INTRODUCTION
I. *Neville and Moyle Compared*

The lives of Neville and Moyle span the century in which republicanism of the kind proposed by English Commonwealthmen ran its course. Neville was born in 1620 when James I and his parliaments were very much at odds. Abroad at the beginning of the Civil Wars, he came back to gain not a little political experience when his associates were, intermittently to be sure, in the ascendant. After the Restoration in 1660, every republican was suspected of conspiracy, and he found it convenient to spend nearly four more years abroad. Returning, he played no further active role in politics. Moyle as a young man was a member of William’s first Triennial Parliament (1695–8), and later carried out some local administrative duties in his native Cornwall. He never held important office, nor did he manage to travel in any of those areas whose history interested him so much. Neville was obliged to leave London during Oliver Cromwell’s Protectorate, and suffered incarceration for more than fourteen months during the reign of Charles II. Moyle ruined chances of government preferment by outspoken opposition to the ruling Williamite Whigs in parliament, and by his share in the writing of important polemical tracts, but he experienced neither exile nor imprisonment.

Both men achieved a considerable reputation outside the political arena; Neville by his *novella*, *The Isle of Pines*, and by his edition of the works of Machiavelli in English; Moyle, as a youth, for his knowledge and translation of classical authors and, posthumously, for learned epistolatory commentaries on biblical, classical and Christian myth and legend. Both were gentlemen, deeply versed in ancient, renaissance and contemporary literature, history and politics.

Widely separated in age, the two probably had at least a brief encounter in the early ’nineties when Moyle was studying at Middle Temple and enjoying the life of neighbouring coffee houses also frequented by Neville. Neither man was a martyr to ‘the good old cause’, nor did either leave direct descendants. Both showed a capacity and willingness to adapt to what they felt were the current needs of an England obviously not as yet ripe for that ‘new modelling’ they admired
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in *Oceana*. Their recognition of contemporary problems and sympathy with many of their countrymen’s prejudices and the brilliance of the presentation of their theories long maintained the circulation of the tracts. With the coming of the American and French revolutions, and the development not only of more radical programmes but also of the philosophies of Jeremy Bentham in England and John Taylor and Thomas Jefferson among others in the United States, a new age of political speculation and experiment began, and brought about the eclipse of all but the greatest of republican reputations. Yet the careers, associations and work of two gifted but less familiar Commonwealth-men help to make comprehensible the role in English history of a number of talented individuals, and may suggest some conclusions about the origins of seventeenth-century republicanism and some factors in the failure to achieve practical implementation of the policies proposed.
II. *Henry Neville, 1620-94*

Henry Neville was the namesake of his grandfather, an Elizabethan ambassador (1564–1615), and his father (d. 1629), of Billingbear Park, not far from Windsor in Berkshire. His mother was Elizabeth (1595–1669), daughter of Sir John Smith (1558–1608), of Ostenhanger in Kent, and sister to Thomas, first Viscount Strangford (1599–1635). At a very early age, long before he went to university, Henry’s marriage to Elizabeth, daughter and heiress of Richard Staverton (d. 1636), of Heathley Hall in Warfield, was arranged.

By the settlement then made, Henry became possessed of Staverton lands, and, since he died childless, these eventually passed to his nephew Richard. Nothing else is known of this marriage save that Henry was buried in the Staverton aisle of the Warfield church, where a stone memorializes the family into which he married.

After matriculating in 1635, Henry attended Merton and University Colleges in Oxford. On 11 May 1641, probably on the occasion of his coming of age, he took the oath of allegiance, and was then listed as ‘of Heathley Hall’. Soon afterwards, Henry left England on the grand tour. Travelling through France, he arrived in Italy and visited Florence. In Rome, shortly before he died, Henry met the renowned Cardinal Guido Bentivoglio, author of *The Wars in Flanders* (1632, tr. 1654). In Venice he studied that Republic’s famous institutions. As he travelled he made friends and acquaintances, among them a

