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Excerpt

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Introduction

Writing in 1981, Ronald Hutton complained that whereas ‘the accepted portrait of the parliamentary party’ during the period of the English Civil Wars had ‘changed almost beyond recognition’ in the previous forty years, ‘the accepted view’ of the royalist party was ‘still that established by Gardiner over a hundred years ago’.¹ In an address to the Royal Historical Society in November 1986, another historian began a ‘modest analysis of the Cavalier party in terms of what may be called ideological temperament’ with the observation that few ‘have paused to consider the kind of people who became Cavaliers and their probable motivation’.² A year later, the editors of an interdisciplinary volume of studies noted that in ‘their emphasis upon the godly politics of the Puritans, historians have paid too little attention to the Royalists’ conviction that they fought God’s as well as the king’s war’.³ A similar verdict was reached by Conrad Russell at the end of a study which went some way towards redirecting the emphasis:

In fact, if we look at England in the context of Charles’s other kingdoms, the peculiarity which needs explaining is not its revolutionary character: it is the fact that it was the only one of the three kingdoms which created a Royalist party large enough to be an effective fighting force. It is the English Royalists, not the English Parliamentarians, who are the peculiarity we should be attempting to explain.⁴

The informing ideas and principles of royalism were not completely neglected by historians, of course, as the work of Paul Hardacre, James Daly and Joyce Malcolm witnesses.⁵ And over the past decade, there have been a number of major advances in our understanding of the origins and nature of the loose coalition of interests that constituted a ‘royalist party’ in the 1640s.⁶

A parallel development has taken place in the field of literary enquiry since Lois Potter’s provocative insight that ‘from 1642 to 1660 the source of the most deliberately and consciously subversive publications was the

royalist party' and her comment that 'comparatively little attention has been paid to the writers of this group'.⁷ Important pioneering work had already been undertaken by Peter Thomas in his analysis of the 'subversive' brilliance of the Oxford propaganda machine organized by John Berkenhead during the years of Civil War, by Annabel Patterson in chapters on 'the Royal Romance' and the rise of the familiar letter as a political genre during the 1640s, by Kevin Sharpe in his investigations into the literary culture of the Caroline court and by Raymond Anselment in his account of five poets who exemplify a particular aspect of the royalist temperament and literary endeavour.⁸ More recently, the deficiency noted by Potter has been supplied by a number of scholars: Thomas Corns has given weight to Lovelace, Herrick, Cowley and the *Eikon Basilike* alongside Milton, Marvell, and the Levellers; Gerald MacLean has examined attempts at adapting traditional literary methods of processing historical events to the new circumstances created by a war between King and Parliament and the judicial execution of a monarch; Dale Randall and Susan Wiseman have investigated the continued use of the dramatic medium by royalist authors, whether in full-length plays or pamphlets in dialogue form, after the closing of the theatres in 1642; James Loxley has subjected the notion of 'Cavalier poetry' to historically informed scrutiny; and Steven Zwicker has included the *Eikon Basilike*, the royalist poetics developed by Davenant and Hobbes, and Walton's *The Compleat Angler* in his study of the way in which literary texts both reflected and enacted history in the second half of the seventeenth century.⁹

The purpose of the present study is to offer a more comprehensive survey than has yet been attempted of the range and diversity of the partisan writing that was devised to meet challenges to the authority of Charles I and the institutional integrity of the Church of England, and later to cope with the social, political, and psychological consequences of the defeat of the royalist armies, the execution of the King, and the abolition of the monarchy. A chronological, narrative approach has been adopted in an effort to locate each text as precisely as possible within the contexts of its original composition, transmission, and reception – all of which may have a bearing on its interest as a product of or contribution to the historical phenomenon of 'royalism'. This procedure follows the advice offered by two influential commentators on Renaissance literature in relation to the politics of its own day: one stresses 'the importance of an exact chronology in determining what any given text was likely to mean to its audience at the time of its appearance' and the

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other stresses the need to take account of ‘authorial intention’, insofar as it can be reconstructed, since to ignore its ‘substantial and under-acknowledged political element’ is ‘effectively to depoliticise’.¹⁰ It will be found that, read in relation to other writing generated by the same set of political circumstances, both familiar and neglected works can reveal unexpected insights into the ways in which individuals and groups perceived and tried to influence the course of history during a period of rapid and disorientating change.

