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Revolutions

Edited by A.D. Cousins and Geoffrey Payne

Excerpt

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CHAPTER I

*Introduction**A. D. Cousins and Geoffrey Payne*

In a world of conflicting nationalist claims, mass displacements and asylum-seeking, a great many people are looking for ‘home’ or struggling to establish the ‘nation’. Often the two quests are closely connected. It is understandable that, especially now, students of British literature and culture should be sensitive to those preoccupations as they manifested themselves between the English and the French revolutions: a period when Britain fought an internecine war – with its devastating, traumatizing effects on how Britons thought of ‘nation’ and ‘home’ – achieved a confident if precarious equilibrium, then seemed to have come once more to the edge of overthrow. Yet no single book offers a developed overview as well as analysis of the debates about what constituted home and nation during this widely studied time. Nor is there a book that examines how those contested terms were seen or made to interact with each other. It is the lack of both those things that our book is intended to meet. Between revolution experienced and revolution observed, attempting to identify or implicitly appropriate home and nation was a concern elemental to British literature. What we hope to offer is an innovative and thorough account of the writings that, throughout this period, debated notions and images of the nation and of one’s private domestic space within it. No single account of this powerful and pervasive dispute can be all-embracing, and it is not our intent to essay complete coverage of the topic. Rather, we aim to trace the larger patterns of disagreement, at the same time exploring how particular writers situated themselves within and gave shape to the debates in which they participated. Our aim is to shed new light on this vigorous contest and, in doing so, to suggest new ways of viewing the writers who took part in it.

By the time of the early Stuarts, the term ‘state’ had of course come to signify far more about England than merely the mechanisms of government operating in the immediate service of the king, but it by no means yet indicated a ‘coordinated and territorially bounded network of agents

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exercising political power' and functioning largely regardless of monarchic rule.¹ The story of the state in Europe between 1648 and 1789 may be, as Martin Van Creveld has argued, that 'the person of the ruler and his "state" were separated from each other until the first became almost entirely unimportant in comparison with the second'.² The British experience during those years interestingly diverges from that trajectory, especially as regards the concept of separation. True, even amidst the Revolution a future without the monarchy was envisioned by few of the English or other Britons. After the regicide, and throughout the brief life of the Republic, it was of course quite imaginable by some; but, again, during the Protectorate it must have been harder to imagine the state without a single ruler of one kind or another (and, upon the Restoration, virtually impossible). Nevertheless, as political changes succeeded each other, the altering 'state' was, in the case of England at least, then also decidedly a nation – insofar as it was geographically defined, sovereign, and variously imagined into possession of its own identity.³ From the English Revolution to the close of the Interregnum, those multifarious concepts of what constituted the nation both helped stimulate and were impacted by conflict; the nation's sovereignty was destabilized; so, too, were its geographical boundaries. The Stuart dream of a composite British empire, of a godly and united nation that might form a bulwark against papal imperialism, had not so much collapsed as been forcibly appropriated and metamorphosed by those who had come to be the Stuarts' opponents.⁴

New ways of envisioning state formation and national identity therefore became necessary, which often – though not invariably – meant that old ways were put to new ends, that precedents and orthodoxies were redeployed. For example, the conquest trope convenient to King James's political theorizing would be easily redirected against monarchic rule by Marchamont Nedham, in his *The Case of the Commonwealth of England, Stated*, so as to justify the existence of the Republic.⁵ Yet at this time of uncharted experiment, iteration of old ways would not necessarily mean their mere duplication or re-allocation. Moreover Andrew Marvell was acutely aware that, after the regicide in 1649, what Machiavelli called 'new measures' had been implemented and thereby a new age had been inaugurated. Marvell's speaker in *An Horatian Ode* declares that Oliver Cromwell has 'ruin[ed] the great work of time, / And cast the kingdoms old / Into another mould'.⁶ How, then, to interpret and capture a likeness of this figure at the forefront of national upheaval, and so of the phenomenon itself? How to depict the violent advent of the Republic and to anticipate its future course? Marvell's tactic in *An Horatian Ode* was in

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part to portray Cromwell as the ambiguous convergence of Lucan's Caesar and Horace's Octavian. A revolutionary and still-transforming England could thus be aligned with different moments in Roman history and therefore divergent possibilities. On the one hand, it could be associated with the Civil War that Lucan linked to Caesar's overreaching and callous ambition – and so with continuing or deepening civil disruption. On the other, it could be associated with the post-Civil War principate and its Augustan peace – with a triumphant resolution of discord. In the absence of 'the royal actor' (53), and by the light of Cromwell's 'active star' (12), both were foreseeable.

