Introduction

In his magisterial *Foundations of Modern Political Thought* Quentin Skinner argues that the Stoicism of Montaigne, Guillaume Du Vair, and Justus Lipsius "carried with it a distinctive set of political implications, the most important being the idea that everyone has a duty to submit himself to the existing order of things, never resisting the prevailing government but accepting and where necessary enduring it with fortitude."[1] He finds it "hardly surprising" that these "stoic moralists were vehemently opposed to any attempt to vindicate the lawfulness of political resistance."[2] This interpretation is exemplary in both negative and positive senses, and Skinner may serve to represent what I take to be the ideal, if initially unwilling, readers of this book: those interested in seventeenth-century English literature and politics, and particularly in the interdisciplinary work now being done by such scholars as Victoria Kahn, David Norbrook, Annabel Patterson, Stephen Zwicker, and, of course, by Skinner himself; and those also who share his widely accepted but to my mind quite inadequate understanding of early modern Stoicism.

In England, at least, Stoicism was seldom about "never resisting the prevailing government" and blindly accepting things as they were. Even in its least resolute forms, it could be a subtle casuistry of political activism. A convenient if none too distinguished example of English Neostoic prose is a text that Skinner cites, *A Buckler against Adversity* (1622). This translation by Andrew Court of a dialogue by Du Vair is not "vehemently opposed to any attempt to vindicate the lawfulness of political resistance." It does not argue in any absolute sense for inaction but instructs readers to consider action as seriously as they possibly can given their actual psychological, political, and military situations. In book 3, for instance, the moderator asks the wise Linus a rather difficult question:

> I would desire to know of you, which of the two we ought rather to imitate: and if we see the striving of Vertue against Violence, to prove unprofitable to the publike, and hurtful to our selves; whether we ought to forsake all publike

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actions, and withdraw us wholly from businesse; or whether Vertue ought even amidst the greatest stormes keep on her course, and rather suffer herself to bee overwhelmed then goe back; or whether there bee ever a middle path between an obstinate austeritie, and a shamefull servitude, by the which an innocent prudence may bee saved harmelesse from these civill broyles, and cragged cliffes, wherewith we are on all sides environed.[3]

Linus proceeds to map out the "middle path" as the one most useful to know in the worst situations. This is not a path to be taken in every situation: there are more active and less active responses that might be chosen, but of course the decision is always up to the actor and should always be made by taking actual situations into account. Perhaps it is the shared ease of the modern liberal democracies that has led scholars to read only pessimism in such texts as *A Buckler against Adversity*, to see so insistently in them a separation between "fortitude" and "resistance" when those terms are so often united in an "innocent" but also politically meaningful "prudence." Their only defender of late, to my knowledge, has been Markku Peltonen, who in *Classical Humanism and Republicanism in English Political Thought* is willing to see humane, "Ciceronian" ideals even in Lipsius's *Politicorum sive Civilis Doctrinae Libri Sex* (1589), a work usually dismissed as a handbook for early modern despots: "It was 'civil life' attained by virtues which formed Lipsius's chief aim" in that work; and the "same values of the virtuous active life" are said by Peltonen to permeate *A Buckler against Adversity*.[4] More often, however, "Stoic" designates defeat, hopelessness, inertia, old-age, or something worse – as when a Miltonist refers to "the isolated, discrete rational individual . . . pushed towards . . . a purely private and personal stoicism in the face of an irrational world."[5] It may be too late to renew interest in the Stoics' conception of the world, its inhabitants, and its history as a vibrant organism amid so much misinformation, but something can be done to recover the relevance of Stoicism to seventeenth-century men and women. Indeed, a central argument of this book is that the Stoic "middle path" was conceived more and more during the seventeenth century as a matter of writing and publication within the "republic of letters" – an "ideal" but also quite real "community," writes David Norbrook in an essay on John Donne, "to which entry was freely offered to those with ability and whose values were critical of tradition, struggling to replace the arbitrary exercise of power by rational political debate."[6] In a sense, this "middle path" led back to the philosophical projects that Cicero speaks of in *De Oratore* 1.1 and elsewhere, and which Seneca speaks of with such ardor in letters and treatises written during

the reign of Nero; but it was also to literalize and substantiate such projects in the age of the printing press and occasional poem. Moreover, if the rigorous Stoic *otium* does sometimes seem too convenient, one should take care to consider just what sort of *negotium* it was that seventeenth-century Stoics were turning away from. As Maurizio Viroli reminds us in *From Politics to Reason of State*, the classical "language of politics" in which political activity was held to foster the collective virtue of citizens had been giving way, "between the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century," to the theories and practices of "reason of state."[7] Stoic retirement often meant retreat from the state, not from political action. Moreover, retirement could itself be a decisive act of political rhetoric and a tacit but hard to ignore plea for a return to virtue-centered politics.

