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1 Introduction

R. Malcolm Smuts

This collection sets out to trespass across boundaries that have traditionally separated political history from literature and the visual arts, and Britain from the rest of Europe. One goal is to combat the fragmentation in our view of the past that results from excessive specialization, by opening perspectives that are both international and interdisciplinary. A second, more specific, intention is to advance an argument with important implications for both political and cultural history. In the seventeenth century England, Scotland and Ireland were ruled by an elite whose mental horizons and social environment were essentially European rather than English or British. Stuart kings and courtiers interacted regularly with European aristocrats and frequently knew more about events in Paris, Madrid or Vienna than about local conditions in Scotland, Ireland or many parts of England. Their culture and intellectual outlook owed at least as much to international as to purely English or British traditions. Since this cosmopolitanism affected the conduct of government, it mattered far beyond the palace gates. Without taking it into account, we can never fully understand either the politics or the political cultures of the seventeenth-century British kingdoms.

In some respects this claim may seem far from original. Political historians have always paid some attention to foreign policy, while the impact of European styles and ideas on Stuart court culture is well known. Nevertheless, most work on the Stuart period is still written primarily within a British – or more often an even narrower English – framework that tends to obscure wider perspectives. There are a number of reasons for this orientation, many deeply rooted in modern academic life. In the anglophone world, British and European history are almost always treated as distinct specialties, while English and European literature are invariably taught by separate departments. Although in some ways unavoidable, these institutional demarcations can inhibit international perspectives in both teaching and scholarship. The proliferation of specialized monographs and journal articles compounds

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the problem, making it increasingly difficult to master the secondary literature in both British and European fields.

Language imposes another barrier, more formidable to many modern scholars than to the linguistically trained elites of the seventeenth century. In that period all serious education began with several years of intensive instruction in Latin, which remained the international language of culture and ideas. In England, as in the rest of Europe, the development of a vernacular literature was accompanied by a substantial output of Latin prose and verse, intended for a European readership.[1] Most of this is today virtually unread, even by specialists. English and Scots writers normally handled Latin with facility and sometimes composed and published in it. Camden's great history of Elizabeth's reign had to be translated *into* English, while Abraham Cowley and John Milton enjoyed European reputations as Latin stylists. In 1635 Sir Francis Kynaston tried to render Chaucer's *Troilus and Cressida* more accessible to modern readers by translating it into Latin.[2]

Most educated gentlemen also knew French and many had acquired proficiency in Italian, Spanish, German or Dutch, often rounded off during a youthful grand tour. Literary and intellectual culture were, therefore, significantly more open to European influences than is often apparent from scholarship based on English sources. Large libraries almost invariably contained European books and sometimes consisted primarily of them: by one estimate only about 2½ per cent of works listed in the original Bodleian catalogue were in English.[3] British scholars, poets and patrons maintained European networks of correspondence. Richard Tuck has recently explored some of these connections in examining seventeenth-century political thought, demonstrating important ways in which Hobbes and other English thinkers were responding to European-wide developments.[4] Charles K. Smith's chapter on epicureanism provides another illustration of how international currents of ideas, disseminated through networks linking natural philosophers, courtiers, politicians and poets, shaped cultural and political discourse. Smith's essay also suggests that the picture of seventeenth-century thought presented by Tuck and other recent scholars may need significant revision. The current emphasis on taciteanism and neo-

[1] J. W. Binns, *Intellectual Culture in Elizabethan and Jacobean England: the Latin Writings of the Age* (Melksham, 1990).
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 254.
[3] Debora Kuller Shuger, *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance: Religion, Politics and the Dominant Culture* (Berkeley, 1990), p. 3, n. 11.
[4] Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government, 1572–1651* (Cambridge, 1993), esp. chs. 6 and 7. One suspects the European connections would be even more evident among Scots writers.

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stoicism arguably needs to be broadened to take into account both overt and covert epicurean themes, present from the late sixteenth century, which reinforced scepticism of traditional philosophical systems and ultimately pointed towards a new synthesis of science, theology and absolutist ideas on both sides of the Channel.