During the Protectorate, when Marvell would picture Cromwell as worthy of a crown but more than a king, he and other writers suggested that a godly principate had been established and an imperial British identity restored or established anew. '[T]o be Cromwell was a greater thing, / Than ought below, or yet above a king', Marvell proposed in his *The First Anniversary of the Government under His Highness the Lord Protector*, going on to identify Cromwell as *pater patriae* and *princeps*, as pre-eminent in both piety and heroic virtue.⁷ Edmund Waller likewise painted England's future in terms of a godly and imperial Augustanism, observing to an already Davidic Cromwell that '[a]s the vexed world, to find repose, at last / Itself into Augustus' arms did cast; / So England now does, with like toil oppressed, / Her weary head upon your bosom rest'.⁸ The death of Cromwell, according to John Dryden, was the loss to Britain of a figure with Roman imperial status and international achievements.⁹ Yet counter-writings of the nation during the Revolution and Interregnum were no less assertive. Cromwell's 'cast[ing] the kingdoms old / Into another mould' was, for Edward Hyde as for other royalists, God's providential punishment of Britain rather than his raising the nation into an empire of his Chosen.¹⁰ Independents such as John Milton saw Cromwell as having marred a divinely offered opportunity to establish a truly free and truly sanctified nation.

The Revolution, moreover, in fracturing the nation had not merely transformed its self-rule and fragmented its self-identity. In doing so the Revolution had made unstable the very notion of home. Richard Lovelace suggested in his *The Grasshopper* that for royalists the concept of home was inseparable from the existence of the monarchic state. The king had perished, his son was embattled, but the spirit of the monarchy could nonetheless survive and flourish in Britain within royalist households. Arrogating the significance of the sacred flame in Rome's Temple of Vesta, Lovelace wrote to Charles Cotton: 'Our sacred hearths shall burn

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eternally / As vestal Flames'.¹¹ A now-sacred flame defines the royalist household, implying a microcosmic survival of the monarchy in Britain despite the king's defeat and death. This sense of domestic space as both precious and surrounded by threats is shared in some respects by Marvell. Displacement and dispossession – homelessness, in fact – recur throughout his verse. For example, the speaker of his *The Nymph Complaining for the Death of her Fawn* is a young girl with apparently no familial or domestic environment; and civil-war 'troopers' have slaughtered the pet that seems to have been her sole companion. But the impact of the Revolution on the domestic sphere is registered more directly and intricately in Marvell's *Upon Appleton House, To My Lord Fairfax*. There, Marvell's persona gestures towards the political turmoil surrounding the Fairfax estate and challenging the judgment of its owner. (In this poem, by way of contrast with Lovelace's, political difficulties are generated by allies rather than by enemies.) He emphasizes from the start however that Fairfax, his family, and his estate manifest an unchallengeable certainty amidst all impinging uncertainties, for they embody a protestant virtue that suggests their domestic space and their futures to be under the sure protection of Providence. Marvell's persona does not deny the complexities pressing upon the little world of the Fairfaxes; he acknowledges the ironic contradictions necessarily confronting them – and Fairfax himself in particular. Yet his perspective is both ludic and salvific, implying that the godly household of the Fairfaxes cannot share in the ruin of the greater British world and will be instrumental in that world's restoration.¹²

A mythos of national restoration runs variously through Stuart, Revolutionary, and Interregnum writings of the nation, and its use to describe the return of Charles II is therefore iterative rather than novel. Yet his return to the throne was portrayed by way of other myths as well. For example the biblical 'Prince of Peace' narrative, which had been associated with his grandfather and his father, was revived.¹³ More important, the Augustan analogy was re-directed from Cromwell to Charles. As Dryden famously wrote: 'Oh Happy Age! Oh times like those alone / By Fate reserv'd for Great *Augustus* Throne! / When the joint growth of Armes and Arts foreshew / The World a Monarch, and that Monarch *You*'.¹⁴ Not everyone would agree with that view of the king and the nation. Marvell gracefully pictured Charles as another Sun King, but just after having depicted him as inclined to violate his own country.¹⁵ Rochester's imaging of the king and his impact on Britain could be even less flattering.¹⁶ A powerful and problematic discourse of the nation had nevertheless been retained and would be amplified.