Among the new developments that those who enlisted as writers in the service of the royal cause had to confront was the emergence of ‘the public sphere’, created by rising literacy and the availability of cheap print, as a significant feature of the nation’s political and social life.¹¹ In his study of the dissemination of lyric poetry following the advent of the printing press, Arthur Marotti argues that ‘one of the obvious reasons for the persistence of the manuscript system of literary transmission through the seventeenth century was that it stood opposed to the more democratizing force of print culture and allowed those who participated in it to feel that they were part of a social as well as an intellectual elite’.¹² While writers like John Cleveland and Alexander Brome continued to favour manuscript circulation for their satirical and subversive poetry throughout the 1640s and 1650s, Charles I’s early commitment to the power of print was an important factor in the proliferation of polemical material in verse and prose that issued from Oxford after it became his headquarters in the autumn of 1642. Although most of this often highly sophisticated propaganda was not aimed at the ill-educated populace, the talents of a genuinely popular writer like John Taylor were also exploited, and the editors of royalist newsbooks and devisers of topical pamphlets were not immune to the effects described by Dagmar Freist: ‘In the process of news presentation and the formation of public opinion residues of oral culture and the characteristics of a literate culture began to merge.’¹³

The problem of terminology needs to be addressed at the outset, since the words ‘royalist’ and ‘royalism’ are beset with as many difficulties as the words ‘puritan’ and ‘puritanism’. Before the 1640s, there is little evidence of any concerted resistance to the inherited belief in a hierarchical system ordained by God in which, as Thomas Wentworth expressed it in a famous speech to the Council of the North in December 1628, ‘the authority of a king is the keystone which closeth up the arch of order and government, which contains each part in due relation to the

whole, and which once shaken, infirmed, all the frame falls together into a confused heap of foundation and battlement, of strength and beauty'.¹⁴ Those who were critical of royal policies in the parliaments of the late 1620s would not have contemplated an attack upon the institution of kingship or indeed upon Charles I himself rather than his evil counsellor, the Duke of Buckingham, for fear that any open questioning of the assumptions that sustained the fabric of the state might open the way to 'mutiny and rebellion' by 'the meaner sort' who 'are not easily ruled'.¹⁵ Indeed, John Pym, one of the leading opponents of the government in the House of Commons, had spoken out a few months earlier in defence of the ancient 'form of government' in which 'every part and member' was disposed 'to the common good', giving and receiving 'strength and protection in their several stations and degrees'.¹⁶

Such a political system was ideologically buttressed by the Protestant emphasis on the decisive role to be played in the defeat of the Roman Antichrist by the Christian Emperor and his Church, which was derived from the millenarian model of history inculcated in John Foxe's highly influential *Book of Martyrs*. In one reading of what happened in 1641, this messianic monarchism, which had been put under increasing strain by the policies of Charles I and his Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud, was rejected by many puritans in favour of Thomas Brightman's alternative eschatology set forth in *A Revelation of the Revelation* (1615):

Foxe had created for Puritans an idealised figure of the Godly Prince: the second Emperor Constantine. But Charles I was not Constantine, and Laud was not Cranmer. As faith in Crown and bishop receded, faith in the 'Godly Rule' that both were to create advanced. Puritans turned more and more to Brightman's vision of a reformation that would come, via neither Crown nor Bishop, but via a 'Godly People'.¹⁷