My goal is thus at once to understand the rhetorical and philosophical bases of a literary movement and to sketch some suggestions for a new map of political discourse during the middle decades of the seventeenth century. By focusing on Andrew Marvell, Katherine Philips, and John Milton I hope to show that these poets and friends within the republic of letters have more in common than the usual philosophical, political, and aesthetic categories have allowed. Although they were by no means ideologically identical – I understand that associating Smectymnuous and Orinda may seem perverse to some readers – each was keenly interested in the republican, libertarian, and oppositional possibilities of the Stoic tradition and each struggled to wrest that tradition from pessimistic and absolutist interpretations. Because these struggles in the name of constancy do not always reveal constant personalities and alliances, I wish to make it clear at the outset that this book is not intended to be a survey of philosophical and political doctrines. Nor am I interested in determining which texts are truly Stoic and which are not. Even if such a survey were within my abilities it would, I believe, be antipathetic to these writers who so rightly exploited the casuistical tendencies of Stoicism to the fullest. The ethical biases of Stoicism ensured that doctrines were always held responsible to the lives of individual readers and writers, and its paradoxical rhetoric ensured that they were always open to internal critique and the complexities of literary figuration.[8] One sees in the texts of Marvell, Philips, and Milton just how contested and nuanced Stoic rhetoric could be during this period. One also begins to understand that Stoicism in its most powerful forms is not about actual withdrawal from the world but about the meaning of action and the manipulation of anger for political ends.

Although or perhaps because Stoicism advised such emotional control, it was often thought to have radical political implications.

The Stoic ethos involved several paradoxical literary and political concepts, most notably constancy accompanied by a fascination with violence, indifference mirroring extremities of anger, and retirement involving quests for honor and authority. I argue in chapter 1 that this politically charged and insistently paradoxical rhetoric was a means to assert the honor of the willful, aristocratic self amid the factional and ideological struggles that characterized Elizabeth's last years and the reigns of James I and Charles I. This did not involve withdrawal but a certain kind of literacy: reading and writing focused especially on Seneca, Tacitus, Lucan, and Lipsius as they could be made to comment on contemporary political situations and ideological issues. From the first English translation of Lipsius's *De Constantia* in 1594, striking homologies were perceived between the content of Stoic privacy and civil war itself. Stoic literacy and imitation theory thus mirrored the competitive tensions that Gordon Braden has discerned at the core of the Stoic soul in his study of *Renaissance Tragedy and the Senecan Tradition*.[9] But while the ancient Stoic often turned away from war and politics toward inwardly directed battles of honor, the seventeenth-century Stoic directed those battles outwardly and symbolically in the literary "arena."

Braden's approach has thus been both very influential to me and something of a problem as I have come to terms with the productivity and vitality of early modern Stoicism in England. Inwardly directed battles of honor are likely to lead, as Braden argues they do, to the abyss. "Between the Stoic and the Skeptic there is not always that much distance," he writes; "the self aspires to be an imitation of the cosmos, but it might as well be an arbitrary stand taken against a meaningless reality that has value only as an opportunity for proving ourselves and enjoying our self-esteem." Indeed, "the pattern of Stoic retreat" drives "relentlessly toward the ultimate Stoic act: suicide."[10] If we take this prognosis too far, we might conclude that it was only their common Christian faith that saved such political opposites as Bishop Joseph Hall, "Our English Seneca," and the Restoration Milton from early, self-inflicted deaths. But Stoicism usually led in the seventeenth century, not to suicide or paralysis, but to *literature* and *publication*. This involved in part the publication of privacy, the commercialization of the withdrawn personality in such texts as Sir William Cornwallis's *Essayes* (1600–01), Donne's *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour* (1651), and Abraham Cowley's