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Indeed, questions about a king's impact upon the nation remained a central problem for writers seeking to validate the new political order that followed from the political revolution of 1688. For supporters of William's takeover, the discourse of national restoration remained a convenient tool, with supporters such as Thomas Shadwell (the Laureate appointed by William's ministry) positioning the new monarch as saviour of the liberties and traditions that had been eroded under the government of the tyrannically bent Stuarts.¹⁷ Shadwell's pair of poems celebrating the new regime of William and Mary, *A Congratulatory Poem on His Highness* (1689) and *A Congratulatory Poem to the Most Illustrious Queen Mary* (1689) are exemplary of the flood of panegyric verse that was written during the years of William and Mary's reign and indicate ways in which narratives of national identity were sustained. The poem addressed to William celebrates his renewal of the traditional forms that sustained the relationship between a constitutional monarch and his subjects. Remembering (or inventing) a past when freedom served as the keystone of England's political order, William's reign is connected to an organically developed social order and is sanctioned by its natural ability to guarantee political freedoms.¹⁸ Such mechanisms are mobilized in support of the poem's inversion of the invasion narrative that might be attached to William's actions: 'H' *Invaded* us with *Force* to make us *Free* / And in *another's realm* could *meet no Enemy*' (133–4). The poem to Mary continues the process of inversion, counterbalancing William's invasion with a discourse of homecoming that bolsters the legitimacy of the new regime. That poem's opening depicts a nation under the Stuarts 'bereft' (2) of light and struggling under the oppression of tyrannical forces, which is 'reviv'd' (7) by the restorative power conferred by the returning Queen.¹⁹ Mary's particular function, however, is to renew the nation's distressed fortunes by her symbolic capture of William, turning William's invasion of England into the nation's conquest over William and, by weight of that conquest, gaining power over benighted Europe: 'Our ador'd *Princess* to *Batavians* lent, / Is home to us with mighty interest sent / For we, with Her, have won the *Great Nassau* / Whose sword shall keep the *Papal World* in awe' (17–20). The nature of Mary's potency at home in England could also be used to assuage concerns about William's foreign-policy aspirations, with Shadwell's celebratory New Year poem of 1692, *Votum Perenne*, celebrating both 'A Prince who bravely can abroad orecome, / While his Fair Queen can wisely Reign at Home'.²⁰ In each of these representations we see the ascendance of discourses that frame England as a national home that serves to anchor and sustain a monarch whose attentions may well be directed to foreign realms, a crucial issue for William's supporters, who found themselves

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defending a Dutch ruler with obvious vested interests in European rather than English affairs.²¹ Such concerns would remain prevalent for decades to come, especially as the Act of Settlement (1701) conferred the succession to the English throne upon the heirs of the Electress Sophia of Hannover.

The idea of Augustus also remained a useful analogy for writers responding to the political climate following 1688, though later writers found a more difficult task in sustaining the positive emphasis that had predominated under the Protectorate and the Restoration court. While some supporters of William did retain the panegyric impulse in connecting William and Augustus – Prior, for instance, in *Carmen Seculare, for the Year MDCC* – for writers marginalized under the new political order, the analogy could be used for satirical purposes.²² Utilizing the facet of the Augustan myth that binds his rule to the notion of the Golden Age – supplying a Classical counterpart to the biblical home of Eden – writers such as Pope deployed the Augustan analogy to signify the Rome's imperial decadence.²³ The satirical *Epistle to Augustus* (1737), for instance, now addressed to the Hannoverian George II, refuses the 'Panegyric strains' (405) of earlier writers, and mobilizes a critique of the nation's predilection for political change by eulogizing a lost model of Englishness that was founded upon a bedrock of domestic restraint and sobriety:

Time was, a sober Englishman would knock
His servants up, and rise by five o'clock;
Instruct his family in ev'ry rule,
And send his wife to church, his son to school.
To worship like his fathers was his care;
To teach their frugal virtues to his heir;
To prove that Luxury could never hold,
And place on good security his gold. (161–8)

Under the new rule of the new Augustus, however, social solidity is undermined through the malign influence of a luxurious culture, and the collapse of boundaries separating different social structures is signified as an aesthetic disease that infects the body politic and undermines its ability to regulate order: 'Now times are changed, and one poetic itch / Has seized the Court and City, Poor and Rich' (169–70). The *coup de grâce* for the old order is registered at a domestic level, as a proper form of divine worship is degraded to popular balladry: 'And all our grace at table is a song' (174). Rather than securing and upholding pious virtue, the courtly home corrupts the remainder of English society via its connections to ordinary homes, and its diseases become the diseases of a disordered and decadent society.

