination of the Elect and the imperial case for the Royal Supremacy that Barlow was to expound in 1679—subverted by the Arminian clergy. Indeed, in an unfortunate but revealing analogy, Prynne compared Laud to Copernicus as the wrecker of established certitudes.

With these myths out of the way, we are in a better position to do justice to the King-worship of our first section, and to see that its appeal was much broader than is commonly supposed. But to argue that King-worship, on the imperial lines laid down by Barlow, was sincere and traditional is not the same thing as saying that it was unconditional. A pamphleteer in 1689 justified the deposition of James II because he had 'changed the form of Government, and Constitution from an English

Monarchy, and Independent; from an Imperial Crown, to a subjection to the Pope, and See of Rome'.[10] This was the other side of imperialism: Coke's assertion that the Kingdom of England should have no foreign power over it. The *suspicion* that Charles I—through the influence of Laud or of his wife—was a Papist and the *certain knowledge* that James II was one: they made possible, respectively, the regicide and the Glorious Revolution. They don't prove that Barlow was wrong in claiming that most English Protestants were sincerely devoted to their King; only that loyalty had its limits and that the Christian Emperor, who broke the rules of the imperial game, could expect no mercy from his subjects.

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There are full references in the footnotes to the most helpful monographs on specific themes. But the following short list may be helpful to readers who are looking for general background works.

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