It is certainly the case, as Conal Condren has demonstrated, that religion was 'the only "colour" under which an army might gather against a lawful magistrate' and that 'Reformation political theology . . . provided a casuistic rhetoric of violence'.¹⁸ One effect of 'the extremities of Civil War' was to upset the 'delicate conceptual balance' of the doctrine of the King's two bodies – the individual ruler and the office of kingship – which was a 'fiction of legal theology . . . designed to explain and legitimise continuity of legally-defined office despite discontinuity of office-holder'. Royalist rhetoric tended to move to one extreme, 'investing Charles with all the sacrosanctity of biblical kingship', while parliamentarians 'for religious reasons, were forced to separate Charles Stuart, that man of blood, from the crown' and to turn 'offices of state'

into ‘objects of allegiance’.¹⁹ It is not too much to claim that almost everyone was a ‘royalist’ before events propelled adversaries of Charles I into developing first the case for resistance to a wayward king and then more radical alternatives to the system of monarchy itself. As Sharpe sums up the situation, before 1642 there was no impetus to ‘rewrite the *language* of politics’, because ‘there were no proponents in 1640 of an alternative parliamentary government’, and the ‘values and discourse’ even of those who were ‘prepared to try to compel the king to heed good counsel’ remained ‘traditional’.²⁰ The term ‘royalist’, in fact, was not needed until the governing class polarized into parties engaged in an ideological and military contest over the locus of supreme power in the state: on the one side, those who wanted to preserve the ancient prerogatives of the crown; on the other, those who wanted to make the monarch answerable to a parliament which had executive as well as merely legislative authority. The first instance of the word ‘royalist’ recorded in the Oxford English Dictionary is significantly from William Prynne’s *Sovereign Power of Parliaments* in 1643.

Part of the revisionist thrust in re-interpreting the early Stuart period has been the claim that parliamentary history has been ‘seriously distorted by hindsight, because historians with their eyes fixed on the Civil War and what followed have been looking for a continuous development of opposition which was not really there’.²¹ Focusing on another of the words that have encouraged political and literary commentators to read back the divisions of the 1640s into the preceding decade, Sharpe has insisted that ‘there were no cavaliers in the 1630s – if the term is intended to delineate a coherent political group’.²² He has taken particular issue with the view that there was a deep rift between the culture of the Caroline court, which has been characterized as exclusive, aristocratic and authoritarian, and the culture associated with the ‘country’ faction in politics, which was heir to the traditions of Elizabethan humanism and puritan in religious orientation. A recent analysis of the cultural significance of chivalric iconography and language at Charles’s court tends in the same direction. J. S. A. Adamson points out that the Earl of Newcastle expressed a ‘nostalgic “Elizabethanism”’ during the 1630s, which he shared with others alienated by court life and which was seriously out of sympathy with the brand of chivalry purveyed in the Caroline masques. This did not prevent him, however, from becoming a leading royalist-in-arms during the 1640s.²³ Further support for this view comes from a study of theatres and plays in the ten years preceding the

outbreak of Civil War, in which Martin Butler argues that ‘the political possibilities of the period were much more various than the simple Cavalier-puritan polarization allows for’ and that ‘by trying to distinguish Cavaliers from Roundheads in the 1630s we are applying categories that will not fit, looking for the conflicts of the Civil War in a decade that was not yet fighting them’.²⁴

This is another reason for the adoption of a narrative approach in the chapters that follow, since one of the aims of this book is to trace the journeys of individual writers like Davenant, Cowley, Quarles, Taylor, Berkenhead, Denham, Symmons, Cleveland and Vaughan across the decades, as they respond to the unfolding of events which slowly reshape the religious and political landscapes in which they live. Alongside this, there is the related aim of charting the gradual development of different kinds of writing to meet the challenges to the traditional resources of literature posed by a changing political environment. This is why the first two chapters provide a much more selective look at the literary genres that flourished at the Caroline court in the years before ‘royalism’ began to emerge as a concept, in order to establish the nature of what Malcolm Smuts has called the ‘stock of ideas, images, and symbols that lay ready to hand for the publicists of the Civil War period’.²⁵ It is hoped that by submitting to close scrutiny a substantial body of texts associated with royal occasions, committed to defending or furthering the royalist cause, or merely preoccupied with aspects of royal policy and behaviour, this study will throw some new light on the use of the written, printed, and performed word to influence events or to control the way in which events were interpreted. And behind those public functions of the writing which was designed to support the cause of monarchy in general and of Charles I or Charles II in particular, there will be an occasional glimpse of the more private processes by which individual citizens strove to come to terms with what was happening inside themselves as the familiar world turned upside-down.