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The diseased nature of common domestic life would increasingly form a subject of interest for writers in the new century. Defoe, for instance, would explore the trope of disease in a literal sense in *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722).²⁴ Pope, too, with grander poetic aspirations, could signal the interests that would permeate his writing throughout his lifetime in his early poem *The Rape of the Lock* (1714), by giving attention to the ‘low’ subject matter that grants the poem its mock-epic status. In the corrupt world that is portrayed, all of the poem’s central events – the episode in Belinda’s dressing room, the party at Hampton Court, and even the Battle of the Lock itself – are granted an air of national significance as political emphasis moves away from a court-centred vision into the broader public sphere that was the offspring of the so-called ‘Republic of Letters’ that is one of the monikers applied to the age. The comparison reaches its epitome in the passage that opens the poem’s third canto, where the separation between public and domestic life are collapsed in the ambiguously public/domestic space of Hampton Court, as even ‘great ANNA! Whom three realms obey / Dost sometimes counsel take—and sometimes tea’.²⁵ Although the tone is different, Pope’s poem explores the same phenomenon that Addison named as inspiration for his project in *The Spectator*, where his ideal of bringing philosophy to ‘dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables and coffee-houses’ is to be advanced by making his paper ‘a part of the tea equipage’.²⁶ In their different ways, both Addison and Pope articulate responses to an opening up and levelling of the spheres of aesthetic influence and interest, not only among classes but also along gendered lines.²⁷

A further challenge presented to writers during the reign of Anne grew from a reconfiguration of the idea of statehood that emerged in debates about the meaning of the Act of Union in 1707 and the ensuing attention to the relationships between the centres and margins of British life. Following the political unification of Britain, the millions of inhabitants of England and Scotland no longer officially dwelt in the nations of the childhood, a process repeated with the incorporation of Ireland under the Act of 1800. As a result, the nostalgia that is endemic to the process of developing a connection with the homeland of one’s birth became a matter that needed careful management by those writers who wished to sell the new British entity as a unifying discourse.²⁸ Throughout the eighteenth century, tensions around the differences of national character between England and her partners in the Union would drive aesthetic experimentation and elicit further instabilities in conceptualizing the relation between home and state.²⁹ Controversy over the potential return of the Stuart

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monarchy, even beyond the calamitous failure of the 1745 rebellion, meant that the nation continued to be troubled by several competing models that might be employed to determine crucial aspects of national identity. As late as 1814, Walter Scott's *Waverley* could gain currency by debating aspects of the national character by presenting an array of competing versions of domestic life, both at home – via a juxtaposition of the hero's formative experiences at Waverley-Honour and Brerewood Lodge – and 'abroad' in the Scottish manor-house of Tully Veolan and Fergus MacIvor's Highland retreat of Glannaquoich. Scott's novel built upon the practices he observed in Edgeworth's pioneering regional novel, *Castle Rackrent* (1800), where a series of problems facing the newly united Kingdoms of Great Britain and Ireland is explored via the narration of 'honest Thady', a domestic servant who 'tells the history of the Rackrent family in his vernacular idiom, and in the full confidence that [their] affairs will be as interesting to the world as they were to himself.'³⁰ Edgeworth's shift to the vernacular is indicative of a broader significance arising from attention to the nation's peripheries, as alternative linguistic models for self-representation were combined with home-grown mythological systems that might serve as alternate models to those handed down from Classical antiquity as potential tools for drawing together a cogent national identity.

In turning to Scott and Edgeworth, we also may acknowledge the growing popularity of prose forms during the eighteenth century, giving rise to new or revised generic models for exploring connections between home and nation. Along with the spectacular and well-charted rise of the novel, other prose media – periodicals, journals, letters, lives, histories – gathered new audiences and opened new fields of authorship. Women, in particular, gained new power in the literary sphere, and writers such as Burney, Moore, and Reeve built upon the successes of earlier pioneers such as Cavendish, Behn, Astell, and Haywood to push domestic issues to a new prominence. Late in the seventeenth century, Mary Astell could respond to Locke's analogy between family and state by contesting his vision of the governance of the microcosmic institution of the family by using his own arguments about state governance against him:

