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This ambitious and provocative study provides a new narrative of nineteenth-century English political history. Based on extensive research the book draws on recent 'postmodern' critical theory to read a vast range of hitherto neglected oral, visual and printed sources, in an attempt to expand our conception of the politics of the period. Read in this way, nineteenth-century English politics resolved itself into a story about the struggle to define the nation's constitution, past, present and future. It suggests the existence of a popular strain of English libertarian politics, albeit one that was used in many different ways. However, the book is also about the erosion of the radical and democratic potential of both this libertarian tradition and the constitution. Ironically, the invention of England's liberal democratic constitution depended upon the demise of the democratic forms of popular politics which accompanied the ascendancy of print, and organised mass party politics. Thus, despite the inclusion of many men within the constitution, politics became less (not more) democratic: a phenomenon which the author sees as pertinent for many struggling to live in, or to establish, liberal democratic constitutions in our own times.

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POLITICS AND THE PEOPLE

A study in English political culture, c. 1815–1867

JAMES VERNON

British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow, University of Manchester

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To Ros

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... the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try and liberate the individual from the state, and from the state's institutions, but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualization which is linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed upon us for several centuries.

Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power' in H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow (eds.), *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago, 1982)

Life obliges people over and over again to give birth to themselves.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *Love in the Time of Cholera* (London, 1988)

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In an academic monograph like this the acknowledgement is a privileged site. It stands apart from the narrative logic of the text, hinting at the argument's fragility and the artificiality of its seemingly seamless progress towards closure, with its beginning (introduction), middle (progressively numbered chapters) and end (conclusion). It is a logic which seems ingeniously designed to refuse any signs of the author's doubts, the endless rethinking and rewriting, the elaborations, the cuts, the responses to preliminary readings by friends and colleagues. Only in the acknowledgements can the author reveal such frailties by thanking those who have encouraged or quelled their anxieties. Certainly, what follows is not intended as a display of 'knowingness' (of whom I know and which network I lay claim to), nor as a way of implicating others in the inadequacies of my own work for which I alone am responsible.

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