Some historians have argued that even if Englishmen were familiar with continental ideas on most topics, their political discourse was still largely rooted in an insular 'common-law mind', characterized by a tendency to argue from indigenous custom and precedent. The unique character of English law underlay an equally distinctive attitude toward governance, effectively inoculating the kingdom from wholesale reception of foreign theories.[5] Johann Sommerville's chapter furnishes a rebuttal to this view. He argues that common-law thought had strong affinities to contemporary continental political ideas, not least in its emphasis on precedent and custom, which is also found in Bodin and other European thinkers. In addition he produces evidence that a number of influential figures at the Jacobean court did not share in a consensual common-law outlook, such as Glen Burgess has posited for this period.[6] The lawyers' habit of arguing from precedent did not block the reception of European absolutist ideas among those who counted most. Several of Sommerville's claims will probably prove controversial, but his essay challenges us to situate common-law arguments within an international context and consider more broadly the intellectual challenges to which proponents of an ancient English constitution were responding. One implication may be that insular and cosmopolitan approaches were not necessarily opposed and incompatible, superficial appearances to the contrary. Awareness of wider European trends of political thought and political life may have encouraged efforts to insist upon English peculiarity, both as a way of imitating claims European scholars made on behalf of their own legal systems, and as a defence against general theories of royal authority and *raison d'état* that needed to be combated precisely because they had become part of English discourse.

A third source of geographic insularity in Stuart scholarship is historiographical tradition. The professional study of history developed in the late nineteenth century, a period of intense nationalism and of state-building in much of Europe. Partly as a result, political historians quickly became preoccupied with the roots of nation states and national

[5] Glenn Burgess, *The Politics of the Ancient Constitution: an Introduction to English Political Thought, 1603–1642* (Basingstoke, 1992).
[6] *Ibid.*

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traditions. This was especially true for the Stuart century, regarded as the formative period of modern British parliamentary government and its liberal political culture. From the late Victorian age until the 1970s, the story of the rise of parliament and its struggle against Stuart absolutism not only dominated political history, but generated subsidiary interpretations and debates concerning many other aspects of the period. By the 1960s the story of a century of constitutional conflict, pivoting around a great mid-century revolution, had been related to everything from the rise of capitalism to the development of distinct court and country cultures. Art, literature and intellectual life were integrated into the narrative historians had created, for example through terms like 'cavalier' poetry and drama. Attempts to link literature and the arts to politics were, in themselves, often legitimate and even unavoidable; but the dominant historical paradigm inevitably shaped how scholars perceived the connections.

One implication of historiography centred on the rise of parliament was that England's experience in the seventeenth century was both unique and peculiarly relevant to the modern world.[7] The features of Stuart society that most deserved to be studied were, therefore, those that made England different from Europe, while somehow foreshadowing the future. Even scholarship that opened European perspectives was sometimes affected by this view. Art historians could scarcely fail to notice the impact of European painting and architecture on Stuart society, and in the 1960s and 1970s scholars including Frances Yates, Roy Strong and Stephen Orgel showed in detail how late Renaissance traditions had contributed to Elizabethan and early Stuart culture. This cosmopolitanism was commonly treated, however, as typifying an isolated court culture that alienated a conservative and puritanical country precisely because of its links to a popish and absolutist continent.[8] The interest in European art of peers and gentry who fought for parliament was glossed over or ignored, since it did not fit prevailing assumptions. Studies on puritanism similarly acknowledged the importance of sixteenth-century European developments to the genesis of radical English protestantism. In dealing with the seventeenth century, however, historians as diverse as Christopher Hill, Perry Miller and William Haller showed much more concern with puritanism's contribu-

[7] Another implication, at least for most English and many American historians, was that Scottish and Irish history were essentially subordinate subjects, since both countries were eventually subsumed within a British parliamentary state rooted in English traditions. I have used the term England, rather than Britain, in the ensuing paragraphs to suggest this anglocentric view.

[8] For example by Lawrence Stone, *Causes of the English Revolution* (London and New York, 1972), p. 106.

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tions to the 'English Revolution' or the formation of New England culture than with ongoing relations between English and European religion. Historical analysis followed a trajectory that led from a comparatively cosmopolitan sixteenth century, to an increasingly anglo-centric (or Anglo-American) focus in the Stuart period, reinforcing the notion that the English were coming into their own and preparing for their future dominant role in world culture.