remarkable *Essays, in Verse and Prose* (1668). In Cornwallis, at the dawn of the century, we see that the fashion for privacy is coeval with the conception that the things and inhabitants of this world are, as the Stoic says, "things indifferent." Judgment of these things counts for every-thing – as Milton was to argue in *Areopagitica* – and judgment is typically a matter of *reading* and *writing*. Thus, in "Of Resolution" Cornwallis writes: "The world is a booke; the wordes and actions of men Commen-taries upon that volume; the former like manuscriptes private; the latter common, like things printed."[11] Cornwallis turns the world, its persons, resolutions, and actions into texts; he only makes surfaces to be scratched, but this is not for him an *aporia*. "Si philospharis, bene est," writes Seneca in *Epistulae Morales* 15, and when you are philosophizing with Seneca and Senecans you are exchanging words, letters, and books on matters of mutual importance.

But the literature of Stoic retirement was much more than a literature of privacy. We cannot begin to understand the fascination that Stoicism held for seventeenth-century writers until we take seriously the cosmo-politan ideals of the Stoics. One of the fullest statements of these ideals is found in Seneca's *De Tranquillitate Animi* 4.1–4, where he writes:

I confesse well that we ought sometimes to retire ourselves, but leasurely, and with a secure retreat, our ensignes displaied, and without empeachment of our worldly dignitie. They are more valiant and more assured than their Con-querours that make a faire and honest retreat. So in my opinion ought vertue to behave her self, and if the inconstancy of worldly affairs disturbe all, and taketh away from a vertuous man the meanes to doe good; yet for all this ought he not to turne his back, nor to cast away his weapons to save himselfe by flight, and to thrust him selfe in a secret place, as if there could be any corner where fortune could not find him out: but he ought to be less busie in affaires, and find out some expedient with judgement to make himself profitable to his Countrie. Is it not lawfull for him to beare armes? Let him aspire to some publique charge . . . Is he put to silence? Let him helpe his Citizens by his private counsell. Is it dangerous for him to enter the judgement place? Let him shew himself a faithfull friend, a gracious companion, a temperate guest in houses, in The-aters, at feasts. If hee have lost the office of Citizen? Let him use that of a man. And therefore with a great mind have we not shut ourselves within the walls of one Citty, but have thrust ourselves into the conversation of the whole world, and have professed that the world is our Countrey, that wee might give vertue a more spacious field to shew her self in.[12]

The literature of Stoic retirement was a literature not only of private selves but also of community. It was a record of what Seneca called *res publica magna et vere publica* and what his dedicated translator, Thomas

Lodge, called "the conversation of the whole world." Having temporarily retired to the study or garden, the Stoic does not cease acting in the world; the world of retirement is really a much larger world than the one that has been left. For all their talk about the masculinity of virtue, ancient and early modern Stoics tended to emphasize the intellectual equivalency of the sexes and sought to bridge moral if not economic gaps between rich and poor. Whatever the "office . . . of a man" really is – answers to this question in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are always fascinating – it is not something likely to be contained by arbitrary boundaries. The world is a living organism for the Stoic, and each person can serve it wisely and well when they recognize that, as *humans*, they share the same fate as all other persons.[13] The Stoics, writes Ludwig Edelstein, "asked the individual to learn that it is necessary for him to live for others and that he is born for human society at large, of which he must always feel himself to be a member rather than a fragment separated off. Here in humanity and not in the state, in the moral community of man, he is truly at home."[14] The history of the literary culture of seventeenth-century England is, among all the other things that it is, a history of Stoic cosmopolitanism – an ideal that because of social and technological realities had never before been achieved in practice although it had been professed since the time of Zeno.