CHAPTER I

The halcyon days: 1628–1637

When supporters of the royal cause looked back across the conflicts and defeats of the 1640s, they remembered the years of Charles I's personal rule as a golden age of peace and prosperity. Writing shortly after the death of Oliver Cromwell, Abraham Cowley gave poetic expression to a common nostalgia:

Ah, happy Isle, how art thou chang'd and curst,
 Since I was born, and knew thee first! . . .
 When upon Earth no Kingdom could have shown
 A happier Monarch to us than our own.¹

A similar testimony in prose was given by Sir Philip Warwick, who declared that 'from the year 1628, unto the year 1638, I believe England was never Master of a profounder peace, nor enjoy'd more wealth, or had the power and form of godlines more visibly in it'.² Edward Hyde, writing as an exile in the Scillies in 1646, laid particular emphasis on the contrast between continental Europe, ravaged by the Thirty Years War, and the realms of Scotland, Ireland and England over which Charles had reigned in peace:

The happiness of the times . . . was enviously set off by this, that every other kingdom, every other province, were engaged, some entangled, and some almost destroyed, by the rage and fury of arms . . . whilst alone the kingdoms we now lament were looked upon as the garden of the world.³

This nostalgia for the decade of rule without Parliament had a cultural as well as a political dimension. As Thomas Corns has pointed out, the posthumously published works of Sir John Suckling and Thomas Carew were presented in 1646 and 1651 as witnesses to a lost world in which the arts had flourished.⁴ And when Andrew Marvell cast his mind back from 1648 to the period of his first acquaintance with Richard Lovelace as a young man at Cambridge, he defined the innocence of 'that candid Age' in terms of its literary contrast with a present infested with 'Word-peckers, Paper-rats, Book-scorpions'.⁵

From the perspective of a nation embroiled in Civil War or experimenting with new forms of government in the wake of a military coup, such an idealization of the past was natural enough – particularly among the gentry class which, it has been argued, enjoyed a period of ‘unparalleled prosperity’ during the 1630s.⁶ But the myth of a Caroline golden age was not the invention of disconsolate Cavaliers and royalist historians exploiting nostalgia for political purposes.⁷ It was created during the period of Charles I’s personal rule by writers and painters commissioned by the King or Queen, by poets seeking patronage, and by courtiers simply celebrating their own delight in an environment which favoured the cultivation of the arts.⁸ The various components that were to contribute to the making of the myth of the ‘halcyon days’ were ready to hand when the event which decisively changed the direction of Charles’s reign took place.⁹

On 23 August 1628, George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, was assassinated by a discontented naval officer as he was making preparations for an expedition to relieve the besieged French Protestants at La Rochelle. The strong dependence of Charles upon the friendship and political advice of his father’s last favourite had been forged during their abortive escapade to Madrid in 1623 to woo the Spanish Infanta. Buckingham had used his power over both the declining James I and the young prince to secure the subsequent war with Spain and the match with the fifteen-year-old French princess, Henrietta Maria, whom Charles married by proxy on 1 May 1625, a few weeks after succeeding to the throne; and he had continued to be the dominant influence in the new king’s political and personal life during the early years of his reign. In the opinion of L. J. Reeve, this relationship was a major factor in undermining the foundations upon which the system of Stuart government had hitherto rested:

The traditional notion of evil counsel had never been further than the shortest of steps from a reflection upon the monarch. In a situation such as that prevailing in 1628 this distinction could not be sustained. The basis for alarm was that, as events had shown, Charles was *susceptible* to such counsel. . . . The removal of Buckingham was to bring those who doubted the king a step closer to recognizing him as the cause of their grievances.¹⁰

Charles never forgave the House of Commons for impeaching his chief counsellor and closest friend in 1626 and when his own attempt to adjourn his third Parliament on 2 March 1629 was resisted, he retaliated by dissolving it and arresting the leading opponents of his policies. In a series of proclamations, he made it clear that he had no plans to

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summon another parliament in the immediate future. The death of the major architect of his foreign policy, however, had freed Charles to pursue a different course after the failure of the expedition to La Rochelle and he was ready to face the fact that he simply could not finance any more military adventures abroad. With the support of Richard Weston, who rapidly became the most powerful figure in the government as Lord Treasurer, peace treaties were signed with France in April 1629 and with Spain in November 1630.