1 The *DNB* account of Neville by J. M. Rigg derives chiefly from Anthony à Wood (1632–95), *Athenae Oxonienses* (2nd ed. Oxford, 1721), 1, 591, 713, 918–19; and from the introduction by Thomas Hollis (1720–74) to his edition of *Plato Redivivus* (London, 1763 for 1765), also dependent on Wood. Daniel Rowland, *Historical and Genealogical Account of the Nevilles* (London, 1830), table v, ‘The Nevilles of Billingbear’, provides indispensable information about the family. Volume i, *Berkshire*, of Daniel Lysons’s *Magna Britannia* (6 vols. London, 1806–22), is useful for Nevilles and Stavertons. On Henry’s marriage there is almost nothing but a tombstone at Warfield, the evidence of Henry’s will (PCC, box Irby, 174) about his property, and a couple of early references to his marriage and residence at Heathley Hall—see *CSPD*, 1633–4, ed. J. Bruce (1863), p. 388. Henry, then about thirteen but married, wants permission to fell trees to repair Heathley. Takes the oath of allegiance—see *CSPD*, 1649–1, ed. W. D. Hamilton (1882), p. 574. Presumably Elizabeth died very young; her parents also being dead, some of the Staverton property went to other Stavertons at Wokingham in 1636, but it seems likely that the entire family was dead before the Civil War began.
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Florentine lawyer, Ferrante Capponi, in whose house he stayed in Rome. It was probably at this time that he began what was to be a lifelong intimacy with Bernard Gascoigne (1614–87), another Florentine who, as early as 1644, was serving in the royalist regiment of Henry’s elder brother Richard (1615–76). Sometime in 1645 as the first Civil War was reaching a climax, Henry returned to England.¹

About his doings for the next three or four years, there is little evidence, except the appearance in two parts, in the summer of 1647, of a very bawdy piece reputedly his, The Parliament of Ladies, making free with the reputations of prominent women on the roundhead side. Neville was already a republican, but he had little affection for the sectaries. An answer, Match me These Two (1647), associated the author with the Levellers, though this was certainly unjustified, and suggested that, when found, he should be thrown to the ladies he had so much abused. In the same vein, News from the New Exchange appeared in 1650. If these indeed be Neville’s, they anticipate the kind of rough and boisterous humour which marked The Isle of Pines in 1668.²

Neville’s public career seems to have started after the execution of the King, when he stood at Abingdon in Berkshire in April 1649 as a recruiter for the Rump of the Long Parliament. The election was allowed, after discussions in which Algernon Sidney (1622–83) and Sir Henry Vane (1613–62) took part, in the following autumn after parliament reconvened. About the same time, Edward Neville, possibly a distant relative, was elected for East Retford. Only when the Journals use a Christian name is precise differentiation of the two Nevilles’ activities possible. Henry may be presumed to be the member defeated over a motion to introduce the use of the ballot; he was already well known to be appointed to the Goldsmiths’ Hall committee for

² Relazione, noted above, displays prejudices about presbyterians probably very similar to Neville’s. Joining the names of Liburne and Neville rests on no better evidence than that of common opposition to the ruling clique.
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raising money out of confiscated estates. Long after, when Plato Redivivus was being criticized for anti-clericalism, the allegation was made that Neville’s bitterness sprang from the forced return of the bishops’ lands he was said to have acquired at this time. In November 1651, Neville was chosen to serve on the Council of State, obtaining half the number of votes cast for Colonel Herbert Morley (1616–67), but four more than those for Harry Marten (1602–80), a well-known republican politician. During his year of office, Neville was occupied with diplomatic and legal matters. His term was not renewed, and in April 1653, with the rest of his fellow members, he was ejected from St Stephen’s by Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658) and his troopers.

With Vane, Sidney and Edmund Ludlow (1617–92), Neville opposed the Protectorate. He lived under it in semi-forced retirement. He emerged in August 1655 by special licence, to settle some private affairs in London, and again, over a year later, to sue the sheriff of Berkshire in Common Pleas. One letter writer ascribed to him the authorship of a tract against Cromwell, possibly an earlier version of Shuffling, Cutting, and Dealing in a Game of Pickquet (1659), a short, vigorous skit at the expense of Protector and army grandees. Neville has also been credited with a hand in A Letter to his Highness from an Officer in Ireland (1656), mentioned in the publisher’s foreword to Plato Redivivus. Thomas Hobbes is said to have declared he had a finger in the writing of Oceana (1656), by James Harrington (1611–77). There is nothing else to prove his share in either, but by this time Neville was certainly among Harrington’s friends.