II

The parliament-centred interpretation of the Stuart period, and the progressive views of historical evolution it had encouraged, first came under systematic attack from revisionist historians in the late 1970s. Some revisionists also began to restore a wider European context to English and British history. Simon Adams, Conrad Russell and Kevin Sharpe emphasized the importance of issues growing out of the Thirty Years' War in shaping domestic politics, while the research of Nicholas Tyacke encouraged more careful consideration of relationships between English and European theologies.[9] Revisionism did not, however, *entirely* overcome the traditional insularity of Stuart historiography. Part of the reason lay in revisionist emphasis upon short-term and localist perspectives, itself the product of studies of provincial politics undertaken since the 1960s. This work had revealed the importance of the county and rural neighbourhood as settings for face-to-face political relationships that often seemed to matter more to contemporaries than great constitutional issues. Revisionist historians attempted to extend this perspective to the national level, through a revival of detailed narratives emphasizing the practical and often petty concerns shaping the day-to-day course of politics.[10] These narratives usually devoted much more attention to factional manoeuvres and the political and administrative difficulties involved in raising taxes and managing

[9] See especially Simon Adams, 'Foreign policy and the parliaments of 1621 and 1624' in *Faction and Parliament: Essays on Early Stuart History*, ed. Kevin Sharpe (Oxford, 1978); Conrad Russell, *Parliaments and English Politics in the 1620s* (Oxford, 1979); and Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: the Rise of English Arminianism, c. 1590–1640* (Oxford, 1987). Also important in this context were the calls for a closer integration of English and European history by J. H. Elliott. See his 'England and Europe: a common malady?' in *The Origins of the English Civil War*, ed. Conrad Russell (London, 1973).

[10] Revisionist emphasis on insights gained from local (chiefly county) histories is very evident, though in rather different ways, in two early classics of the movement: J. S. Morrill, *The Revolt of the Provinces: Conservatives and Radicals in the English Civil War 1630–1650* (Harlow, 1976) and Russell, *Parliaments and Politics*, where the debt to country histories is made clear on pp. 3–7.

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military expeditions than to larger religious and strategic issues growing out of European affairs.[11]

In addition revisionism fostered a climate of iconoclastic scepticism, which inhibited efforts at rethinking within large interpretive frameworks. As Jonathan Scott argues in this volume, attacks on the old parliament-centred view of the Stuart century did not lead to a new synthesis but instead produced a fragmented historical landscape, littered with the wreckage of discredited ideas and increasingly difficult to bring into focus. This fragmentation also made it more difficult to bridge disciplinary boundaries, at a time when many scholars of English literature were showing renewed interest in history. Revisionist historiography did complement the kind of literary historicism that operates by locating plays or poems within precise historical contexts. But the collapse of consensus over larger interpretive issues presented problems for scholars seeking to draw wider relations between literature or the arts and historical change. Partly for this reason many literary historicists continued to prefer older historians, such as Lawrence Stone and Christopher Hill, who were less chary of grand interpretive schemes. Others turned to modern European theorists like Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and Louis Althusser, creating a highly theoretical new historicism, with a penchant for grand generalizations, which could scarcely have differed more profoundly in style from revisionist historiography. Although a few scholars have managed to produce significant interdisciplinary work in the last two decades,[12] too often

[11] The European dimensions of English politics emerges more clearly in two works on the 1620s than in most other recent scholarship: Thomas Cogswell, *The Blessed Revolution* (Cambridge, 1989) and Roger Lockyer, *Buckingham: the Life and Political Career of George Villiers, First Duke of Buckingham 1592–1628* (London, 1981). Perhaps the most broadly conceived treatment of the European context of English politics in the early seventeenth century is a brief essay by Simon Adams, 'Spain or the Netherlands: the dilemmas of early Stuart foreign policy' in *Before the English Civil War*, ed. Howard Tomlinson (London, 1983), pp. 79–102. Despite these works and a number of other useful specialized studies, foreign affairs remain a comparatively neglected topic, especially for the first half of the century. The situation is somewhat better for the Restoration period, although even here the most systematic survey, J. R. Jones, *Britain and Europe in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1966) is now almost thirty years old.

[12] The appearance of several collaborative works has also helped to span disciplinary boundaries. See, in particular, Heather Dubrow and Richard Strier (eds.), *The Historical Renaissance: New Essays on Tudor and Stuart Literature and Culture* (Chicago, 1988); Kevin Sharpe and Steven Zwicker (eds.), *The Politics of Discourse: the Literature and History of Seventeenth Century England* (Berkeley, 1987), and Kevin Sharpe and Peter Lake (eds.), *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England* (Basingstoke, 1993). For two attempts by individual scholars to link political history systematically to literature see Martin Butler, *Theatre and Crisis* (Cambridge, 1984) and Kevin Sharpe, *Criticism and Compliment* (Cambridge, 1987).

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theoretical literary history and empirical political history proceeded along wholly different trajectories, taking little notice of each other.