Thus, while I am indebted to Braden's recovery of the *anger* within the Stoic tradition, and while chapter 1 deals with the rhetorical combination of Stoicism and war in seventeenth-century English culture, the following chapters are guided by journeys from violence and rage to the paradoxical engagements of retirement. By retiring strategically in a Stoic manner – to gardens (Marvell), to a "rude and . . . dark Retreat" (Philips), and to "retired silence" (Milton) – each of these writers makes, to use Seneca's language, "a secure retreat" with "ensignes displaied," and thus gives to "vertue" – carrying on the characteristic military metaphor – "a more spacious field to shew her self in." Stoic literature of the 1640s and 1650s is best understood, then, not simply as a response to the Civil War, but as a crucial part of the discursive history that prepared for and structured that conflict from beginning to end. The properly vigilant Stoic lays "Gardens out in sport / In the just Figure of a Fort," as Marvell, the subject of chapter 2, writes in "Upon Appleton House." In that poem, and in "The Garden" and elsewhere, Marvell's gardens figure conflicts between intellectual and military fortitude on the one hand and weakness, vanity, and corruption on the other. They are compact with the history of civil conflict, and the latter pages of

chapter 2 and chapters 3, 4, and 5 follow that history through the
Restoration and beyond.

In a century so dominated by "fears and jealousies," Stoic rhetoric
was available and attractive to the "winners" and "losers" alike – a fact
that bound many writers together who might otherwise have been
strangers. Maren-Sofie Røstvig's still-valuable *The Happy Man* and fine
studies by Earl Miner and Raymond A. Anselment have, for the most
part, stressed the conservative and reactionary phases of English Neo-
stoicism.[15] We have been shown that Seneca, Cicero, and Boethius
consoled displaced royalists during the 1640s and 1650s, providing them
with philosophical warmth during their long "Cavalier winter." But
while Miner and Anselment have been convincing in regard to their
chosen writers, they have not come close to exhausting the topic.
Indeed, the Stoicism of the Cavaliers should not be limited to the war
years and interregnum. Notable in this regard are Sir Roger L'Es-
trange's popular *Seneca's Morals by Way of Abstract* (1678), a work whose
appeals for Senecan "gratitude" were intended in part to shore up the
Stuarts amid the Exclusion Crisis. Nor, of course, was there any monop-
oly on "offices," those actions which are for the Stoic, as Thomas
Stanley writes in *The History of Philosophy* (1655–62), "whatsoever reason
requireth to be done, as, to honour our Brethren, Parents, Country, to
relieve our friends."[16] It is not surprising that "reason" required differ-
ent things to be done by different writers at different times. For Philips as
she wrote *Pompey*, the subject of chapter 3, her proper "office" as a
"man," so to speak, was Stoic criticism of Stoic clemency as a means of
monarchical control. For Marvell in the 1670s, the subject of chapter 4,
the best "office" was "to relieve our friends" by surrounding the be-
leaguered Milton with a protective aura of "retired silence" in *The Second
Part* of *The Rehearsal Transpros'd* and by placing him in the Stoic-republi-
can tradition of Lucan, Jonson, and Thomas May in "On *Paradise Lost*".
Marvell had his own reasons for understanding Milton's career in this
way, of course, but they are to my mind definitive: the Stoic casuistries
that do so often mark his career, and an extended comparative reading
of *Paradise Regain'd* and Lucan's *Pharsalia*, are the topics of chapter 5. In
Milton we reach one culmination of the Stoic tradition, a tradition in
which constancy could imply conflict, peace could imply war, and a
translation of *De Constantia* published in the year after *Paradise Regain'd*
could be called *War and Peace Reconciled*.

A few things remain to be said about my method. Because so many of
the texts that I deal with are not readily available on library shelves or

even in rare book collections, I have often quoted from them at con-
siderable length in the pages that follow. This has been necessary
sometimes to lend credibility to particularly troublesome arguments;
but it is always necessary, in my opinion, to read even the lesser writers
of the seventeenth century carefully and at length in order to acquire a
just appreciation of their styles and outlooks. Readers will also notice the
liberal use that I have made of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century
translations of Lipsius and the ancient writers – Cicero, Lucan, Seneca,
and Epictetus, among others – who play important roles in this study.
Although scholarly translations from our own century are easier to find
and would in most cases provide the most reliable texts, I have desired
on every page to give the reader a feel, not for what Stoicism supposedly
is, but for what it could *mean* to seventeenth-century readers and writers.
The two are not always the same, although we should ourselves be
careful not to assume that we know in any objective sense what Stoicism
is. In some cases, as in Marvell's relatively well-known use in the
"Horatian Ode" of Thomas May's translation of Lucan, we are dealing
with writers who almost certainly used popular translations rather than
originals. But my reasons for relying on the labors of May, Sir John
Stradling, Thomas North, Thomas Lodge, and other translators are
really more broadly based than that. I have been concerned throughout
to understand the "Silver Age" of the English Renaissance as a her-
meneutic project – or a series of hermeneutic crises – caught, as it were,
between the demands of its own rigorous scholarship and the natural
desires of writers to respond meaningfully to contemporary political and
commercial situations and even to create new ones. The typical seven-
teenth-century translation of Seneca or Lucan, however difficult it may
be to find and read, poses those exciting crises for us again.