In the summer of 1656 Neville decided to try his luck in the coming elections. The poll at Reading on 20 August was taken amid considerable confusion. Neville had many friends, and was reported to have enough votes to win one of the five seats. He refused an offered bargain by which he would be paired with a ‘Mr Trumbull’. The

2 W. W., Antidotum Britannicum (London, 1681), pp. 137–8. There is no firm evidence about Neville’s acquisition of episcopal lands, though very likely he took over nearby property if available.
3 Council of State, Cf. vii, 41–2 (24–5 Nov. 1651), and 220–1 (Nov. 1652); Neville’s activities may be traced passim in CSPD, 1651–2, ed. M. A. E. Green (1877).
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sheriff, William Strode, or Stroode, with the assistance of ‘corrupt and flattering ministers’, soldiers and major-generals, to the accompaniment of fisticuffs and threats of decimation for opponents, returned all five members of the Cromwellian persuasion. Neville took his wrongs to court, and sued the sheriff under the statute of 23 Hen. 6. c. 15 for damages. These the jury awarded, but the presiding judge, uneasy about the verdict, decided that parliament, after fifty years of exercising the right to determine the validity of returns, must be consulted in the matter. Sheriffs were liable to penalties for misconduct, but, even in the later and similar case of Barnardiston versus Soames, sheriff of Suffolk in 1674, so learned a judge as John Vaughan (1603–74) professed himself unclear on the law. What is obvious is, first, that the election, described, possibly by Neville himself, in A True and Perfect Relation of the Manner and Proceeding held by the Sheriff for the County of Berks at Reading upon the 20th August (1656), was highly irregular, and involved John Boul of Warfield and other Neville supporters in all sorts of trouble. Secondly, it is also plain that, though juries might sympathize with Neville and Sir Samuel Barnardiston (1620–1707), the sheriffs, discriminating against known opponents of the government in power, evaded the penalties which the Henrician statute seemed to allow. Neville’s case was discussed in the Parliaments of 1659–60, eventually sent to Exchequer Chamber, and never determined. The Suffolk case ran a similar course.¹

For Richard Cromwell’s Parliament, Neville and the republican Daniel Blagrave (1603–68) were ‘unanimously’ elected, and formed part of that lively and eloquent Commonwealth group about whom John Thurlow (1616–68) wrote bitterly to Henry Cromwell (1628–74) in Ireland, and Andrew Marvell (1620–78) in similar vein to George Downing (1623–84) at the Hague. The Diary of Thomas Burton more than confirms the tributes wrung from the Cromwellian sectaries. Sir Arthur Haselrigg (d. 1661), Vane, Neville, the regicide Thomas Scot (d. 1666), and John Weaver (d. 1685) had indeed ‘much the odds’ in speaking. Neville’s friends were prominent, but his enemies were

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numerous enough to make trouble. On 16 February, these debated for five hours the matter of his religion or lack of it. If it were established that he was an atheist and blasphemer, then he ought to be ejected. Neville had, perhaps in too public a place, declared a preference for reading Cicero to the Bible, and the fanatics pounced upon the heresy. England’s Confusion, a leaflet of this year, referred satirically to ‘levelling Ludlow’, ‘preaching’ Vane, and, surely with this debate in mind, ‘religious’ Neville. Enthusiasm was certainly distasteful to Neville; he often expressed sympathy for catholics, asserting that penal laws should be unnecessary in a well-ordered government; but he remained to the end of his life a protestant, free to worship ‘only in spirit and in truth’.1

In the House in this spring of 1659, Neville’s objectives were three-fold: the rescuing of some old associates, like Colonel Robert Overton (fl. 1640–68), once parliamentary governor of Hull, but imprisoned by Oliver; the thwarting of protectorial foreign policy on Sweden’s behalf, England’s true interest running counter, Neville thought, not to Denmark, but to Spain; and, last and chiefly, the preventing of recognition of Richard Cromwell as anything but the de facto head of state, while Parliament reconsidered the whole constitutional problem. Neville thought both Protector and ‘other house’ improperly established; the union of the three kingdoms merely a device to strengthen the executive through the virtual appointment of their representatives in parliament; the control of the armed forces dangerously concentrated in the Protector’s hands.