The geographic insularity of scholarship on the Stuart century is thus related to a more general inability to integrate specialized research into convincing overall frameworks. This lack of integration not only impedes understanding of the period's broad contours. It can also obscure the ideas and experiences of contemporaries whose intellectual, temporal and geographic horizons were wider than those imposed by most scholarly monographs. In the final analysis we can never understand people like John Milton and John Dryden, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, or James I and William of Orange, by relying entirely on detailed empirical studies focused on the local and the short term. We certainly need to understand as precisely as possible the circumstances in which these figures wrote or acted, but we also need to take into account their broad European culture, their awareness of international events, their deep historical memories, and their conviction that politics is about ideas and values as much as immediate interests. Some historians have assumed that most seventeenth-century people had much narrower and more concrete perspectives. Recent work has at least qualified this view, however, by showing that consciousness of some national and international issues often penetrated quite far down into English society. Hans Werner's essay in this volume provides a striking example, by showing how central European politics provided a frame of reference for a citizen play performed before heterogeneous London audiences in 1614, several years before the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War.

III

One way of seeking to achieve a broader and more integrated view of the Stuart period is through closer examination of environments and institutions marginalized by the old parliament-centred historiography, in which the connectedness of culture to politics, and of British to European history can be traced in specific terms. Chief among these is the royal court. Studying the court cannot, of course, illuminate all aspects of Stuart history, or even all the connections between Britain and Europe. This point has been deliberately emphasized by Geoffrey Parker's concluding essay, which points to several topics which the present collection does *not* examine, but which any full consideration of Stuart Britain's relations to Europe would certainly need to take into account. We have concluded in this way to emphasize that the present collection is intended less as a summation of current research on its

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topic than as an effort to stimulate further research and discussion on a much wider scale.

If the court ultimately represents only one piece of a larger picture, however, it is nevertheless an especially central and important one. This is especially true if we combine analysis of the court's internal history with studies of its relationship to wider environments and the reactions its policies provoked among people beyond its ranks. These essays do not all confine their view to Whitehall and its immediate environs, nor even entirely to social groups involved in court society and politics. They attempt, instead, to suggest how attention to the Stuarts' cosmopolitanism will affect our view of a wider, national and international scene.

Revisionism has ostensibly attempted to place the court squarely at the centre of national politics, arguing that its factional politics and its interactions with provincial society were usually more important than parliament. In practice, however, revisionists have rarely studied the court in depth.[13] To a remarkable degree they have instead concentrated on topics that traditional historiography defined as important, such as the day-to-day history of parliamentary sessions, the nature of elections, and the resistance of local elites to demands by the crown. Rather than opening a research agenda, revisionist emphasis on the court has too often served the narrow polemical purpose of deflating claims about principled parliamentary opposition.[14] This is especially true of Conrad Russell's work. Russell at times acknowledged the existence of political and even ideological divisions *within* the court, but he has not often subjected these to systematic analysis or examined how they may related to larger conflicts extending beyond Westminster.[15] Whether deliber-

[13] For the earlier part of the century, the notable exceptions are Kevin Sharpe and (if he is to be counted as a revisionist) Neil Cuddy. See especially the works cited in note 14. The late Stuart court also needs more work, though much can be gleaned from biographies of kings and leading courtiers, e.g. Ronald Hutton, *Charles II* (Oxford, 1989).

[14] The one notable exception to this statement is Kevin Sharpe, whose work anticipates some of the argument advanced here. See especially *Criticism and Compliment* and *The Personal Rule of Charles I* (New Haven and London, 1992), chs. 4 and 5. In addition to these works important perspectives on the court have been opened by D. Starkey (ed.), *The English Court from the Wars of the Roses to the Civil War* (London, 1987), which has two chapters on the Stuart period: Neil Cuddy, 'The revival of the entourage: the bedchamber of James I, 1603–1625' and Kevin Sharpe, 'The image of virtue: the court and household of Charles I, 1625–1642'. See also Linda Peck (ed.), *The Mental World of the Jacobean Court* (Cambridge, 1991) and her *Court Patronage and Corruption in Early Stuart England* (Boston, 1990).