CHAPTER I

Conflict and constancy in seventeenth-century England

When civil war broke out in England in 1642 Stoic constancy was a moral ideal embraced by both sides. Tears and outrage had a place with the vulgar, but the heroic norm is stated in Sir John Denham's *The Sophy*, the most celebrated play of that climacteric year. The youthful and brilliantly militaristic Prince Mirza, cruelly blinded at the command of the king his father, would somehow find greater victories and a better kingdom within himself:

> 'Tis something sure within us, not subjected
> To sense or sight, only to be discern'd
> By reason, my soul's eye, and that still sees
> Clearly, and clearer for the want of these;
> For gazing through these windows of the body,
> It met such several, such distracting objects;
> But now confin'd within it self, it sees
> A strange, and unknown world, and there discovers
> Torrents of Anger, Mountains of Ambition;
> Gulfes of Desire, and Towers of Hope, huge Giants,
> Monsters, and savage Beasts; to vanquish these,
> Will be a braver conquest than the old
> Or the new world.[1]

The modern reader may tend at this point to think of the prince as an escapist, as having abandoned his political will as well as the public virtues that had made him such a promising heir to the throne. Yet Mirza's "braver conquest" over "Torrents of Anger" and "Mountains of Ambition" is not, one soon realizes, an escape from anything but fear and regret. Indeed, it brings to him a distinctly anti-monarchical perspective:

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> Man to himself
> Is a large prospect, rays'd above the level
> Of his low creeping thoughts; if then I have
> A world within my self, that world shall be
> My Empire; there I'le raign, commanding freely,
> And willingly obey'd, secure from fear
> Of forraign forces, or domestick treasons,
> And hold a Monarchy more free, more absolute
> Than in my Fathers seat; and looking down
> With scorn or pity, on the slippery state
> Of Kings, will tread upon the neck of fate.[2]

This is one variety of Stoicism, which for Prince Mirza is an inwardly directed philosophy with public consequences. It is an attack on himself – the "Towers," "Giants," "Monsters," and "savage Beasts" of his emotions – that is also an attack on kings and their counselors, and he is willing to pay the highest price for his victories. Concerned primarily with "tactics of selfhood" in desperate moral and political contexts, such Stoicism, says Braden, "engages powerful psychic drives that are in themselves preethical and have potentially anarchic implications."[3] This is eccentric from the usual philosophical perspectives, but it has pointed Braden's readers to a better understanding of the Senecan dramatic tradition of which Denham's Mirza is a part; as I shall be arguing throughout this chapter and book, the idea that Stoicism amounts to a rhetorical mediation of anger rather than an elimination of it can help us to a better understanding of Stoicism as a cultural and political fact in seventeenth-century England.

England was overcome in the 1640s, 1650s, and 1660s by anger on a national scale, and during those decades men and women sought like Mirza better, "more absolute" kingdoms and often expected to be killed or jailed for doing so. They were angry – angry at the vices of monarchs and their inability or unwillingness to recognize honor and merit, angry at those who they felt trod on the "ancient rights" of the English people, angry at those who denied the fullest reformation of religion, angry when their hopes and plans failed utterly – and when they chose Stoically to resist the tide this was rightly interpreted by their enemies as an especially dangerous kind of anger. Such is the judgment of Haly, the king's vicious counselor in *The Sophy*: Mirza's "constancy" is perceived as a threat to his designs, and he has him poisoned for it. The virtuous Mirza dies an anti-monarch in 1642. While this may seem strange to say of a character conceived by so highly reputed a royalist as Denham, Mirza embodies a tradition that has been passed over as escapist or, on