He was, Neville said, for a single person and for two houses, but not for the arrangements made for the Cromwells. If there were to be a king, he was said to have told Oliver, Charles Stuart had the better title. Much later, during the Exclusion crisis (1679–81), Neville was to write to a friend that he was not interested in the substitution of one monarch by another—that was, of course, of a Monmouth for a James. Only a republic was worth the risks of conspiracy. Neville disliked Cromwell, the enemy of the Commonwealth, and he disapproved wholly of a small military junto deciding the form of government. A

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single person, he said in 1659, as he was to write later in *Plato Redivivus*, should not have a veto, nor should he control the army and militia. Nations had lost prized liberties through their ruler’s unrestricted command of an armed guard; the army could intimidate, the veto could restrict the legislature. As for the ‘new lords’, they neither deserved the respect commanded by the old Lords’ independence and property, nor did they properly balance the Commons. Privileged persons should never, he vowed, have the power to obstruct the passage of laws desired by the popular or lower house. Neville did not wish to restore the old constitution, Stuart or Oliverian; he wanted to force a reconsideration of government, evolving and implementing, if not an *Oceana*, at least an arrangement reflecting changed social conditions. In this Parliament efforts were futile. Richard could, to be sure, command a slight majority in the House, but in April 1659 an uneasy alliance of Commonwealthmen with the army brought about his fall.1

So in May the Rump returned. Neville was allowed to sit in spite of his service in Richard’s House, and he was once more elected to the Council of State. During the next months, until a *coup d’état* in October again evicted the Rump, the Harringtonians tried to put and keep their views before Parliament and people. *The Armie’s Dutie: or, Faithful Advice to the Souldiers* appeared on 2 May. Its address ‘to the Reader’ was signed by six initials, of which one may indicate Neville. Written before Richard’s Parliament met in January, it opposed the support apparently being given him at that time, and proposed a popular assembly to set up a government determined by the ‘immutable laws of nature’, recognizing shifts in property and power. All that Neville had spoken for in Parliament was also here, but with no trace of his wit or style. Appeals to Christ, and more than a touch of unctuousness, make it unlikely to have been penned by him, even if he shared its fundamental principles.2

In the House on 6 July, Neville brought in ‘The Humble Petition’ of his associates. This may have been his own composition, or that of Harrington himself, in whose works it may be found. The government,

1 *Burton’s Diary*, iii, 45, 48; *ibid.* iv, 150, 154, 162, 213; *ibid.* iii, 314, 387, 451; *ibid.* iii, 34, 72, 132–5, 330–1, 368, 461; *ibid.* iv, 23, 76, 105, 188, 219, 278, 347, 349. Cromwell story, *GM*, vol. 83 (1813), ii, 123, letter signed ‘E.J.’.

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the petition declared, was dissolved, and the time therefore at hand to quell distractions by the institution of a new and stable regime. The interests of ruler and ruled would be identical; all would in turn be subject and officer. No single assembly would be permanent, but a system of rotation would be devised. Executive and legislature would be separate. All would enjoy Christian liberty. A constitutional convention would be called, properly representative in character, and it would determine the government. A small body, to last for a stated period only, would be created to guard the infant system against enemies and infringers of its rules. This was the most succinct proposal of the Harringtonians. The Commons seemed to have received it kindly, but, beyond the appointment of a committee on government some time later, did no more. Only more futile than this restored Rump was the government by the army from 13 October until 26 December, when the Rump returned for what was to be its last session.¹

Parliament and printer were not the only means by which the Harringtonians worked. During an autumn of anarchy, the Rota Club met. From around Michaelmas until 21 February 1660, they discussed politics at Miles’ coffee house by the parliament stairs. Often the butt of town wits, the club was none the less sufficiently the mode to attract many, not members, to its sessions. Round the oddly shaped table, Harrington, Neville—by now his recognized lieutenant—and their friends, articulate and gifted, staged the best debates of the century, but they talked in a vacuum. They never seem to have attracted any considerable support, and, without it, their suggestions were unlikely to have any perceptible result.²

With the return of the Rump in December, Neville was once more on the Council of State, but George Monck (1608–70) was already a public figure, the writing was on the wall, and the country awaited a decision unlikely to favour the Commonwealth. In defiance of signs and portents, Neville brought in a motion in the House for an oath renouncing Charles Stuart, even as fellow republicans were under attack. Ludlow was suspended from his duties as Monck marched south,

¹ Cf. vii, 706; and see James Harrington, Works (London, 1747), pp. 541–6. Toland (ibid. p. xxviii) says Neville presented the document.