[15] See, for example, *Parliaments and Politics*, pp. 9-13. The ways in which internal divisions within the court dovetailed into issues of principle affecting national politics are brought out more effectively by Richard Cust, *The Forced Loan and English Politics* (Oxford, 1987) and Caroline Hibbard, *Charles I and the Popish Plot* (Chapel Hill, 1979). Russell's own *Fall of the British Monarchies* (Oxford, 1991) is also somewhat

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ately or not, his work has conveyed an impression of court politics as a struggle for 'patronage and place', dominated by 'the day-to-day rivalries, the personal plots and factional intrigues that surrounded the person of the monarch'.[16]

This is much too restrictive a view. Political behaviour can never be divorced altogether from underlying cultural assumptions affecting individuals' perceptions of their own interests and their relations to others. As Linda Peck has shown, even struggles over patronage in this period need to be related to assumptions concerning the nature of royal bounty and its role in fostering loyalty and service.[17] Any deep study of court politics must attempt to reconstruct the total environment in which kings and courtiers acted, examining their fears, aspirations and mental horizons, their sense of the nature and purposes of political life and the personal interactions shaping their view of the world.

The moment we do this it becomes clear that the court was not an isolated cockpit for contests over office and patronage, but a national and international centre of landed culture and society; a place where politics became intertwined with ornate ceremony, lavish entertainment and leisure pursuits ranging from making love to collecting art.[18] Most great courtiers were not politicians in a modern – or even an eighteenth-century Namierite – sense: men who were primarily concerned with pursuing office and gaining control over the state's patronage resources. They were peers or royal favourites, who regarded political power as a natural outgrowth of high birth and personal influence, an inseparable part of a great man's lifestyle. Competition among them took place not only in the Council Chamber but in all settings where they might seek to influence the king, and through activities that we do not habitually associate with politics. To understand Stuart high politics we therefore need to pay attention not only to formal institutions but informal social networks and interactions, which frequently involved foreigners. All Stuart kings before William of Orange had European wives and counted European rulers among their relatives by marriage. Most leading courtiers had also spent periods abroad – on youthful grand tours, diplomatic missions, or serving in foreign armies – acquiring well-placed

more willing than his earlier book to link disagreements within the court to larger political contexts.

[16] The quotation is from a summary of the revisionist position by Lake and Sharpe, *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England*, p. 1.

[17] Peck, *Patronage and Corruption*, esp. chs. 1, 7 and 8.

[18] For an elaboration of this point see Ronald Asch, 'Introduction: court and household from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries' in *Princes, Patronage and the Nobility: the Court at the Beginning of the Modern Age*, ed. Ronald Asch and Adolf M. Birke (Oxford, 1991).

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European friends and correspondents. At a lower level, holders of ceremonial and other secondary posts at court included not only English and Scottish peers and gentry but foreigners, such as James I's physician, the French nobleman Théodore de Mayerne, or Charles I's privy chamber servant, Niccolo Biondi, who wrote the first Italian history of the Wars of the Roses. Royal patronage networks also crossed national frontiers: the recipients of court pensions in Charles I's reign included not only leading provincial magnates in England, Scotland and Ireland, but the rebellious French duke of Soubise. Conversely, as Geoffrey Parker reminds us, many English courtiers and ranking government officials – including some puritan servants of the protectorate – received pensions and gifts from the Spanish and other foreign courts.

Historians have long recognized that in provincial politics the operation of formal authority often became entangled with personal relationships and rivalries among densely interlinked local elites. Caroline Hibbard and Nancy Maguire show that the same thing sometimes happened on an international plane. Court intrigues were not always confined within the palace gates nor even within the British Isles: they drew in both British provincial magnates and factions at other European courts. Every now and then, the subject of a foreign king became a central player in Whitehall's politics. Gondomar's career under James I is the best known example, but Maguire's account of Charles II's French mistress, the duchess of Portsmouth, provides an equally striking illustration. Portsmouth is precisely the kind of figure that traditional political history, focused on exclusively male institutions like parliament and the privy council, has ignored. When noticed at all, she has figured in the historical literature mainly as an episode in the king's legendary sex life. Maguire makes a convincing case, however, that her personal influence over Charles, her control over access to the apartments where he was often to be found, her connections to the French royal court, and her alliances with leading English politicians gave her substantial political power, making her feared and respected by figures of the stature of Danby and Shaftesbury. In the latter's evocative phrase, she had become a true 'mistress of state'.

Along with the role of social networks we need to consider the influence of conventions, values and cultural assumptions affecting attitudes and behaviour. As Maguire shows, Portsmouth's skill in parlaying her relations with Charles into a position of power is partly explained by her derivation from a society where women frequently played important political roles. She was not the first French woman to have engaged actively in Whitehall's politics: Henrietta Maria had preceded her, albeit as a legitimate wife rather than a royal mistress; and

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