If the Authority of the Husband, so far as it extends, is sacred and inalienable, why not of the Prince? The Domestic Sovereign is without Dispute Elected, and the Stipulations and Contract are mutual; is it not then partial in Men to the Last Degree, to contend for and practice that Arbitrary Dominion in their Families, which they abhor and exclaim against in the State?³¹

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Progress in disseminating new ideas to a broad audience and effecting social change, however, takes time, and thus we find Wollstonecraft struggling with similar issues at the end of the eighteenth century in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, interrogating the structural position of ‘vice-regent’ wives who remain subordinate to the tyrannies of their husbands’ governing order.³²

Emerging from the nexus between an interest in regional writing and the situation of figures marginalized by the prevailing hegemonic order, writings in the Gothic mode typify other late-century developments in imagining a corporate national identity. From its origins in the Gothic revival in architecture to its articulation in Walpole’s *Castle of Otranto* and beyond, the Gothic genre’s interest in the ambiguous signification of domestic spaces is paramount, and connects with its obsessive interrogation of myths of national significance. Homes are a central feature of Gothic novels. As symbols, they are suggestive of the complex struggle for modern subjects to find their place within a world built on antiquated social paradigms. Castles, abbeys, manors, halls are typically turned to sites of modern domestic living, and the conflicts that emerge within those spaces are significant of the struggles of modern individuals (especially those connected to the middle classes) to establish their place among the revariant relics of a quasi-feudal social order. Walpole’s seminal *Castle of Otranto* (1764) sets the frame with the titular ‘Castle’ serving to house a family drama that has implications of national significance because of the way individual actors are framed in relation to an archaic feudal system. Later, even writers who approach the genre in a satirical vein, such as Austen in *Northanger Abbey* (1819), make use of the conventions so delineated. After all, even though Catherine Morland may well be mistaken in her attempts to read the Abbey and its owner General Tilney upon a schema derived from the principles of Gothic fiction, her general impressions of them are true. General Tilney does secretly harbour a tyrannical bent of character: though not a murderer as Catherine imagines, his monstrosity is exposed via his breach of the rules of decorum for the hospitable treatment of guests when he ejects Catherine from the house when he learns of her family’s straightened finances. It is via the lens of those actions that readers must interrogate Henry Tilney’s castigation of Catherine when he learns of her beliefs about his father’s character. It is also in the terms of his expostulation that readers are invited to consider the ramifications of the actions contained within an isolated domestic space in terms of the delineation of a national character: ‘Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are

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Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you. Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? Could they be perpetrated without being known, in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing?³³ Whether Tilney's questions are to be answered in the affirmative or negative, the implicit suggestion that sites of domestic action both reflect and determine features of the national character remains central to the message conveyed.

Although it was published in 1819, *Northanger Abbey* was chiefly a product of the 1790s, and is reflective of the interests of that decade – especially in its responses to the French Revolution's disruptive influence in Britain. Like many contemporaneous texts, Austen's novel imagines the possibilities of the terrible ramifications of the spread of the Terror across the Channel, as Robert Miles suggests, making connections between 'narratives of repression, violence, and liberation on the one hand, and the present revolutionary context on the other'.³⁴ Austen's youthful responses were, of course, pre-empted by earlier vociferous political debates with competing interpretations of the meaning of the Revolution for English nationalists vying for supremacy. Edmund Burke typified conservative responses to the Revolution, presenting a series of pamphlets that depicted the potential threat to the English nation. An image from Burke's *Letter to a Noble Lord* speaks to his horror at the innovations implicit in the revolutionary act:

The revolution harpies of France, sprung from night and hell, or from that chaotic anarchy, which generates equivocally 'all monstrous, all prodigious things,' cuckoo-like, adulterously lay their eggs, and brood over, and hatch them in the nest of every neighbouring state. These obscene harpies, who deck themselves, in I know not what divine attributes, but who in reality are foul and ravenous birds of prey (both mothers and daughters) flutter over our heads, and souse down upon our tables and leave nothing unrent, unrifled, unravaged, or unpolluted with the slime of their filthy offal.³⁵

Notable in Burke's choice of imagery is his use of Milton's depiction of Hell from book 2 of *Paradise Lost* (the reference is to 2.625), which serves to characterize the relationship between the 'neighbouring state' of France and the English homeland. Implicit, here, is a reprisal of the notion of England as an Edenic paradise, an ideal home that is threatened with destruction via the demonic powers unleashed by the innovative (though not unprecedented) actions of Revolutionary France. The connection between Milton and Burke may appear ironic given Milton's support of the revolutionary regime under the Commonwealth, but the choice is