The first years of Charles's marriage to Henrietta Maria had not been a success. Mentally and physically immature when she arrived in England in June 1625, the French princess was a Catholic in a Protestant country and initially encountered animosity on all sides. Fearing the loss of his own influence over the King, Buckingham had encouraged distrust of the Queen's French household, and Henrietta Maria herself caused dissension by refusing to attend the Protestant ceremony of her husband's coronation in 1626. By August 1628, however, she was ready to fill the void left in Charles's emotional life by the Duke's death and the royal marriage was soon re-established on a basis of mutual love. Her first pregnancy in January 1629 was said to have made the King 'very forward to have a peace' with France;¹¹ and the loss of their first-born helped to draw the couple closer together. When the future Charles II was born in 1630, Ben Jonson hailed the young mother as 'Spring / Of so much safety to the realm, and king'.¹² Thereafter there was a minor industry of poems greeting the result of each new confinement.¹³ The University of Oxford alone produced no less than five volumes to commemorate royal births between 1630 and 1640 and Henry King struck a representative note when he welcomed Charles back from a visit to Scotland in 1633 with the thought that the offspring of his 'fruitfull Love' for Henrietta Maria were 'Seales of your Joy, and of the Kingdome's Peace'.¹⁴

The arrival of Peter Paul Rubens in London in 1629 to conduct the peace negotiations on behalf of Spain gave Charles an opportunity to signal the change of foreign policy in cultural terms and to incorporate his improved relationship with his wife into the royal myth that was to be cultivated by court artists and writers throughout the 1630s. His major commission for the painter-diplomat was the decoration of the Banqueting House which Inigo Jones had designed for James I. In addition to the depiction of James as Solomon summoning the allegorical figures of Peace and Plenty, the central oval of the ceiling was to be

occupied by the apotheosis of James and the side panels filled with images of the Golden Age. All this was a continuation or revival of the cultural traditions of the previous reign, and it fed into the ‘halcyon myth’ that came to dominate the imagination of many Caroline courtiers and later royalists.¹⁵ Another of the works started by Rubens during his year in England anticipates a motif that was to run through many of the royal entertainments and much of the panegyric output of academic and court poets in the 1630s. In *A Landscape with Saint George and the Dragon*, Charles is the model for St George and Henrietta Maria is the princess who has inspired his courageous victory over the dragon. Malcolm Smuts decodes the political message embodied in the details of a picture in which ‘the landscape represents the kingdom itself’, released from the ‘devouring monster’ of war, and ‘the royal couple have already become guardians of peace, in an extended sense which encompasses their personal victories over passion, the defense of the church, and their patronage of the civilizing arts.’¹⁶

In the field of literature, it is appropriate to find at the threshold of the new age a liminal poem in the form of ‘A New-yeares gift. To the King’ by the man who has been described as ‘the Caroline *arbiter elegantiae*’, the number and variety of whose commendatory verses and literary epistles ‘testify to the central position he commanded in the artistic life of the court’.¹⁷ Thomas Carew had been personally singled out by Charles for service as a gentleman of the Privy Chamber and evidently enjoyed an intimate relationship with his royal master. The poem he presented to him on 1 January 1631 brings together the themes and motifs of both the commissions that had recently been given to Rubens and sets the cultural agenda for the decade that it ushers in so gracefully. After calling upon the classical god who stands at the gateway between the old year and the new to twine ‘auspicious dayes’ into a wreath for the monarch, Carew utters a benediction over Charles in his two family roles as husband and father. The joys of the marriage bed and fidelity to his beautiful consort have a direct bearing upon the performance of his kingly duties ‘by day’, seasoning the ‘cares’ of public responsibility with private consolation; and the fruits of that happy and stable union will be a blessing to both parents and kingdom, as they grow into the royal inheritance symbolized by their status as ‘Suns’ in the social and political firmament.¹⁸ Carew then turns to the strategies of international and domestic policy which it will be his task as an artist to endow with cultural values: