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RADICAL POSSIBILITIES:

LITERATURE IN THE ENGLISH REVOLUTION, 1640-1660

by

Brian Patton

Department of English

Submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Graduate Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario
August, 1993

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the circulation of radical social and political ideas in the literature of the 1640-1660 Revolution, when England's most fundamental institutions, from the monarchy to the patriarchal family, appeared in danger of annihilation. For students of literature, the period is so rich that its relative neglect seems remarkable. A lapse in government control over the nation's printing presses resulted in a veritable explosion of books, pamphlets and broadsides, and a literature that offers an unprecedented diversity of views and voices. Surveying a wide range of texts, from the familiar to the lesser-known, my study draws upon insights gleaned from cultural-materialist, new-historicist, and feminist criticism in an attempt to view the culture of mid-seventeenth century England as a complex set of dialogues between elite and non-elite voices.

The first section deals with real and imagined threats to the hierarchy of social rank. It begins with a chapter on Brome's A Jovial Crew, which, with its exploration of begging and vagrancy, anticipates the debates that would shortly achieve wide recognition with the rise of the Digger movement. The second chapter looks at constructions of popular political activism, with a focus on the role such constructions played in the propaganda war between the army leaders and those of the "Leveller" movement. The final chapter examines Marvell's "Upon Appleton House," which discloses the unsettling position of England's wealthy landowners in the wake of the regicide.

Section II turns to the seemingly imperilled hierarchy of gender. It opens with a chapter on the writings of female petitioners and the satirical responses to their activities. An equally hostile response was accorded sectarian women who claimed the power of prophecy; the second chapter looks at their writings and their implications. The reactions to both groups demonstrate anxiety over the state of the family, the model and building block of the commonwealth. The final chapter highlights this connection between the family and the state through an examination of some contemporary uses of marriage as a political metaphor.

for Teresa,

best friend and beloved

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Introduction

Several years ago, when I first encountered Milton's famous justification of the freedom of the press, Areopagitica, I found myself relying heavily upon George Sabine's brief introduction and copious notes in an attempt to place this address to "The Parliament of England" in the historical context that was so obviously important to it. Sabine's opening comments reminded me of Milton's pre-Paradise-Lost participation in something called "the Puritan Revolution," a phrase that may have prompted some further, equally vague recollections having to do with Cavaliers and Roundheads, Oliver Cromwell and King Charles I, and, perhaps, Marvell's "Horatian Ode." However, the marginal comments I scribbled during my reading indicate that the historical moment of Areopagitica was not, ultimately, the context in which I read it. Rather, I seem to have sought after other, more familiar contexts, noting similarities between this prose tract and Milton's poetic writings ("cf. 'L'Allegro'"), or highlighting points in his argument that might enable me to compare it with others favouring or opposing freedom of the press ("history as continual reformation, movement towards spiritual truth, the 'whole body' of Osiris"). In short, I was reading a political pamphlet that spoke to a particular set of historical circumstances, but I was ill prepared to read it as such. Apparently the abolition of Star Chamber in 1641 had opened a gaping hole in the government's control of censorship, and the 1643 ordinance to which Milton was responding represented an attempt to re-assert control over the nation's presses. But what exactly was rolling off those presses, other than Milton's Areopagitica, remained a mystery.

I would like to think that my ignorance of the state of English literature in 1644, when Areopagitica was published, was not unique. Fortunately, a glance through a few familiar literary-historical sources would probably confirm this hopeful suspicion. The third edition of The Norton Anthology of English Literature, the text through which I was introduced to the "major authors" and historical periods of English Literature, prefaced its section on "The Seventeenth Century (1603-1660)" by informing me of the centrality of "the Puritan Revolution," which not only defined the end of a period of literary history, but illuminated an entire century:

> The quarrels and controversies which culminated in this upheaval began to make themselves felt shortly after 1588; its tremors and aftershocks largely subsided after 1688. In more senses than one, the Revolution was the central event of the century. (Adams 575)

Yet of all the writers featured in this section, only one, Milton, had even lived through the years of the Revolution, and only two of his anthologised works seemed to have anything to do with "the central event of the century": one was the poem "On the New Forcers of Conscience Under the Long Parliament," and the other was, once again, the pamphlet Areopagitica.

The Norton Anthology's relative neglect of the literature produced between 1640 and 1660 is anything but anomalous, though. On the contrary, the anthology simply mirrors a practice of literary historians and university English departments so routine that James Holstun has recently dubbed this much-overlooked period "one of the great lacunae in British literary history" ("Introduction" 2). Pamphlet Wars, a recent volume

of essays exploring the prose of the English Revolution, represents Holstun's attempt to begin probing this fascinating yet neglected moment in literary history, which,

> with the *de facto* breakdown of censorship . . . saw a staggering output of more than 20,000 books, pamphlets, broadsides and newspapers: sermons and scriptural commentaries mixed with satires and fictions, political theory and manifestos--a polyglot Babel of print . . . . (1)

This thesis represents my own modest contribution to the exploration of this polyglot Babel of print.

The chapters that follow offer readings of a wide variety of texts emanating from an equally wide variety of sources, but all somehow participating in the complex tangle of social, political, and religious conflicts that beset England between 1640, when the Long Parliament made its long-awaited return to Westminster, and 1660, when Charles II returned to England to reclaim the throne his father had hastily vacated some eighteen years earlier. In other words, the texts I have assembled here come from and speak to the historical events we have come to know as the English Revolution, and they illuminate and are illuminated by their historical situation. More specifically, though, the texts I have chosen are in diverse ways suggestive of the radical possibilities of those turbulent years.

What makes these works and their historical moment so fascinating is that they display the effects of a powerful clash between prevailing assumptions regarding the very bases of English society and circumstances that appeared to throw all of those assumptions into doubt, or even render them obsolete. In his famous 1943 study,

E.M.W. Tillyard outlined the details of what he called the "Elizabethan world picture," an orderly and hierarchical world view that he held to be common to "the Elizabethans," by whom he meant, apparently, all English men and women in the sixteenth century and well into the seventeenth. Whether one subscribes to Tillyard's (still famous but now less reputable) view, or to the more popular contemporary alternative--that this "world picture" might be better described as an element of a complex ideological apparatus shoring up the several institutions of Renaissance England--it remains beyond doubt that the writing of Tudor and early Stuart England is replete with invocations of hierarchies both mundane and divine. The standard assumption, moreover, is that hierarchy is synonymous with order, and its only possible alternative is chaos. In his Book Named the Governor (1531), the Henrician humanist Thomas Elyot delineated the benefits of a hierarchical society controlled by a small aristocracy, contending that such an arrangement most resembled the manner in which God had arranged the heavens: ". . . euery thyng is in ordre, and without ordre may be nothing stable or permanent; and it may nat be called ordre excepte it do contayne in it degrees, high and base, accordynge to the merite or estimation of the thyng that is ordred" (1.1). Elyot's sentiments were famously echoed by Shakespeare's Ulysses in Troilus and Cressida, and by innumerable other speakers and writers of succeeding generations (Tillyard 18-28).

It followed from the sanctity of order (equated with hierarchy) that a rebellion of the "base" against the "high" was, as a homily of 1570 put it, "the greatest of all mischiefs" (An Homily against Disobedience 98). This notion, too, remained in evidence for decades: it is a recurrent theme in the political writings of King James I, and in

those of the patriarchalist Sir Robert Filmer, who deemed it absurd that "the People," who had, rightly, always been ruled, should demand liberty (57). For Filmer, as for James and countless royalists of the 1640s and 1650s, the monarch was the keystone of an ordered society: to imperil his position in any way was to risk bringing the whole social structure crashing down.

In the eyes of many who witnessed the events of the middle decades of the seventeenth century, then, England was living a nightmare that had tormented it for generations. Long simmering hostilities between the king and Parliament exploded when Charles was finally forced to recall Parliament in 1640 after more than a decade of personal rule. By January of 1642, popular enmity toward the king had grown to the point where he and the royal family were forced to leave Westminster, fearing for their personal safety. Months later, Charles declared war on Parliament, initiating the bloody civil war that would be fought intermittently over the next four years, culminating in the king's defeat in 1646.[1] During subsequent negotiations between the king and Parliament, royalist forces encouraged a series of revolts against Parliament, raising the ire of its generals and galvanising the newly formed and increasingly radical New Model Army. During yet another series of negotiations between Charles and Parliament, the army itself intervened. On November 29, 1648, a delegation from the Army Council arrived at the Isle of Wight with instructions to seize the king, who was to be tried for having "traitorously and maliciously waged war against his people" (Nalson 26). Just over a week later, Colonel Pride purged Parliament of the army's opponents, leaving the residual "Rump" Parliament with little more than a rubber stamp with which to approve

the army's plans. On January 20, the king's trial began, and nine days later "the royal actor born" mounted the scaffold at Whitehall for his last and most memorable scene.

Marvell's famous recounting of the king's execution, in his "Horatian Ode," heralds a new order in which the ancient right of a monarch has no place, and power is something to be gained, and maintained, by "arts." It is the making and the mapping of this radically challenged world that will be the focus of this dissertation. If generations prior to those who lived through the Revolution habitually *imagined* radical alternatives to their social, political and religious institutions in order to repudiate those alternatives, it appeared, at mid-century, to the staunch defenders of the old institutions that the feared chaos was now imminent. Presbyterians wrested ecclesiastical power from the bishops only to find themselves waging an apparently hopeless war on a profusion of protestant sects, who gave ear to untutored "tub preachers" and even, in some cases, female prophets. Parliament fought a war with the king only to see its chief army, the New Model, transform itself into a separate political force more powerful than the king and Parliament alike. And, having freed the press from Star Chamber control, Parliament found itself unable to re-assert any effective control. London and environs were flooded with an unprecedented number and variety of books, pamphlets and broadsides in which readers were offered everything from risqué sexual satire to sophisticated political theory. The press became the principal tool in the period's propaganda wars, employed by groups as diverse as the royalist faction and the communist Diggers. Meanwhile, a series of "diurnals" and "mercuries" offered English men and women their first running accounts of domestic affairs (Clyde 57); in 1645, even some of the king's most private

papers, captured at Naseby, were published, allowing ordinary citizens into the previously forbidden territory of state secrets (Carlton, Charles I 289). Little wonder then, that England in the 1640s and 1650s was, and is, frequently described as a world turned upside down.

The possibility that the world could be turned upside down, or otherwise radically re-arranged, is the idea that connects the chapters that follow. The first section explores the threat--a threat both real and imagined--that the prevailing winds of revolution might exert a democratising or levelling influence on English society. The hierarchy of social rank, and the distribution of property and wealth that lent both ideological and practical support to it, was a source of great debate and anxiety during these turbulent years. The apparent obliteration of the old order inevitably raised the compelling question, what was to take its place? Some of the proffered responses made wealthy landowners, including those at the helm of the New Model Army, more than a little nervous. The Levellers proposed a moderate expansion of the franchise, while the humble Diggers, omitted from the plans of the Levellers and so many others, proceeded to reclaim untilled "waste lands" in order to feed themselves. For the Digger Gerrard Winstanley, who advanced his utopian programme in The Law of Freedom in a Platform, that the world he inherited could be turned upside down was cause for celebration.

Section II focuses on another, related hierarchy that seemed at risk amidst the confusion of the times: the hierarchy of gender. Nothing in the period's manuals for feminine instruction encouraged women to enter into the day's religious and social controversies, yet their presence and active participation are undeniable. London women

of the 1640s and 1650s wrote, circulated, and presented various petitions to Parliament, punctuated on occasion with a spectacular show of numbers in support of their demands. Among the sects, there was a remarkable increase in the activities of female prophets, who preached at church meetings and on the streets, and whose pronouncements could on occasion interest the most powerful men in the kingdom. Little of this unwonted public activity on the part of women was to the liking of the more conservatively minded, who feared that such preaching and petitioning women were threatening the institution of the patriarchal family, even as the broader conflict was transforming the analogous political and religious institutions in which it played an essential part.

At the considerable risk of appearing to make a glib show of cultural self-awareness, I nonetheless feel it important to make some attempt to acknowledge the historical "embeddedness" of the text that follows. This dissertation, like the texts it examines, is the product of a particular author--me--situated in a particular time and place--the much fought-over groves of Academe in 1993. It reflects, I hope, the perspective of one who has come to the predominantly upper-middle-class assumptions of traditional literary study from a point outside, and who finds he cannot but applaud the contemporary trend to view the worlds of our past and present through a wider-angle lens. One of the more common arguments advanced by literary critics in recent years is that an unfortunate part of our critical heritage is a tendency to ignore the diversity of literary works available to us. At present (and glibness, again, is an ever present danger) students of literature are increasingly reminded of the value of attending to "other voices," in the literatures we study--of attempting, in other words, to look beyond the

familiar in order to discover the unfamiliar, or, in a phrase that has perhaps become too familiar, to look beyond the centre in order to see what lies at the margins. At its best, such an enterprise stands to enrich our sense of the cultures we study.

Readers conversant with seventeenth-century English literature will find much here that *is* familiar. Andrew Marvell is a major presence; Milton is here as the author of the divorce tracts and one or two other contemporary works; the Caroline playwright Richard Brome is the subject of one chapter; Thomas Browne and Thomas Hobbes both make appearances. But I have also tried to admit at least some of the teeming rabble whose clamorous voices dissolved into the footnotes of my old paperback edition of Areopagitica. The writings of Lilburne and Winstanley are here, along with the protracted rant of the wonderfully paranoid Presbyterian Thomas Edwards, the petitions of Leveller and other women, and the prophecies of Anna Trapnel and Elizabeth Poole.

It will quickly become clear, if it has not already, that literary criticism's much-debated return to the subject of history--a trend most clearly in evidence among those who study the literature of the English Renaissance--has exerted an overwhelming influence on my approach to the literature and culture of revolutionary England. Certainly, that approach owes much to the work of cultural-materialist critics such as Jonathan Dollimore, Catherine Belsey and Raymond Williams, who regard culture as a multi-faceted and internally fractured field in which (in Williams's terms) "residual," "dominant" and "emergent" elements contend with each other (Marxism and Literature 121-27) or (in Dollimore's) "non-dominant elements interact with the dominant forms, sometimes co-existing with, or being absorbed or even destroyed by them, but also

challenging, modifying or even displacing them" (Radical Tragedy 7). As Belsey has argued, a materialist understanding of culture offers us a new way of reading texts as sites of diverse and often competing "discourses" which disclose "their uncertainty, their instability, their relativity" ("Literature" 24). Since it subordinates nebulous aesthetic concerns to political ones, such an approach justifies a considerable increase in the number and variety of texts that can be seen to merit critical attention.

I have been influenced, too, by some of the diverse critical practices that are generally gathered under the banner of "the new historicism"--in particular the work of Stephen Greenblatt and Louis Montrose. In a 1986 essay, some of the basic tenets of American new historicism were outlined by Montrose as follow:

> . . . the newer historical criticism is *new* in its refusal of unproblematized distinctions between "literature" and "history," between "text" and "context"; new in resisting a prevalent tendency to posit and privilege a unified and autonomous individual--whether an Author or a Work--to be set against a social or literary background. Briefly and too simply characterized, its collective project is to resituate canonical literary texts among the multiple forms of writing, and in relation to the non-discursive practices and institutions, of the social formation in which those texts have been produced--while, at the same time, recognizing that this project of historical resituation is necessarily the textual construction of critics who are themselves historical subjects. (6)

My study has much in common with the "newer historical criticism" to which Montrose

refers: it draws upon not only recognisably "literary" texts such as Marvell's "Upon Appleton House," but texts, such as Elizabeth Poole's A Vision, which have previously been treated as uncomplicated historical documents; I have tried to regard my chosen texts not as disinterested reflections of surrounding circumstances but rather as *deeply* interested constituents of those circumstances; I have tried to highlight the ways in which individual voices and works are often divided against themselves and cannot be reduced to a spurious unity; and, finally, I have tried to remain aware that my research and writing have taken place at a time when passionate debates over the future of the literary canon are taking place among many members of English departments in this country and elsewhere, and that the nature of my research inevitably discloses my own views on this question. I will end with an attempt to clarify those views.

It is important to recall that new historicism did not emerge, full grown, from the head of either Greenblatt, Montrose, or Michel Foucault . As Judith Lowder Newton has reminded us, its emphasis on the subjective and historical nature of knowledge owes more to the work of feminist critics and historians than is often recognised (153). It is my hope that the broad focus of this study produces a more complex and inclusive view of seventeenth-century English culture, and thus avoids at least some of the characteristic omissions of a critical approach that, in spite of its potential to do otherwise, often seems to bring us back, in Newton's phrase, to "history as usual." Montrose contends (in an admittedly brief and over-simplified manner) that the collective project of new historicism "is to resituate canonical literary texts among the multiple forms of writing, and in relation to the non-discursive practices and institutions, of the social formation in which

those texts have been produced." However valuable, though, this proposed resituation of canonical texts does not seem sufficiently "new" if it fails to bring those other "multiple forms of writing" into clearer view. As Newton and others have observed, many critics who are recognised as practitioners of new historicism have exhibited a "tendency to insist upon the totalizing power of hegemonic ideologies, ideologies implicitly informed by elite male values and often presented as typical of the way culture itself is constructed as a whole" (166). James Holstun recently catalogued a series of new historicist studies which feature "this model of a dominant social order that reproduces itself by producing and containing its own controlled subversion," pointing out that in most cases the chosen metonymic texts were all too often familiar products of elite culture, while avowedly oppositional popular texts tended to be ignored ("Ranting" 197, 192). A disturbing result of such a limited approach is, in Frank Lentricchia's formulation, an apparent demonstration that "radicalism is a representation of orthodoxy in its most politically cunning form and that all struggle against a dominant ideology is in vain" (239). My hope, in including the voices of those seventeenth-century writers and thinkers who have been recognised as exponents of various forms of religious and political radicalism, is that an alternative understanding of culture might emerge--one that is characterised by a complex web of dialogues between elite and non-elite voices, rather than a monologue involving only the former.

A great deal has been said and written of late by theorists and practitioners of political and historical criticism, as well as their critics, regarding the Foucault-influenced "subversion/containment" paradigm to which Newton, Holstun, and

Lentricchia refer--a model based upon Foucault's understanding of power as a diffuse and all-encompassing force in which resistance is always contained (Foucault 95). Dollimore has summarised tl.e "so-called subversion/containment problematic" in the following manner:

> . . . repressive laws are seen not only to defeat us coercively--that much was always obvious--but to inhabit us in ways which ensure our defeat prior to, in ways other than, direct force. Resistance from the margins seems doomed to replicate internally the strategies, structures, even the values of the dominant. (Sexual Dissidence 81)

In a study centring on a failed revolution, or perhaps even a whole series of failed revolutions, the notion that all resistance is ultimately futile might seem to give particular cause for despair. But as Dollimore sensibly points out, containment theorists cannot reasonably judge the success of every instance of "subversion" or "transgression" by the impossible criterion of a "complete transformation of the social (i.e. revolution), or total personal liberation within, or escape from it (i.e. redemption)" (Sexual Dissidence 85). To do so is to disregard "the part played by contradiction and dislocation in the mutually reactive process of transgression and its control" (86). To acknowledge the resilience of power structures and social institutions is not to despair of social change--societies do, after all, undergo countless transformations--but to recognise the tenacity of those structures which stand in opposition to forces for change.

Inevitably, much of what follows will indeed confirm the pervasiveness of "hegemonic ideologies," and will focus on various instances of real or apparent

"subversion" that were ultimately contained. After all, whether or not the events of 1640-1660 constitute a "revolution" in the modern, political sense, they might be (simplistically) regarded as constituting a "revolution" in the older sense of "a movement in a circular direction": the restoration of Charles II in 1660 saw the world turned right-side up again; Winstanley's utopia failed to materialise, as did a whole range of new world orders proclaimed by the various sects. And the paradigm of subversion/containment is a helpful one in considering how various battles of the propaganda wars were waged and won by those who were best able to remake their opponents into demonic agents of subversion. However, a model that attempts to reduce the infinite complexities of culture to a series of exchanges within a narrowly-defined "hegemonic ideology" derived from a small handful of canonical texts cannot possibly do justice to the social and literary conflicts of this period or any other. The projected fears of dominant groups are everywhere in evidence, but they are not projected onto blank screens. The subjectivities of oppositional figures like Gerrard Winstanley and Elizabeth Poole, while unquestionably permeated by the often unspoken and unacknowledged assumptions of the worlds in which they lived and thought, remain *their* subjectivities. Their voices are not mere projections of their social betters. They are their own, they are distinct, and they are worth attending to.

Notes

[1] Charles Carlton describes the civil wars of mid-century as "the bloodiest conflict in relative terms in English history" ("The Impact of the Fighting" 20). He estimates that "of England's population of roughly five millions, 3.6 per cent perished as a result of the civil wars. By comparison 2.6 per cent of the population of the United Kingdom lost their lives as a result of the First World War, and only 0.6 from the Second World War" (20).

II Revolutions From Below

"As the king at first called a Parliament he could not rule, and afterwards the Parliament raised an army it could not rule, so the army have agitators they cannot rule. What the end will be, God only knows."

-- Sir Edward Nicholas

Introduction

The influence of Marxism on the work of historians of seventeenth-century England is most obvious in the emphasis in recent decades upon the potential for understanding a history "from below." Twentieth-century students of the period inherited the notion of a "Puritan Revolution" from S.R. Gardiner's highly influential History of the Great Civil War (1893), but by mid-century, the adequacy of this model, which placed an overwhelming emphasis upon political and religious conflicts at the expense of social and economic ones, began to be called into question. Foremost among its challengers was Christopher Hill, whose The World Turned Upside Down (1972) provided readers with some insights into what the English Revolution meant to those who--at various removes from the centre of power--participated in the period's less familiar radical movements such as the Levellers, Diggers, Ranters and Quakers.

To the more conservatively minded inhabitants of seventeenth-century England, and to those whose investment in the old order was great, the possibility of their world being overturned was a terrifying one that appeared to be immanent in the political and social turmoil that reached a climax with the execution of the king. Contemporary fears coalesced around the notion of "levelling," a practice variously understood to involve attacks on enclosures and attacks on the social order alike. But of course, property and rank were intimately related concepts--mutually supportive ones, in fact. The chapters in this first section explore some of the anxieties and, in the cases of those who had something to gain, the hopes stemming from the apparent threat posed by the

revolutionary currents of mid-century to the fundamental social and economic institutions of property and rank. The first chapter focuses on Richard Brome's A Jovial Crew, a play written and produced on the eve of the first civil war that undertakes a rare dramatisation of the situations of England's vagrants. With its critique of an economic system that not only allows but creates an abundance of vagrants, Brome's play anticipates some of the debates that would involve England's would-be revolutionaries in the coming years. The second chapter looks at some constructions of popular political involvement during the 1640s, considering how the widely detested notion of "levelling" came into play during the propaganda wars, particularly those conducted by the army "Levellers" and the army leaders who seized power in 1648. It contends that the successful imposition of negative constructions like "levellers" or "the mob" on popular activists served an effective de-historicising and de-legitimising function. Finally, the third chapter explores the dilemma of the fundamentally conservative "revolutionary" Sir Thomas Fairfax by way of Andrew Marvell's celebration of the Fairfax estate in "Upon Appleton House." As Commander-in-Chief of the New Model Army and eventually all of the Parliamentary forces, Fairfax was a major player in the war against the king. Yet, like so many of his peers, he looked on in dismay as forces that he had helped to unleash began to take on a life of their own. Regicide was never a part of Fairfax's plans, yet his own officers ended the negotiations that were to lead to Charles's restoration, and brought their king to trial on a charge of treason. As a poem in the tradition of Jonson's "To Penshurst," "Upon Appleton House" celebrates the social and economic order that makes country houses like Nun Appleton possible, but this celebration, coming as it does

in the midst of the crisis from which Fairfax had only recently withdrawn, is, to say the least, a troubled one.

1/ Beggars and Merry Beggars: Brome's A Jovial Crew

Although Richard Brome lived at least another decade after A Jovial Crew: or, The Merry Beggars opened in 1641, historical circumstances had destined it to be his final play. A Jovial Crew had the dubious "luck," as Brome remarks in his dedication to Thomas Stanley, "to tumble last of all in the epidemicall ruin of the scene" (27). Composed in 1640 and/or the early months of 1641, A Jovial Crew was probably being performed when, on September 2, 1642, the First Ordinance of the Long Parliament against Stage-plays and Interludes closed the theatres, bringing Brome's career, along with those of his fellow playwrights, to an abrupt halt.

The closing of the theatres on the eve of the Civil War marks a critical turning point in the history of English drama, but a growing interest in the pamphlet literature of the 1640s is beginning to dispel the notion that the rest is silence. Both Margot Heinemann and Richard Butler have convincingly demonstrated that there are some important connections to be made between the popular drama of the later Caroline period and the seemingly endless stream of pamphlets that poured off the printing presses following the abolition, in 1641, of the government's principal censoring body, the much despised Star Chamber. Through the work of Middleton and other writers whom she regards as "opposition dramatists," Heinemann traces a "tradition of popular secular critical writing" which in the 1640s "appears in a new and increasingly confident form" (237). Many of the anti-papist, anti-Laudian, and Leveller pamphlets of the 1640s are semi-dramatic in their form, and more still--including the Leveller newspaper, Mercurius

Militaris--are full of dramatic allusions (252). One might add that royalist pamphlets seeking popular support--such as Craftie Cromwell (1648), New-Market Fayre (1649), and the various "Mistress Parliament" dialogues--were also likely to be cast in a semi-dramatic mould.

Like Heinemann, Martin Butler sees the playlets of the 1640s as positive evidence that there is some continuity between the popular drama of the 1630s and the pamphlet war that came in its wake. Even if only a small number of the playlets are actually stageable, Butler insists,

> they are still significant for their demonstration of the real continuity between the concerns of the Caroline drama and of the political pamphleteering which took over the mass market from it in the following decades, that 1642 did not mark a dead-end but that the developments of the revolutionary years took place on ground which the theatres had helped, energetically, to prepare. (247)

Whether or not we choose to regard the social and political upheaval of the 1640s and 1650s as a "revolution," it *is* clear that many fundamental assumptions about the bases of England's social order were openly questioned and challenged as they had not been in previous decades. The literary and political campaigns of the Leveller and Digger movements sought to introduce varying degrees of reform into a society where "innovation" was, to many minds, synonymous with rebellion. The radical critique of social and economic injustice mounted by Winstanley in the aftermath of the regicide in 1649 demonstrates the freedom of speech that was, at least temporarily, available to

dissenters at the time. But, as A Jovial Crew illustrates, neither the problem nor the critical assessment was entirely novel.

The conjunction of Brome's subject matter and the date of his final play's appearance on stage makes it a particularly apt place to begin this study. Not only did A Jovial Crew appear on the eve of the literary and political explosion that would bring a thinker like Winstanley into public life, but it focuses on the lives of England's vagrants and beggars, the bane of monarchs and local governments alike, who stood to benefit in Winstanley's Utopia. For almost a century prior to 1640, the vagrancy problem in England had been growing at a disturbing rate owing to a variety of factors including population growth, landlessness, and the rise of wage-labour, which typically offered the landless meagre and insecure incomes during a period of relatively high inflation.[1] According to A.L. Beier, "between 1620 and 1650 these developments reached a crisis point, and the condition of the vagrant poor sharply deteriorated" (14). Like the greater world surrounding it, the world of A Jovial Crew contains so many beggars that "now the countries swarm with 'em under every hedge, as if an innumerable army of 'em were lately disbanded without pay" (5.1.74-76).

For generations, local and national authorities had struggled in vain against the problem of vagrancy. The Poor Relief Act of 1598 and its companion, the Poor Law Act of 1601, were preceded by over two centuries of legislation aimed at curtailing the wanderings of the lower orders. As early as 1351, Edward III's Statute of Labourers had attempted to control the movement of then scarce labourers by forbidding employers to pay higher wages (Bagley & Bagley 1351). Several Tudor acts, beginning with that of

1495, had sought to restrict the activities of vagabonds and beggars. The frequency with which such subsequent proclamations appeared indicates not only the enormity and tenacity of the vagrancy problem, but also its importance to England's rulers. The vagrant, after all, lived outside of the fixed and orderly world striven after by a succession of Tudor and Stuart monarchs.

While one might agree with Heinemann's contention that "in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama the common people do have a voice . . . and often provide a sceptical commentary on the main heroic or royal action" (255), inquiries into the causes of beggary, or of the circumstances of beggars' lives, are remarkably rare on the Caroline stage. Of course, Brome's play is not some gritty seventeenth-century equivalent of "social realism"; it is a comedy, as both its title--A Jovial Crew--and its subtitle--The Merry Beggars--would indicate. But it is a comedy that wanders into a region that would not seem to offer much in the way of humorous material. One wonders what could be less funny than poverty, hunger, homelessness, and the threat of the stocks or the lash--so we should not be overly surprised to discover that Brome tidies up his beggars for us, or that he romanticises the beggar's life. What is surprising, though, is that the play does more than romanticise. A Jovial Crew is also full of indications that the beggar's life is indeed a horrible one, and that romantic notions about that life are merely that. In fact, the play's main plot puts such romantic notions to the test and demonstrates for us how great is the difference between the romantic preconception and the thing itself. More remarkable still is that Brome's play goes so far as to de-mystify the origins of wealth and poverty. Several years before Winstanley and his little community of Diggers

began to till the waste lands at St. George's Hill in Surrey, Brome offered theatre-goers a disparaging look at an economic system based on greed, whose beneficiaries, the wealthy, attained their positions by preying upon their weaker fellows and reducing them to a state of beggary.

Critical attention recently accorded Brome--most notably by Butler--coupled with the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of A Jovial Crew in 1992 (the first in over two centuries), would indicate that Brome's star is on the rise. Nonetheless, even this, the best known of his plays, remains largely unfamiliar to readers and theatre-goers--so a brief synopsis is probably in order. As the play opens, Squire Oldrents, a model country gentleman, describes to his companion, Hearty, how he is troubled by a fortune-teller's prophecy: Oldrents has been warned that his two daughters, Rachel and Meriel, will prove beggars. Beggars are not entirely foreign to Oldrents: as the most generous housekeeper in the land, he charitably supports a horde of them, all of whom duly sing his praises. Nonetheless, the squire is less than keen on the idea of his offspring actually joining their society, jovial or otherwise. Another connection between Oldrents and the beggars' world is established through his steward, Springlove, a partially reformed beggar whom Oldrents has tried to cure of his wandering ways. Straddling the play's two social worlds, Springlove is torn between his loyalty to his beloved master, and his innate and apparently unconquerable desire to wander the countryside as a beggar. With Oldrents's tolerance, but not with his approval, Springlove has been leading a double life: during the winter months he is as fine a steward as Oldrents is a squire, but with the coming of spring, Springlove heeds the call of his blood and goes into the world as

himself, as a beggar.

The play's subplots also involve movements from the stable world of Oldrents's country estate to the migratory world of the beggars. In one sub-plot, Oldrents's daughters, Rachel and Meriel, challenge their suitors, Vincent and Hilliard, to try the beggar's life with them. They hope that a little tour of the economic underworld will serve a double purpose: it will test the resolve of their suitors, and at the same time it will harmlessly fulfil--and thus defuse--the dark prophecy of the patrico, the beggar fortune-teller. In the other, related sub-plot, Amie, niece to Justice Clack, and Martin, the justice's clerk, run off into the beggars' world in an attempt to defy Clack's plan to marry his daughter to the well-born but unappetising Tallboy.

Thus both plot and subplot offer us glimpses into the world of beggary, and over the course of the play we see some competing notions as to what the beggar's life is like and, most important, what compels people to beg. More precisely, Brome's play offers two contradictory answers to the question, where do beggars come from? The first and least contentious answer to this question is that beggars are born, not made--and the character who most clearly embodies this notion of "begging as nature" is Springlove, whose compulsion to beg is equated with a kind of spring fever. The song of a nightingale is heard on stage and Springlove is once again compelled to demand another temporary release. "Oh, sir, you hear I am call'd," he says to his dispirited master: ". . . 'tis the season of the year that calls me./What moves her notes provokes my disposition/By a more absolute power of nature than/Philosophy can render an accompt for" (1.1.152, 166-69). Like the nightingale, or the swallow or cuckoo to whom he

likens himself (1.1.180, 5.1.369), Springlove and his fellow beggars are motivated by a force beyond reason, a force of nature that inflames the blood of their kind.

The play appears to confirm Springlove's understanding of his own true nature. When he re-enters the beggars' world, it is clear that, unlike his gentle companions, Vincent and Hilliard, he has arrived in a place where he belongs. During their first night away from Oldrents's estate, the three retreat from a tempestuous storm into a barn where they enjoy the combined company of a jovial crew and a herd of insomniac and storm-tormented pigs. The following morning, Springlove informs his drowsy and incredulous companions that he has not slept "so well these eighteen months, I swear, since my last walks" (3.1.17-18). Springlove's love for the begging life, incomprehensible to Vincent and Hilliard, substantiates his earlier assertion that "They dream of happiness that live in state,/But those enjoy it that obey their fate" (1.1.495).

Obviously, this notion that beggars are drawn to begging by natural forces offers little hope for well-intentioned people who, like Oldrents, would rescue one or two souls from the mean existence of the beggar. If begging is a part of nature, then it cannot be eliminated. Accordingly, A Jovial Crew suggests that there is little to be done for the poor other than to maintain the established system of charity. Oldrents's groom observes, of the beggars who arrive at his master's estate to partake of his charity, that "'Tis the seat, the habitation, the rendezvous that cheers their hearts. Money would clog their consciences" (1.1.315-17). Springlove confirms the groom's assertion later in the play when he accepts money from Martin after Springlove has offered the runaway lovers some food. When Martin offers "something towards your reckoning," Springlove resists,

insisting that he will receive "Nothing by way of bargain, gentle master. 'Tis against order, and will never thrive." He will, however, accept "your reward in charity" (3.1.489-94). For Springlove, the distinction between money paid for a service rendered and money given in charity is not merely a semantic one. On the contrary, it is crucial: if he is to be truly of the beggars' world, Springlove cannot *earn* the money he requires.

This distinction, upon which Springlove insists, between money earned and money received in charity is crucial not only because it is the marker separating beggars from everyone else--from those who participate in the conventional economy--but also because their dependence upon charity is the key to the freedom that is unique to beggars and that is the source of their eponymous joviality. To beg, the play tells us, is to receive an income without incurring obligations or responsibilities--so beggars, who "of all men's meat and all men's money/Take a free part; and, wheresoe'er they travel,/Have all things gratis to their hands provided" (2.1.177-79), are the most carefree people in the world. In fact, as Meriel admiringly describes them, beggars are

> The only free men of a commonwealth;
>
> Free above scot-free; that observe no law,
>
> Obey no governor, use no religion,
>
> But what they draw from their own ancient custom,
>
> Or constitute themselves, yet are no rebels. (2.1.172-76)

Such envious accounts recur throughout, and the beggars themselves often appear to confirm this happy construction of their lives. The first sign of the jovial crew that we hear is a beggar's song that begins with the following verse:

From hunger and cold, who lives more free,

Or who more richly clad than we?

Our bellies are full; our flesh is warm;

And, against pride, our rags are a charm.

Enough is our feast, and for tomorrow

Let rich men care; we feel no sorrow.

No sorrow, no sorrow, no sorrow, no sorrow.

Let rich men care; we feel no sorrow. (339-46)

The merriment of the song's composer cannot be called into doubt, but one could perhaps be more convinced of his familiarity with the lives of beggars.

This notion that pervades Brome's play, that beggars are happily free from the burdens of wealth, is a recurrent one in contemporary ballads, and the strong similarity suggests that such songs are among the sources for A Jovial Crew. For instance, in a ballad entitled The cunning Northerne Begger, the title character declares, "Yet though I'm bare,/I'm free from care,/A fig for your preferments." Similarly, The Begger-Boy of the North proclaims that "The richest miser that liveth this day,/Hath not so much ground as I at disposing./My fields lye open as the high way,/I wrong not the Country by greedy inclosing." It would appear, then, that the carefree "merry beggar" celebrated by Brome's characters is a popular type, a figure who might well have been familiar to theatre-goers in 1641 or 1642.

Brome's insertion of this popular type into his play is noteworthy because, unlike either the balladeers or even his own characters, he seems intent upon taking a more

critical look at it. In other words, while it is true that there are a number of points at which A Jovial Crew offers us a simplistic and romantic picture of carefree beggars enjoying the benevolence of the careworn wealthy, such an account does not do justice to the play's complexities. A Jovial Crew's wealthiest figure, Oldrents, is indeed its most troubled, and his melancholy does stem from the burden of his wealth: because he has so much, he has so much more to lose, and is thus vulnerable to prophecies such as that o. the patrico. However, significantly, Brome allows neither Oldrents's self-pity nor the fanciful notion of poverty that sustains it to remain unchallenged. When Oldrents observes the beggars' feast he rehearses the popular commonplaces regarding poverty and wealth, and freedom and responsibility. He is filled, he says, "with envy/At their full happiness." And he asks his companion, Hearty,

> What is an estate
>
> Of wealth and power, balanc'd with their freedom,
>
> But a mere load of outward compliment,
>
> When they enjoy the fruits of rich content?
>
> Our dross but weighs us down into despair,
>
> While their sublimed spirits dance i'th'air. (2.2 185-90)

But Hearty--who, we are reminded at several points, is a decayed gentleman--is in a particularly good position to mount a sensible challenge to Oldrents's obviously simplistic view. Though he does not share the supposedly sublime freedom of the beggars, he is far enough removed from Oldrents's own financial position to view his patron's words with a more sceptical eye. In fact, the difference between Hearty and the beggars is one

of degree rather than kind. Like the beggars, Hearty too is dependent upon Oldrents for even his food and lodging. And, also like them, Oldrents's companion earns his keep by entertaining the master of the house. The groom Randall's sincere commendation of Hearty, while celebrating the man, also hints at a relationship not entirely untainted by material concerns:

> But of all the gentlemen that toss up the ball, yea and the sack, too, commend me to old Master Hearty, a decay'd gentleman, lives most upon his own mirth and my master's means, and much good do him with it. He is the finest companion of all. He does so hold my master up with stories, and songs, and catches, and t'other cup of sack, and such tricks and jigs, you would admire. (4.1.113-20)

Hearty's similarity to the "merry grigs" who flock to Oldrents's estate for sustenance lends authority to his response to Oldrents's poverty-envy. "I ha' not so much wealth to weigh me down," he remarks, "Nor so little (I thank Chance) as to dance naked" (2.2.191-92). However, Hearty's gentle irony is lost on Oldrents, who merely agrees that Hearty is indeed "the merrier man," although the beggars "exceed thee in that way so far/That should I know my children now were beggars . . . I must conclude/They were not lost, nor I to be aggriev'd" (2.2.194-98). The illogicality of Oldrents's position (he celebrates beggary while grieving over the prospect of his own children becoming beggars) only serves to make us more aware of the fog through which he views himself and his world. His observations on the begging life demonstrate what circumstances later in the play will accentuate: that Oldrents's most glaring deficiency is a failure to

comprehend his role in an economic system whose margins are inhabited by beggars dependent upon his charity. This exchange between Oldrents and Hearty over the notion of the "merry beggar" is an important one because it produces a moment of dramatic irony: Oldrents rehearses the familiar lines, but Hearty knows better, and his gentle reproach, while perhaps missed by its immediate audience, does not fall on deaf ears. Brome's audience is also invited to regard the "merry beggar" as an absurd fiction; in fact, a main effect of the Vincent and Hilliard/Rachel and Meriel sub-plot is to bring this absurdity to the fore. The suitors begin, like Oldrents, in envy of the jovial crew. Hilliard echoes Oldrents and the ballads alike when he declares that beggars

> are the only people can boast the benefit of a free state, in the full enjoyment of liberty, mirth and ease, having all things in common and nothing wanting of nature's whole provision within the reach of their desires. (2.1.2-5)

But unlike Oldrents, Vincent and Hilliard are persuaded to put their ideas to a test. When they agree to play at being beggars in order to satisfy a whim of Rachel and Meriel's, they enter a world they have previously observed only from a safe distance--and they quickly realize how greatly they have misconstrued it. Their first sleepless night is only the beginning of an education that will drain much of the romance from their understanding of the beggars' world.

Brome's sub-plot--in which lovers depart the fixed world of the estate for the fluid one of the surrounding countryside--is obviously reminiscent of earlier pastoral comedies such as Shakespeare's As You Like It. And, in Brome's play as in Shakespeare's,

despite the potential dangers of the unknown territory, the final resolution is a comic one. But Brome arrives at his comic resolution via a most tortuous path. Before the veil of romance is once again drawn over the world, the play's lovers, as well as its viewers, are exposed to an unsettling series of brutal incidents. Vincent and Hilliard's clumsy attempts at begging earn them nothing more than a verbal assault and a switching from their intended benefactors. Far more disturbing, though, is Rachel and Meriel's encounter with Justice Clack's son, Oliver, who hopes to pass some of his time in the country engaging in a little "beggar sport"--which his actions quickly demonstrate to be a euphemism for rape:

> I durst not take a touch at London, both for the present cost and fear of an after-reckoning. But, Oliver, dost thou speak like a gentleman? Fear price or pox, ha? Marry, do I, sir; nor can beggar-sport be inexcusable in a young country gentleman short of means for another respect, a principal one indeed, to avoid the punishment or charge of bastardy. There's no commuting with them, or keeping of children for them. The poor whores, rather than part with their own or want children at all, will steal other folks' to travel with and move compassion. He feeds a beggar-wench well that fills her belly with young bones. (3.1.255-66)

Oliver's speech on the benefits to himself of his chosen sport sheds disturbing light not only on the fate of the "beggar-brachs" he singles out, but also on the telling difference between what children *mean* to landless beggars and to landed gentlemen like himself. His emphasis upon the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate issue reminds us

that among the upper ranks children embody the genealogical line by which property, wealth, and power are transmitted from one generation to the next. Among the poor, children play a role in more modest exchanges, becoming props whose function is to elicit sympathy and charity.

That Oliver is to be regarded as an outright villain here is certain, yet neither his attempted rape nor the creed underlying it is punished in the play. When his "sport" is interrupted by a rageful Vincent and Hilliard, it is the seasoned beggar, Springlove, who has to prevent his companions from taking action and demonstrate instead how properly to grovel before even this most ungentle of gentleman. "If they have offended," he pleads on behalf of his companions, "let not your worship's own hands drag'em to the law, or carry 'em to punishment. Correct 'em not yourself. It is the beadle's office" (3.1.399-402). Springlove's experience has taught him that, in this world, it is not the would-be rapist but the audacious beggar who must be chastised.

The experiences of the play's tourist beggars, then, demonstrate that the beggars' world is a dangerous, violent place. Even when that violence is not overt, it remains present in the play's language. From the moment the lovers enthusiastically undertake to become "stark, errant, downright beggars, ay,/Without equivocation; statute beggars . . . Current and vagrant . . . Stockant, whippant beggars!" (2.1.165-68), the play's songs, jokes and offhand remarks, are replete with references to the hardships and punishments awaiting vagabonds. Rachel's account of the marriage of two elderly beggars typifies the manner in which comedy contends with misery in the play. Her speech seems as likely to provoke pity as laughter:

> And then, how solemnly they were join'd, and admonish'd by our Parson Under-hedge to live together in the fear of the lash, and give good example to the younger reprobates, to beg within compass, to escape the laws of the justice, the clutch of the constable, the hooks of the headborough, and the biting blows of the beadle. And, in so doing, they should defy the devil and all his works, and after their painful pilgrimage in this life, they should die in the ditch of delight. (4.2.56-64)

The beggars' lives are characterised by an uncomfortable mixture of comedy and pathos, as Oldrents himself might have discerned earlier when Randall informed him that the "*confused noise within of laughing and singing, and one crying out*" (2.2.120) that he heard was no mere spontaneous expression of joviality, but rather an attempt by the beggars to drown out the cries of a woman in labour.

Not surprisingly, Vincent and Hilliard's journey into the economic underworld promptly leads them to re-assess their ideas about the beggar's life. "If I could but once ha' dreamt in all my former nights that such an affliction could have been found among beggars," declares Hilliard, "sure I should never have travel'd to the proof on't" (3.1.24-27). But the suitors' conversion to a new way of thinking is, in the end, a superficial one. In spite of all they have endured, one riotous beggar-marriage celebration quickly revives their appreciation for the beggar's life--and they depart the play, as they entered it, believing that among the beggars "there is no grievance or perplexity;/No fear of war, or state disturbances./No alteration in a commonwealth,/Or innovation, shakes a thought of theirs" (4.2.90-93).

The sub-plot of A Jovial Crew, then, has dismantled the type of the "merry beggar" only to re-assemble it in the end, but by this time it has at least been scrutinised and found (if only temporarily) wanting. Because it raises a complex issue only to set it down again, apparently without having made much of it, the Vincent and Hilliard/Rachel and Meriel sub-plot appears untidy and inconclusive. Brome's material brings him to a crossroads where he can either pursue some of the social and economic implications of his de-mystification of the "merry beggar," or he can move, rather awkwardly, toward a comic resolution. He chooses the latter, but his choice appears neither naive nor unconsidered. On the contrary, the play's apparently indefensible return to romance is entirely consistent with the author's intentions as they are delineated in the prologue.

Before considering the prologue, though, we might reflect on the equally unsatisfactory manner in which Brome brings his main plot to a close. I suggested earlier that A Jovial Crew offers two contradictory responses to the question, where do beggars come from? The first answer was that beggars are like swallows, cuckoos or any other beings at the mercy of their own natural impulses: vagrancy and begging are in the blood, as they are in Springlove's blood, for example. Clearly, this first answer poses little threat to the world of the play. Far more hazardous to the health of the Oldrents estate, though, is the second answer--that beggars are not born, but made, and that their existence is necessary to create and sustain wealth of the sort enjoyed by Oldrents.

In many ways, Oldrents's world is reminiscent of those celebrated in country-

house poems like Ben Jonson's "To Penshurst." Brome portrays Oldrents as a benevolent lord of a prosperous manor who extends hospitality to all comers, even the very poorest. Like the Sidneys in Jonson's poem, whose "ancient pile" produces no resentment in the hearts of its neighbours, Oldrents is described by Hearty as "th' only rich man lives unenvied," the natural centre of an ideal economic and social world. "Have you not," Hearty asks,

> . . . all the praises of the rich,
> And prayers of the poor? Did ever any
> Servant, or hireling, neighbor, kindred curse you,
> Or wish one minute shorten'd of your life?
> Have you one grudging tenant? Will they not all
> Fight for you? Do they not teach their children,
> And make 'em, too, pray for you morn and evening,
> And in their graces, too, as duly as
> For king and realm? The innocent things would think
> They ought not eat else. (1.1.67-77)

Hearty's speech might make Oldrents appear the epitome of the country gentleman, but even at this early stage a small tear appears in the fabric. Moments before he declares his friend "th' only rich man lives unenvied," Hearty remarks that he would happily exchange his own merry heart for "Such an estate as yours" (1.1.57). The inconsistency is a small but portentous one: by the end of the play, Oldrents will remain the epitome of the country gentleman, but the type itself will appear far less attractive.

The antiquity of Oldrents's house, and the facility with which he fulfils his housekeeping role is celebrated on several occasions in the play--so often, in fact, that the ritual begins to assume an air of parody. When Oliver and Tallboy arrive at the Squire's estate, they are greeted by Randall, the groom, whose account of Oldrents sounds like a brief lesson prepared for the benefit of tourists:

> My master is an ancient gentleman, and a great housekeeper; and pray'd for by all the poor in the country. He keeps a guest house for all beggars, far and near, costs him a hundred a year at least, and is as well belov'd among the rich. (4.1.64-68)

Similar accounts are offered shortly thereafter by the butler ("No gentleman's house in all this county or the next so well stor'd [make us thankful for it]" [4.1.164-65]) and, finally, by the cook, who declares himself "the oldest cook, and of the ancientist house, and the best for housekeeping in this country or the next" (4.1.203-4). Brome invokes a familiar convention of country-house poetry, but he brings its very conventionality to the fore, so that our attention is drawn less toward Oldrents himself than to the stock figure, the type, that he represents.

If the irony that characterises Brome's invocation of country-house poetry leads us to suspect that some distance separates him from his one-time mentor, the author of "To Penshurst," Brome's careful inclusion of mundane economic details might confirm that suspicion. Unlike "To Penshurst" or the poems that followed it, Brome's play gives close attention to the estate as a place of economic exchange, a factor which contributes to Butler's assessment of A Jovial Crew as "one of the most determinedly realistic of the

entire period" (275). Where Jonson was vague about the sources of the Sidneys' great wealth, Brome gives us a precise rendering of Oldrents's income and expenditures. When, in the first scene of the play, Springlove turns the account books over to his master, we encounter seventeen lines of speech in which Springlove details the collection of rents, payments for cattle, wool, and corn, as well as expenditures on housekeeping, building, repairs, journeys, apparel and so on down to Oldrents's benevolences to the poor (1.1.122-38). In other words, Brome makes clear what Jonson obscures--that the country house is, to a great extent, a place where money, as well as goods and services change hands.

A Jovial Crew's focus on routine economic matters is significant because it contributes to the tension in the play between *received* and *made* social and economic orders. While Brome's characters assume without question that gentility resides in the blood, the play itself blurs the distinctions between the gentle and ungentle. Rachel may remain confident that her mind and blood remain discernibly noble regardless of her humble attire, but Oliver's vile conduct offers little evidence of the gentle nature that he avows. If qualities of mind or behaviour are problematic indicators of one's social status in the play, so too is occupation, for A Jovial Crew offers precious little evidence that either beggars or country gentlemen are born to their destined stations. In fact, most of the play's characters are, or believe themselves to be, socially mobile in one direction or the other: Springlove, of course, is a former beggar who has risen to the position of Oldrents's chief steward; even the groom, Randall, describes how, from his humble origins as a turnspit boy, he has risen to a position that has enabled him to save no less

than forty pounds (4.1.100). However, as the presence of the decayed gentleman, Hearty, indicates, the rise of the humble implies its opposite, the decline of the great, and this movement in the other direction, toward the world of those "stockant, whippant beggars," is obviously less attractive. Given that it is the patrico's prophecy that Rachel and Meriel will prove beggars that brings on Oldrents's melancholy humour and thus initiates the action of the play, though, the fear of social decline remains remarkably submerged throughout the play, masked to a great extent by Oldrents's dubious envy of the beggars.

However, in the play's final act, this undercurrent finally breaks into the open, and we learn that Oldrents's real relationship with the beggar world is characterised less by ignorance than by guilty knowledge. In a scene remarkable for its candour, A Jovial Crew discloses the extent to which one person's fortune is related to another's misfortune--or, more precisely, how Oldrents's wealth rests upon the beggars' poverty. We discover that the patrico, the beggar fortune-teller who predicted the impoverishment of Oldrents's daughters is himself the grandson of a former gentleman, Wrought-on, whom Oldrents's grandfather "craftily wrought out/Of his estate" (5.1.412-13). As a result, all of Wrought-on's "posterity/Were, since, expos'd to beggary" (5.1.414). These beggars, at least, were not born but made--and by the Oldrents family, the victors in a high-stakes game of Beggar My Neighbour.

The patrico takes pains not to blame Oldrents for the actions of a greedy ancestor, but Oldrents's guilt is not entirely of the inherited kind. The old beggar's next disclosure, offered in private to Oldrents alone, is a revelation to the Squire only in as

much as it fills some gaps in a story he already knew:

> I had a sister, who among the race
>
> Of beggars was the fairest. Fair she was
>
> In gentle blood, and gesture to her beauty,
>
> Which could not be so clouded with base clothing
>
> But she attracted love from worthy persons,
>
> Which (for her meanness) they express'd in pity,
>
> For the most part. But some assaulted her
>
> With amorous, though loose desires, which she
>
> Had virtue to withstand. Only one gentleman
>
> (Whether it were by her affection, or
>
> His fate to send his blood a-begging with her,
>
> I question not) by her, in heat of youth,
>
> Did get a son, who now must call you father. (5.1.417-29)

Again, the patrico is remarkably generous to Oldrents under the circumstances, but despite the kindly spin the teller puts on the tale, it remains a damning one. The expression "some assaulted her" might appear more ambiguous had Oliver not earlier modelled what he clearly regards as the acceptable behaviour of young country gentlemen with respect to attractive young beggar women. The implication, that as a young man, Oldrents engaged in a callous bit of "beggar sport" himself, is made stronger still when the patrico discloses how Oldrents concluded the affair: "Your bounty then," he says, continuing to put the best face on things, "Dispos'd your purse to her" (5.1.430-31).

Finally, his concluding mention of the woman's death within days of the child's birth recalls unpleasantly Oliver's glib assertion that "He feeds a beggar-wench well that fills her belly with young bones" (3.1.265-66). It becomes clear at this point that Oldrents has been aware all along that his sexual encounter with the beggar woman produced a child. His earlier cryptic reference to a "crime/That's charged on my conscience" (2.2.142-43)--a crime for which he might do penance by providing a grand feast to celebrate the arrival of an unknown beggar woman's child--is suddenly made plain. So too is the reason for the "sudden qualm" that overcame Oldrents earlier in the play, when the patrico offered to procure for him a "doxy, or a dell,/That never yet with man did mell" (2.2.273-74). The question posed by Hearty at the outset--"What justice can there be for such a curse/To fall upon your heirs?" (1.1.64-65)--is answered unequivocally by the revelations of this fifth act, where it becomes clear that Oldrents's concern over his daughters' fate had far less abstract origins then it might have first appeared.

The patrico's tale builds to a great ironic climax--the revelation that the offspring of that ignominious encounter was Springlove. Thus Oldrents's steward--the beggar whom he has tried to rescue from the beggar's life--was actually brought to that station by Oldrents's grandfather and by Oldrents himself. Having led us to view Springlove as the embodiment of the natural beggar, Brome now pulls back that veil, revealing that Springlove is, rather, a victim of an economic system driven by greed. The social and economic critique implicit in this final act of A Jovial Crew is remarkable, especially in light of the general tendency to regard Caroline drama as romantic and escapist.

Yet given the clarity with which he observes the economic relationships in A

Jovial Crew, the manner in which Brome concludes his play is equally remarkable. Just as he declined to pursue the potentially radical possibilities he raised in the sub-plot, Brome brings about another not quite satisfactory resolution to this main plot: Springlove the beggar is suddenly Springlove the gentleman, a position that entails a valuable estate that he will enjoy with his gentle wife-to-be, Amie; the patrico, meanwhile, is content to join Oldrents's household as his "faithful beadsman" (5.1.485). Even Oliver, the would-be rapist, exits the play with a hope that "we are all friends" (5.1.496). So once again we arrive at an ending that returns, improbably, to the way things were at the outset. Springlove has risen in the world, but only to his rightful place; his truly gentle nature has, after all, been hinted at throughout. Meanwhile, the system that made him a beggar and now makes him a gentleman remains untouched. Instead, the dangers of that system conveniently vanish from sight. In a statement obviously inconsistent with everything we have just learned about the creation and maintenance of wealth, Oldrents declares that he "will instantly estate [Springlove] in a thousand pound a year to entertain his wife, *and to their heirs forever*" (5.1.473-75; emphasis mine). Having seen Springlove move from one economic pole to the other, Oldrents can still blithely assert that his new-found son and his heirs are perpetually secure.

These unsatisfactory resolutions might appear careless, or merely perverse, had the play's prologue not prepared us for an improbable ending. In the prologue, Brome draws our attention to the title of his play, which, he says, "May seem to promise mirth, which were a new/And forc'd thing in these sad and tragic days/For you to find, or we

express in plays." In other words, the times, of which this play is keenly aware, are not particulary conducive to comedy. Regardless, he observes that the contemporary trend in the theatres is toward romantic comedies wherein improbable, even impossible occurrences are common. Displaying more than a touch of irony, Brome declares his readiness to embrace this trend:

> Our comic writer, finding that romances
> Of lovers through much travel and distress,
> Till it be thought no power can redress
> Th'afflicted wanderers, though stout chivalry
> Lend all his aid for their delivery,
> Till, lastly, some impossibility
> Concludes all strife and makes a comedy--
> Finding, he says, such stories bear the sway,
> Near as he could, he has compos'd a play . . . . (8-16)

"Near as he could," of course, is rot quite near enough to disguise the glaring inappropriateness of the play's ending. "All strife" is not concluded; it is abruptly and conspicuously swept away. The assessment offered by R.J. Kaufmann, that Brome, "after a life of criticising 'escape,' finally came to advocate a basic variant of it" (169), seems well wide of the mark. So too, though, does the response of Catherine Shaw, who regards A Jovial Crew not as an escapist play, but rather, as a play that offers a critical look at escapism. Shaw contends that while the "green world" into which Brome's characters hope to escape is a chimera, the world to which they return, "Oldrents's world

. . . is a much more compassionate, humanly responsible world" (132-33). Brome's play does indeed expose the illusory nature of the "green world" of the merry beggars, but the result is hardly an endorsement of Oldrents's world. Rather, A Jovial Crew demonstrates that the apparent security of that world is illusory, because the line separating the play's two worlds is itself illusory. A Jovial Crew is less a romance than a declaration of the perils of romance in the "sad and tragic days" that brought it forth.

In retrospect, Brome's final play appears remarkably in tune with its times. As Kaufmann notes, the beggar poet's sketch of a play-within-the-play, in which he proposes to present a commonwealth where country, city and court contend for superiority (4.2.179-218), "is a neat epitome of the historical situation in England in 1641" (172). More notable still, though, is that A Jovial Crew certainly confirms Heinemann and Butler's recognition of a continuity between the concerns of the Caroline drama and the political pamphleteering of the 1640s. The penetrating social and economic critique Brome offers, before his characters retreat into their spurious contentment, anticipates those of Winstanley and the more radical members of the Leveller movement--thinkers who would emerge from the confusion of the civil wars with programmes for the much-needed transformation of the commonwealth. The alarming growth of poverty, vagrancy and beggary had been troubling the nation for generations, but Brome's play suggests that it was not yet troubling the nation enough. Before the pamphlet wars, before the Revolution, he presented his audiences with a piercing analysis of the vagrancy problem, rightly suspecting that he would be ignored by those in a position to alleviate it. A few years later, with the rise of the Diggers, some of the landless themselves would

undertake to help themselves in the most pragmatic fashion--by denying the right of the wealthy to monopolise the land and reclaiming untilled "waste" lands for their own use. That Brome's final play should come to rest upon foundations that have been shown to be dangerously weak, that it should conclude so inconclusively, seems entirely appropriate given that after the theatres were closed the debate was simply carried onto another stage.

Notes

[1] Beier describes the effects of contemporary economic trends on the poor in the following manner:

> Rises in food prices averaging about 4 per cent a year might not seem much by the standards of the 1970s and 1980s, but the inflation was sustained for nearly 150 years and had serious consequences. Those who did not produce their own food, which included most of the poor, had to purchase it at inflated prices in the marketplace. Meanwhile, wages were rising half as much as food prices because the supply of labour outran the demand: real wages for *both* agricultural and industrial labour fell by as much as 50 per cent . . . The best economic prospect was unquestionably land, but this was precisely the resource denied to the English poor. (20)

2/ Levellers and Faerie Levellers, Mobs and Monsters

(i)

Bothersome, frequently despised, but apparently unavoidable, the vast numbers of common men and women who constitute the majority of England's population are the undesirables who dwell on the margins of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literature. Since most of the literature that we read and discuss from the period was produced by members of the social elite or writers in their employ, we typically view the growing crowds residing in London and their labouring counterparts in the countryside through contemptuous eyes. In their benign form, the common folk provide comic diversions in the form of country clowns like the love-struck Silvius or witless urban tradesmen like Bottom the weaver. Assembled, though, their charm tends to vanish, and they meld into that ominous mass, the "multitude," whose enormous power combines with its utter unpredictability to make it a dangerous force that must be contained.

Margot Heinemann contends that "in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama the common people do have a voice," a contention that she rightly qualifies, noting that "what they say is not always enforced by the play as a whole" (255). But some attention to the "voices" of Brome's merry beggars, or those of their less amicable stage cousins, the mob, might lead us to qualify her statement further. It is significant that, while Brome dismantles the false type of the merry beggar, he does not really supplant it with anything that might be regarded as a "true" depiction. Despite the first-person

perspective of the beggar songs within the play and without, the experience being voiced is clearly not that of the destitute--Brome's play makes that much clear. But, given the play's extensive probing of the subject, it seems remarkable that the actual "statute . . . Stockant, whippant" beggars--those who will continue to be such in the wake of the play's happy ending--remain virtually absent. The play ends with disguises being shed and true identities resumed. Its play-within-the-play concluded, Oldrents can happily announce that "Here are no beggars (you are but one, Patrico), no rogues, nor players: but a select company, to fill this house with mirth" (5.1.469-71). And, of course, even the excepted patrico is really a well-born Wrought-on who will now leave his former life behind him. But what of all the other beggars who have no disguises to shed? Justice Clack tosses them a meagre crumb and casually dismisses them from the play: "And now, Clerk Martin, give all the beggars my free pass, without all manner of correction! That is to say, with a-hey, get 'em gone" (5.1.487-89). The "free pass" to which he refers, of course, is the order which, in theory, sent the indigent back to their place of origin; typically, though, the effect was simply to move them on to another, equally hostile place. For today, at least, these beggars will be neither stockant nor whippant, but they will remain statute and vagrant; their paltry share in the play's happy ending will allow them to leave "unpunish'd" (5.1.506). With the beggars gone, begging becomes a metaphor, as Springlove turns to the audience and begs for applause.

Despite Brome's reluctance to uphold the image of the "merry beggar" in his play, then, *A Jovial Crew* does not articulate the "authentic" voice of the true beggar. An attempt to find such a voice in Brome's play will yield only a stubborn silence: the

falsity of the familiar voice is demonstrated, but nothing rises to take its place. The silence of the beggars is suggestive of the broader problem of attending to "common" voices in early modern literature. Those voices, when we hear them at all, are filtered through others--voices of those to whom the experiences of the lower orders are foreign. The censorship that existed in England prior to the abolition of the Star Chamber in 1641 sought to safeguard the nation from any overtly eccentric voices that might have been seeking its ear. In the years to follow, though, despite the Long Parliament and its successors' attempts to restrict printing, England's writers and printers enjoyed a far greater degree of freedom than they had in the past. The result, with "well over 22,000 sermons, speeches, pamphlets and newspapers . . . published between 1640 and 1661," was what Lawrence Stone aptly describes as "an extraordinarily wordy revolution" (Causes 49).

Of course, it would be pointless to over-simplify the situation, to construct a neat binary division between the situations pre- and post-1641, with the former characterised by censorship and intellectual homogeneity and the latter by freedom of speech and multivocality. As Brome's final play and scores of other works demonstrate, the evidence simply does not permit such a tidy distinction. However, the evidence *does* seem to justify Martin Butler's assertion that "the massive explosion of political commentary and satire which occurred" after 1641 suggests the magnitude of hidden scepticism and dissent in England prior to that pivotal year (232-33). While sharp limitations must inevitably hinder our access to the history of this period "from below"--the vast majority of English men and women were illiterate and consequently persist in

their silence with respect to us--the printing explosion of the revolutionary decades does give us access to an unprecedented variety of voices, many of which contributed to the uprisings that inspired such horror and contempt in the eyes of others.

If the accustomed view from above tended to construe popular demonstrators and activists as one unruly, destructive mass, the extraordinary abundance of books, pamphlets and petitions produced during the middle decades of the century offers other vantage points from which the "mob" appears a far more complex entity. During the 1640s, distinct voices began to emerge from the multitude--voices conveying sophisticated social, political and religious ideas that bespoke a longing for the betterment of the nation. Most prominent among these were the champions of limited democracy, dubbed "Levellers" by their opponents in the political and pamphlet wars of the 1640s. The present chapter will examine the Leveller controversy as one that rested, to a very great extent, upon a controversy over language, over words and their meanings. Notions of popular politics inherited from a variety of literary sources created obstacles over which causes like that of the Levellers stumbled. In the hands of anti-democratic writers engaged in the pamphlet wars, the image of the mob served as a powerful blind which de-humanised protestors, and de-legitimised their concerns. The Leveller leaders--effective propagandists themselves--sought to fashion for themselves, via the printing press, a public identity distinct not only from the more conservative "revolutionaries" above them but from the teeming masses below. The history of the failed Leveller movement, and the history of its demonisation by its enemies, primarily the army commanders, reveal a great deal about the ideological supports of the society that

embarked upon what some have described as a revolutionary course. Most telling of all is the emotionally-charged epithet with which the "Levellers" were branded, and from which they were ultimately unable to distance themselves. A history of literary "levellers" had instructed readers and audiences that such figures were blind destroyers of the tangible and intangible boundaries that were the manifestations of social order, and if either the boundaries of social degree, or the bounds of property that symbolised and sustained them were imperilled, the awful possibility of chaos loomed.

(ii)

That the power of the mass of common people could somehow assist the cause of good government was inconceivable to many. Christopher Hill reminds us that "most writers about politics during the century before 1640 agreed that democracy was a bad thing" ("The Many Headed Monster" 181). As his title implies, and his essay goes on to demonstrate, this is something of an understatement. Time and again, the literature equates popular incursions into political affairs with the frightening actions of mobs certain of their power, but not their aims. Brutal, arbitrary and irrational, the mob is the antithesis of the just and rational rulers it defies. Thus, in Shakespeare's 2 Henry VI, it takes only a few words for Buckingham to lure Jack Cade's rebels to proclaim their loyalty to the king, and a few more for the upstart Cade to win them back again (4.8). More famously, the Roman plebeians in Julius Caesar prove equally pliable, as they are quickly persuaded by the rhetoric of Mark Antony to call for the blood of the man they

had pronounced Rome's saviour only moments before (3.2). On the heels of this scene we see them as the rampaging throng that murders Cinna the poet, knowing full well that his only crime is that of sharing a name with one of the conspirators (3.3).

This same mixture of loathing and contempt that Shakespeare's nobles directed towards the "many-headed monster" remains very much in evidence throughout the early decades of the seventeenth century and into the civil-war period. Sir Thomas Browne, who would have us believe that he regarded the conflicts of the day from a position somewhere "above Atlas his shoulders," commences the section of the Religio Medici (1642) devoted to the virtue of charity with a most uncharitable assault on the multitude. Although he claims to be "of a constitution so generall that it consorts, and sympathizeth with all things" (133), Browne acknowledges one exception to his general rule of tolerance:

> If there be any among those common objects of hatred I doe contemne and laugh at, it is that great enemy of reason, vertue and religion, the multitude, that numerous piece of monstrosity, which taken asunder seeme men, and the reasonable creatures of God; but confused together, make but one great beast, & a monstrosity more prodigious than Hydra; it is no breach of Charity to call these fooles, it is the stile all holy Writers have afforded them, set downe by Solomon in canonicall Scripture, and a point of our faith to beleeve so. (134)

The extreme (though not unfamiliar) language of monstrosity might alert us to the presence of a barely submerged and uncharacteristic tirade, as the usually sedate Browne

appears to come a little unstuck and part company with the reason he so values. His contempt for the masses is obviously mingled with a fear of the latent power they possess by virtue of their great numbers.

Such fear and contempt for the common people was not limited to the Anglican-royalist faction; nor was it confined to those who, like Browne, invoked the notion of a divinely ordained hierarchy shaping all worldly affairs. In a remarkable display of cynicism, the Commonwealth's man Anthony Ascham granted the right of the multitude to a share in political power, only to suspend that right for reasons of expediency. Taking as a first principle that "in government it ought to be most prudently cautioned that a society of state ravel not out into a dissolute multitude," Ascham asserts that

> confusion rises most out of the reflection which particular men make on their particular rights and liberties which perhaps may lawfully belong to them but are not always convenient for them to have, no more than knives and daggers are for young children. (221-22)

Ascham's paternalistic rhetoric merits some scrutiny. "Particular men," that is, the individuals who make up the "multitude," are equated with young children, who are denied the rights of adults by virtue of their youth and inexperience--a situation with which few take issue even in the present. Their "particular rights and liberties" are likened to "knives and daggers," toys too dangerous for unsupervised youths and better left in other, more practised hands. Where Browne appealed to "all holy Writers," Ascham appeals to necessity--but the result is the same. Whether or not the masses were regarded as possessing any rights or liberties at all, they were rarely encouraged to act

as though they did. If they *had* power, whether by virtue of their numbers or by God's gift, the needs of the state required that they did not exercise it.

In spite of these repeated strictures against popular participation in politics, though, popular demonstrations were an extremely important factor in the upheavals of the 1640s. More to the point, such demonstrations had a significant effect on people's *perceptions* of events. "Whether rioting and violence were more extensive than hitherto" is uncertain, according to J.S. Morrill, but "most gentlemen certainly *believed* that they were" (34). In fact, the popular commotion was a constant source of dismay among contemporary observers. In his History of the Parliament of England (1647), the apologist for the republican cause Thomas May observed that "another thing, which seemed to trouble some who were not bad men, was that extreme license which the common people, almost from the very beginning of the parliament, took to themselves, of reforming, without authority, order, or decency" (113). May's distinction between good and bad men, and his invocation of "order" and "decency," suggest that he regards the public demonstrations of the early 1640s as an affront not only to legal standards, but to moral ones as well. For others, the legal and moral boundaries that were being transgressed only pointed to more literal and alarming trespasses to come: royalist propaganda that construed parliamentary opposition as incipient communist revolution frequently appealed to widespread fears of agrarian revolt (Turner 157). While such claims were doubtless excessive, the shrill fear-mongering of the propagandists was not without foundation. Brian Manning's detailed study of the protests, demonstrations, and revolts that took place both in London and in the countryside prompts him to argue that

the grievances and actions of the "middling sort"--the growing numbers of independent craftsmen and landholding peasants--were a significant force behind the events of 1640-1649 (v). The demonstrations to which May alludes hastened the demise of Strafford (Manning 18), and even drove the king himself out of Westminster in 1641, making the split between Charles and his parliament a geographical as well as an ideological one and thus contributing to the outbreak of the civil war.

The accustomed distant view, however, provides us with little insight into the motives of the demonstrators. Such accounts tend to construe the demonstrators in terms lifted from conventional literary constructions of the "mob"--to describe them, that is, as an aimless, angry mass bent solely on destruction. The author of the Eikon Basilike (1648), for example, acknowledges the enormity and the power of the London mob but does not go far in his consideration as to why they might have assembled. Looking back at the events of 1641 in the aftermath of the royalist defeat, the writer (who speaks throughout in the voice of the doomed king himself) asks,

> Who can blame me, or any other, for withdrawing ourselves from the dailie baitings of the tumults, not knowing whether their fury and discontent might not fly so high as to worry and tear those in pieces whom as yet they but played with in their paws? (18)

The Eikon equates the crowds with the darker forces of nature, alluding here to the cruel play of the many-headed beast, and elsewhere likening them to "an earthquake, shaking the very foundation of all" (14). Of course, it suited the interests of royalists like the author of the Eikon to view all challenges as merely "insolent" and to attribute to their

victorious opponents not only the power but also the moral sophistication of an earthquake or a vicious animal. While it appears to acknowledge the demonstrators' power, then, this writer's account simultaneously robs them of any legitimacy by recasting them as an unfavourable literary archetype. His mob--essentially the same one that blindly followed Jack Cade and murdered Cinna the poet--is motivated not by historical circumstances but rather by the baser elements of human nature.

Of course, popular demonstrators had not, in every instance, been so negatively construed; but even where they are regarded as a potentially benign force--as on those occasions where they were imaginatively transformed into agents of divine justice--they tend to remain mouthpieces for the voices of elites, forming an uncluttered surface onto which the *wishes* rather than the *fears* of their social betters could be projected. The Sicilian horde that rises up to place Philaster on his throne, in the eponymous Beaumont and Fletcher play, restores proper order in the kingdom: committed monarchists all, they simply will not be ruled by the usurper. This benign revolt is necessary in order to bring about the play's comic conclusion; it is only when faced with such popular resistance that the usurping king grants Philaster the power to which the prince is entitled. In the wake of the Revolution, the royalist author of the playlet New-Market-Fayre (1649) longed for a similarly conservative rebellion that would oust the new military regime. Of all the threats facing his villainous "Crumwell," the greatest is that "the People generally doe our late *Actions* curse" (1.283-84). The second part of the play concludes with a Philaster-like popular uprising in which the people proclaim, "Let's Petition our King home; we shall never be happy else" (2.618-19). While the monarchy

certainly enjoyed significant popular support, this depiction of an assembly of monarchist plebeians is less than convincing. However, their role in this royalist fantasy te'ls us that even anti-populist writers recognised the importance of popular opinion in their struggle to restore Charles II to the throne. If further evidence is needed of the perceived importance of "the people's" wishes during the political manoeuvring of the Revolution, one need only consider the sheer volume of propaganda issued from all sides, aimed at winning public support.

(iii)

In 1648, probably during the royalist uprisings of the second civil war, one of the more intriguing propagandistic texts of the pamphlet wars appeared: a pro-royalist, anti-levelling work entitled The Faerie Leveller. This pamphlet, in which a literary account of a politicised mob provides a filter through which contemporary events are viewed, demonstrates the de-historicising, de-legitimising functions of the "mob." Unlike the vast majority of civil-war pamphlets, The Faerie Leveller would not be entirely unfamiliar to students of literature; the pamphlet reprints an episode from the fifth book of Spenser's Faerie Queene in which Artegall and Talus confront a levelling giant (5.2.29-54). The anonymous editor of 1648 re-contextualises the incident, offering it as an allegory of the army's--and specifically Cromwell's--rise to power, and a projection of their inevitable defeat. His preface offers a key to reading the text in light of contemporary history:

Charles, of course, is embodied by Artegall, and his forces by Talus; Cromwell is the giant, the head of the "Levellers," whose true nature is revealed in the bad anagram the editor forms from the letters of his name: "Com' our vil' Leveller" (4). These upstarts, the editor informs us, "were discryed long agoe in Queene Elizabeths dayes, and then graphically described by the Prince of English Poets Edmund Spenser, whose verses then propheticall are now become historicall in our dayes" (3). But the "Levellers" depicted in this royalist pamphlet are no more "historicall" than the misguided rabble that first appeared in Spenser's poem in 1596. On the contrary, by deceptively merging Cromwell, the army and the Levellers into one combined force, and then equating that force with the one confronted and routed decades earlier by two inhabitants of Spenser's faery-land, the editor of The Faerie Leveller *detaches* his opponents from history.

The conservative antipathy towards "levelling" to which The Faerie Leveller's editor hopes to appeal, and the extreme response that the charge of "levelling" might provoke are both very clearly demonstrated by his chosen text. In his proem to Book Five Spenser laments the state of the modern world, invoking Ovid's myth of a "golden age" and adapting it to an England in which social mobility is becoming increasingly common. The poet describes the reign of Saturn as a time when "all men sought their owne, and none no more" (3). He wishes to offer this pre-lapsarian world of universal peace and contentment as an ideal to be striven for in his own time, but in order to do so he must somehow reconcile that ideal with a political and economic system that places wealth and power in the hands of the privileged few: regardless of his own relatively humble origins, Spenser was no democrat. Accordingly, his account of the "morall

vertue" of justice defends the inequities of Elizabethan England, demonstrating that they are not only necessary but natural, and so cannot but be maintained. The ferocity with which they are defended against the threat posed by the levelling giant and his followers categorically announces their importance to the poet and, presumably, his audience. The editor of 1648 hoped, no doubt, that many in the audience of 1648 would share this fear and loathing of "levelling" forces.

In Spenser's original poem, Artegall's encounter with the giant is the second of two related narratives devoted, as Elizabeth Heale has observed, to the form of justice that Aristotle referred to as "distributive"--that is, the form having to do with "the distribution of honour, wealth, and the other divisible assets of the community" (*Ethics* 5.2.12; Heale 121-23, 128-30). While "commutative" justice--the form concerned with the suiting of punishments to crimes--must regard all equally, distributive justice recognises that there are by nature several degrees of humanity, each of which is entitled to a larger or smaller share of the earth's wealth (*Ethics* 5.4.3; 5.3.6). The two stories contained in Book Five, Canto Two of *The Faerie Queene* are complementary accounts of misguided malcontents who seek to violate the code of distributive justice.

The first of these is the story of Pollente and Munera. Pollente's crime is of the sort characteristic of a world governed by greed. He is the faery-land equivalent of a rapacious and oppressive landlord, who "great Lordships got and goodly farmes,/Through strong oppression of his powre extort" (5). Artegall slays Pollente as punishment for his excesses, and the tale openly declares its moral: Artegall mounts the dead Sarazin's head upon a pole

To be a mirrour to all mighty men,
In whose right hands great power is
contayned,
That none of them the feeble ouerrun,
But alwaies doe their powre within iust
compasse pen. (19)

The "mighty," then, are no less subject to limits than the "feeble" are. But the task of bringing the tyrannical Pollente to justice falls to Artegall, not to the oppressed masses themselves.

That an abused populace should exhibit patience in their suffering and trust in a higher power to redress their wrongs is a commonplace in political writing of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. James I repeatedly instructed his subjects that, regardless of the circumstance, a rebellion against a king was a violation of God's law, "yet does God never leave kings unpunished when they transgress these limits" (A Speech 109; Trew Law 105). The error made by Spenser's giant--who would take upon himself the task of administering his own justice to the Pollentes of the world--is one of ill-advised presumption. Artegall's response is to remind the deluded giant that

All in the power of their great Maker lie:
All creatures must obey the voice of the most hie.

They live, they die, like as he doth ordaine,
Ne euer any asketh reason why. (40-50)

Talus punctuates that reminder with a punishment as brutal as that meted out on Pollente a little earlier. He nudges the giant off the symbolic "higher ground" (49) that he had claimed and into the sea below, where the giant drowns.

However, the giant's offense resides not only in his presumptuous attempt to take matters of justice into his own hands, but also in the nature of his programme. He proposes to negate the social hierarchy that Spenser and Artegall so emphatically insist upon. The giant shares the poet's recognition of "how badly all things present bee,/And each estate quite out of order goth" (37), but his understanding of the old, proper order is vastly different. According to the giant, the unfallen world was a place of absolute equality, a world lost through the encroachments of some upon the property and wealth of others. His proposed remedy, then, is a redistribution of the world's wealth, symbolised by a levelling of the geographical terrain:

> Therefore I will throw downe these mountaines hie,
> And make them leuell with the lowly plaine:
> These towring rocks, which reach vnto
> the skie,
> I will thrust downe into the deepest maine,
> And as they were, them equalize againe.
> Tyrants that make men subject to their law,
> I will suppresse, that they no more
> may raine;
> And Lordings curbe, that commons ouer-aw;

And all the wealth of rich men to the poore

will draw. (38)

In the world of Spenser's poem, the giant's ideas are preposterous and indefensible, as the giant himself demonstrates when he tries, in vain, to weigh truth with falsehood on his scales. The impossibility of this exercise confirms Artegall's assertion that there is only one truth--his own--and "by no meanes the false will with [it] be wayd" (45); nature itself joins Artegall in rejecting the giant's fatuous notions. Further attesting to the absurdity of the giant's ideas is the lowly status of his adherents, an unimpressive assembly of "fooles, women and boys" (30). Only such unsubtle and vulgar minds as these could be so easily misled! When the death of their leader transforms this body into an unruly mob bent on revenge, we encounter yet another instance of the "lawlesse multitude" (52). But in spite of their numbers and their weapons, their very lawlessness renders them impotent in the face of Artegall and Talus. Artegall is troubled by them, but solely for reasons of knightly etiquette: he is "loth . . . his noble hands t'embrew/In the base blood of such a rascall crew," but he is equally reluctant to withdraw, lest they follow and he be seen with them (52). He resolves his dilemma by dispatching Talus to crush the rebellion, which he does, single-handed and with consummate ease.

The source of The Faerie Leveller, the fifth book of The Faerie Queene, has generally been considered to be more concerned than other parts of Spenser's poem with topical events. For instance, Christopher Hill's response to the giant's promise to level the mountains and distribute the wealth of the rich among the poor is the flat assertion, "Spenser must have heard someone saying that" ("Many Headed Monster" 184). Earlier

still, F.W. Padelford identified that "someone" as the Anabaptists, the sect whose name became anathema in the wake of the notorious Anabaptist revolt in Munster during the 1530s. Given the frequency of peasant revolts throughout the sixteenth century, one could no doubt isolate other particular incidents or individuals underlying Spenser's tale of the rebellious giant. What is intriguing about The Faerie Leveller, though, is its demonstration that the movement from historical incident to literary construction is not a movement in one direction only. The editor resurrects Spenser's text as a weapon in a war of propaganda, re-casting his own political adversaries as literary types drawn from a poem written half a century earlier. Just as the bad anagram of his title page transforms a particular, historical body, "Parliaments Army," into a general principle, "Paritie mar's al men," this new allegorical reading of Spenser transforms the immediate, historical conflict into one mere instance of a universal struggle between order and chaos, natural hierarchy and unnatural "levelling."

(iv)

The levelling giant episode of The Faerie Queene demonstrates how little sympathy any sort of popular uprising was likely to receive from those in power. The image of Talus's ruthless subjugation of the giant's pathetic followers carries us uncomfortably back from Faery-land to England, reminding us that "levellers" are no more welcome in the imaginative terrain of Spenser's poem than in the nation that inspired it. The recurrence of peasant revolts, however, suggests that the rural poor

were driven by pressures quite different from those which motivated the author of The Faerie Queene. In the early years of the seventeenth century, it appears that one form of "levelling" was advocated by a group or groups of rural agitators whose activities were known to the king. In a 1616 speech to the Star Chamber, James urged members of the gentry to remain in the countryside, since their migration to London was having an unsettling effect upon life in provincial England. "For beside the having of the countrey desolate," he remarked,

> when the Gentrie dwell thus in London, divers other mischiefes arise upon it: First, if insurrections should fall out (as was lately seen by the Levellers gathering together) what order can be taken with it, when the country is vnfurnished of Gentlemen to take order with it? (Political Works 344)

The insurrection to which James refers is probably the Midland revolt of 1607, in which many--perhaps thousands--of the inhabitants of Northamptonshire, Warwick and Leicestershire expressed their anger and frustration with enclosers of land by filling ditches and breaking down hedges enclosing lands formerly held in common. Some of these insurgents chose for themselves the name that the army officers were to use in their propaganda campaign against the democratic movement that emerged in the midst of their revolution (Lipson 403).[1] For these labourers, husbandmen and craftsmen, though, the term "leveller" underscored their demand for the levelling of the barriers that were converting common lands once used for tillage into private pastures. Like Spenser's giant, they wanted to restore the land to its former "level" or horizontal state; but they

wished thus to transform the landscape for entirely practical, rather than ideological reasons--primarily to alleviate the poverty resulting from depopulation of the commons. The king, demonstrating more indulgence than either Spenser's knight of Justice or his enforcer, Talus, appointed a commission to investigate the enclosures made in some of the Midland counties during the preceding thirty years. In spite of this conciliatory measure, though, James's distaste for untidy, bottom-up politics of this sort is obvious in the admonition he delivered to the delinquent members of the gentry.

Upon its appearance in the ideological conflicts of the Revolution, then, the term "leveller" already carried with it a cluster of unfavourable meanings ranging from "communist" to "anarchist," and the application of the term to Lilburne and his fellow democrats burdened them with such ignoble ancestors as Spenser's wretched giant and the hedge-destroying hordes of the Midland revolt. In the pamphlet wars of mid-century, the "leveller" frequently plays the role of bogeyman, the one who imagines the nearly unimaginable--a world without the social, political and economic hierarchy conferred upon it by its maker. The immediate symbolic resonance of the term in a society so emphatic in its insistence upon hierarchies made it a most effective tool not only for the army leaders who were eager to prevent their revolution from becoming a democratic one, but also for royalists, for whom *all* of the innovations of the 1640s were evidence of the alarming spread of "levelling" in the nation.

The Leveller controversy spanned roughly four years on either side of 1649, reaching its greatest intensity during the months leading up to the trial and execution of the king. The conclusion of the first civil war with Charles's surrender to the Scots in

the summer of 1646 marked the beginning of what Ian Gentles has described as "a much more subtle and complicated war of political manoeuvre that would be fought with petitions, pamphlets and secret plots" (87). From the perspective of the army officers who engineered the Revolution, the Leveller controversy was foremost among the battles of the political war leading up to the execution of the king and the founding of the Commonwealth in 1649. Although the history of the Leveller movement has been recounted in numerous places,[2] a brief summary is nonetheless in order here to help clarify some of the historical detail that controversial pamphlets like The Faerie Leveller sought to obscure.

The New Model Army, created by parliamentary ordinance in February, 1645, was suffused with the piety and zeal of its Puritan generals. The sense of egalitarianism that accompanied this devout Puritan faith manifested itself in the spring of 1647, when a number of regiments elected official agitators to resist a resolution (advanced by the conservative, Presbyterian faction in Parliament) for the disbandment of the New Model. In London, the most vehement opponents of what they regarded as the tyranny of the Presbyterian-dominated Parliament took up the cause of the army rank and file in the "Large Petition," presented to Parliament in May, 1647. Although the probable authors of this document--John Lilburne, Richard Overton, William Walwyn and John Wildman--were as yet untainted by the "Leveller" label, this "Large Petition" has been described as "the first party manifesto issued by the Levellers" (Frank 111). The "Large Petition" issued a series of demands that were to be repeated, with some alterations, many times over the next few years, including a call for the establishment of a parliamentary

government founded in "the free choice of the People," and a demand for religious toleration.

The degenerating relations between the army and the Presbyterian faction over the ensuing months eventually led to the army's occupation of London in the summer of 1647, an event that presented the London "Levellers" with an opportunity to infiltrate the already politicised army. Several of the new Leveller agents who emerged in a number of regiments produced The Case of the Armie Truly Stated, a flagrant denunciation of their far more moderate officers and an appeal for religious toleration and an extension of the franchise to all freeborn Englishmen. The growing power of the Levellers within the army--at the expense of the army's officers--compelled the General Council of the Army to hear and debate the agents' demands, which they did during the famous meetings at Putney in October and November, 1647.[3] There, the Leveller agents presented the first draft of their proposed constitution, The Agreement of the People, and the debate quickly focused on it. Little was resolved, and a general rendezvous of the army was decided upon, although the officers, eager to re-establish control over the New Model, were careful not to invite several of the more radical regiments. Provoked by the officers' resistance, one regiment mutinied, and another appeared at a rendezvous wearing copies of the Agreement pinned to their hats.

The royalist uprisings of the second civil war served to radicalise even the moderates, temporarily uniting the army--soldiers, Levellers and officers--in their outrage at the duplicity of the king. But as the army began its period of ascendancy, the officers and Levellers were quickly alienated once again. Lilburne participated in the revision

of the Agreement for presentation to the purged House of Commons, but the document received little notice from M.P.s and the Army Council allowed it to die of neglect. From this point, the Leveller influence quickly dissipated: by the time of the Leveller-inspired mutiny at Burford in May, 1649, the movement had next to no support among the army officers; and when Lilburne, Walwyn, Prince and Overton drafted the final Agreement at about the same time, they did so from a cell in the Tower of London.

Although this political contest between victorious revolutionaries and would-be revolutionaries was not without bloodshed, it was fought at least as much with the printing press as on the battlefield, generating a profusion of books, pamphlets and petitions in which cases were made for and against the Levellers' constitutional proposals. As a propaganda war--a struggle for the support of the English people--the conflict between the "Levellers" and the "Grandees" (the Levellers' own term of contempt for the senior army officers) can be regarded as a series of contests over meaning: both Lilburne and his associates and the army leaders who opposed them were fighting to place their own constructions on themselves, on each other, and on the newly emerging nation.

The innovative programme of the Levellers, however, left them particularly vulnerable to the sorts of attacks that had long been directed at any proponents of political or social change. Branded as "levellers" in spite of their protests to the contrary, they found themselves being fashioned via the press into familiar and easily dismissed types. Nedham's The Levellers levell'd (1647), a play composed prior to the author's abandonment of the apparently lost royalist cause, is similar to The Faerie

Leveller in that it depicts the conflicts of the 1640s as a battle between the forces of order, headed by the king, and the forces of anarchy, embodied by the "Levellers"--a group of agitators who personify the qualities of Apostasy, Conspiracy, Treachery, Democracy and Impiety. Nedham's Levellers show the odd distorted fragment of their origins in the activities of Lilburne and his associates--they seek "absolute freedom" through an "AGREEMENT OF THE PEOPLE" (7), for instance, and intend "to Levell the inclosures of Nobility, Gentry and property, and make all even" (5)--but they are in fact as abstract as their names suggest, comprising the worst elements of the "multitude" armed with a terrible plan. The confused substance of that plan transforms bits of the army's Solemn Engagement[4] and the Leveller programme into a scheme for the reduction of England to a state of anarchy. Conspiracy presents his fellow "Levellers" with a portrait of Catiline, bidding his comrades,

> By the fam'd memorie of this brave spirit, that once made Rome to tremble at his nod, who took the horrid Sacrament in blood to levell her proud battlements, sweare not to lay down armes till King Charles be sent to the invisible land, till all Lawes are repealed and abrogated, meum and tuum on pain of death not mentioned. (4)

Jonson's Catiline, Potter notes, is one of the most frequently mentioned plays of the period. No doubt its horrifying portrayals of the rebels' behaviour (in one instance, Catiline and his followers drink the blood of a murdered slave and pledge to destroy Rome) took on a particular significance in the minds of uneasy royalists as the forces opposing the king grew in strength (Secret Rites 119). Clearly, Nedham is here invoking

his audience's memories of the earlier play's horrors in a bid to demonise those forces. The "Levellers"--all those forces conspiring to "root out Monarchie" (title page)--are a murderous crew who seek not only the death of "CHARLES their Lord," but to "levell all men by the sword" (8). As in The Faerie Leveller, then, a force seeking political change--more recognisably Lilburne's "Levellers" in this case--is robbed of legitimacy by being equated with a familiar literary type, the unnatural, blood-drinking monsters of Catiline.

As the editor of The Fairie Leveller was (perhaps deliberately) careless with the particulars of the contemporary incidents underlying his allegory--creating, for instance, an unlikely union between Cromwell and the Levellers--Nedham is equally heedless of the details of the Leveller programme, lining up the Agreement of the People, for example, next to a call for the destruction of enclosures and the dismantling of the social order. An examination of writings by the so-called "Levellers" reveals just how misleading such accusations were. In A Manifestation, a joint effort published in April, 1649, Lilburne, Walwyn, Prince and Overton vehemently, and in obvious frustration, denied "that we would Levell all mens estates, that we would have no distinction of Orders and Dignities amongst men, that we are indeed for no government, but a Popular confusion" (278). Three years later, when the "Leveller" threat had been safely contained, Lilburne voiced without ambiguity his aversion to the "levelling" principles of which he had been accused:

> Now, as for my levelling of propertie & Magistracy, I answer: I have now bin about 15 yeares upon the public stage of troubles and

> sorrowes; and little and great I have writ with mine owne hands and caused to be printed about 40 bookes in which if there be one page, argument, line or syllable in them all, or any one of them, so much as tending to such a thing, I will be willing to loose my life therfore: nay if in them all put together there be not the highest and most rationall arguments to the contrarie, that Law, reason, or experience can afford: let me lie under this grand brand of infamie to perpetuity. (Apologetical Narration 68)

Clearly, neither Lilburne nor his associates regarded themselves as the levelling radicals their opponents made them out to be. Yet the irritation registered in these responses to having been so branded testifies to the power of the word "Leveller" to disrupt their activities by conferring a disagreeable meaning upon them.

While they rightly disputed such deliberate falsehoods, though, Leveller language was misleading in its own way. If they chose any name at all for themselves, it was that of "the people"--but the apparent inclusiveness of the term is deceptive. Their formal demands, issued in a series of pamphlets and petitions throughout the controversy, give a clear indication as to whom the Levellers actually identified as their fellow "people," and betray their own disdain for the "multitude." The final statement of their programme, An Agreement of the Free People of England, called for the formation of a representative body consisting of four hundred members, "in the choice of whom all men of the age of one and twenty yeers and upwards (not being servants, or receiving alms, or having served the late King in arms or voluntary Contributions)" (321).

Certainly, the adoption of this constitution would have resulted in an expanded franchise, but the expansion would have been a sharply limited one. The Agreement's exclusions, then, are very revealing: this "agreement of the people" might be better described as an "agreement of the middling sort"; to the poor, it had nothing to offer but continued poverty.

That such a significant portion of the English populace should be so effortlessly excluded from the category of "people," even by a group of impassioned reformers such as these, is not as extraordinary as it might seem. Christopher Hill has noted that in seventeenth-century parlance, the term "the people" characteristically excluded those who owned no property ("The Poor" 76-77). This group was more likely to be designated the "multitude," a name that generated a contemptuous reflex not only among Anglican royalists like Browne or like Ascham, but also among more innovative political thinkers like the Leveller Richard Overton (Hill, "The Poor" 86). The cause of those excluded from the Leveller Agreement was left for Gerrard Winstanley and his followers, who in 1649 announced themselves to the world as the "True Levellers" and began to cultivate waste land at St. George's Hill in Surrey. Anxious to distance themselves from Winstanley's Christian communist notions, the authors of the Agreement concluded it with a declaration "That it shall not be in the power of any Representative . . . [to] level mens Estates, destroy Propriety, or make all things Common" (327). The efforts of Lilburne, Overton, Prince and Walwyn--pretenders to power on behalf of "the people"--to distinguish between their own platform and the far more radical one of the "Digger" Winstanley confirms that in a nation as enamoured of social distinctions as Renaissance

England was, the grievous charge of "levelling" was very likely to be detrimental to the health of a political movement.

The currency of the term "Leveller" in present-day writing about the Revolution testifies to the overwhelming success of the officers' campaign to discredit the democratic body that surfaced in and around the army during the 1640s. Lilburne, Walwyn, Overton and others are routinely designated by the derogatory and misleading label foisted upon them by their adversaries. Even the Oxford English Dictionary unwittingly repeats anti-Leveller accusations in its definition of a "leveller" as "One who would level all differences of position or rank among men," to which it adds: "the term first arose as the designation of a political party of Charles I's reign, which professed principles of this character" (OED 2). In support of this errant claim, the OED cites Marchamont Nedham's The Case of the Commonwealth of England, Stated (1650),[5] itself a highly propagandistic, anti-Leveller work. The Case of the Commonwealth was written in the wake of Nedham's imprisonment for his contributions to the royalist cause and his subsequent conversion to the cause of England's new governors, whose power had been established in part at the Levellers' expense. By Nedham's account, the Levellers' misguided and dangerous aim is to dismantle the social order. The movement earned its name, he says, because its members held that "all persons have an equality of right to choose and be chosen without respect of birth, quality, or wealth, all orders of men being leveled in particular" (98). His chapter "Concerning the Levellers" is a rehearsal of contemporary anti-democratic fears in general and, more immediately, of the fears expressed during the 1647 Putney debates by the men who had since come to power:

> . . . such a democratic or popular form that puts the whole multitude into an equal exercise of the supreme authority, under pretense of maintaining liberty, is in the judgement of all statesmen the greatest enemy of liberty . . . for the multitude is so brutish that . . . they are ever in the extremes of kindness or cruelty. (99)

The great fear of Nedham and his new-found allies is that "this plea for 'equality of right' in government at length introduceth a claim for 'equality of estates'" (Nedham 98). As Ireton put the matter at Putney, "if we shall take away this [the stipulation that only propertied men are entitled to vote], we shall take away all property and interest that any man hath either in land by inheritance, or in estate by possession, or anything else" (Woodhouse 55). The apprehensions of Nedham and Ireton stem from their belief that the levelling of intangible boundaries entails the razing of more material ones, that a democratic political system will initiate an equal distribution of property and wealth. Thus the "Levellers" came to be associated with a programme for a radical redistribution of wealth and property--a programme with which few of their number had any sympathy at all. A decade after Nedham, Hobbes mentions in passing how, during the revolutionary years, agitators within the English army "were casting how to share the land amongst the godly, meaning themselves and such others as they pleased, who were therefore called Levellers" (<u>Behemoth</u> 161). Centuries later, the foremost dictionary of the English language continues to bolster the case of the anti-democratic faction.

Notes

[1] Another group, incidentally, anticipated Winstanley and those who joined him in cultivating waste lands for the poor, by issuing a manifesto entitled "From the Diggers of Warwickshire to all other Diggers" (Lipson 403)

[2] Two standard works on the Leveller movement are Joseph Frank's The Levellers (1955) and H.N. Brailsford's The Levellers & the English Revolution (1961). A good, brief introduction to the subject is Ian Gentles's essay, "The Impact of the Army" (1991). The Levellers also feature heavily in Hill's The World Turned Upside Down (1970), especially his chapters on "Agitators and Officers" and "Levellers and True Levellers," although the latter unnecessarily confuses Lilburne's movement with Winstanley's Diggers or "True Levellers."

[3] The council secretary, William Clarke, recorded much of what was said at Putney. His record, one of the most remarkable documents of the revolutionary period, has been edited by A.S.P. Woodhouse as Puritanism and Liberty.

[4] The Solemn Engagement--a declaration that the New Model would not disband until its grievances (including arrears of pay) were addressed--was adopted by the army during the Newmarket rendezvous of 5 June, 1647. The senior officers had called for the rendezvous in response to the activities of the agitators, and it led to the formation of the Army Council, a body initially comprising two soldiers and two officers from each regiment.

[5] The OED mistakenly gives a date of 1644 for The Case.

3/ Preserving Property: "Upon Appleton House"

". . . I hope that they may live to see the power of the King and the Lords thrown down, that yet may live to see property preserved."

--Colonel Petty at Putney, 28 October, 1647[1]

". . . we improve that victory which you have gotten in the name of the Commons over King *Charles* . . . In doing whereof, we rather expect protection from you then destruction."

--Gerrard Winstanley to Lord Fairfax and the Council of War, 9 June, 1649[2]

The army debates held at Putney in 1647 provide us with some unique insights into the misgivings of the men who were soon to bring about the trial and execution of the king. Their very practical need to placate the then powerful "Leveller" faction within the army drew the "Grandees" into talks which clearly reveal the limits of their revolutionary aspirations. The principal objection of both Cromwell and Ireton to the proposals of the Levellers is also the most telling. Both men saw in the Leveller Agreement a threat to the current economic order, an order based upon the ownership of property by a relatively small number of men. Ireton declared, "all the main thing that I speak for, is because I would have an eye to property" (Woodhouse 57), and his constant harping upon the point underscores his sense of its importance. The denial of

"all property"--which was what he took to be the Leveller programme--would be an affront to both natural and divine law (58, 60). Cromwell, complementing Ireton's invocation of God and nature with the more mundane promptings of necessity, added that "the consequence of this rule tends to anarchy, must end in anarchy" (59).

Neither Cromwell nor Ireton was the first to express concern over the future of an economic system with which they were well pleased. Lawrence Stone records that from the early years of the 1640s the propertied classes watched the growing rural and urban disturbances with an increasing uneasiness that transformed many a moderate reformer into a reluctant royalist (Causes 141). The owners of land were, after all, the bearers of power. The urgency with which property holders on both sides of the revolutionary divide sought to defend their rights becomes more comprehensible still in light of the centrality of property to one's sense of identity in seventeenth-century England. As James Turner has observed, "'land' and 'place'" were "equivalent to 'propriety'--meaning . . . both *property* and *knowing one's place*" (5). One's "estate" was not merely a geographical entity (this modern sense of the word does not appear before the latter half of the eighteenth century [OED 13a]), nor was its meaning limited to "possessions, fortune," or "capital" (12a). In early modern England, one's "estate" referred also to one's position in the social world (3a). So the repeated claim that activists like Lilburne or Winstanley were "subverters of well-settled States" (Faerie Leveller 3) is not merely an accusation of public mischief--of threatening to level enclosures or otherwise infringe upon another's property rights--but one of attempting to dismantle the social order by unnaturally removing all distinctions between men. As

even the most casual reader of sixteenth- or seventeenth-century literature will be aware, conventional wisdom held that the preservation of those distinctions guaranteed an harmonious and organic society, while the failure to maintain them would--as Cromwell feared--inevitably plunge the world into a state of anarchy. Of course, conventional wisdom is frequently at odds with the circumstances that nonetheless manage to produce and sustain it. With the rise of the Digger movement in the months after the regicide, claims that the current economic order was conducive to social harmony appeared very dubious indeed.

The desire of the wealthy to assert an intrinsic connection between their identities and their properties is perhaps nowhere more obvious than in the country-house poems that began to appear in the first half of the seventeenth century, when possession of a country seat was, in the words of Lawrence Stone, "a sine qua non of elite membership" (An Open Elite 11). The cluster of such poems in the period was first identified by George Hibbard in his seminal essay, "The Country House Poem of the Seventeenth Century." The country house--as celebrated in poems like Jonson's "To Penshurst," Carew's "To Saxham," and Herrick's "A Panegerick to Sir Lewis Pemberton"--is not only a nexus of social relations, but a visible emblem of the benevolent authority of the nobility, a showplace for spectacular displays of well-managed wealth.

Hibbard put forward the convincing argument that one of the most important historical circumstances contributing to the growth of the country-house genre was "an important alteration in the whole relationship of the great landowner to his country home" (161). The "alteration" to which he refers is the drift of the aristocracy away

from the countryside and towards London and the Court--a trend that was the bane of both James and Charles. In his 1616 speech to the Star Chamber, James complained that "now in *England*, all the country is gotten into *London*; so as with time, *England* will onely be *London*, and the whole countrey be left waste" (343). In James's mind, the country gentry and nobility constituted an essential component of "the old fashion of *England*" (343) that he was so eager to maintain. Throughout the decades preceding the civil wars, both he and Charles passed decrees aimed at reversing this migration to the city and its suburbs.

Jonson, Carew and Herrick added their voices to these Stuart appeals by celebrating, in their country-house poems, the old, organic country communities over which the aristocracy presided. For instance, the Sidney estate, Penshurst Place, is characterised by Jonson as a house where landlord, tenant and poet alike find a place at the ritual feast,

> Where comes no guest, but is allowed to eat,
> Without his fear, and of thy lord's own meat:
> Where the same beer and bread and self-same wine,
> That is his lordship's, shall be also mine.
>
> ("To Penshurst 61-64)

In the account Jonson gives here, the bounty of Penshurst seems to spring from the top and trickle down to the grateful labourers at the bottom. But the poem also allows us a glimpse at the actual bottom-up flow of wealth on the estate. None of the guests, we are told, come to the feast "empty-handed to salute/Thy lord, and lady" (49-50); rather,

they come bearing some product of their labour:

> Some bring a capon, some a rural cake,
>
> Some nuts, some apples; some that think they make
>
> The better cheeses bring them; or else send
>
> By their ripe daughters, whom they would commend
>
> This way to husbands; and whose baskets bear
>
> An emblem of themselves, in plum, or pear. (51-56)

Jonson's careful detailing of the items of food presented by the guests only serves to make more obvious his vagueness regarding the source of the "free provisions" to which their contributions are added. As Hibbard describes it, the landlord-tenant relationship as it appears in "To Penshurst" is "a reciprocal one of duties and responsibilities on both sides, freely entered into. The tenants come because they want to, not because they must" (164). But we can be forgiven, I think, for approaching Jonson's idealised depiction of a happy and easy union of rich and poor with a little more scepticism. If the poem's happy and contented farmers and "clowns" fail to provoke such a response, the suicidal fish and fowl that eagerly hurl themselves onto the banquet table may well do so.

The mild absurdities of "To Penshurst" can be attributed to the fact that, like many country-house poems, it is not merely descriptive, but prescriptive; the poem presents us with a highly idealised portrait of the Sidney estate in order to show us how the world *ought* to be. Or, more precisely still, the poem works to convince its audience that the world--at least this small corner of it--*is* as it ought to be. Jonson praises the

timelessness of Penshurst Place, which seems to have sprung, along with its hills and woods, from the very earth around it. Yet all the while, both poet and reader remain conscious that somewhere on the periphery of this ideal world lies an encroaching world of time and change. The poet begins his description of the estate, not by telling us what it *is*, but rather what it is *not*:

> Thou are not, Penshurst, built to envious show,
>   Of touch, or marble; nor canst boast a row
> Of polished pillars, or a roof of gold;
>   Thou hast no lantern, whereof tales are told;
> Or stair, or courts; but stand'st an ancient pile,
>   And these grudged at, art reverenced the while. (1-6)

In Jonson's poem, England's "old" families, secure in their connections to their land and to a traditional feudal past, are epitomised by the Sidneys; however, "ancient piles" like Penshurst are increasingly surrounded by the ostentatious houses of the grasping gentry, whose concern with mere monetary affairs distinguishes them from the true nobility. In this unflattering account of the "new money" circulating in England, Jonson acknowledges that the nation is undergoing profound social and economic change, but he retreats into a place he would deem untouched by those changes, a place that could serve as a model for the resurrection of "the old fashion of *England*" lamented by King James.

The "alteration" in social circumstances that Hibbard sees as an important catalyst for the country-house poems, then, was even more fundamental than he perhaps realised.

In a later account of the genre, Raymond Williams traces a close connection between the emergence and decline of the country-house poem and the social upheaval arising from England's transition from feudalism to agrarian capitalism, and reminds us that the apparently ahistorical and timeless nature of the country house could well be regarded as the product of a mystifying history which conceals the real origins of aristocratic wealth and privilege. Williams points out that "Penshurst and Saxham, now taken as symbols of the old order, were direct creations of the new order, as were all 'country houses,' whether idealised or not" (The Country and the City 41). The latter estate--celebrated by Carew in "To Saxham," a poem with clear echoes of Jonson's "To Penshurst"--"was a product of the agrarian disturbance: engrossed around 1500, it passed to the Crofts family in 1531" (40). Penshurst itself was awarded by Edward VI to William Sidney--then tutor and chamberlain of the court--a mere half a century before Jonson's visit (41). While poets praised country estates as symbols of a timeless order, those very houses bespoke the ambition--projected onto "those proud, ambitious heaps" condemned by Jonson in the final lines of "To Penshurst"--of the owners themselves.

Williams's argument centres on a contradiction at the very heart of seventeenth-century country-house poetry: the idealisation of the house as the embodiment of tradition and social stability masks, or tries to mask, the fact of perpetual social change. "Thus a moral order is abstracted from the feudal inheritance and break up, and seeks to impose itself ideally on conditions which are inherently unstable" (48). Nowhere is this tension between the apparent stability of the old order and the inherent instability of social order *per se* more clearly visible than in that most enigmatic of the country-house

poems, Andrew Marvell's "Upon Appleton House." That the genre's inherent contradictions should be most in evidence in Marvell's poem is appropriate, given the circumstances that produced it. Marvell invokes a series of conventions associated with the celebration of a timeless, idealised, organic world; yet the world he must confront is that of England in the wake of the wars that culminated in the trial and execution of its monarch. Not only is "Upon Appleton House" the first non-Cavalier/royalist country-house poem, but the patron to whom it is addressed is none other than the Lord General Thomas Fairfax, who had recently led the New Model Army to victory over the armies of the king. To complicate matters further, the poem emerges from the period immediately following Fairfax's resignation and premature retirement, actions that signalled his own unease with the events in which he had played such a major part.

Deeply conscious of its historical moment, "Upon Appleton House" registers some of the anxiety of the time. The following chapter will explore how questions of "property," understood in its more complex contemporary sense, loom large in Marvell's account of the "lesser world" (96) of Nun Appleton and of the greater world beyond. In the gardens, meadows and woods of the Fairfax estate, the poet presents his patron with a series of emblematic incidents that are evocative of the troubling events leading up to Fairfax's highly controversial retirement from civic affairs. The Levellers and the Diggers, radical forces that had achieved prominence in the preceding months and years, surface in demonised and contemptible forms, but, in spite of the poet's mockery, their presence remains a disturbing one. Against all these forces of time and change, the poet extols the Fairfax estate itself as an embodiment of the family name as it is passed on

from one generation to the next. However, the poem hints that even *this* form of permanence may be illusory--and those hints are confirmed by circumstances surrounding the poem. Complications arising from the transfer of the estate reveal that the very material basis of property, Nun Appleton, might itself be a fragile and transitory thing. At the time of the poem's composition, the "lesser world" to which the Lord General has withdrawn may also face a troubled future: as Fairfax's only child--his daughter, Mary--approaches marriageable age, the question of inheritance of the estate becomes a pressing one. With a daughter as the sole heiress, the family's grasp on its property, and hence on its wealth and power, is less than secure. Having contributed to the downfall of his king, Fairfax must now insure that his own position in the world is not equally vulnerable.

(i)

". . . had it pleasèd him and God . . ."

The current trend among literary critics to "rehistoricise" Marvell's work[3] has prompted a number of readers to take a closer look at the life of the man to whom the poet addresses "Upon Appleton House." While the centrality of Fairfax's retirement to the poem has long been recognised, we have only recently been reminded of the controversial nature of that retirement. As R.I.V. Hodge observes, commentators from Milton to Fairfax's nineteenth-century biographer, Clements Markham, provided their

readers with a "picture of this move . . . as a serene retirement, a fitting reward for a lifetime of virtuous endeavour" (134). Marvell's own poems to Fairfax participate in this construction of the Lord General's withdrawal from political life in positive terms--or, at least, in not overly negative ones. In "Upon the Hill and Grove at Bilbrough," the poet plays down the significance of his patron's retirement, telling us that Fairfax "often here retired" (6), thus making this present retreat resemble one of Fairfax's customary withdrawals to his country seat.

Given his position as a young tutor in the service of so powerful a man, it should not surprise us that Marvell approaches this sensitive and politically awkward subject with such care. But one cannot ignore the obvious note of regret in his celebration of Fairfax's retirement. Sadly contemplating the "dear and happy isle" of Britain in its fallen, militarised state, the poet reminds us of the leader who once held the possibility of salvation in his hands:

> And yet there walks one on the sod
>
> Who, had it pleasèd him and God,
>
> Might once have made our gardens spring
>
> Fresh as his own and flourishing. (44)

However, this possibility of salvation is--or, more precisely, *was*--a conditional one. God's pleasure is left unspecified, but Fairfax's choice is not: " . . . he preferred to the Cinque Ports/These five imaginary forts" (44).

Many readers have seen in Marvell's words a rebuke directed at Fairfax. In response, Michael Wilding offers a much needed reminder of the relative positions of the

two men at the time the poem was written. "For a hired tutor to presume to offer advice to the former lord-general of a victorious army," he insists, "is inconceivable. Twentieth-century commentators unconsciously write as if Marvell's twentieth-century repute as a great poet, admired by T.S. Eliot, was a repute known to his contemporaries" (Dragons Teeth 143). While Wilding convincingly argues that for Marvell to "rebuke" Fairfax seems unlikely, however, he overstates his case when he dismisses as "inconceivable" the possibility of the tutor offering advice to the patron. To advise, especially in a cautious and circuitous manner, is not necessarily to chastise. Nonetheless, Marvell is well aware that unwelcome messages--no matter how valid--can be dangerous to the messenger. In "Upon the Hill and Grove at Bilbrough," the poet projects his own regrets onto Bilbrough's sensible trees, who, like the poet of "Upon Appleton House," contrast the private world Fairfax has chosen with the public one he has left behind:

> "Much other groves," they say, "than these
> And other hills him once did please.
> Through groves of pikes he thundered then,
> And mountains raised of dying men.
> For all the civic garlands due
> To him, our branches are but few.
> Nor are our trunks enow to bear
> The trophies of one fertile year." (9)

The poet himself has no argument with the sentiments expressed here, yet he tries to

silence them, reproaching the trees for their imprudent indiscretion:

> 'Tis true, ye trees, nor ever spoke
>
> More certain oracles in oak.
>
> But peace, (if you his favour prize):
>
> That courage its own praises flies. (10)

To some extent, the poet chooses to follow his own advice in "Upon Appleton House," where Fairfax is praised not for the "courage" that enabled him to raise mountains of corpses, but for the "conscience" that led him to abjure the "civic garlands due/To him" ("Hill and Grove" 9). In the longer poem, Fairfax is praised because "he did, with his utmost skill,/Ambition weed, but conscience till" (44). The Lord General's abdication of the civic crown provides another indication of the humility for which he is praised throughout.

However, Marvell's celebrations of Fairfax's "retreat" from "his own brightness" and his courage's retreat from its own praises are clearly not couched in unambiguous terms. The element of disappointment in the poet's assessment becomes clearer still when Marvell's praise of Fairfax's choice of "conscience" over "courage" is set against his later celebration of the man who rose to power in the wake of Fairfax's resignation. In his "Poem Upon the Death of His Late Highness the Lord Protector," Marvell praises Cromwell as the leader who "first put arms into Religion's hand,/And timorous *Conscience* unto *Courage* manned" (179-80, emphases mine). In this account of the Lord Protector's rise, courage and conscience appear as complementary virtues: wedded to his courage, Cromwell's conscience re-shapes the nation. Fairfax, on the other hand,

has chosen between the two virtues, and settled upon that which shrinks at every touch" (45).

Marvell's corpus includes three poems to Fairfax ("Upon the Hill and Grove at Bilbrough," the Latin "Epigram on Two Mountains, Almscliff and Bilbrough," and "Upon Appleton House") and three poems to, or about, Cromwell ("An Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland," "The First Anniversary of the Government under his Highness the Lord Protector," and "A Poem upon the Death of His Late Highness the Lord Protector"). When either group is viewed in isolation, it appears to create a complimentary--if not entirely unambiguous--depiction of its subject. Viewed together, though, these poems invite us to compare the Lord General with his former lieutenant. But these comparisons remain implicit and are available only to the attentive reader who, unlike Marvell's contemporaries, has access to all of these poems. Only this advantageous situation enables us to hear--in the two most famous of these poems--the echoing couplets that point to the opposing directions chosen by the retiring Fairfax and the ascending Cromwell: "So restless Cromwell could not cease/In the inglorious arts of peace" ("Horatian Ode" 9-10), and "Who, when retirèd here to peace,/His warlike studies could not cease" ("Upon Appleton House" 36). Commenting upon these lines, Annabel Patterson adds that "the movement from 'private gardens' to public service, from public service to private gardens, completes the chiasmus" (Marvell 95).

If the tidy, and no doubt accidental, numerical balance between the two groups of poems does not invite us to compare them, the extremely close connection between the careers of the two men certainly should. Indeed, given the strength of that

connection, it is remarkable that each is absent from the poems centred on the other. Particularly striking is the absence of Fairfax from the "Horatian Ode," in which Cromwell is characterised as "The force of angry heaven's flame" who managed, single-handedly, to "ruin the great work of time,/And cast the kingdoms old/Into another mould" (26, 34-36). Celebrations of Cromwell such as Marvell's, coupled with Fairfax's withdrawal from public affairs at this crucial point in English history, have contributed to the effacement of Fairfax from popular memory of the civil wars. Many readers of Marvell's poem will be unaware that it was Fairfax, not Cromwell, who headed Parliament's armies in their wars with the king. Following the conclusion of those wars, the Lord General's military power and the great respect he commanded among his troops could easily have translated into enormous political power. When Marvell hints at Fairfax's potential for renewing the nation, he is not overestimating the Lord General's influence at the time. In his account of the crucial events of 1648-49, David Underdown portrays Fairfax as a key figure whose active involvement could have radically altered the course of those events:

> Had Fairfax vigorously supported both the Purge and the trial he might have been the most powerful man in the kingdom; had he effectively opposed both he might have prevented them or have plunged the country into renewed civil war. (Pride's Purge 189)

Of course, Fairfax chose neither of the options that Underdown outlines here. The decisive move that he *did* make was to resign.

Yet Fairfax's decision to distance himself from the revolutionary tumult--neither

to support nor oppose the zealous officers under his command--was by no means an indication that the nation's future was a matter of indifference to him. As Patterson, Hodge and Wilding have all reminded us, "Fairfax's retirement . . . was open to interpretation in a distinctly unfavorable light" (Patterson, Marvell 96). The regicide that cleared the way for the founding of the Commonwealth was in Fairfax's eyes an abhorrent act. In his commonplace book he memorialised the great event with a poem that expresses at best a grudging acceptance of what may or may not have been God's will:

> Oh Lett that Day from time be blotted quitt
> And lett beleefe of't in next Age be waved
> In deeper silence th'Act Concealed might
> Soe that the King-doms Credit might be save'd
> But if the Power devine permited this
> His Will's the Law and we must acquiesse. (Bodleian MS, Fairfax 40, p. 600; qtd. in Patterson, Marvell 97)

There is considerable evidence to suggest that Fairfax's discomfort with the regicide was widely known. The Lord General's was one of many signatures missing from the king's death warrant; and he made no appearance at Westminster during the brief trial. If his absence from the High Court was not already obvious to the many onlookers, it would have been made so when a woman in the gallery--reputed to have been Lady Fairfax--denounced the trial and declared Fairfax's refusal to take part (Markham 349).

The absence of Fairfax from the "Horatian Ode," then, is remarkable but not

surprising, since the withdrawal of the one leader and the simultaneous rise of the other were the results of markedly different political choices made in the aftermath of the civil wars. An awareness of those choices, and their implications, however, may allow us to catch a glimpse of Fairfax dwelling on the fringes of the poem that declares his lieutenant's ascendancy. Having subdued Ireland, Marvell tells us, England's new Caesar has set his sights on Scotland:

> The Pict no shelter now shall find
>
> Within his parti-coloured mind,
>
> But from this valour sad
>
> Shrink underneath the plaid. (105-8)

Commenting upon these lines, Michael Wilding reminds us of something of which few of the poet's contemporaries would not have been aware: that the Scottish campaign was highly contentious, and that it was the immediate cause of Fairfax's resignation as Commander-in-Chief of the Commonwealth's armies ("Marvell" 13). But most commentators agree that while Fairfax's qualms about attacking an ally were the *immediate* cause of his resignation, he had, by that time, little in common with the nation's new governors. When Marvell alludes to the Roman legend of the founding of Tarquin's temple of Jupiter--

> So when they did design
>
> The Capitol's first line,
>
> A bleeding head where they begun,
>
> Did fright the architects to run (67-70)--

he is also, clearly, alluding to the dramatic incident in the preceding lines of the poem, in which "the royal actor born . . . bowed his comely head,/Down as upon a bed" (53, 63-64). In Livy's account of the founding of the Capitol, the portentous head is not bleeding; nor are the men who discover it frightened (1.55.6).[4] Viewed in the *immediate* context, the most eminent of the recoiling "architects" is the man whose misgivings over the impending Scottish campaign find no expression in the poem--Fairfax himself. Fairfax's passive opposition to the designs of Ireton, Cromwell and the other regicides appears certain; but equally certain is his complicity in the events leading up to the fateful act. Although he chose not to reap the political rewards, the military victory was his. As Clarendon noted in his disparaging assessment of the Lord General, he "wished nothing that Cromwell did, and yet contributed to bring it all to pass" (History 2.66). It is this uncomfortable fact that troubles the celebrated conscience of the man to whom Marvell addresses "Upon Appleton House."

(ii)

"And now to the abyss I pass . . ."

Grim as the tone may be, the acquiescence expressed by Fairfax in his poem on the regicide indicates a willingness to acknowledge and submit to a power greater than his own. It is plain that he is sickened by the king's trial and execution, but if he can see the will of God at work behind those events, he will at least find them endurable, if not a cause for cheer: ". . . if the Power devine permited this/His Will's the Law and

we must acquiesse." Yet the conditional mood in which Fairfax casts these potentially consoling words reveals his uncertainty as to what power *is* actually behind these events. Fairfax's own experiences between his military victory in 1646 and his premature retirement in 1650 had provided him with ample evidence that forces *other* than the power divine were at work in England. His position at the head of the army, whose increasingly politicised and radicalised membership transformed it into the engine of the Revolution, certainly gave him an opportunity to view some of those forces at close range.

Fairfax's early retirement--the subject of the poet's regretful praise--constitutes another example of his acquiescence in the presence of a force that would not be restrained. Fairfax was only thirty-eight when he retired in June, 1650, finally separating himself from the regicides whose cause was clearly not his own. But by late 1648, the Lord General had effectively lost control of his own army, which proceeded to purge Parliament and try and execute the king against their commander's wishes (Wilson 147-53). Years later, in his Short Memorials, Fairfax would look back upon the parliamentary purge that preceded the trial and insist that "I had not the least Intimation of it till it was done . . . The Reason why it was so secretly carried, that I should have no notice of it, was, because I always prevented those Designes when I knew them" (119-20). By the time of his retirement, Fairfax's more radical officers--men like Henry Ireton and Oliver Cromwell--had shattered some of England's most fundamental institutions in spite of him.

Looking back upon recent events, "Upon Appleton House" registers the anxieties

of both patron and poet over the nature of the forces at work in revolutionary England. The poem is suffused with a nostalgia for a lost paradise in which the ordering influence of God upon nature was everywhere in evidence. As it draws to a close, "Upon Appleton House" seeks to restore--with the aid of a mythologised "Maria" Fairfax--a "more decent order tame," at least in the "lesser world" of Nun Appleton (96). At the same time, however, the poem admits into its presence some of the uncontrollable forces with which Fairfax tried to contend during his public career. The chaos of the civil wars, and the unsettling energies they helped to release, re-emerge in Marvell's poem during the fascinating and troubling meadow sequence in which we can catch cryptic glimpses of the rise of the Levellers and the Diggers, and the fall of the king. While those forces appear to have been subdued by the poem's concluding stanzas, they have also changed the world utterly. "Upon Appleton House" struggles towards the confidence of "To Penshurst" without ever really attaining it; the forces for change with which the later poem must contend are too immediate and too powerful to be denied.

As Hibbard, Williams, and numerous other commentators on the country-house genre have noted, its constituent poems have in common a sense of nostalgia for the old, feudal order of which the country house itself is an emblem. Like its predecessors, "Upon Appleton House" depicts a benignly hierarchical world in which everyone has a place. Thus the men and women of diverse ranks who converge upon the house in search of its owner's hospitality become, themselves, components of it:

> A stately frontispiece of poor
>
> Adorns without the open door:

Nor less the rooms within commends

Daily new furniture of friends. (9)

Visiting friends and the poor are metaphorised into the house's furniture and its frontispiece. These roles, moreover, are carefully designated according to their respective ranks. As Felicity Keal comments, the early modern notion of "hospitality" was very rarely seen to require the actual admission of the poor into the house itself:

> Instead it was usually acknowledged that degree would be maintained by the careful separation of the social location in which hospitality was offered: the great chamber for men of influence, the hall for those of lesser worship who had some specific claim on the head of the household, the gatehouse for the needy. (78)

Properly remaining "without," while less humble arrivals find a place "within," the poor form a frontispiece that is "stately" because it is decorously placed. Thus Marvell, like Jonson and Herrick before him, portrays his patron's house as a place where the social tensions that might elsewhere express themselves in the form of agrarian revolts or enclosure riots are happily absent. At Bilbrough, the very landscape bespeaks the humility of its principal tenant and the sense of community his humble rule has engendered:

See what a soft access and wide

Lies open to its grassy side;

Nor with the rugged path deters

The feet of breathless travellers.

> See then how courteous it ascends,
>
> And all the way it rises bends;
>
> Nor for itself the height does gain,
>
> But only strives to raise the plain. ("Upon the Hill and Grove at Bilbrough" 3)

At Nun Appleton, all of the estate's natural inhabitants seem to participate in this benevolent community in which all respect their proper places in the grand scheme. In the emblematic woods the poet sees "highest oaks stoop down to hear" a nightingale singing amidst "low shrubs" (65) and a heron dropping the eldest of its young "as if it stork-like did pretend/That tribute to its Lord to send" (67).

If Marvell's poem is conventional in its portrayal of the country house as the centre of an idealised and harmonious social and natural world, however, it is radically unconventional in its disturbing depiction of the antithesis of that ordered world. Marvell's account of the mowing and floating of the meadows is the gate through which all of the horror and confusion of the civil wars and their aftermath come rushing into the poem, threatening to obliterate the ordered world that flourished there before. The stability and order of the timeless Nun Appleton world give way to rapid masque-like scene changes and peculiar alterations in perspective, so that "men like grasshoppers appear,/But grasshoppers are giants there" (47). These fields, where men are dwarfed by their surroundings, are likened to an "unfathomable . . . abyss."

This vision of contemporary England as a world inverted is not entirely unique, however. It resembles--and may even be indebted to--a 1647 pamphlet entitled <u>The</u>

World turn'd upside down, which purports to offer "a briefe description of the ridiculous Fashions of these distracted Times." The author, "T.J.," a self-described "well-willer to King, Parliament and Kingdom," is a Presbyterian whose discomfort with the apparent emergence of unruly "Sects," "Papists" and "Schismatics" during the course of the war prompts him to appeal for a return to government by the king, the peers, and Parliament ([4-5]). There are several points of comparison between this pamphlet and Marvell's poem: T.J. equates warring England with a "Vicious garden" (A2ʳ); and the casual manner in which he guides his readers from setting to setting--"Thus leaving *Ireland* (with my hearty prayers)/To *B[r]itaine* backe again, my Muse repaires" (2)--is not unlike that of the narrator who takes us on a tour of Nun Appleton: "And now to the abyss I pass/Of that unfathomable grass." The most striking similarity between the two poems, though, lies in their common lament for the ordered and civilised England of earlier times. T.J. complains that

> . . . England hath no likelihood or show
> Of what it was but seventy years ago;
> Religion, manners, life and shapes of men,
> Are much unlike the people that were then,
> Nay, Englands face, and language is estrang'd,
> That is all Metamorphos'd chop'd, and chang'd,
> For like as on the Poles the World is whorl'd,
> So is this Land the Bethlam of the World. ([4])

Marvell's own lament for the lost "paradise of four seas" (41)--

'Tis not, what once it was, the world,

But a rude heap together hurled,

All negligently overthrown,

Gulfs, deserts, precipices, stone. (96)--

appears to echo its predecessor. T.J.'s use of Marvell's characteristic couplets, and the similarity of Marvell's "world/hurled" rhyme to T.J.'s "whorl'd/World" underscore the resemblance.

Whether or not Marvell was familiar with The World Turn'd Upside Down cannot be established with certainty, but this is of no great importance. What is notable is that, regardless of the source of their similarities, Marvell--a tutor in the employ of the great parliamentarian general--and T.J.--a "well-willer to King, Parliament and Kingdom"--clearly tread similar ideological ground. T.J.'s vision of a world turned upside down provides a satirical commentary on "the ridiculous Fashions of these distracted Times." His unmistakable desire is to see a return to the good, old ways of England prior to the conflict between king and Parliament that has allowed the Irish rebels, along with England's own sectarians and papists, to flourish. He accentuates the social and political confusions of his day by literalising his metaphor of an inverted world. The title page of The World Turn'd Upside Down bears a woodcut illustration of an understandably perplexed man wearing his boots on his hands, his gloves on his feet, his tunic on his legs, and so on. Above, below, and behind him are further instances of unnatural inversion, to which the author refers in the text of his poem:

The Church o're turn'd, (a lamentable show)

The Candlestick above, the light below;

The Cony hunts the Dogge, the Rat the Cat,

The Horse doth whip the Cart, (I pray marke that)

The Wheelbarrow doth drive the man (oh base)

And Eeles and Gudgeons flie a mighty pace. (A2)

While T.J.'s ultimate appeal for a return to order is by no means a frivolous one, the poet's world turned upside down is clearly not devoid of humour. He is able to look on chaos with a sense of detached amusement because he is certain as to where the restorative power lies: "*A*nd wee doe know King *Charles* our supreame head/(Beneath God, who hath plac'd him in his *T*hrone)/For other Supreame, we acknowledge none)" ([6]). The world he portrays is nothing more than a temporary aberration; order will be restored when "wee amend, and leave our crimes" ([6]). In 1647, neither T.J. nor many of his contemporaries imagined that England's "crimes" would culminate in regicide.

Like The World Turn'd Upside Down, the meadow sequence in "Upon Appleton House" depicts a world in chaos. During the floating of the meadow, Nun Appleton's natural order is thrown into confusion, as "eels . . . bellow in the ox . . . And fishes do the stables scale" (90). But while T.J. views the absurdities he imagines with an easy sense of irony, Marvell's tone is far more unsettled and unsettling. The poet's characteristic wit is in evidence throughout the passage, but that wit does not express itself only in humorous ways. On the contrary, some of Marvell's conceits in this section of the poem are quite horrifying. The giant grasshoppers, for instance, imagined from the perspective of their minuscule human observers, are terrible:

> They, in their squeaking laugh, contemn
>
> Us as we walk more low than them:
>
> And, from the precipices tall
>
> Of the green spires, to us do call. (47)

The scene becomes more dreadful still if we pause to consider whether the grasshoppers' squeaking "condemnation" is a rebuke or a proclamation of doom.

The unsettling nature of Marvell's odd mix of humour and horror is underscored by its appearance in the midst of a section of the poem devoted to traditional country labours and pastimes: the mowing of the meadow and the harvest celebrations that follow; the grazing of the villagers' cattle on the stubble of the freshly mown meadow (57); and the floating of the meadow, when "Denton sets ope its cataracts" (59). What Marvell gives us here is not a celebration of the timeless rhythms of rural existence; rather, it is a sinister parody of such a celebration: his mowers partake in a "massacre" of the grass, which ends with "the plain . . . quilted o'er with bodies slain" (50, 53). Looking on--one part pastoral archetype and one part fiend--is "bloody Thestylis" (51).

While it would probably be futile, and inappropriately reductive, to try to find in this sequence a simple allegorical narrative of the political events of the years preceding Fairfax's decisive withdrawal to Nun Appleton, these stanzas are, nonetheless, rife with allusions to the civil wars in which he was a main participant. Not surprisingly, the incident in which one of the mowers kills a young rail has on numerous occasions been read as an allegorical rendering of the regicide that so troubled the Lord General.[5] Like the "royal actor born" of the "Horatian Ode," the rail is obliterated by a vastly greater

power before which it is helpless. In that earlier poem, Marvell casts Cromwell as a scourge of God, a natural force whom "'Tis madness to resist or blame" (25). Like the mower in "Upon Appleton House," Cromwell is an agent of an irresistible power. Charles's acquiescence before "the force of angry heaven's flame" (26) implies his acceptance of the poet's assertion that "Nature . . . must make room/Where greater spirits come" (41-44):

> *He* nothing common did or mean
> Upon that memorable scene:
>   But with his keener eye
>   The axe's edge did try:
> Nor called the gods with vulgar spight
> To vindicate his helpless right,
>   But bowed his comely head,
>   Down, as upon a bed. (57-64)

Recognising that his "right" is "helpless," Charles accepts his fate; he tries the axe's edge and prepares himself for death. The irresistible forces of change, embodied by Cromwell in the "Horatian Ode" and the humble mower in "Upon Appleton House," appear to recognise *no* "rights"--neither the king's right to live and rule by virtue of his descent, nor the rail's right to live by virtue of its youth. If we recall that Fairfax tried--and failed--to save King Charles's life, the possibility that Marvell's poem should be haunted by the implications of that failure does not seem remote. Moreover, the rail's is not the only death in the poem that invites such an allegorical reading. The poet's

later discovery of an oak felled by a "hewel" (*ie*. a woodpecker) prompts this rhetorical question: "Who could have thought the tallest oak/Should fall by such a feeble stroke!" (69). The question gains in significance if we recall that the oak is an ancient symbol of the British monarchy, and that this particular oak was felled with a metaphorical "axe" (69).

What is perhaps most disturbing about the mower's killing of the rail is that it is entirely accidental. The mower's task is to carry out the more generalised "massacre" of all the grass; his mowing of the rail is not only "untimely," but unintended--he performs the act "unknowing." Indeed, the premature death of the rail offers the mower an unwelcome reminder of his own mortality:

> The edge all bloody from its breast
> He draws, and does his stroke detest,
> Fearing the flesh untimely mowed
> To him a fate as black forebode. (50)

The mower acts as the *agent* of death, but he cannot command death's power. Nor does he himself transcend the mortality of which the rail's death is an emblem. Like the young bird "Whose yet unfeathered quills her fail," the mower is fated one day to be defenceless in the face of death, which, as Marvell reminds us elsewhere, is "a Mower too" ("Damon the Mower" 88).

If this ominous accident brings to mind the execution of Charles Stuart, the martial imagery surrounding the event might lead us to think of the General whose military victory helped make that execution possible. Fairfax himself was once a mower

of sorts, when "through groves of pikes he thundered . . ./And mountains raised of dying men" ("Upon the Hill" 9); and like the mower of "Upon Appleton House," the Lord General's broad strokes reached a victim he had never intended to harm. The Fairfax to whom Marvell addresses his poem resembles the sorrowful mower in that he has discovered his own inability to command the forces he helped to unleash. The New Model Army, Fairfax's army, quickly became a seed-bed for a variety of political ideas far more radical than those of the parliamentarians who had created it or the General who had been chosen to lead it. By 1648 it had, in spite of its putative leader, transformed itself into the most powerful political body in England. For the retired Fairfax--perhaps "resigned" might be the more appropriate adjective--Marvell's cryptic allusions to recent events, and in particular his contemptuous attack on "Levellers," would have had immediate relevance.

Commentators have on the whole been justifiably cautious in their attempts to unravel the enigmatic allegories of "Upon Appleton House." However, if the poet's allusions to the king's execution are so carefully veiled as to make it uncertain that such allusions *exist* in the poem, he is far less subtle in his poetic assault on the group he refers to as "Levellers." As Michael Wilding has reminded us, though, an attack on the popular forces for political and social change was far less dangerous than a covert allusion to the king was:

> . . . one thing that Cromwell and Fairfax and the Royalists were united in was opposition to radical tendencies emerging through the Levellers or Diggers. Nothing would be lost by endorsing ruling-class prejudices

against the lower orders. (Dragons Teeth 163)

Marvell could be certain of the Lord General's own displeasure with the "Levellers" whose influence greatly altered the New Model; Fairfax had joined with Cromwell to crush the Leveller revolt of May, 1649 in a brutal fashion.[6] The poet's allusion to a Biblical passage used in Leveller propaganda[7] and, more obviously, his reference to the sea-green colour associated with the army Levellers (49) would clearly point to this group. Throughout the meadow sequence, then, we can--in the contemptible "careless victors" whose unseemly jubilation precedes the chaos of the flood--catch glimmers of the radicals most frequently implicated in the deleterious transformation of Fairfax's army.

But Marvell is not here concerned to produce a mere allegorical narrative of the Leveller movement. That movement is certainly implicated in this explosion of anarchic violence into a pastoral setting, but the army Levellers who sought to undercut Fairfax's power are not the sole source of the confusion in which they join. Even more clearly present behind Marvell's levelling mowers are the *other* "levellers" of the revolutionary period--the group to which we usually refer as the "Diggers." As the mowers work their way through the tall grass, Marvell says, "they seem like Israelites to be,/Walking on foot through a green sea./To them the grassy deeps divide,/And crowd a lane to either side" (49). Marvell equates the mowers with the Israelites of the Pentateuch, only to allow his own metaphor to be undercut a few moments later by "bloody Thestylis," who recalls and mocks it: "He called us Israelites;/But now, to make his saying true,/Rails rain for quails, for manna, dew" (51). But this metaphor is not of the poet's own

making. Rather, it is one favoured by William Everard and Gerrard Winstanley, the leaders of the short-lived Digger movement. As Marvell is obviously aware, Fairfax had had personal contact with both men in the months prior to his resignation. In fact, it was to Lord Fairfax that the Diggers made the first of several appeals on behalf of England's poor.

Less than two months after its formation in February, 1649, the Council of State received word that a small group, led by Everard, had begun to till a patch of waste land near St. George's Hill in Surrey. "It is feared," the report concluded, "they have some design in hand" (Clarke Papers 2.209; Berens 34-35). Concerned that "that conflux of people may be a beginning whence things of a greater and more dangerous consequence may grow," the Council asked Lord Fairfax to look into the matter (Clarke Papers 2.210). At Fairfax's request, Everard and Winstanley appeared before him at Whitehall on the 20th of April, to give an account of their activities. On the same day, the two men, along with thirteen others, published The True Levellers Standard Advanced, an extended apology for their "digging," ambitiously addressed to "THE POWERS OF ENGLAND, AND ALL THE POWERS OF THE WORLD" (Winstanley 251). Throughout, the authors rely upon a metaphorical equation of the oppressed English "people" and the Israelites of Exodus:

> If you cast your eye a little backward, you shall see, That this outward Teaching and Ruling power, is the Babylonish yoke laid upon Israel of old, under *Nebuchadnezzar*; and so Successively from that time, the Conquering Enemy, have still laid these yokes upon Israel to keep *Jacob*

> down: And the last enslaving Conquest which the Enemy got over Israel, was the *Norman* over *England*; and from that time, Kings, Lords, Judges, Justices, Bayliffs, and the violent bitter people that are Free-holders, are and have been Successively: The *Norman* Bastard *William* himself, his Colonels, Captains, inferiour Officers, and Common Souldiers, who still are from that time to this day in pursuite of that victory, Imprisoning, Robbing, and killing the poor enslaved *English* Israelites. (259)

According to Whitelocke's account of the meeting between Fairfax, Everard and Winstanley, this metaphor, which informs many Digger writings,[8] was proclaimed before the Lord General himself. "Everard said he was of the race of the Jews," Whitelocke reports, and "that all the liberties of the people were lost by the coming in of William the Conqueror, and that ever since the people of God had lived under tyranny and oppression worse than that of our forefathers under the Egyptians" (Memorial of English Affairs 397; qtd. in Berens 37). Thus the mowing Israelites crossing the green sea of Nun Appleton's meadow would certainly have prompted in Fairfax some recollection of his recent encounters with the beleaguered Diggers. The poet's witty but contemptuous manipulations of Digger rhetoric not only reveal his awareness of those encounters, but clearly mark him as an opponent of the Digger programme.

In fact, Marvell appears a more concerned opponent than the Lord General himself was. While the fledgling Council of State was (understandably) apprehensive in its response to the initial reports of the Diggers' activities, Fairfax apparently saw little cause for alarm, and their initial encounter seems to have been a not unpleasant one. In

his later letters to Fairfax, Winstanley and his associates made direct appeals to the Lord General himself, referring to the "mildnesse and moderation" they had received from the General and the Council of War (281).[9] And the brief, admonitory speech Fairfax delivered to the Diggers when he visited their colony at St. George's Hill stands in sharp contrast to the brutal tactics used to put down the Leveller mutinies within the army.

However, Marvell's evocation of the Diggers in the meadow sequence of "Upon Appleton House" reverberates with the misgivings of the Council of State. His antipathy for the Diggers, moreover, is not bred of ignorance of their "design," but rather of knowledge. His account of Creation and the Fall as understood by the Diggers is disdainful but not inaccurate. The True Levellers Standard Advanced begins its task of justifying the Diggers' programme with a declaration that while "Man had Domination given to him, over the Beasts, Birds, and Fishes . . . not one word was spoken in the beginning, That one branch of mankind should rule over another" (Winstanley 251). The unequal distribution of wealth, and particularly land, that characterised seventeenth-century England, then, was an affront to Creation. For the Diggers, the Fall was a fall into individual ownership of property, an evil epitomised by enclosure:

> But man following his own sensualitie became a devourer of the creatures, and an incloser, not content that all the Land, Trees, Beasts, Fish, Fowle, &c. are inclosed into a few mercinary hands; and all the rest deprived and made their slaves, so that if they cut a Tree for fire they are to be punished, or hunt a fowle it is imprisonment, because it is gentlemens game, as they say; neither must they keep Cattle, or set up a

> House, all ground being inclosed, without hyring leave for the one, or buying room for the other, of the chiefe incloser, called the Lord of the Mannor, or some other wretch as cruell as he . . . . (Light Shining in Buckinghamshire; Winstanley 612)

Marvell echoes Digger rhetoric, then, when he finds the "levelled space" of the mown meadow reminiscent of the original state of creation: "The world when first created sure/Was such a table rase and pure" (57). The poet's tone, though, is clearly ironic here, his "sure" a knowing wink at his audience. Should there be any doubt, he immediately retracts his metaphor and substitutes another: as the commoners chase their cattle on to it, the meadow that for a moment appeared Edenic is suddenly more suggestive of "the *toril*/Ere the bulls enter at Madril" (56). Marvell thus dismisses the Diggers, but his dismissal is not an ignorant one.

The poet's responses to the violent masque of the mowers and the chaotic flood that follows it, however, are not solely ironic and contemptuous in tone. As we have seen, his entry into the "abyss" is accompanied by a disconcerting mixture of irony and horror. Shortly thereafter, his ironic detachment is compromised once again. When "the mower . . . commands the field," it becomes a site of random violence that inspires the poet's lament for the slaughtered rails:

> Unhappy birds! what does it boot
> To build below the grass's root;
> When lowness is unsafe as height,
> And chance o'ertakes, what 'scapeth spite? (52)

The poetic lament for a dead bird is usually an instance of travesty whose intent is humorous.[10] But the poet's grief seems genuine here, and his compassionate response is underscored by the callousness of "bloody Thestylis" who answers his meditations by trussing up the bird on which she "forthwith means . . . to sup" (51). The shifting tone of this sequence betrays a complex emotional response to the events depicted within it. Marvell associates various groups--the army Levellers, the Diggers, rural labourers--with the levelled meadow, and it is clear that he holds them in contempt. But the irony with which he derides them is not consistently maintained. Nor does the poet always maintain the distance that enables him to liken the mowers to men diving under water (48), or the villagers to spots on a face and "fleas, ere they approach the eye" (58). The relationship between observer and observed is reversed when "men like grasshoppers appear" and grasshoppers become giants who "contemn/Us, as we walk more low than them" (47). And the poet is obviously much closer to his subject when his portrait of "Israelites" traversing "a green sea" leads to a meditation on one small, carefully observed object in that sea--"the rail/Whose yet unfeathered quills her fail" (50). The poet's inability to remain aloof from the dangerous chaos of the meadow finds a parallel in the rail's vulnerability. Just as the bird cannot find a safe retreat by nesting "below the grass's root," the poet cannot adequately insulate himself with his own ironic detachment; nor can he maintain a comfortably distanced point of view, "When lowness is unsafe as height,/And chance o'ertakes, what 'scapeth spite" (52).

Marvell's inability to maintain the easy detachment of the Presbyterian "T.J." points to the fundamental difference in the situations of the two poets. For T.J., the

ultimate embodiment of authority--the king--is only temporarily absent; his return to power will bring an end to the various absurdities the poet derides: the world will, without a doubt, be put back the right way around again. For Marvell, however, the questions as to where authority resides and how social order is to be restored are far more difficult ones. As conservative as they might have been, the engineers of the king's downfall--including Marvell's employer--had nonetheless participated in a drastic act whose implications threatened the very order that sustained their own power, privilege and wealth. Clearly, the desire of the regicides was to remove the corner-stone but leave the building intact. As Colonel Petty put the matter at Putney, "I hope that they may live to see the power of the King and the Lords thrown down, that yet may live to see property preserved" (Woodhouse 61). But the difficulty of such an operation was a constant source of unease. "It is for something," Petty felt, "that anarchy is so much talked of" (Woodhouse 61).

While the immediate context of Petty's remark is the debate over the Agreement of the People, it is clear that the fundamental issue underlying that debate was the issue of authority. Cromwell expressed the danger of tampering with a social order in which power rested in the hands of a small group of elites. To admit the first question to the traditional bases of authority, he believed, was to initiate a process of questioning and change that would be unstoppable. "How do we know," he asked,

> if whilst we are disputing these things, another company of men shall [not] gather together, and put out a paper as plausible as this [the Agreement]? . . . And not only another, and another, but many of this

> kind. And if so, what do you think the consequence of that would be? Would it not be confusion? Would it not be utter confusion? (Woodhouse 7)

Cromwell repudiates the Leveller programme, not on the basis of its intrinsic merit, but on the basis that he would reject *any* programme of social change: it would lead to "confusion." While such an argument may seem unconvincing on the lips of a man whom both friend and foe saw as the destroyer of "the great work of time," it points clearly to the dilemma of England's conservative revolutionaries.

The notoriety achieved by the Diggers following their appearance in 1649 indicates the extent to which their actions--despite the small scale on which they were carried out--threatened the seemingly fragile order that had been maintained in the wake of the king's execution. Marvell was not the only observer outside the government who had made note of the Diggers' activities. By June they had become, in Winstanley's words to Fairfax, "the talk of the whole Land" (281). They were abused not only by local freeholders, but by soldiers as well (284-85). On one occasion, some of their number were attacked "by men in women's apparel, and so sore wounded, that some of them were fetched home in a Cart" (393). This curious incident would indicate that Marvell was also not the only onlooker to see the growing Digger community as a case of carnivalesque inversion allowed to continue too long. Both official and unofficial responses exhibited a high degree of sensitivity to the implications of the digging of St. George's Hill.

In spite of their strongly pacifist convictions, the Diggers themselves did little to

quell the fears of their many enemies. Winstanley never tried to disguise the fact that he was proposing a communist solution to a problem that had been created by distributing land in accordance with the dictates of a nascent agrarian capitalism, or that St. George's Hill was merely the starting point of a campaign that he hoped would soon transform "the whole Land" (412). While the Digger threat is rarely so bluntly stated as it is in the "Digger Song" that declared, "the Gentry must come down, and the poor shall wear the crown" (Winstanley 663), there is a mildly threatening undercurrent in many of Winstanley's reassuring words. In a December, 1649 letter to Fairfax, for example, Winstanley contends that

> if this freedome were granted to improve the common lands then there would bee a supply to answer everyones inquire, and the murmurings of the people against yow and the Parliament would cease. (348-49)

By associating himself and his confederates with an awakening power in the land, the long dormant power of "the people," Winstanley touches a sensitive nerve made doubly sensitive by the unsettled times. The powerful sense of God-given authority that rings throughout the Digger tracts, coupled with their appeal to the huge numbers of disenfranchised men and women in England, understandably distressed those who had relied upon God's authority to carry them into power.

The most troublesome element of Winstanley's argument for England's new rulers, though, was his claim that *their* recent actions had given legitimacy to the political manoeuvrings of the common people. "We improve that victory which you have gotten in the name of the Commons over King *Charles*," Winstanley told Fairfax, "In doing

whereof, we rather expect protection from you then destruction" (285). So Winstanley not only aligned himself with "the people," but drew Fairfax and *his* associates into that company. The Digger view, in other words, was that the regicide was not the end of the revolution, but its beginning; the end was in the communist utopia whose prototype was being realised at St. George's Hill.

For men of property, then, men like Lord Fairfax, the Revolution was a deeply troubling time. The regicide had rid England of a king whom many regarded as an incorrigible one, but at the same time it made a gaping hole in the social order that gave legitimacy, or at least its appearance, to their own position and its attendant wealth. Concluding his masque of the meadows on a hopeful note, though, Marvell re-metaphorises the deluge as a Biblical "Flood" with its promise of renewal in the wake of destruction. The confusion of the preceding stanzas will surely pass, but "while it lasts," the poet will retreat into the "yet green, yet growing Ark" of Nun Appleton's woods (61). But there, too, he will be reminded that there is no secure retreat from the torrent he will later describe as "the fertile storm,/Which to the thirsty land did plenty bring,/But, though forewarned, o'ertook and wet the King" ("First Anniversary" 236-38).

(iii)

"The progress of this house's fate"

The civil wars and their aftermath generated an abundance of questions regarding the legitimating bases of English society as it existed at the time. At Putney, the

Leveller Thomas Rainborough expressed an interest in determining "how it comes about that there is such a propriety in some freeborn Englishmen, and not [in] others" (Woodhouse 65). A few years later, in A Watch-Word to the City of London, a typically spirited response to his arrest and those of two fellow Diggers on a charge of trespassing, Gerrard Winstanley clarified the radical implications of Rainborough's query. Winstanley marvelled that the "Norman tyrants" and their descendants had managed to maintain their usurped power for so long. "We wonder," he remarked, "where you had your power to rule over us by will, more then we to rule over you by our will" (338). The implication of Winstanley's statement is as clear as it is radically opposed to the ideology underlying all of the country-house poems of the period: what separates rich from poor, ruler from ruled, landlord from tenant, is a barrier neither natural nor divine. Rather, it is merely human--the "will" of the covetous that has overcome the will of the poor and oppressed. For Winstanley, the origin of property lies in common human greed, and the approaching demise of property brings with it a promise of universal human peace (Winstanley 262).

More than any other example of its genre, "Upon Appleton House" delves into the origins of the house it celebrates. Marvell traces "the progress of this house's fate" from its beginnings as a Catholic convent in the years prior to the English Reformation up to the present moment. However, though his account is hardly offered in support of Winstanley's thesis on the origins of property, the poet's efforts to distract us from the mundane economic factors underlying the Fairfax acquisition and maintenance of the property are not entirely successful. Raymond Williams has rightly noted an "advance

in candour" (56) in Marvell's poem as compared with its predecessors, but his supposition that the poet's wit is employed *exclusively* in the service of candour--that "the origin of the house is no longer mystified, but is openly and wittily stated and justified" (The Country and the City 55)--is itself unjustified. Marvell's account of "the progress of this house's fate" represents an attempt to balance the demands of the historical record with those of a desirable notion of history as a process that is both teleological and comprehensible, and that has, in accordance with destiny, produced the world as it currently exists. However, that balance proves difficult, if not impossible, to maintain.

All aristocratic families scrupulously preserved the genealogical records that supported their claims to antiquity and its consequent privileges. According to at least one account, though, the Fairfaxes may have been even more scrupulous than most. George Johnson remarks that

> the care with which the family records of the Fairfaxes were preserved is almost without parallel. In no other collection are there to be discovered such a mass of letters and documents, public and private; pedigrees, not only of the different branches of their own family, but of all the families with whom they were connected by intermarriage. (1.lviii)

Apparently, Thomas Fairfax not only shared his family's fascination with its own history, but also showed an interest in the history of England's convents and monasteries (Hodge 137, 145). It would seem unlikely, then, that the Lord General would not already have been familiar with the material that Marvell shapes into the historical narrative of "Upon Appleton House."

It is hardly surprising that in a poem he addresses "to my Lord Fairfax" Marvell should place a great deal of emphasis on the genealogy of the family, and particularly upon the principal male line that he calls "the great race" (31). The poet affirms the nobility of his patrons' respective families in a manner in which they would no doubt be pleased. In seventeenth-century England, a country house like Nun Appleton was intended to be seen as a physical manifestation of the familial "house" who inhabited it generation after generation (Stone, An Open Elite 61). Marvell's account of the family's history seeks to portray Nun Appleton as an immutable monument to the house of Fairfax. It stands firm amidst the flux of history, preserving the names and reputations of its inhabitants for future ages who "Shall hither come in pilgrimage/These sacred places to adore,/By Vere and Fairfax trod before" (5).

The poet also affirms, as did Jonson, the natural connection between the family name and the estate. The very woods surrounding Nun Appleton are emblematic of the two pure and well-established lines that have merged through the marriage of Marvell's patrons, Thomas Fairfax and Anne Vere:

> The double wood of ancient stocks
>
> Linked in so thick, an union locks,
>
> It like two pedigrees appears,
>
> On one hand Fairfax, th' other Vere's. (62)

The trees suggest to Marvell the pedigrees, the genealogical trees of Fairfax and Vere, two "ancient stocks" united by marriage. His metaphorisation of the Fairfax/Vere marriage suggests that it was, by seventeenth-century standards, a good one. The union

extends well beyond Thomas and Anne to encompass all of their kin. Stone reminds us that "the greatest fear in a society so acutely conscious of status and hierarchy was of social derogation in marriage, of alliance with a family of lower estate or degree than one's own" (The Family, Sex and Marriage 87). The union of Fairfax and Vere poses no such threat. Both families are established and secure in their social positions, and it appears to the poet "As if their neighbourhood so old/To one great trunk them all did mould" (63). The result of such a union is a consolidation of power and a shoring up of the barriers that separate the true nobility from the surrounding swarm of *arrivistes*. The forest that symbolises the marriage of Fairfax and Vere, then ("Dark all without it knits; within/It opens passable and thin" [64]), is also a symbol of social conservatism. The marriage is a good one because it not only maintains, but reinforces the status quo. "Low things," after all, only "clownishly ascend" (8).

Yet Marvell's historical narrative extends to the very origin of the house itself, to its acquisition by a member of the Fairfax family at the time of the dissolution. While he colours the incident with elements of romance coupled with those of anti-Catholic satire, Marvell's account also indicates that the seizure and re-distribution of monastic lands in the sixteenth century made manifest the sort of covetousness that Winstanley condemned.[11] The poet's romantic tale of William Fairfax, Isabel Thwaites and the seductive nuns who would stand between them is an allegorical celebration of the triumph of virtuous Protestantism over decadent Catholicism, but it is also an account of a hard-fought property dispute. "'Tis thy 'state,/Not thee, that they would consecrate," William warns Isabel of the designing nuns (28). Yet his own motives in pursuing Isabel are not

as unsullied as the conventions of Romance might demand. Although she is, of course, "Fair beyond measure," Isabel is also "an heir/Which might deformity make fair" (12). William's victory over the nuns brings her valuable "'state" under *his* control; to her former companions, Isabel "bequeaths her tears" (34).

The marriage of William Fairfax and Isabel Thwaites is held up as an original moment--the simultaneous founding of a dynasty and acquisition of a country estate. But the simultaneity of the two happenings is of Marvell's own making: the dissolution of the monasteries and the family's acquisition of Nun Appleton probably occurred about twenty years after the marriage (Wilson 5). Marvell telescopes time, bringing the two events together; the result is the creation of a dramatic and providential moment of founding:

> At the demolishing, this seat
> To Fairfax fell as by escheat.
> And what both nuns and founders willed
> 'Tis likely better thus fulfilled. (35)

The teleological thrust of the poet's narrative is obvious. Marvell emphasises the link between Nun Appleton and the house of Fairfax by tracing an apparently continuous genealogical line that begins with the marriage of William Fairfax with Isabel Thwaites and culminates in the emergence of his patron. The poet asks the "Ill-counselled" nuns who would frustrate William's marriage plans,

> Is not this he whose offspring fierce
> Shall fight through all the universe;

And with successive valour try

France, Poland, either Germany;

Till one, as long since prophesied,

His horse through conquered Britain ride? (31)

William Fairfax is held up as the founder of a dynasty that will ultimately produce the great Thomas Fairfax.

The connection between Thomas Fairfax and his ancestor is underscored in two ways: the fact that Thomas appears to spring immediately from the marriage bed of William and Isabel has led at least one critic mistakenly to assume that Thomas is their son, rather than their great-grandson (Gilliland 1916); further confusion results from the poet's use of the family name to designate both William and Thomas, leaving the reader uncertain as to which Fairfax the poet refers at any given moment. What Marvell implies is that in spite of their separation in time, there is far more sameness than difference between these two figures named "Fairfax." Past and present are deliberately conflated, creating the appearance of a Fairfax essence which remains unchanged from generation to generation.

However, an examination of Fairfax history reveals the extent to which that appearance is misleading, and we must wonder how much of Marvell's account Fairfax himself could have believed. The historical connections between William, Thomas, and Nun Appleton, while still shrouded in some mystery, are certainly not as Marvell has portrayed them. According to George Johnson's "Historical and Biographical Memoir of the Fairfax Family" (1848), William Fairfax and Isabel Thwaites's eldest son died

without issue,[12] leaving their second son, Thomas--the ancestor of Marvell's patron--in position to inherit his father's properties, including the family estate of Steeton. But he did not. Thomas was in fact disinherited by his father of an estate that Thomas's grandson, Charles, later valued at two thousand pounds per annum (Johnson 1.xvi-xviii). Thomas, the rightful heir, is not even *mentioned* in his father's will. The properties were inherited by a younger son, Gabriel and (the will reads with what must have been for Thomas a terrible note of finality) "the heirs males of the body of the said Gabriel for ever" (1.xvii).

This disinheritance--so clearly an obstacle in the poet's path--is an event of importance to readers of "Upon Appleton House" whose force has been diminished due to the murkiness of the historical accounts. Johnson attributes William's disinheritance of his son to Thomas's participation in the Sack of Rome (in spite of Marvell's rendering of his and Isabel's marriage as an allegory of the English Reformation, William was Catholic). But this account has been disputed by C.R. Markham, who points out in his 1870 biography of Fairfax that Thomas would have been six years old in 1527 when that event took place. Unfortunately, he goes on to dismiss altogether the disinheritance claim with some highly unsatisfactory speculation:

> The simple truth no doubt is that his son Thomas is not mentioned in William's will because he had been already amply provided for as the heir of his mother, through whom he inherited Denton, Askwith, Acaster, Nunappleton, and property in York (5).

A violation of the rules governing primogeniture is a remarkable occurrence, and despite

the lack of supporting evidence, Markham's casual dismissal of the disinheritance has proven tempting to writers even to the present day. In his 1979 account of "Marvell's 'Upon Appleton House' and the Fairfax Family" Lee Erickson offers Markham's conjecture as one possible explanation for the failure of Thomas to inherit his father's estates, although Erickson acknowledges that "whatever the explanation, the story of Thomas fighting at the sack of Rome appears to be an attempt to gloss an embarrassing irregularity in the line of descent" (160).

Yet while the reason for the disinheritance of Thomas remains mysterious, the fact of this unusual occurrence can be established with certainty. William's determination that his son should not inherit is very clearly revealed by William's 1557 covenant, granting the family estates to

> himself for life, then as he should appoint *to any person, other than Thomas Fairfax of Bilbroughe, one of his sons*, and subject thereto to his sons Gabriel and Henry for 57 years; rems. in tail male to Guy, his eldest son, 'yf God of his grace call him vnto such good and perfecte witte, memorie and discrecion, as he may take and haue by the lawes of this realme the rule, order and disposition theirof himselfe'" (Brown 127, emphasis mine).

Contrary to Markham's speculation, Thomas clearly did not deem himself "amply provided for" and his younger brothers knew it. Subsequent documents among the Yorkshire Deeds contain clear evidence of a dispute over the family properties. The evidence includes a covenant between Gabriel and Henry "to help one another in case of

any suit being brought against them by Guye Fairfax or Thomas Fairfax, esquires, concerning the title to the premises [awarded them by William]" (Brown 129). Thomas did launch such a suit but was unsuccessful. In 1563, arbitrators chosen by himself and Gabriel awarded the family estates to Gabriel, while Thomas was awarded "the manor-site, etc., in Nun Appleton and tenements in Appleton and Harwood, and the tithes from Bilbroughe and certain cottages in Bilbroughe" (Brown 130).

Although his father left Thomas nothing, Isabel apparently left her son the Denton, Bilbrough and Nun Appleton estates which became the properties of the line to which Marvell's Fairfax belonged.[13] Nun Appleton, then, is *not* the family seat handed down from William through successive generations of male Fairfaxes to the current Lord Fairfax, Thomas. Rather, its beginnings as a Fairfax estate are probably rather humble, and its source is not the father, but the mother. Marvell's tale of William and Isabel is one of dynastic origins, but the line to which his Thomas Fairfax belongs is the disinherited line, the line that William cut off "for ever" when he chose Gabriel as his heir. What is missing from his account is any acknowledgement of this major rupture, as the all-important legitimising connection between the principal male line and the family estate is severed. Michael Wilding detects, behind Marvell's "burlesque account" of William and Isabel, "an anxious need to defend the land-grab" that followed Henry VIII's break with Rome (Dragons Teeth 148). I would argue that Marvell's elision of these inconvenient incidents--the disinheritance of Fairfax's ancestor and the subsequent legal wrangling among family members over control of the estate--indicates a related need to accompany the appearance of legitimate possession with one of natural and easy

succession. Yet given Fairfax's likely familiarity with a less flattering version of his family's history, one must wonder how comforting such a story could have been.

If the history of Nun Appleton and its former residents presents the poet with material that makes it difficult to affirm the providential nature of the economic system that brought such grand estates into existence, the present moment offers material that is more awkward still. At the time of Marvell's writing, the issue of succession was a pressing one in the Fairfax household. Towards the end of the poem Marvell lavishes praise upon his pupil, Thomas and Anne's only child, Mary. Mythologised as "Maria," she becomes an emblem of hope who brings order to a chaotic world, transforming Nun Appleton into a map of paradise:

> 'Tis she that to these gardens gave
> That wondrous beauty which they have;
> She straightness on the woods bestows;
> To her the meadow sweetness owes;
> Nothing could make the river be
> So crystal-pure but only she;
> She yet more pure, sweet, straight, and fair,
> Then gardens, woods, meads, rivers are. (87)

Lee Erickson has observed that "Marvell is not merely complimenting his patron indirectly by praising his daughter, but, more than that, is underlining the Fairfaxes' dynastic hopes, by arguing that just as Isabel Thwaites founded a great line, so would Mary Fairfax" (162-63). The poem itself occurs in the "Meantime" preceding Mary's

marriage to an as yet unknown husband. When the poet concludes his celebration of "Maria," he leaves us waiting "Till fate her worthily translates,/And find a Fairfax for our Thwaites" (94). However, Marvell's equation of Mary Fairfax with Isabel Thwaites is a misleading one: if there is to be a "Fairfax" involved in the impending marriage, surely it would have to be Mary herself. She is like Isabel Thwaites only in that her property will, upon her marriage, become *her husband's*; but unlike Isabel's, Mary's husband *cannot* be a Fairfax.

In the present moment of the poem, the house of Fairfax is facing a dynastic crisis. Mary's father had chosen to break off the entail on his estates in order that they could descend through his daughter: the poet's assertion that "goodness doth itself entail/On females, if there want a male" clearly alludes to this circumstance (91). Fairfax's motives for taking this unusual step are not absolutely certain, but it seems likely that the former commander of Parliament's army was hoping to match his daughter with the man whom she did eventually wed: the prominent royalist, George Villiers, second Duke of Buckingham. The "goodness" Mary Fairfax inherited from her parents, that was cultivated by her tutor, Marvell, ultimately allowed her to play a pawn's role in what was almost certainly a property union between two powerful families whose interests were not, apparently, as opposed as their parts in the recent wars might have led one to believe (Wilding, "Upon Appleton House" 154). Upon his retirement, Fairfax had been awarded part of Buckingham's sequestered property; however, Fairfax held that property in trust, and Buckingham regained it when he married Mary in 1657 (Markham 364-65; Wilson xxx). What Buckingham brought to the match was the potential for a

royal connection in the event of the restoration of Charles II--which occurred within three years of the marriage, and in which Fairfax himself played a significant role.[14] Certainly one member of the Fairfax family saw excessive ambition in Thomas's action. His decision to break off the entail in favour of Mary prompted Thomas's uncle, Charles Fairfax, to bring to his attention the prophetic warning of the first Lord Fairfax that "such is *Tom's* pride, led much by his wife, that he, not contented to live in our rank, will *destroy his house*" (Johnson 1.cviii). Thomas's unusual decision had the effect of making his daughter an attractive match, but passing estates through an heiress was an extremely risky business. The cracks which begin to appear in Marvell's Fairfax myth at this point indicate his awareness of the present fragility of the dynasty founded at Nun Appleton by Mary's great-great-grandfather. The apparent weakness of the female link in the dynastic chain stems from the belief that the role of women in a patrilineal order is to serve as the medium through which that order replicates itself; it is the father's essence, not the mother's that is passed on from one generation to the next. When Jonson includes the mistress of Penshurst in his catalogue of that house's glories he is praising her, indirectly, for fulfilling an ideal of woman deriving from such a belief:

> These, Penshurst, are thy praise, and yet not all.
>
> Thy lady's noble, fruitfull, chaste withall.
>
> His children thy great lord may call his owne:
>
> A fortune, in this age, but rarely knowne. ("To Penshurst" 89-92)

Fruitful, and chaste, Barbara Gamage enables the Sidney line to maintain its integrity as

it extends itself into another generation. "Upon Appleton House" assigns a similar role to women in the procreative process. We are told, for instance, that Sir William Fairfax was "First from a judge, then soldier bred" (29)--the former referring to his own father, the latter to his *mother's* father;[15] his mother leaves no trace of herself on her son. Nor does Isabel Thwaites, apparently; "he whose offspring fierce/Shall fight through all the universe" (31) must have Isabel if he is to generate that offspring, yet they are nonetheless unquestionably his. The only children who merit inclusion in the genealogical line, moreover, are (fiercely) male.

Y^t this very assumption, so confidently implied in Marvell's account of the "great race," is at the heart of the anxious and muted celebration of the present moment in the family's history. The continuance of Thomas's line depended upon Mary's ability to produce a son who would inherit her father's estates. In a letter dated October 29, 1700, arising from the dispute over Mary Buckingham's (Mary Fairfax's) right to sell the Nun Appleton estate in order to satisfy her deceased husband's creditors, Brian Fairfax, second son of the fourth Lord Fairfax, describes

> the deed of settlement of the late Lord Thomas Fairfax, wherein Bolton and Appleton are given to the duke and duchess [Mary and her husband, the duke of Buckingham] for life, and to the heirs of her body; but if she have none, to the heirs of the Lord Fairfax the grandfather. (Bell 259)

It is not without good reason, then, that the poet assigns such impor. nce to "Maria" at the conclusion of the work. Mary was to do the extraordinary, to perform "beyond her sex," bridging the gap in the line and restoring a semblance of continuity:

Hence she with graces more divine

Supplies beyond her sex the line;

And, like a sprig of mistletoe,

On the Fairfacian oak does grow. (93)

The poet figures her as "a sprig of mistletoe," a plant that the antiquarian John Selden believed to have been used in Druidic rituals as, in part, "a remedy against Barrennes" (Drayton 194).

Marvell clearly wishes to foster the hope of Mary's parents, yet he cannot entirely submerge the discomfort connected with their uncertain situation. She is not, after all, a branch on the great "Fairfacian oak," but a sprig of mistletoe with only a tenuous connection to the genealogical tree. Furthermore, even that connection must be severed for Thomas and Anne's hopes to be realised. Mary must wed--and surrender the Fairfax name--if she is to bear the desired offspring. Thus, "for some universal good,/The priest shall cut the sacred Bud" (93). The marriage is described not as a union, as was the Fairfax/Vere marriage, but rather as the smaller severance that the Fairfaxes must endure in the hope of staving off a greater one.

Marvell's description of Thomas and Anne's response to the severing of the sacred bud indicates a desire to mask their understandable concern. "Her glad parents most rejoice,/And make their destiny their choice" (93), the poet says, reassuring Thomas and Anne of their ultimate control over events. But does their uncertain solution to this uncomfortable circumstance offer cause for rejoicing, or does the biological failure of the line, coupled with the machinations necessitated by that failure, evince the

Fairfaxes' *incomplete* command of their own destiny, their susceptibility to random forces which they cannot ultimately control? Marvell's meadow--that chaotic, unpredictable place wherein "none does know/Whether he fall through it or go"(48)--is intended as the antithesis of the "more decent order tame" (96) over which "Maria" presides; yet the poem is haunted by the possibility that these worlds are, in the end, one and the same.

In spite of the sprig of mistletoe that is held out as an emblem of hope for the mighty Fairfacian oak, Marvell can offer no entirely satisfactory guarantees that the Fairfax line, or any other, can remain aloof from a world of time and change. Marvell's poem is set in a world that offers no safe refuge and no freedom from change. That "the tallest oak/Should fall by such a feeble stroke" calls into question the security of all such lesser oaks as the "Fairfacian" (69). While he would reassure his patrons that the world as they know it has always been and will always be so, circumstances prevent him from making the point very convincingly. Marvell cannot disguise entirely the possibility that "this house's fate" will not be as happy as he prophesies.

As things turned out, it was not. Mary's marriage to Buckingham was by all accounts an extremely unhappy one for her. A series of letters exchanged between Mary and the fourth Lord Fairfax detail her desperate but unsuccessful attempt to sell Nun Appleton in order to settle her dead husband's debts (Bell 2.256-265). Poised to sell the property for twenty-five hundred pounds, Mary was politely reminded by the current Lord Fairfax of her tenuous claim and of his intention "to secure the title of these lands to the heirs males of the family, as they were expressly given, by all the deeds and

settlements that were ever made" (2.264). When Mary died, childless, in 1704, Nun Appleton and the other Yorkshire properties passed, in accordance with the deeds and settlements, from her hands into his.

Notes

[1] Woodhouse 61.

[2] Winstanley 285.

[3] See, for instance, Marion Campbell, "Rehistoricising the Marvell Text" and Annabel Patterson, "Against Polarization: Literature and Politics in Marvell's Cromwell Poems."

[4] ". . . there followed another prodigy foretelling the grandeur of their empire. A human head, its features intact, was found, so it is said, by the men who were digging for the foundations of the temple. This appearance plainly foreshowed that here was to be the citadel of the empire and the head of the world, and such was the interpretation of the soothsayers . . ." (Livy 1.55.6). Pliny's account (in the Natural History 28.4) is equally free of blood and fear.

[5] See, for example, Don Allen Cameron's Image and Meaning, in which he reads the rail-killing incident as a moment in a larger allegory of the civil wars (209-10).

[6] In April, a dispute over pay and arrears had led to the execution of Robert Lockyer, a soldier in Edmund Whalley's regiment. Lockyer's funeral procession became a Leveller-led protest which drew thousands of men and women. Within a week, several regiments of the New Model had mutinied. At Burford on May 15, the mutineers surrendered to Fairfax, apparently having been given some assurances as to their safety. Nonetheless, two cornets and two corporals were ordered shot. As subsequent Leveller pamphlets maintained, it was far from clear that Fairfax and Cromwell had either the

legal or moral right to take such action under the circumstances (Pease 278-86).

[7] The allusion, in stanza 47, is to Numbers 13. Michael Wilding has noted its presence in the "Preparative" to the final Agreement of the People (in Wolfe 401; Wilding, Dragons Teeth 160.

[8] See, for instance, The New Law of Righteousness, Light Shining in Buckinghamshire, and A New-Yeers Gift for the Parliament and Armie, all in Sabine's edition of Winstanley's works.

[9] See also the first of the letters written to Fairfax in December, 1649, wherein the signatories "desire that you would continue your former kindnesse and promise to give commission to your soldiers not to meddle with us without your order" (Winstanley 345).

[10] See for instance, Ovid, Amores 2.6, or John Skelton, "Philip Sparrow".

[11] In his 1677 Account of the Growth of Popery and Arbitrary Government in England, Marvell argued that the disruptive restoration of Roman Catholic properties was one of the reasons to avoid an "alteration of Religion," acknowledging the great gains property-holders had made in the wake of the Henrician Reformation:

> . . . it would make a general Earth-quake over the Nation, and even now the Romish Clergy on the other side of the Water snuff up the savoury Odour of so many rich Abbies and Monasteries that belonged to their Predecessors. *Hereby no considerable Estate in England but must have a piece torn out of it upon the Title of Piety*, and the rest subject to be wholly forefeited upon the Account of Heresie" (State Tracts [1693] 73;

qtd. in Wilding, Dragons Teeth 148; italics mine).

[12] "Guy, Sir William Fairfax's eldest son, died a lunatic, unmarried. The family was carried on through Sir Thomas, the second son" (Brown 127, note 1).

[13] Markham (5, note 1), Johnson (1.xix) and Wilson (5) all name Isabel Thwaites as the source of Thomas's inheritance. As Lee Erickson points out, though, the question of ownership of Nun Appleton from the time of the dissolution to Thomas's time is a vexed one (16, note 10). Sir William Dugdale's Monasticon Anglicanum (1655-73), for instance, lists two separate grants: one by Henry VIII to a Robert Darkenall, and another by Edward VI to William Fairfax and a Humphry Shelley. To complicate matters further, "among the Abstracts of the Rolls called Originalia the homages of Guido and Thomas Fayrfax are recorded for the House and Site" (5.562).

[14] Shortly after Richard Cromwell was forced aside by Generals Fleetwood, Lambert, and Desborough in the spring of 1659, George Monk, the army commander in Scotland, began to manoeuvre against his fellow generals in favour of the recently recalled Rump of the Long Parliament. According to Wilson, Fairfax's "great personal prestige, above all in the army, offered him a crucial role. He alone could propose an honourable alternative to doubting troops" (175). Monk's campaign, in which Fairfax chose to participate, led to the recall and final dissolution of the Long Parliament on March 16, 1660, the election of a new Parliament, and, shortly thereafter, the restoration of the monarchy. See Wilson 174-83.

[15] Respectively, William Fairfax, a judge of Common Pleas, and George Manners, whom Margoliouth identifies as "a distinguished soldier who died at the siege

of Tournay in 1513" (1.283, note to line 232).

II/ Did Women Have a Revolution?

Introduction

If one were to apply Joan Kelly-Gadol's eye-opening question "Did women have a Renaissance?" to the events of 1640-1660, it might be altered to read, "Did women have a Revolution?" The upheavals of the Revolution led some to believe that England was preparing to transform itself further still, into a communist utopia or an anarchic mobocracy. But how were women to figure in this dreamt-of transformation? When Winstanley envisioned a world turned upside down he had in mind a world liberated from the artificial barriers of social rank, in which all men were equal. While some observers may have objected to the apparent sexual egalitarianism in his Digger colony (Seaberg 126), though, Winstanley's programme did not include the active pursuit of *sexual* equality.

There is, of course, nothing remarkable in such an oversight. Most students of Renaissance culture would concede that the early modern period was not on the whole a kind one to women. The new restrictions placed on women's social, political and sexual activities as feudal societies gave way to emerging modern states led Kelly-Gadol to conclude that "there was no renaissance for women--at least, not during the Renaissance" (176). A possible exception to the exclusion of women from the social transformations of the Renaissance is the flourishing of women's education in the first half of the sixteenth century under the influence of humanist writers like More and, especially, Juan Vives.[1] But this movement affected only a tiny minority of elite women, those who claimed royal or noble blood (Stone, Family 158; Goreau 1-4). Furthermore,

it was short-lived, lasting only about forty years. Queen Elizabeth herself had benefitted from the humanists' educational reforms, but she did little to encourage the growth of women's education, and by the time of her death, the learned lady had become an unseemly figure (Goreau 3-4). Finally, as Margaret Hannay has observed, the nature of the texts made available to young female readers and translators betray the limitations of women's instruction: "the Protestant emphasis on the word of God," she suggests, "encouraged education for women so that they could read the Bible and the appropriate commentaries, not so that they could speak or write their own ideas" (7). Although Hannay contends that some were able subtly to defy these limitations and create a space for self-expression, it is clear that the social pressures which conspired to make even these elite women "silent but for the Word" were considerable. However, an assortment of variously distressed and bemused observers of the 1640s and 1650s indicates that even common women appeared more vocal and more visible in the public sphere during those decades than they had been in preceding ones. Alarmist responses to women's involvement in public affairs disclose that, at least to some minds, there was more than one way in which the world could be turned upside down.

The participation of women in the Civil War and its accompanying religious, political and social struggles has only recently begun to be explored in any depth. Since Ellen McArthur's 1909 study of "Women Petitioners and the Long Parliament" and Keith Thomas's 1958 essay, "Women and the Civil War Sects," an increasing number of historians have turned their attention to the political and religious activities of the female half of England's population, who were, of course, no less embroiled in the upheavals

of the time than their male counterparts were. If historians have been slow to discover the presence of women in the events of the 1640s and 1650s, literary analyses of women's writings of the period have been rarer still. However, feminist and cultural-materialist approaches to Renaissance literature have recently begun to enrich our sense of the culture by bringing some long unregarded works into view. The diverse texts generated by the phenomenon of female prophecy--a by-product of popular radical protestantism--passed unnoticed by students of literature prior to a fairly recent (1980) essay by Christine Berg and Phillippa Berry. The women's petitions studied in the following chapter are remarkable as instances of collective action undertaken by women; yet they, along with the intriguing satirical responses to them, remain little known.

This is not to say, however, that England's civil wars have always appeared to lack female participants. On the contrary, the unwonted visibility and expressiveness of many women during those years drew the notice of many. One contemporary observer, clearly a less than sympathetic one, went so far as to accuse the women of England of having "hugged their Husbands into this Rebellion" (Mercurius Civicus, 25 August, 1643; qtd. in George 42). This charge acknowledges women's active involvement in the political tumult, but it also suggests much more: the civil wars arose, the writer implies, as the result of an unnatural, feminising intrusion of women into the traditionally masculine domain of politics. While few modern historians would readily accept this contribution to the debate over the causes of the English Revolution, it was certainly not unique in its day. Nor is it very difficult to see why such an accusation should be made. A small number of women readily added their voices to the political and religious

controversies of the 1640s and 1650s, a period that saw a marked increase in writing and publishing by women. Moreover, their works were frequently polemical in nature.

To the more conservatively minded, women were as welcome in politics as the rabble was--in other words, not at all. In fact, when either of those two troublesome groups was perceived to be meddling in political affairs, they were frequently subject to strikingly similar constructions (Nadelhaft 558). The standard appraisal of the mob in Renaissance writing is that it is fickle, inconstant, unpredictable. The people, claimed Pierre Charron in 1601, are "inconstant and variable, without stay, like the waves of the sea" (208; Patrides 246). This commonplace is still in evidence decades later, in Sir Robert Filmer's charge that "the nature of all people is to desire liberty without restraint, which cannot be but where the wicked bear rule" (89), a charge accompanied by a catalogue of democracies in which good rulers were removed by the mercurial masses. Similar contemptible qualities were ascribed to women by Joseph Swetnam in his notorious Araignment of Lewde, idle, froward, and unconstant women (1615), a work that prompted one of the period's more famous controversies over the nature of women. But Swetnam's pamphlet was far from unique, as Katherine Usher Henderson and Barbara McManus's recent re-presentation and discussion of such controversial texts reminds us.[2] The nature of women, like that of the foolish mob, was commonly regarded as antithetical to the rational and constant nature required by those who would constitute and advise the government.

This construction of femininity, and its corollary--the belief that women had no place in political affairs--influenced contemporary perceptions of many facets of the civil

wars; the attempt to locate the genesis of the conflict in the treacherous hugs of the nation's wives is but one instance. Throughout the conflict, individual partners of powerful men were singled out for special criticism. Lucy Hutchinson censured Elizabeth Cromwell for what she saw as political pretensions on her part, and blamed Lady Anne Fairfax's deleterious influence on Sir Thomas for his fall from glory (208-9; 168, 195; George 38). The most widely disparaged wife of all, though, was Queen Henrietta Maria, whom Margaret George identifies as the likely object behind Hutchinson's insistence that a princess should submit to "her masculine and wise Councellors" (Hutchinson 48; George 38). The queen's unnatural and malign influence upon her husband (she was, conveniently, both foreign *and* Roman Catholic) was a recurrent theme in anti-royalist writing. The widespread mistrust of Roman Catholics in general, and of the papist queen in particular, is well known. The specific nature of protestant fears is plainly exhibited in an item in the popular press, recently re-presented by Lois Potter, in which the Earl of Arundel describes a depiction of Charles offering the royal sceptre to the queen, who in turn offers it to the Pope (Potter 46; Mercurius Britanicus [10-17 June, 1644]). Charles's occasional concessions in favour of recusants, coupled with Henrietta Maria's involvement in the selection of her husband's advisors, alarmed many of the king's rigidly Calvinist subjects. Even when that alarm matured into open conflict, the king's opponents tended (at least at the outset) to aim their criticisms not at Charles himself, but at his errant advisors, and thus, in part, indirectly at his wife.

To many, the Catholic queen appeared to exert a harmful feminising influence on

the Stuart court. The increasingly elaborate masques in which the queen and her attendants played central roles testified to the court's growing tolerance for idolatry.[3] After the regicide, Henrietta Maria's influence continued to . rnish commentators with an explanation of the king's downfall. While Milton demonstrated no reluctance to attack the king directly, he too saw in Charles an effeminate king who had improperly allowed himself to be "govern'd by a Woman" (Eikonoklastes [1649], CPW 3.538). In The Life and Death of King Charles, or, the Pseudo-Martyr Discovered (1651), Milton wonders

> how and by what Fate this most unfortunate Prince came to be so overpowered with the Inchantments of a Woman, betwixt whom and himselfe, it is well known, a good space after their Inter-marriage, there were many jarres, and continued fallings out, and yet at last she alone to become his Oracle for the leading on of all his designes; In so much as he durst not offend her in the least punctilio, or to retract any thing of never so little moment without her good liking, and approbation, and so much to dote on her, as not to permit the Prince to stir a foot, or to undertake anything, but by her only direction, such an absolute power and command had this Queene gained over him and his affections. (214-215)

In Milton's hands, the question remains rhetorical, but it is difficult to imagine any response that could place Charles's queen in a favourable light. Through his use of the language of witchcraft ("enchantments," "oracle") Milton hints at one possible explanation for the king's having been so fondly overcome with female charm.

Such charges were not limited to the king or the ruling classes, however. Those

who regarded the activities of sectarians (who were typically, though not always accurately, regarded as members of the lower orders) frequently vilified *them* for exhibiting unnatural, effeminate behaviour. The visibility of women in the sects was recurrently noted and derided by anti-sectarian writers, as Keith Thomas has remarked ("Women" 336). For the benefit of those unable to read, the woodcuts illustrating these anti-sectarian pamphlets also stressed the prominence of women in those groups (T. Williams 100). Obadiah Couchman's The Adamites Sermon (1641), for instance, bears a title-page illustration of a male "Adamite" addressing his flock. Like their preacher and their unfallen namesake, the members of the congregation are naked; six of the eleven are female. Women's supposed incapacity for reasoned thought made them appear particularly vulnerable to the conniving of unscrupulous preachers. At the same time, the charge of unnatural effeminacy could be a very effective tool in the propaganda campaign against religious and social radicalism. Robert Seaberg has suggested that the apparent equality between men and women in Gerrard Winstanley's "Digger" community may in part explain the curious incident in which four members of that group were brutally attacked by six men, four of whom were dressed as women (126).

The politics of the revolutionary period, then, were frequently discussed in terms of gender. More specifically, effeminacy on the part of men with political pretensions was regarded either as the *cause* of their downfalls (as with the king and his court) or the *justification* for their exclusion from power (as with the Independent congregations). The presence of actual *women* in political assemblies of any sort, from the court to the public meeting, was likely to be interpreted as evidence of an unnatural and risky

encroachment on forbidden ground.

The feminine ideal that pervades the literature of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries is concisely summed up in the title of Suzanne Hull's study of books produced for a female audience--Chaste, Silent and Obedient. In his popular guide to feminine conduct, Richard Brathwait advised his female readers that

> To discourse of State-matters will not become your auditory: nor to dispute of high poynts of Divinity, will it sort well with *women* of your quality. These *Shee-Clarkes* many times broach strange opinions, which as they understand them not themselves, so they labour to intangle others of equall understanding to themselves . . . Silence in a *Woman* is a moving Rhetoricke, winning most, when in words it wooeth least. (89-90)

Female speech is deemed undesirable because women are by nature irrational creatures who will necessarily speak nonsense if unchecked. But for Brathwait and many of his contemporaries, women's speech is also inextricably tied to their sexuality. As Peter Stallybrass comments, "the surveillance of women concentrated upon three specific areas: the mouth, chastity, the threshold of the house"--three areas that "were frequently collapsed into each other" (126). Stallybrass's observation is here confirmed by Brathwait, whose desire to limit a woman's utterances clearly reflects a more fundamental wish to secure her fragile honour from the dangers of social intercourse. "How subject poore *Women* be to lapses, and recidivations, being left their owne Guardians," he maintains, "daily experience can sufficiently discover" (42). The interdependence of the three pillars of feminine virtue--chastity, silence and obedience--is

indicated by Brathwait's inclusion of his paternalistic commendation of women's silence in a chapter on the subject of "Decency."

Naturally, compliance with the second of these restrictions placed considerable limitations on women's use of the printing press as a means of addressing the public. Prior to 1640, printed books by women are relatively scarce.[4] That Brathwait, a man, should author a guide to "*What* Habilliments *doe best attire* . . . *What* Ornaments *doe best adorne*," and "*What* Complements *doe best accomplish*" the English gentlewoman is no anomaly. The powerful taboo against writing and publishing by women is most evident in the practical domestic guidebooks produced for female readers. Their function was to instruct women in conventional feminine tasks such as midwifery, cooking and needlework; yet of the eighty-five examined by Hull, only *one* is openly acknowledged to have been the work of a female author--the rest are authored by men or published anonymously. Of course, it is possible that women were responsible for some of these anonymous works, or that some were publishing under male pseudonyms. Regardless, Hull's conclusion--that the tradition of following men's instructions must have been very strong indeed to prevent women from writing openly about the domestic field in which they could justly claim some expertise--is a convincing one (Hull 136).

The first two chapters in this section will focus on the popular reception and constructions of two groups of women who felt compelled to defy the restrictions placed on their sex and add their voices to the religious and political controversies of the day. The first examines the writings of the women petitioners of 1642 and 1643, and the Leveller women who petitioned on behalf of the imprisoned Leveller leaders between

1646 and 1653--women who were motivated by secular, political concerns. Their petitions--attempts to influence the institutions of government--were answered by a series of ribald "mock petitions" which typically impute sexual frustration to their ostensible authors, who were bereft of their husbands and lovers by the war. What else could women have to complain about, after all? The apparent proximity of women to the centre of political power is probably what motivates the authors of the "Parliaments of Women," contemptuous satirical works in which parliament is transformed into a gathering of witless gossips or the anthropomorphic "Mistris Parliament." Although they are produced by writers of diverse political persuasions they share a common hostility towards women who would seek to enter, and thus bring to ruin, England's institutions of government.

The second chapter considers sectarian women who presumed to claim divine inspiration and prophesy--another relatively small and exceptional group, but one whose activities tended to receive a disproportionate amount of attention from their contemporaries. Although their motives were predominantly spiritual in nature, their conduct and their writings posed both implicit and explicit challenges to existing social and political institutions. Like their more worldly counterparts, female prophets were maligned, ridiculed and subject to grotesque misconstructions in the popular press.

What unites the literature by and about these two groups of women is the great disparity between their own avowed intentions in taking such audacious action, and in the intentions imputed to them by those who find their behaviour offensive. That behaviour is most frequently interpreted as a series of attempts to disrupt one of the

principal hierarchical structures of English society--the hierarchy of gender. Writers who oppose female participation in political and religious conflicts frequently present us with travesties of the institutions of family and state in which the world is turned upside down and powerful, devious women rule weak and effeminate men. More often than not, these works tell us more about the fears of their writers than the aims of their female subjects. Yet for that very reason they are important. In the presence of an apparent threat to the current order--whether real or illusory--the proponents of social conservatism air their own nightmares and present us with a demonic mirror image of the social values they espouse. Such perverse renderings of the status quo can provide us with valuable insights into the thing itself--the construction of seventeenth-century society and the construction of gender upon which it is in part based.

Contemporary reactions to both of these groups indicate that less liberal theologians and political observers saw in their behaviour an attempt to undermine one of the pillars of English society: the patriarchal family. While such a charge would have been serious enough in less troubled times, in the political confusion of the Civil War and after it takes on a special intensity. If all forms of authority were connected, as the nation had long been informed from the pulpit, then the potential disruption of the family structure had profound implications for all social institutions. The family had by this time not only come to be regarded as the smallest unit and building block of the commonwealth, but as an obvious and immediate model for the proper distribution of power in the state.

The use of marriage as a political metaphor is the subject of the third and final

chapter in this section. The social conservatism implicit in this metaphor placed it increasingly at odds with the political situations it was used to describe. The identification of the husband and father's patriarchal authority with that of the king was seriously compromised by Charles's long absence from Westminster and his subsequent trial and execution. When Archbishop Ussher wrote, in the king's support, that "*a household is a kind of a little Common-wealth*, and a *Common-wealth a great houshold*" his intent was to affirm the natural stability of both institutions by way of a tautological commonplace (131-32). Yet the circumstance that prompted Ussher to write--a war between king and Parliament--makes his assumption of stability in the "little Common-wealth" less than convincing.

Notes

[1] While Vives's views may have been relatively liberal, though, his greatest concern was with the preparation of a woman for her role as a wife or widow (Henderson and McManus 82). See Henderson and McManus's Half Humankind, 81-92 for a brief account of the theory and practice of women's education in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. On the divergent interests of feminists and humanists, see Hilda Smith's Reason's Disciples, 5-6.

[2] Earlier accounts of contemporary controversies over women can be found in chapter 13 of Louis B. Wright's Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England (1935) and in Carroll Camden's The Elizabethan Woman (1952), 239-71.

[3] The pretext for the infamous Star-Chamber prosecution of the militant Puritan William Prynne in 1634 was the questionable charge that he had labelled Henrietta Maria a notorious whore in his Histriomastix (1632). Unfortunately for Prynne, the publication of his mammoth attack on the theatre, which included a particular attack on female actors, coincided with the Queen's performance in Montague's masque The Shepherd's Pastoral. See Lamont's Marginal Prynne, 28-33, and Kirby's William Prynne, 21-31.

[4] Patricia Crawford's "Women's Published Writings, 1600-1700" includes some informative statistical analyses by Crawford and Richard Bell (265-74). Between 1600 and 1640, an average of 10 first editions by women appeared per decade. Between 1641-1650, that number increased to 92, and in the following decade, to 124. While the volume of works by women remains relatively small (reaching a high of 1.3 per cent of

all published material in the 1650s) the increase is nonetheless significant, given the minuscule output in earlier decades. We must take into account, of course, that the actual *number* of extant texts after 1640 is, to a great extent, due to the efforts of Thomason, whose renowned collection of printed books and pamphlets makes the study of this period's literature so inviting (and daunting). Nonetheless, the relative *proportion* of extant printed texts by women does show a marked increase, from an average of around 0.5 per cent between 1600 and 1640 to almost three times that amount, 1.3 per cent, by 1650 (Crawford 266, Figure 7.2). Finally, the *public* nature of much women's writing after 1640 is significant, since it indicates a tendency among some groups of women to refuse the accustomed muzzle of modesty. The most striking increase is in the number and relative proportion of prophetic texts by women. Between 1600 and 1640, only 2 of the 39 first editions of women's texts were prophetic works; between 1641 and 1660, 72 of 230 (or almost one third) were prophetic in nature (Crawford 269, Table 7.3).

1/ Female Petitioners and Other Revolting Women

The confusion that beset England between 1640 and 1660 created opportunities for many women to move into unaccustomed roles. Property-owning husbands departing for the wars took it for granted that their wives would stand in for them, managing the family estates during their absence. Even military efforts by women in defence of those estates, though rare, were not entirely unknown (George 38-39; Higgins 220). In a brief royalist closet-drama printed during one of the short-lived royalist uprisings of the second civil war, such direct participation by women received an eager endorsement (albeit very likely a desperate one, coming as it did in the midst of a losing cause). The Kentish Fayre (1648) encourages continued resistance to Parliament. Toward that end, the play offers as models to its readers Mrs. Webster and Mrs. Maine, Kentish women armed with pistols and swords, who enter proclaiming their defiance of the parliamentary forces.

Like so many who felt that the wars should never have begun at all, Mrs. Webster and Mrs. Maine find the source of the disruption in the weakness of men who ought to have exercised their rightful authority. But rather than laying the blame on feminising wives, these self-proclaimed Amazons credit women with the masculine strength to recover what their husbands have lost. "Men tardy growne, and deaf to good,/remisse in every thing," sings Mrs. Webster,

> Their owne great woes, not understood,
>
> themselves slav'd, and their King.

'Tis time that Women armour weare,

and teach Men for to fight:

'Gainst those, who their destruction sweare,

and seeke it, day and night. (61-68)

The royalist author of The Kentish Fayre has modelled his militant ladies after earlier cross-dressed warrior women, such as Spenser's Britomart or the man-woman of Haec Vir (1620), whose aim is not to violate nature but to adopt extraordinary measures to restore it (Shepherd 85). Hic Mulier, the apologist for female cross-dressing in Haec Vir, makes this plain when she issues a call to arms very similar to that of Mrs. Maine and Mrs. Webster. "Cast then from you our ornaments and put on your own armor," she bids womanly men like Haec Vir, "be men in shape, men in shew, men in words, men in actions, men in counsell, men in example: then will we love and serve you; then will we heare and obey you" (C3^v). What saves Mrs. Maine and Mrs. Webster from a hostile reception is the extraordinary circumstance that has brought them to put on arms. While the pedlars who encounter this strange spectacle are at first taken aback--"Ha, who are these, what Women weare Armes?" (56-57)--they are immediately won over by the women's stridency in the royalist cause. The women are indeed emblems of a world turned upside down, but they have pledged to fight for its restoration. Unfortunately, the play's propagandistic purpose carries it abruptly on to other matters, and its "viragoes" (97) vanish from sight. We are left, however, with the intriguing proposition that women can and must divorce themselves from the effeminate behaviour that has undermined the royalist cause in England. If men will enslave themselves, then women

must fight to free them, as Britomart fought to free her beloved Artegall from that unnatural destroyer of masculinity, Radigund.

Of course, for women who were looking to move into new spheres of activity not all of this was good news. The very terms in which Mrs. Maine and Mrs. Webster define the Civil War re-affirm the already solid notion that women (at least insofar as they exhibit feminine behaviour) and politics are a bad combination; they enter the fray as manly women in order to help purge England of the effeminacy threatening to ruin it. This propagandistic celebration of women's militancy, then, is somewhat deceiving. In 1620, James I had regarded the wearing of doublets and broad-brimmed hats and the sporting of stilettoes and poniards by women as an unacceptable violation of the rules governing dress (Chamberlain 2.286-87); but disturbing as this fashion trend might have been, the weapons appear to have been as ornamental as the clothes--worn for their symbolic rather than their practical worth. Certainly, nothing resembling the armed bands of women heralded by Mrs. Webster and Mrs. Maine ever surfaced prior to or during the revolutionary period. Women participated in the struggles of the day, but their participation took very different forms. Besides, their involvement in causes other than those leading to the restoration of the king would certainly have led the conservative viragos of The Kentish Fayre to regard them as the feminising enemy.

The role of London women in the popular demonstrations of the 1640s and 1650s--particularly the phenomenon of women's petitions which reached its height with the petitions for the release of the Leveller leaders in April and May of 1649--has received some attention from historians, but surprisingly little from students of literature.[1] Like

the Leveller controversy with which it intersects, the petitioning phenomenon points to a series of struggles, fought via the printing press, whose implications extended well beyond a purely literary sphere. My aim in this chapter will be to approach the question of women's participation in the political controversies of mid-century by way of the attendant literary phenomenon--the dissemination of mock-petitions and the popular satires depicting "Parliaments of Women." The petitions themselves are remarkable as evidence of women using the press as a means to political ends. These documents, which were circulated in printed form in addition to being submitted to Parliament, enable us to discern how groups of politically active women hoped to present themselves to a public unaccustomed to such sights. The responses, by writers who despite their various political persuasions share a common dislike of forward women, shed light on how the petitioners were construed. The petitioners themselves were well aware that they stood in violation of a powerful taboo against women's speech in public, and invariably they felt compelled to justify their conduct; yet that taboo was clearly not sufficient to silence them. When the Leveller petition of April 23, 1649 was delivered to Westminster, several hundred women were on hand to see that it did not pass unnoticed (Higgins 202). It could hardly be expected that the general response to such incidents would be entirely positive.

The earliest examples of women's petitions arise from the widespread hostility towards the Laudian programme of church reform undertaken with the king's approval during the years of personal rule. As Brian Manning has illustrated, the long-awaited Parliaments of 1640 were viewed as the hope of the anti-Laudian faction in the contest

to persuade the king to abandon what they regarded as a dangerous flirtation with Roman Catholicism. The general anxiety is plain in the petitions of 1642, A True Copie of the Petition of the Gentlewomen and The Humble Petition of many hundreds of distressed Women, Trades-mens Wives, and Widdowes, which concern themselves above all with the state of church government. They voice widespread popular fears of Catholic subversion--greatly intensified by news of the rebellion in Ireland--and hostility toward the bishops and their fellow Peers, who are suspected of conspiring to undermine the foundations of the Church of England. These petitions, then, are avowedly conservative in their aims, and the petitioners themselves take pains to stress the humility with which they voice their grievances; the authors of the Petition of the Gentlewomen go so far as to prostrate themselves metaphorically at the feet of the king and Parliament, their chosen defenders against papists and prelates (3 [4]). Yet, as is often the case in the conflict historians once called "the Puritan Revolution," the demands of religion and politics are clearly opposed here. A claim to orthodoxy made by petitioners who, however humbly, urge Parliament to move the king "to purge both the Court and Kingdome of that great Idolatrous Service of the Masse, which is tollerated in the Queenes Court" (5) cannot be taken entirely at face value. Henrietta Maria is openly made the object of suspicion and hostility, and even the monarch himself is not untainted by the petitioners' language. Their argument (a commonplace one at the time) that the king would prevent the excesses of the prelates if only he knew of them, saves the petitioners from having to criticise their monarch directly, but just barely.

The putatively conservative stance of these petitioners is also seriously

compromised by the fact that they are women acting in public and as a group for political ends. The petitions of 1642 constitute a rare instance of women organising themselves *as women*, a group that comprises at least "gentlewomen" and "tradesmans-wives." Accompanying this limited reach across the bounds of social rank is the sense of a shared experience, peculiar to their sex, that transcends geographical boundaries. The authors of the Petition of Gentlewomen, for instance, view the recent atrocities in Ireland specifically as they have touched the Anglo-Protestant women with whom they identify: ". . . wee wish wee had no cause to speake of those insolencies, and savage uses and unheard of rapes, exercised upon our Sex in Ireland, and have we not just cause to feare that they wil prove the forerunners of our ruine . . ?" (2 [3]). The potential for a self-conscious articulation of a distinctly female experience can also be glimpsed when the petitioners voice their past griefs and their fears for the future of England. The petitioners' concern is with the effects of civil disruptions on the world they know, that of home and family:

> . . . oh how dreadfull would this be! We thought it misery enough (though nothing to that we have just cause to feare) but few yeares since for some of our Sex, by unjust divisions from their bosome comforts, to be rendred in a manner Widdowes, and the children Fatherlesse, Husbands were Imprisoned from the Society of their wives, even against the Lawes of God and Nature, and little Infants suffered in their Fathers banishments . . . . (3 [2])

The petitioners' conventional humility, then, should not prevent us from recognising just

how extraordinary the activities of these women were. Certainly they themselves realised that "It may be thought strange, and unbeseeming our sex to shew our selves by way of Petition to this Honourable Assembly" (6), and felt it necessary to append to their petition a list of reasons why they were motivated to do so. But like the royalist warriors of The Kentish Fayre they appear to have found a receptive audience. The women's wishes accorded closely with those of the reform-minded members of the Long Parliament, and a concluding note details their reception at "the Commons doore" by the renegade M.P., John Pym, who commended their actions and bade them return to their homes and place their trust in Parliament (6).

However, not all observers shared Pym's willingness to overlook the unorthodox nature of the petitioners' behaviour because of its timely contribution to an important cause. The first in a series of mock petitions appeared in 1641[2], and while it obviously shares the petitioners' anti-Catholic and -Laudian sentiments, it is openly hostile towards the participation of women in religious debate. The objects of attack in The Petition of the Weamen of Middlesex include not only the bishops and the Book of Common Prayer, but women who presume to enter the controversy, regardless of their convictions. This mock petition asserts that women are by nature bereft of the intellectual powers required to criticise religious institutions. Thus the mock-petitioners' avowed intention to demonstrate, through their active support of the Puritan cause, that women can be as religious as men (A3^r^), is absurd. Accordingly, the satire's subtitle announces that their petition is to be withdrawn "untill it should please God to endue them with more wit, and lesse Non-sence."

The bases on which the author of The Petition of the Weamen of Middlesex disparages the women who petition for church reform are conventional ones in the period. Women are fundamentally irrational creatures, more likely to be seduced by the sensual rituals of Catholicism ("the melodiousness of the voyces of those well tuned boys . . . are sufficient to put wee women which are the weaker vessels in mind of a Bawdi-house" [A2^v]) and yet for that same reason they are incapable of analysing or criticising those rituals. Behind all the contemptuous laughter, though, one cannot help but detect some nervousness. The satirist's withdrawal of the petition prior to its submission to Parliament evinces an element of wish-fulfilment that his dismissive tone does not entirely disguise. Unlike the genuine petitions it mocks, The Petition of the Weamen of Middlesex remains safely distant from the centre of power. One wonders, also, what to make of the author's adding to his title a note that the petition was "Subscribed with the Names of above 12 000." He is hoping to suggest, perhaps, that vast numbers of women--all women, even--are implicated in the stupidity he derides. At the same time, though, he is--perhaps inadvertently--acknowledging the potential strength of a dormant political force. While the number is grossly exaggerated, the possibility of women massing for political purposes (though not precisely feminist ones) would be realised several years later with the petitions and demonstrations initiated by the women of the Leveller movement.

Subsequent mock petitions share with The Petition of the Weamen of Middlesex a fundamental refusal to take seriously the opinions of women on any topic of political or religious significance. They frequently blend flippant anti-feminist satire with earnest

pleas for an end to fighting and a restoration of proper order in the kingdom. The Resolution of the Women of London to Parliament (1642) provides one example of this peculiar combination of purposes. The pamphlet's title page bears a woodcut depicting an eager wife instructing her horned husband to "Go to the wars." In the text, however, women are satirised in a less direct manner. The Resolution makes an appeal to both king and Parliament to resolve their differences and return to the business of governing the nation, but it conveys this message by way of a mock declaration by women who are incapable of constructing an argument and who repeatedly become enmeshed in a language over which they obviously exercise little control. In the mouths of these would-be political activists, familiar contentions become virtually incomprehensible:

> . . . the King God be thanked, is a wise, gracious, and temperate Prince, a Soveraigne that can reigne and rule over his owne passions, and therefore it may very well seeme strange, even to women of the best understanding, that the King hath withdrawne himselfe: for if the King had been withdrawn and not himselfe, or himselfe had been withdrawne and not the King, it had then been very likely that the King might in time have withdrawne himselfe from those evill wicked counsellors, who have not onely withdrawne the King and himselfe, but also himselfe and the King: and indeed to speake plainly, the Kings owne selfe. ([A3ᵛ])

When we wade through the confused rhetoric we discover nothing more than another attack upon "the malignant party" ([A3ᵛ]) of advisors who are held responsible for the present friction between Charles and his Parliament. Only this favourite target of

cautious parliamentarians is directly maligned; yet no attempt is made to use *them* for humorous ends. What is satirised is neither the king nor his advisors, but the limited rational abilities of these "women of the best understanding," who presume themselves to be capable of discussing political affairs. The Resolution mocks the medium, not the message. Unlike the author of The Petition of the Weamen of Middlesex, the author of The Resolution sees no need to have his women retract their nonsensical contributions. The end is nonetheless the same: given what we have seen of their rhetorical skills, their promise to "reason and wrangle" in defence of both their king and Parliament ([A4^{v}]) is neither encouraging nor threatening; it is merely humorous.

In accordance with convention, and with the title-page illustration of an unfaithful wife and her cuckolded husband, the putative authors are unable to avoid allusions to sexual matters, their proper area of expertise, as they try to grapple with matters clearly beyond their reach. They make much, for instance, of the fact that "the Kings Majesty hath withdrawne himselfe from his Parliament," putting a bawdy spin on a familiar metaphor that likens the king to a husband and Parliament to "his faithful loving wife" [A2^{v}]. Such sexually suggestive humour, usually at the expense of women, is characteristic of the mock petitions as a group. The enforced abstinence endured by the lusty wives of London whose husbands are away fighting the war is a common theme in these pamphlets. The Humble Petition of Many Thousands of Wives and Matrons (1643) is a mock complaint that ends with the wives' recognition that the war and their resulting frustration is "a just judgement of Heaven upon us for our sinnes and iniquities; for before, when each of us had as loving and kinde husbande as ever laid leg over a

woman, we were not contented with them, but still desired change" (7). Similar woes are voiced by equally licentious women in The Virgins Complaint (1643) and The City-Dames Petition (1647). The function of these satires is to present the activities of the petitioning women so that they appear at once familiar and inconsequential. Now, as always, their authors imply, women are foolish, garrulous and over-sexed.

What is remarkable about these often vicious responses to the women's petitions is how completely the strictures against women's speech can prohibit some from hearing their message, whatever its content. This chronic deafness on the part of many becomes acutely apparent at those moments where clear and apparently sincere pleas for an end to fighting are ridiculed, not on the basis of their intrinsic merits, but because they are spoken by female voices. The Mid-wives just Complaint (1646) protests that "it is a lamentable case when the sonne shall go out against the father; father against the sonne; brother against brother, and kinsman against kinsman" (A3^{v}), echoing the general cry against the unnaturalness of the Civil War. But the concluding words of their lament--"and we condole even to the lower-most angle of our triangular hearts" (A3^{v})--are intended to move us to anti-feminist derision; the appeal for peace is merely a means to that end. A similar response is solicited by the author of The Widowes Lamentation for the Absence of their deare Children and Suitors (1643), who has his complainants

> most humbly implore and beseech, that these cruell and unnatural warres may have a sudden and final conclusion, that so no more men who are so precious in our eyes, may be betrayed to untimely deaths, nor no more blood shed in this quarell, but that we widowes may be restored to our

> former joyes, by having plurality of suitors, and daily hopes of obtaining good and lusty young husbands, to the solace of our bodies, and rejoycing of our soules . . . . (8)

These clashes of sincerity and irony are truly disconcerting. Set against the genuine fears expressed in pamphlets such as The Petition of Gentlewomen, and the actual losses suffered by so many families in the wars, such trivialisations of the "Mid-wives'" and "Widowes'" complaints appear unpardonably cruel.

Since the earlier women's petitions were made the objects of such derision, often by writers who appeared to have shared the petitioners' concerns, it should come as no surprise that the more radical petitions presented by the women of the Leveller movement between 1646 and 1653 failed to find a receptive audience. The increasing isolation of the Leveller leaders and the growing power of the army Grandees and their associates among the Independent faction in Parliament ensured that there would be no kind greeting at the House door for these petitioners.

The Leveller petitions are a manifestation of the kind of collective action only imagined--and even then in jest--by the author of the satirical Petition of the Weamen of Middlesex in 1641. During April and May, 1649, months identified by Patricia Higgins as the high point of intervention by women in the political tumult of the Revolution (200), two separate petitions were presented to Parliament. The second, To the Supream Authority of England The Commons Assembled in Parliament, bore ten thousand signatures and was presented, in what must have been dramatic fashion, by one thousand of those signatories.

While the writers avow their humble positions as petitioners, they nonetheless make some extraordinary claims regarding their rights, as women, to engage in public debate. Adapting Leveller rhetoric to justify their unorthodox behaviour they ask,

> Have we not an equal interest with the men of this Nation, in those liberties and securities, contained in the Petition of Right, and other the good Laws of the Land? are any of our lives, limbs, liberties or goods to be taken from us more then from Men, but by due processe of Law and conviction of twelve sworn men of the Neighbourhood?

The petitioners' language points to a feminist potential latent in Leveller politics. As most commentators have recognised, though, what the Leveller leaders actually demanded was expanded suffrage for men. The final draft of the Agreement (1649) called for an electorate comprising "All men of the age of one and twenty years and upwards (not being servants, or receiving alms, or having served the late King in Arms or voluntary Contributions)" (Haller and Davies 321). Although Lilburne argued for the inherent rights of men and women, as the Leveller women do here, neither Lilburne nor the petitioners followed the logic of their own arguments and demanded votes for women (Dow 43). Regardless, the May news-sheets indicate that the appearance of large groups of politically active women in such close proximity to England's centre of power caused disquiet among many contemporary observers. The 22-29 May issue of Mercurius Militaris railed bitterly against "the Ladyes-errants of the Seagreen Order," sarcastically demanding:

> . . . why doe ye not againe muster up your Pettycoates and white

> Appoms, and like gallant Lacedemonians, or bold Amazons advance your Banners once more in the Pallace yard, and spit defiance in the teeth of Authority . . . tell them that you have had a pretty time on't and licked their fingers long enough, and now 'tis high time that Cate of the kitchin and Tyme the turnspit should rule the rost, and tell them that you are now growne as skilfull in State Cookery as themselves . . . .

That the manly art of statecraft could be made to don an apron and become "State Cookery" is an appalling possibility to this anonymous observer. Clearly, though, he does not see that possibility as being remote enough for his liking.[3] Like their predecessors, the Leveller women were ridiculed via the mock petition. A Remonstrance of the Shee-citizens of London (1647) bends Leveller language to the familiar end of sexual satire. Lilburne becomes "that stiffe stander for the subjects Liberties," while the Leveller women demand "that in case of our husbands defaults, or debillities, we may our selves trade a broad in the Country, and utter our warres to our best advantage" (3). In the case of the Leveller petitioners, though, this stock transformation of the strange into the familiar and innocuous was apparently insufficient to defuse the radical potential of their attempts to influence the nation's government. Beginning in 1647 a new form of anti-feminist satire appeared in which the dreaded feminisation of England's political institutions is presented in various ways as an accomplished feat. These "Parliaments of Women" depict the ludicrous transformation of Parliament itself into an imprudent gossip, "Mistress Parliament," or an assembly of giddy women.

The pamphlets of this sort produced during the 1640s and 1650s fall into two

broad groups: those produced by writers who supported parliamentary rule and those penned by supporters of the king. The first comprises conventional anti-feminist satires whose only remarkable feature is their use of the women's parliament as a means to deride women and undermine their supposed political pretensions. Like the mock petitions, these pamphlets clearly respond to a perceived feminist cause driving women into the political melee. That the "Parliaments of Women" are at least in part a response to the phenomenon of women's petitions is evidenced by the occasional appearance within these satires of grotesque versions of the petitioners themselves. The Parliament of Maids described in the revealingly entitled Hey Hoe, for a Husband (1647) receive "the humble Petition of many hundreds of crackt Virgins, in and about the City of London" (3); their counterparts in Henry Neville's The Ladies, A Second Time, Assembled in Parliament (1647) hear a similar "Petition of many thousands of Citizens Wives, in and about the City of London" (7), the essence of which is, of course, a demand for elusive sexual satisfaction.

These satires share with the mock petitions the assumption that the exclusion of women from political affairs is both natural and necessary. Henry Neville's frequently reprinted pamphlet, A Parliament of Ladies (1647)[4] makes this point without any ambiguity. As subtler writers had done before him, Neville displaces his impressions of contemporary English politics on to the institutions of ancient Rome. A Roman senator allows his son, Papirius, to accompany him to a meeting of the Senate. The boy's mother, desperate to pry into the secrets of state, threatens to beat her son if he refuses to disclose what he heard there. Balancing his desire for self-preservation and

his duty to protect the institutions of government from the meddling of mere women, this budding patriarch concocts a lie: he tells his mother that the Senate has passed a decree entitling husbands to two wives. In response, she convenes a women's parliament which begins to air its own grievances regarding husbands and make absurd and comical claims regarding women's rights. "If the Husbands be ours," they contend, "then be their goods ours, their Lands ours, their Cash and Coyne ours" (B1^{r}); and they wonder "Where be those magnanimous and Masculine spirited Matrons" of old, "who made Coxcombes of *Keysars*, Puppets of Princes, Captives of Captains, Fools of Philosophers, and Henchmen of their husbands?" (A2^{v}). Their presentation of their grievances before the Senate--another parodic rendering of the women's petitions--provokes various responses. The senators are

> greatly amazed; but after more narrowly sifting how all this businesse came about, some laught, some lowred, some it served for pleasure, to others for perplexity; but in conclusion, they greatly condemned their wives levity and inconstancie, but indulgently commended the Lads silence and taciturnity. (B4^{r}-B4^{v})

However varied the senators' responses, then, they all affirm the necessary exclusion of women from the political domain. Papirius, in spite of his youth, has already learned this lesson well and is duly commended for it.

In Neville's satire, the Ladies' parliament is a parodic version of the exclusively male Senate. The author's intent is to satirise not the institution itself but rather the women who would seek a form of admittance to it. Contrasted with the garrulous

matrons who present themselves at their door, the paternalistic senators appear wise, sober and capable. That Neville should so fortify Parliament against the distracting influence of frivolous women accords with his commitment to the republican cause and his later membership in the Commonwealth's Council of State (Greaves and Zaller 2.261). His "Parliament of Ladies" contains all the inanity that the real Parliament must exclude.

However, in the hands of royalist writers, whose claims to legitimacy were unfettered by any taint of rebellion, the "Parliament of Women" became a perfect emblem of a world in confusion. Aiming to exploit widespread antipathy for the "unnatural" civil disruptions of mid-century, these pamphlets offer far more outrageous depictions of England in the grip of Revolution. By literalising Parliament's metaphorical status as the monarch's wife, and so presenting the movement of women into government as an accomplished feat, royalist propagandists were able to place conventional anti-feminist stereotypes in the service of their attacks upon the legitimacy of the Rump Parliament.

These royalist satires--most of which are subscribed with the pseudonym "Mercurius Melancholicus," although they are probably the work of more than one author[5]--are constructed in dramatic form, as dialogues or closet dramas. That form itself had taken on pro-royalist connotations in the wake of Parliament's refusal to re-open the popular public theatres (Potter, Secret Rites 34); but one need not look quite so carefully to discover their authors' political allegiances. Without exception, these dialogues are extremely topical and blatantly propagandistic. They typically feature an

anthropomorphic "Mistris Parliament" or "Mrs. Rump," and her pernicious gossips, women like "Mrs. Sedition," "Mrs. Ordinance"[6] and "Mrs. Jealousie." Opposing these foolish or malevolent figures are the downtrodden "Mrs. Truth" or "Mrs. England," whose impending victory is promised. With their emblematic figures and utter lack of moral ambiguity, the royalist "Parliaments of Women" are to some extent reminiscent of the Jacobean and Caroline masques. However, many of the spectacular entertainments that had been performed at Whitehall, such as Jonson's Masque of Queens and Davenant's Salmacida Spolia, had celebrated the women of the court, especially the queen herself. The overwhelming female presence in these more humble dialogues is obviously intended to elicit contempt, even disgust. The world of revolutionary England is here populated by figures from an anti-masque, unnaturally holding the stage, awaiting their negation by their opposites, the rightful rulers who will restore order in the kingdom. Mistress Parliament and her associates are not merely ludicrous, they are frequently abhorrent.

Although the writers' intended victim is the Rump Parliament, their chosen medium ensures that the language of misogyny is rarely out of sight. In Mistris Parliament her gossiping (1648) the titular character is tried and discovered to be the witch responsible for Mrs. England's strange fits. Mistris Parliament Presented in her Bed (1648) similarly portrays her as the enchantress who "Bewitch'd the simple and their hearts did steal" (A4^v). In Mistris Parliament Brought to Bed (1648), the metaphors of infidelity and marital and social inversion are invoked. "She hath imprisoned her Husband, and prostituted her body to a very Eunuch," announces the old nurse, Mrs.

Synod, "and turn'd up her tayle to every lowsy Ill-dependent Rascall in the Army; Sir Thomas himself, and king Cromwell too, a very Town-Bull, and committed flat fornication with Broom-men, [Tinkers], and Cha[r]nell-rakers" (A2'). "Mercurius Melancholicus," the exiled royalist in the unfamiliar role of political opposition, can freely vent his spleen on the subject of England's new parliamentary rulers. Comfortable in their connections with the rightful rule of the king, these royalist propagandists can construe the political conflict in the simplest of terms, as a series of fundamental oppositions between order and chaos, rule and misrule. The current product of that conflict, an inversion of the old, legitimate institutions of government, is accordingly depicted as that most preposterous of all cases, the rule of women.

Where the parliamentarian Neville portrays the feminine presence in politics in humorous terms that expose its ultimate impotence and alleviate potential fears, then, the royalist satirists who write as "Mercurius Melancholicus" make that feminine presence, embodied by "Mistris Parliament," into a grotesque emblem of the unnatural state of the kingdom. The knowing mockery of Neville's satire becomes spiteful invective in the royalist ones. The obsession with the uncontrollable female body that characterises most examples of the genre here gives way to an outright repugnance which manifests itself in the authors' hideous renderings of pregnancy and birth.

The monstrous birth and its attending illness is a recurrent theme in the royalist dialogues. Much of Mistris Parliament Brought to Bed of a Monstrous Childe of Reformation dwells on the ghastly sickness of the offending dame, who vomits "innocent blood, that hath lain in clodds congealed in my stomach this full seven yeers"; gold for

which she has sold God, king and soul; "Ordinances, Votes, and Declarations" and other suggestive emblems of her sins (A2^v-A3^r). The ultimate result of Mrs. Parliament's infidelities, though--and the full expression of her diseased state--is the "Monstrous Childe of Reformation" anticipated by the pamphlet's title. The work concludes with Mrs. Privilege's announcement that

> Mrs. Parliament, was miraculously delivered of a Monster of a deformed shape, without a head, great goggle eyes, bloody hands growing out of both sides of its devouring panch, under the belly hung a large bagge, and the feet are like the feet of a Beare. (A4^v)

In the apparent sequel, Mistris Parliament Presented in Her Bed, we are reminded of "the sore travaile and hard labour which she endured last weeke, in the Birth of her Monstrous Off-spring, the Childe of Deformation" (title page) and--in case that reminder does not suffice--we are treated to some more vomiting.

The author's delineation of the unwanted Reformation in terms lifted from the popular literature of prodigy and monstrosity is entirely appropriate to his utter repudiation of parliamentary rule. As J.C. Davis has remarked, "prodigy books were . . . another form of inversion or contrary, teaching the natural by exposing the unnatural" (Fear, Myth & History 123). The deformed, headless monster, the child of Reformation, is chaos incarnate. At the same time, it is a portent (as such births were typically held to be) of an impending general disaster; nature itself is perturbed by the child's arrival.[7] The pro-royalist and anti-Puritan allegories of Mistris Parliament Brought to Bed of a Monstrous Childe of Reformation and Mistris Parliament Presented

in her Bed, after the sure travaile and hard labour which she endured last week, in the Birth of her Monstrous Offspring, the Childe of Deformation are apparent before the reader's eyes have passed beyond their title pages. But the authors' means to their satirical ends--their hideous portrayals of pregnancy and birth--are more telling still. When "Mercurius Melancholicus" seeks to produce a picture of horror, he does so in terms of physical capacities unique to the female body. Nature overturned spawns a loathsome world of moral and physical illness, a world in confusion--a world misruled by women.

The supposition that masculinity can be put on like a suit of armour--an apparently uncomplicated one for the author of The Kentish Fayre--becomes extremely contentious when it appears to cross from the realm of propaganda into history. In retrospect, the satirical responses accorded the London women who circulated and published petitions appear ridiculously extreme. If the hints of collective identity in the women's petitions are somehow indicative of an emerging feminist self-consciousness, it is clear that this potential remains largely unexplored and that any "feminist" concerns are subordinated to other political issues--the state of civil and church government in the case of the early petitioners, and Parliament's response to the Leveller cause and its treatment of the movement's leaders in the case of the Leveller women. Yet to highlight the distance separating the women who petitioned in the 1640s and 1650s and the feminist writers of the following decades--women such as Jane Sharp, Elizabeth Cellier, Hannah Wooley, or Bathsua Makin[8]--is not to deny the extraordinary nature of the petitioners' undertaking, for while the ancillary status of "women's rights in the

petitioners' arguments may be evident to us, it is clear that many contemporary observers saw little *but* a dawning feminism implicit in their behaviour.

The tentative encroachments of the petitioners into the traditionally male domain of politics prompted a hugely overdetermined response that reveals to us not only the enormity and pervasiveness of the barriers excluding women
but also an apparent uncertainty as to the strength of those barriers. For the moment, though, the barriers were safe enough. The commonplace distinction between properly masculine and unnaturally effeminate governments drawn by commentators ranging from "Mercurius Melancholicus" to Milton left little space for the admission of women as positive contributors to any political cause. The roles that politically active women were made to play in the popular imagination--the giddy, sexually insatiable fool or the ghastly, ravenous monstrosity--were hardly empowering ones. As a result, women who would be political message bearers were transformed into media for other messages--some in favour of Parliament, others in favour of the king, but all opposed to the women themselves.

Notes

[1] See Ellen McArthur, "Women Petitioners and the Long Parliament" and for a more recent study, Patricia Higgins, "The Reactions of Women."

[2] This pamphlet could well have been written in direct response to one of the above-mentioned women's petitions of 1642, since many continued to recognise March 25 as the first day of the new year. Regardless, it is plainly a response to the phenomenon of women petitioners.

[3] See also Mercurius Pragmaticus. For King Charls II, No. 3, 1-8 May, 1649.

[4] Neville's pamphlet was first published in 1646 as The Parliament of Women. Three variant editions followed in 1647. See Wing STC, entries N508, N511, N512A and P505. See also Smith and Cardinale, entries 627A through 631A. Since all of these works were published anonymously, Neville's authorship is not certain.

[5] Mercurius Melancholicus was the first of several illegal royalist journals which appeared between 1647 and 1649. It too was probably penned by more than one hand. See Lois Potter's general introduction to "The Mistress Parliament Political Dialogues" and her individual introductions to the four pamphlets in her edition.

[6] An Ordinance was an Act of Parliament lacking the king's assent. Following the king's departure from London in 1641, Parliament could only pass Ordinances.

[7] The association of monstrous births with impending disasters has a long history. In his treatise of 1573, Ambroise Paré could remark parenthetically that such occurrences were "usually signs of some forthcoming misfortune" (3). While mid-seventeenth-

century accounts typically insist upon their own veracity, they also usually have transparent political overtones. A Strange and Lamentable Accident that happened lately at Mears Ashby in Northamptonshire (1642), for instance, describes the birth of a headless child with a cross on its breast; the mother announces that she would rather have a headless child than one whose head would be signed with a cross in baptism. Comparable morals are drawn from monstrous births in A Declaration, of a Strange and Wonderfull Monster born in Kirkham Parish (1646) and Strange News from Scotland (1647). The first of these is said to be verified by a cleric, the second by both a minister and the attending midwife.

[8] The writings of these women of the later seventeenth century are examined by Hilda Smith in Reason's Disciples.

2/ Female Prophecy in the World Turned Upside Down

(i)

Women's Speaking Justified?

The breakdown of ecclesiastical control under the Long Parliament was followed by the rapid rise of radical Protestant sects all over England. Although they were typically small and relatively few in number, the separatist congregations represented (to their Presbyterian opponents) the potential for a democratised English Church, and as such, a threat to the very bases of order and civilisation in the commonwealth. We see this fear at its most hysterical in Gangraena (1646), the protracted anti-sectarian rant by the Presbyterian Thomas Edwards, who issues an urgent plea for an immediate settlement on the question of Church government and an end to official toleration:

> Error, if way be given to it, knowes no bounds, it is bottomlesse, no man could say how farre England would goe, but like Africa it would be bringing forth Monsters every day; a Toleration, like Opportunity, would make many Hereticks, cause many to broach and fall to that which they never meant; God appointed government both Eccclesiastical [sic] and Civil to restrain mens nature and wantonnesse, as knowing what men would fall to, that there be no end of his follies and madness if tolerated. (1.121)

Thomas construes England as a nation under siege by monstrously disruptive forces, which require only a small breach in its defences to burst in. To tolerate difference, even to the slightest degree, is to surrender to chaos.

Like the royalist satirists behind the "Mistress Parliament" dialogues, Edwards invokes the language of monstrosity in his attack on the sects and uses that language to distinguish between nature (aligned with a centralised church government on the Presbyterian model) and chaos (associated indiscriminately with toleration of the sects, madness, and mysterious monsters emanating from Africa). Of course, every monster has a mother, and Edwards shares with Mercurius Melancholicus a tendency to conflate monstrosity with the female body in the process of giving birth. "There are many monsters conceived by some in this Intermistical season, which are not yet brought forth," he warns, "waiting only for the midwife and nursing mother of a Toleration, to bring them forth and nourish them" (1.3). Edwards's equation of the diseased social body with the pregnant female body alerts us to the anti-feminist stance that he elsewhere makes more explicit. Little surprise, then, that among the most galling examples of the monstrosities envisaged by Edwards and his associates were a handful of sectarian women who laid claim to the power of prophecy.[1]

Women and prophecy have long been associated with each other. The classical sibyls, the female prophets of the Old Testament and the fifteenth-century French martyr Joan of Arc are all familiar instances of such a tradition. Among the female prophets of mid-seventeenth century England there was considerable diversity in means and motives--although such fine distinctions were not always evident or of interest to their

adversaries. The period saw its share of mystics, like Sara Wight, whose comfortably non-political prophecies made her "the embodiment of a feminine visionary, filled with special grace, devout and humble" (Ludlow 160). Of much greater interest to civil authorities, though, were those women who ventured into the more hazardous realm of political prophecy. In 1633, Lady Eleanor Douglas, the most renowned female prophet of the pre-Civil-War period, had run afoul of King Charles, earning a two-year term in the Gatehouse Prison when she prophesied his impending destruction. Charles had reason to be nervous: Lady Eleanor had already prophesied her own widowhood and had foretold, to the month, the death of Buckingham (Spencer 46, 48). Charles's political successors also took notice of prophecies touching on their activities. The writings of the Fifth-Monarchist visionary Anna Trapnel chronicle her harassment by the authorities following her public denunciation of Cromwell for his enjoyment of "great pomp and revenue, whiles the poore are ready to starve" (Cry of a Stone 50). On the other hand, less hostile messages could be well received. When Elizabeth Poole arrived at Whitehall late in 1648 with an inspired message in support of the army's recent seizure of power, the Army Council interrupted critical debates over the fate of both the king and the kingdom in order to hear what she had to say.

Not all prophesying women were equally effective at reaching their desired audience, though. Elinor Channel--who underwent great difficulty, leaving her protesting husband and "many small children" (A3^{v}) to travel to London with a harmless message for the Lord Protector--was unable to complete her mission, perhaps for the want of the five-pound bribe demanded by Cromwell's guards (5). In itself, the adoption of the

prophetic role was not always enough to command attention or obtain influence; more mundane factors such as a talent for self-publicity and ready access to a printing press (Anna Trapnel and Eleanor Douglas had both) were often helpful.

What licensed the speech of unaccustomed orators like Trapnel, Cary and Poole was the widespread Puritan belief in the possibility of a direct line of communication whereby God would speak to and through ordinary Christian men and women. Under this scheme, the learned clergy, traditional mediators between the Word and God's people, were redundant if not intrusive. The stance common among the radical Protestant sects of the period--the rejection of all sources of spiritual authority save personal inspiration by the holy spirit--was obviously not without its social ramifications. "It is well known," says Keith Thomas, "how in political matters this consciousness of direct relationship with God proved a great source of strength and these beliefs with their frequently democratic implications became a powerful solvent of the established order" ("Women" 335). While the advocates of a Presbyterian system were eager to pursue church reform to the point of abolishing episcopacy, they vehemently opposed the democratising tendencies of sectarian thought. The career of William Prynne provides a case in point. Persecuted as a radical for his opposition to the Laudian church, Prynne became, in the wake of Laud's downfall, a powerful *conservative* opponent of Independency and sectarianism.

For people with little or no education, the sectaries' rejection of a traditional church government open only to men with university degrees permitted much greater control over their own spiritual lives. Sectarian writers questioned whether education of

the sort offered by the universities was necessary, or even of much use, to the true Christian. The Quaker George Fox proclaimed the limitations of book learning and insisted upon looking to the Bible and a personal experience of Christ as a source of true knowledge:

> The Scribes, Pharisees, great Rabbies, and Doctors knew not the Scriptures, being not learned of *Christ*, him who was the life of the prophets, and the end of the Law, whom *Peter* was learned in, knew and preached, whom they knew not: So here the unlearned, who was in the life, confounded all the learned out of the life . . . . (2)

That the unlearned could confound the learned must have been as attractive to the many uneducated men and women who began to speak, write and publish in the name of their religion, as it would have been unnerving for educated clerics like Edwards, accustomed to more docile congregations.

For women, whose access to "book learning" was even more limited than it was for most men, the possibility that spiritual authority could derive from another source could be particularly inviting. This is certainly true in the case of Anna Trapnel, for whom the shortcomings of university learning is a recurrent theme. Yet one can see in Trapnel's writing evidence of the difficulty she experienced in her attempts to extricate herself and her co-religionists from the powerful grasp of convention. A strong note of defensiveness in her assaults on the university-educated betrays the extent to which she could be intimidated by them. The lack of education among female sectaries gave their adversaries a ready source of ammunition. "Thus have I declared some of the female

Academyes," declared the mocking author of A Discoverie of Six women-preachers (1641), "but where their University is I cannot tell" (5). Clearly, Trapnel was unable to share in the irony. Her angry diatribes aimed at the educated elite reveal her position to be a difficult and frustrating one--unavoidably excluded from their circle, she must nonetheless contend with them on their own ground:

> . . . fierce looks, nor deep speech gathered up and fetcht from both *Cambridge* and *Oxford* Universities shal not affright the Lords flock, though they stammer, they shal be understood, no dark saying shall be concealed from the faithfull, they shall understand fierce looks, and deep subtle speeches, though they be brought forth with a Latine tongue, and in Greek expressions, yet the wise-observing-spirited ones shall understand the cunning works of the politick Sophister . . . . (Report & Plea 55-56)

While her intimidation in the presence of the learned elite is obvious, though, so is the adamancy with which she refuses to give in to it. Trapnel asserts that the spiritual authority she champions on behalf of her fellow sectarians is equally available to all, and that the knowledge deriving from that authority will penetrate the most subtle rhetoric. If the attractiveness of such a democratic ideal to some of the stammering faithful is understandable, so too are the concerns of the "politick Sophisters" whose authority Trapnel and her associates would challenge.

As Trapnel's emphatic rejection of rhetoric and learned quotations in Greek and Latin makes plain, the speech that is licensed by the authority of the spirit differs in kind from that authorised by the universities. Whereas the "great Professors" are

characterised by their intellectual pride and their powers of reason, the truly knowledgeable Christian is humble and passive in the presence of the Spirit. "They onely can try the spirits that are children indeed," she insists, "the other by virtue of their literall knowledge, their own understanding, their own apprehensions, their own light, oh such are taken with flesh" (Cry of a Stone 57). The sectaries extolled divine inspiration as a more immediate and accessible route to knowledge. The fitting expression of such knowledge was not the learned and polished sermon, but spontaneous, unrehearsed prophetic speech.

The anxiety that pervades the published attacks on this particular manifestation of radical Protestant belief is probably the result, at least in part, of the peculiar nature of that speech, which raised special difficulties for those who wished to challenge the prophets' assertions. It was by no means self-evident that these upstart preachers and prophets were deliberately assuming the prophetic role in order to advance their own worldly ends. Nor--if the claim of external inspiration was granted--was it entirely clear whether the source of that inspiration was divine or diabolical (Thomas, Religion 128). Contemporary evidence indicates that audiences were uncertain as to now to interpret the unusual behaviour and speech of the men and particularly the women who presented themselves as God's messengers. An account of Anna Trapnel's prophesying at Whitehall, for instance, reveals an audience faced with an apparently insolvable problem of definition:

> Those that look to her, and use to be with her, say she neither eateth nor drinketh, save only sometimes a toast and drink, and that she is in a

> trance, and some say what she doth is by a mighty inspiration, others say they suppose her to be of a troubled mind, and people flocking to her so as they do causeth her to continue this way, and some say worse, as every one gives their opinions as they please . . . . (Cromwelliana 133)

The writer himself apparently shares the audience's uncertainty. He offers several readings of Trapnel's behaviour, ranging from madness and celebrity-seeking to divine or even diabolical inspiration, but he commits himself personally to none, choosing rather to detail "what is visible to those that see and hear her" and leave the problem of interpretation in the reader's hands.

If the ambiguous nature of prophetic speech posed problems for those who would interpret it, neither was it without its complications for those who would use it to what they considered important ends. The possibility that the source of an inspired message was diabolical rather than heavenly left the female prophet open to the charge of witchcraft. Having been threatened with such accusations throughout her imprisonment and trial, Anna Trapnel's frustration with the distracting effect of the authorities' constructions of her is obvious in her response to them:

> Oh, you cannot abide to think it comes from God; for then you would tremble; they say, we will not own it to be from God, but from some evil Spirit, some Witchcraft, some design or hiring of men; But oh! says God, though you would not acknowledge it, yet you shall acknowledge it. (The Cry of a Stone [1654] 70-71)

Trapnel's aim was not to be elusive or enigmatic but to bring a broad range of social

injustices to the attention of "the whole Nation" (title page) in as convincing a manner as possible. The various motives and meanings imputed to her behaviour only hindered that end, allowing the authorities to dismiss her criticisms of England under the government of the Lord Protector.

Still, if prophetic speech was a sometimes unwieldy and imprecise weapon, there was no other of equal effectiveness available to women who, after all, had limited means by which to obtain a public audience. The size of the audiences reached by Anna Trapnel indicates that the prophet's role could provide her with a powerful means of entry into the political world. The female prophet had always been granted "a certain nervous respect" by a society perhaps uncertain of the veracity of her claims, but no more certain of their falsity (Fraser, Weaker Vessel 280). Nor was that respect limited to members of the lower classes. The prophecies of Lady Eleanor Douglas impressed some of the highest rank, including Queen Henrietta Maria herself (Spencer 47). Elizabeth Poole, a woman of far meaner connections, was nonetheless able to appear before and advise the General Council of the Army on such crucial issues as the Leveller constitution and the trial of the king (Poole, A Vision; Clarke Papers 2.150-55, 163-69).

The empowering qualities of prophetic speech raise the question of its possible place in the incipient feminist movements of the early modern period, but the connection between the prophetic voice and the emergent voices of feminism is a troublesome one. In her seminal study of feminist writers in seventeenth-century England, Hilda Smith holds that there was little connection between the revolutionary currents of the 1640s and 1650s and attempts to improve the status of women. The feminists of later decades,

whose writings form the subject of her study, rose not from the ranks of the revolutionaries, but from among the royalist faction and later the Tory party into which it evolved. If the Revolution had any impa-t on feminist thought at all, she contends, it was "almost wholly negative" (xi). Even those women who participated in sectarian activities did so because of religious rather than political commitment (53). This distinction between an overtly political orientation and a spiritual one is also critical in Phyllis Mack's assessment of the sects' possible benefits for their female members. She not that

> it was precisely the most radical of the radical sects . . . whose programmes were least concerned with women, visionary or otherwise; it was the sects or groups or individuals which had the least articulated political programme and the most mystical theology--the Ranters, the Baptists, and above all the Quakers--which were most willing to integrate women into their activities. ("The Prophet and Her Audience" 143)

Mack rightly observes that Gerrard Winstanley, regarded as the most revolutionary social thinker of his day, formulated a programme that, "while radical in terms of class relationships, [was] conservative to the core in terms of gender" (144).[2]

An exception to the chorus of nay-sayers is Elaine Hobby, who tentatively advances the case that women who prophesied "actively and deliberately transcended the bonds of true feminine self-effacement, using the ideas and structures of contemporary thought to negotiate some space and autonomy" (27). However, her judicious qualification, that "the very terms of this rebellion . . . also made possible [the women's]

eventual re-confinement to less noisy, more feminine concerns" (27), indicates how dubious her tentative claim is. The assumption of the prophetic voice necessarily involves the *total* surrender of the self before God. The difficulty with Hobby's attempt to reconcile the passive state of the prophet with the activism of the feminist is plain in her reading of the disclaimer with which Mary Cary prefaces The Little Horns Doom & Downfall. "If any shall hereby receive any light, or any refreshment," Cary says,

> let them blesse the Lord for it, from whom alone it came: for I am a very weake, and unwc:thy instrument, and have not done this worke by any strength of my owne, but have been often made sensible, that I could do no more herein, (wherein any light, or truth could appear) of my selfe, then a pensill, or pen can do, when no hand guides it: being daily made sensible of my owne insufficiency to do anything, as of my selfe; that to use the Apostles expression and to speak it feelingly, (for I finde it daily true) I must professe, *I am not sufficient to thinke a good thought, but my sufficiency is of God*, to whom be glory, and honour, and praise for evermore, Amen. ("To the Reader")

Hobby makes an unprofitable attempt to turn this disavowal of responsibility into an ambiguous statement whereby Cary simultaneously asserts her status as author: "By using this particular analogy for her impotence," she argues, "Cary also brings to mind a picture of her own hand guiding the pencil" (30). This against-the-grain reading of Cary's emphatic denials certainly brings to light the dilemma of an inspired writer who would not intrude upon the inspiring voice, but it slights the overwhelming intent of the

passage: Cary is attempting to efface herself in the presence of the Word; if she has failed to convince her more subtle readers that her words are not her own, it is not for want of trying. One sees, in Cary's reduction of herself to the status of God's pencil, the conventional gestures of Christian humility. Yet it is difficult to avoid finding in her insistence upon her "insufficiency" deference not only to God, but also to an unflattering conception of women. As Phyllis Mack has observed, such statements, when made by women, are not merely symbolic, but descriptive (222). When Donne or Herbert adopt the feminine voice as a means of expressing their passivity before God, the gesture is metaphorical; the voice and the stance are assumed. For Cary, the situation is quite different: the feminine voice is not something to be put on but rather an expression of her essence. Prophecy, then, was no uncomplicated means by which women could gain access to power. The behaviour of the prophet, while often gaining one woman an audience she could not otherwise reach, also served to reinforce notions of womanhood that denied all *other* women the authority to speak.

The connection between prophecy and conventional constructions of femininity is underscored by the utterly non-rational character of prophetic discourse. Lady Eleanor Douglas's prophecies--comprising garbled bits of scripture, bad anagrams and enigmatic prognostications--are often ambiguous in the extreme. Those of the Fifth Monarchist Mary Cary also present a would-be interpreter with considerable difficulty. While the anti-Protectorate messages of Anna Trapnel are relatively clear, they are not offered in the form of a reasoned critique. Rather, Trapnel goes into trances and delivers lengthy speeches peppered with apparently impromptu song and verse. In Anna Trapnel's Report

and Plea (1654), she describes this experience of beyond carried beyond the bounds of reason:

> Then the Lord made his Rivers flow, which soon broke down the Banks of an ordinary capacity, and extraordinarily mounted my Spirits into a praying and singing frame, and so they remained till morning-light, as I was told, for I was not capable of that. (20)

Like Cary--God's "pensill"--Trapnel presents herself as the agent of an external power, one so great that it overcomes her rational mind, leaving her unaware of her own actions.

Of course, passivity and irrationality were two things that Renaissance women were reputed to be very good at. As Mack has noted, "women were suited to be prophets because of their essence, which was irrational, emotional and unusually receptive to outside influences"--hardly celebrated qualities ("Women as Prophets" 217). The peculiar speech and behaviour of female prophets made them convenient targets for antagonists looking out for the "silly frantick creatures" of the anti-feminist stereotype (A Spirit Moving in the Women Preachers [1646]). The author of The Maids Prophesies (1647)--an anti-revolutionary lamenting the breakdown in both civil and church government--adopts the voice of a female prophet who styles herself after the Trojan Cassandra: "She was a frantick Damsel So am I Or else could have no power to prophesie" ([4]). While the writer's direct objects of attack do not include prophesying women, it is clear that his chosen speaker, knowingly violating the dictum that "Maids should be seen and not heard," embodies the "distraction" and "Confusion" that are destroying the nation ([5]). For women, to achieve the power of the prophet was, to

some extent, to underscore the inherent physical and mental weakness of their sex.

Finally, women who embraced the prophetic role implicitly accepted their place among the despised of the earth. Mack has observed that "the traditional Christian paradox that the last shall be first" made women's membership among society's outcasts another dubious distinction that helped them gain access to the prophet's uncertain status ("Women as Prophets" 217). Anna Trapnel happily counts herself among those "who have seen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, babes and children to bring to nothing the Scribes and Disputers of this world, the first to be last and the last first" (Cry of a Stone A2). That God should choose such mean instruments for so great a purpose seemed to many evidence of his great wisdom. Unfortunately, God's wisdom in these matters was invariably stressed to the detriment of his servants. Trapnel, who demonstrated remarkable courage in her vocal opposition to Cromwell, describes herself as "a poor Shrub, one of a timerous, fearful, cowardly nature: and in her own concernments no whit valorous" (A Legacy for Saints 60). She recounts how her initial protestations of unworthiness were met with a reminder from God "that out of the mouthes of babes and sucklings he would perfect his praise" (Strange and Wonderful Newes 4)--a less than flattering response, but one that typifies the general perception of the prophet's status *outside* of her prophetic role.

The relationship, then, between the activities of the female prophets of the period and a nascent feminism is a difficult one. While it is clear that these women succeeded in provoking fears of a feminist uprising percolating in the radical sects, it is not clear that such a collective cause motivated their conduct. The separatist churches to which

such women belonged were not necessarily any more liberal with regard to the status of women than was the established church (Ludlow 20); on the contrary, their positions on the structure of the family tended to be conservative (Thomas, "Women" 350). Nor were women characteristically drawn to ministers who espoused more liberal views (Cross 202). What is at issue in Farneworth's A Woman forbidden to speak in the Church (1654), Fox's The Woman Learning in Silence (1656) and other published defences of women's freedom to prophesy is not the freedom of women (or men) to speak, but rather the freedom of the Spirit to issue from whatever vessel it chooses. In church, Farneworth maintains, *none* must speak save the Spirit (4).

Regardless, women who prophesied did so in violation of some very powerful social taboos, and some contemporaries obviously construed the women's behaviour as above all an attack on men's governance. Such an attack was not to be taken lightly. The lengthy sub-title of the anonymous A Spirit Moving in the Women Preachers (1647) provides a good indication of the tirade to follow in its address to "this affronted, Brazen-faced, Strange, New Feminine Brood" who, the author promises will be therein "proved to be rash, ignorant, weake, vaine-glorious, prophane & proud, moved only by the spirit of errour." The indignant response indicates that this strange, new feminine brood had touched a very sensitive nerve indeed. The author purports to see nothing but foolishness, pride and insolence in their

> presuming to advance themselves before, and over men, transgressing the rules of *Nature*, *Modestie*, *Divinitie*, *Discretion*, *Civilitie*, *&c.* in triumphing against Authoritie, contemning Lawes, and all things opposite

> unto their weak proceedings . . . . (2)

Yet his dismissal is belied by the ferocity of his attack. Clearly, he perceives and is alarmed by a potential strength inherent in "their weak proceedings."

Such representations of the female prophets' activities as instances of feminine effrontery are common, if rarely so eloquently realised. Since women's activities were on the whole confined to the domestic sphere, the "authoritie" to which the author refers is that of the husband and/or father, and the "lawes" those regulating domestic government. However, it is a commonplace of the period that all forms of government--domestic, civil and divine--are interconnected; the patriarchal family is the building block of the commonwealth, its arrangement established by God. For the arch-conservative Edwards, any movement towards official toleration of the sects is invariably associated with "the Disturbance and overthrow of oeconomicall, Ecclesiasticall and Politicall relations and Government" (1.61). He aligns preaching by women with a whole series of enormities, symptoms of a diseased nation in need of a strong and united church. The only alternative is the dissolution of the nation and a reign of chaos. The presumably appalled reader of Gangraena encounters a mammoth compendium of

> horrible disorders, confusions, strange practices, not only against the light of Scripture but nature; as in womens preaching, in stealing away mens wives, children from husbands, parents, in baptizing women naked in the presence and sight of men, &c. (1.143)

Although one is left wondering what remaining horrors could possibly be contained in that final, tantalizing *et cetera*, it is clear that the fight against toleration--Edwards's

raison d'être--is a fight against all of the forces for social anarchy. Where those gangrenous forces are most in evidence, moreover, is at the microcosmic level of the family.

(ii)

Milton, Mistress Attaway,
and the Spectre of Divorce

In A Light Shining in Buckinghamshire, Caryl Churchill's 1978 play based upon the "other" revolutions of the 1640s and 1650s, an exchange between William Claxton, a male sectarian, and Jone Hoskins, an itinerant female preacher, neatly encapsulates for a modern audience the terms of the seventeenth-century debate over women's preaching and its implications:

> *Claxton:* St. Paul to Timothy, "Let the woman learn in silence."
>
> *Hoskins:* Jone Hoskins to St. Paul, fuck off you silly old buggar. (233)

Hoskins's curt dismissal of St. Paul and the orthodox Christian tradition that he represents suggests what Edwards and his associates suspected and feared--that there is a causal relationship between the practice of women preaching and the dissolution of the marriage bond. The frequent coincidence in the tracts of women's preaching and their adulterous behaviour reveals a widespread belief that such license to speak was obviously incompatible with the meek submission appropriate to a wife. Perhaps the most famous of Edwards's countless anecdotes is that of Mistress Attaway, the London lace-seller and

preacher who was reputed to have argued, on the basis of Milton's Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, that she was entitled to leave her unbelieving husband and remarry, which she accordingly did (2.11). Similar stories are to be found in abundance elsewhere. Tub-preachers overturned includes an account of a Mistress Attaway look-alike who so wins over a "sainted Convert" that he "Desir'd a private Application,/Unto the point in Agitation." He accepts her private tutelage, and the two leave their respective spouses and travel overseas together (14). The author of A Discoverie of Six women preachers relates a tale in which a mother and daughter conspire to bestow the infamous horns upon a London bricklayer. His wife, delivering a sermon to her tipsy friends, hastily concludes when her daughter rushes in to remind her of a rendezvous with a gentleman in Bloomsbury (2). Underlying these tales of female preachers who cuckold and dominate their men is the conventional Renaissance equation between female loquacity and sexual promiscuity; mothers and daughters who preached could not possibly be faithful or obedient toward their husbands.

Although it seems very unlikely that the numbers of abandoned husbands and children of preaching women would have been significant, the frequency with which one encounters them in the literature hints that there must have been some cause for concern among the defenders of the patriarchal family. Keith Thomas has suggestively observed that the rash of prophesying by women coincided with a potentially transformative moment in the history of the family. He points out that "during the Civil War and Interregnum the very foundations of the old patriarchal family were challenged in a number of important ways," including published attacks on the subjection of women to

their husbands, their confinement to the domestic sphere and their limited educational opportunities, and even a discussion of polygamy ("Women" 353-54).

The challenge most pertinent to the circumstances of the female prophets, however, was that posed by the circulation of arguments in favour of divorce--more specifically, divorce on the grounds of spiritual incompatibility. According to Chilton Powell, Milton's The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce (1643), which so scandalised the church-going public on its appearance, marked the culmination of a controversy dating back to the reign of Henry VIII. Simply put, Milton's position is that divorce is a matter of conscience, and ought to be permitted in cases where the partners discover that they are mentally incompatible. In the fourth and final of his tracts on the subject, Milton states his case succinctly: if marriage "is the dearest league of love, and the dearest resemblance of that love which in Christ is dearest to his Church; how then," he asks,

> can peace and comfort, as it is contrary to discord, which God hates to dwell with, not bee the main end of mariage? Discord then wee ought to fly, and to pursue peace, farre above the observance of a civil covnant, already brokn, and the breaking dayly iterated on the other side. And what better testimony then the words of the institution it self, to prove, that a conversing solace, & peacefull society is the prime end of mariage, without which no other help, or office can bee mutual, beseeming the dignity of reasonable creatures, that such as they should be coupl'd in the rites of nature by the meer compulsion of lust, without love, or peace,

wors than wild beasts. (Colasterion, CPW 2.739)

As Powell contends, and Milton's tracts confirm, the advocacy of divorce on such grounds was a logical corollary of the Puritan conception of marriage. Rejecting the grudging Pauline acceptance of marriage as a tolerable alternative only for those who are unable to control their lusts, Puritan theologians celebrated it as an institution intended for the mutual benefit of husband and wife. Readers of Paradise Lost will be well aware of Milton's whole-hearted acceptance of the latter view, even if they disagree as to how fairly those benefits are divided between marriage partners. Indeed, it is the "ignorance & iniquity of Canon Law, providing for the right of the body in mariage, but nothing for the wrongs and greevances of the mind" (CPW 2.248) that prompt him to advance a more noble conception of the institution in The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce. Milton's defence of divorce on the grounds of mental incompatibility, then, stems from his elevated conception of marriage--a view which has its precursors in the writings of Protestant reformers reaching as far back as Erasmus (Powell 93).

Since Milton's clearly stated intent was not only to preserve the institution of marriage but to raise its status by rescuing it from the baser implications of Canon law, the notoriety he attained as a result of The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce is truly remarkable. A perusal of William Riley Parker's gathering of contemporary allusions to Milton--particularly the various Presbyterian responses to The Doctrine--reveals a very different figure from the one usually encountered by present-day students of his work. In his 1649 history of Independency, Clement Walker (writing under the pseudonym "Theodorus Verax") describes Milton as, of all things, "a Libertine that thinketh his Wife

a Manacle, and his very Garters to be Shackles and Fetters to him: one that (after the Independent fashion) will be tied to no obligation to God or Man" (Parker 82). In Daniel Featley's The Dippers dipt (1645) the unlikely libertine finds himself in the company of those who espouse "Anabaptism" and "other most damnable doctrines, tending to carnall liberty, Familisme, and a medley and hodg-podge of all Religions" (Parker 74). A marked vagueness regarding the actual details of Milton's argument characterises most of these negative reviews, suggesting that a garbled version of his case was circulating far more widely than the book itself.

A particularly telling distortion is one that features in several attacks--that is, the erroneous charge that Milton was an advocate of, in William Prynne's words, "divorce at pleasure" (Parker 73, 75). From the first, Milton took pains to emphasise that he regarded divorce as a last resort (DDD, CPW 2.272), a humane answer to otherwise remediless grievances (Tetr, CPW 2.621). In Colasterion (1645), a clearly frustrated Milton responds to Prynne's charge insisting on its injustice and reiterating his advocacy of divorce only "upon extreme necessity, when through the perversnes, or the apparent unfitnes of either, the continuance can bee to both no good at all, but an intolerable injury and temptation to the wronged and the defrauded" (Tetr, CPW 2.723).

The overdetermined nature of the attacks on Milton's ideas regarding divorce--the Presbyterian fashioning of him into a notorious libertine--indicates that like the female prophets who attracted extreme reactions, Milton was broaching a very sensitive issue. Thomas Edwards's tale of Mrs. Attaway, one of the Doctrine's more sympathetic readers, suggests that one of the more threatening implications of Milton's thought lay

in the power it could be seen to confer upon married women. Two members of Edwards's apparently nationwide network of heretic-hunters, "Gentlemen of the Inns of Court, civill and well disposed men, who out of novelty went to hear the women preach," conversed with Mrs. Attaway following her sermon,

> and among other passages she spake to them of Master *Milton's* Doctrine of Divorce, and asked them what they thought of it, saying, it was a point to be considered of; and that she for her part would look more into it, for she had an unsanctified husband, that did not walk in the way of *Sion*, nor speak in the language of *Canaan*; and how accordingly she hath practised it in runing away with another womans husband. (2.10-11)

According to Mrs. Attaway's reading, the Doctrine authorises women as well as men to initiate divorce in cases where the husband is a non-believer.

While Milton does not embrace the idea with the same enthusiasm as does Mrs. Attaway, there is no question that his divorce tracts could invite such an interpretation from a reader willing to emphasise certain passages over others. The full title of his first tract, after all, is "The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce: Restor'd to the Good of Both Sexes." Moreover, Milton indicates an awareness of and sympathy with the plight of women trapped in unhappy marriages. Suggesting that "God was not uncompassionat" of unhappily married women when he framed the law permitting divorce (Tetr, CPW 2.626), Milton commends the granting of divorce "to release afflicted wives" (DDD, CPW 2.324). It is possible, then, to catch an occasional glimpse of Mrs. Attaway's Doctrine through a highly selective reading of Milton's.

For most readers, though, it would be very difficult not to share in Mary Nyquist's recognition of the "deeply masculinist assumptions" of the tracts (106). Occasional glimpses of egalitarian thought--such as the uncharacteristic inclusion of a woman's perspective in his assertion that a "man or wife who hates in wedloc, is perpetually unsociable, unpeacefull, or unduteous, either not being able, or not willing to performe what the maine ends of mariage demand in helpe and solace" (Tetr. CPW 2.691)--tend to be cancelled out by the texts' overriding assumption that divorce is predominantly a men's issue. In this instance, the apparent inclusiveness of "man or wife" quickly gives way to the implicit exclusiveness of "helpe and solace," terms in which Milton (following Genesis 2.18) tends to define the wifely role. When those words occur prior to the creation of Eve in Paradise Lost, they also appear to promise a relationship between equals. Attempting to formulate the as-yet-unknown object of his desire, Adam says to God,

> Thou in thyself art perfet, and in thee
> Is no deficience found; not so is Man,
> But in degree, the cause of his desire
> By conversation with his like to help,
> Or solace his defects. (7.415-19)

However, Adam's search for "Collateral love, and dearest amity" (7.426) does not result in an Edenic democracy of two. Although he is quite mesmerised by her beauty, Adam immediately recognises Eve as his "inferior" (7.541). Nonetheless God deems it necessary to instruct Adam to

weigh her with thyself;

Then value: Oft-times nothing profits more

Than self-esteem, grounded on just and right

Well manag'd; of that skill the more thou know'st,

The more she will acknowledge thee her Head. (7.570-74)

Apparently, Milton and his God share some of St. Paul's ideas on the relative positions of husband and wife. Eve, a lesser being, is created in response to Adam's need. How her creation and subsequent marriage is conducive to her own help and solace is not made clear.

Even questionable gestures of inclusiveness such as that in the above passage from Tetrachordon are rare in the divorce tracts. In spite of the suggestive subtitle of Milton's first tract, the implied reader of the Doctrine is unquestionably male. "It may yet befall a discreet man to be mistak'n in his choice," acknowledges Milton, "and who knowes not that the bashfull mutenes of a virgin may oft-times hide all the unlivelines and naturall sloth which is really unfit for conversation" (DDD, CPW 2.249). The author is at this point a man speaking to men about their shared experiences of women. Milton's arguments are informed by the conventional assumption--rooted in the pronouncements of Moses and Christ (Deuteronomy 24.1-4; Matthew 19.3-9)--that divorce is an act performed by men upon women. Arguing from the assumption that the first wife, Eve, was created as "a meet help" for Adam, he concludes that "shee who naturally & perpetually is no meet help, can be no wife" (DDD, CPW 2.309), but he fails to consider a parallel situation in which a husband might be repudiated for failing

to perform his ordained role. Likewise, when he discusses the topic of spiritual incompatibility, Milton typically assumes a situation wherein a believing husband is bound to "an Idolatresse" (DDD, CPW 2.260), rarely dwelling on the possibility of those roles being reversed. Even his brief commendation of divorce as "not only a dispensation, but a most mercifull Law" benefitting "afflicted wives" is followed by a much lengthier and more passionate dismissal of the contention that divorce was instituted *only* for the benefit of wives (DDD, CPW 2.324-25). To Milton's mind, such an argument is obviously absurd, and there is precious little evidence of sexual egalitarianism in his dismissal of it:

> For certainly if man may be liable to injuries in mariage, as well as woman, and man be the worthier person, it were a preposterous law to respect only the less worthy; her whom God made for mariage, and not him at all for whom mariage was made. (Tetr, CPW 2.627)

Clearly, Milton was neither the ally Mrs. Attaway believed him to be, nor the intractable libertine chastised by Prynne and his fellow Presbyterians.

Still, such readings of Milton's divorce tracts--perverse or paranoid as they may appear--were evidently not uncommon. The typically sweeping nature of the attacks that lumped Milton unflatteringly with a hoard of vaguely defined upstart radicals indicates that his opponents immediately recognised in his argument a menace to social order comparable to that posed by the radical sects. Like the separatist churches which licensed women's speech, Milton had provided women with a door through which they could sidestep men's governance. To a modern reader, the relief that Milton extends to

unhappily married wives may not appear great, but one need not be as creative a reader as Mrs. Attaway to see that his argument could have crucial implications for wives who are badly matched.

Although he lacks Edwards's hysterical tone, Milton shares with the author of Gangraena a basic assumption that "there is a certain scale of duties . . . a Hierarchy of upper and lower commands, which for want of studying in right order, all the world is in confusion" (DDD, CPW 2.264). For Milton that right order is clear: he gives Jehu's rhetorical question of 2 Chronicles 19.2, "Shouldst thou love them that hate the Lord?" the answer it demands: "No doubtlesse" (DDD, CPW 2.264). Mrs. Attaway's reading of Milton--if we ignore the baser motives imputed to her in Edwards's account--centres on that part of his argument which confirms her belief in the absolute authority of her own conscience. But what Milton and Mrs. Attaway might regard as "right order" appears, in Edwards's eyes, a harmful source of confusion and controversy. When the demands of conscience came into conflict with the duty of a wife towards her husband, it was not immediately apparent to *all* concerned that the "lower command" of obedience in marriage was rendered inconsequential.

Understandably, attempts by radical Protestant thinkers to shift the locus of spiritual authority from husband to wife, or from the clergy to the individual Christian were not always well received. The primacy of the Spirit championed by the sects implied a fundamental re-definition--a democratisation--of church government. Similarly, a recognition of the primacy of the Spirit within the household could precipitate a fundamental change in the marriage relationship. In the hands of a woman, then, the

demand for liberty of conscience within marriage could easily acquire socially radical overtones, regardless of her overtly spiritual aims. A good instance is provided by Katherine Chidley, Edwards's most vocal female adversary. Noting the Apostle Paul's prohibition of divorce in the case where a Christian wife is bound to a non-Christian husband, Chidley asks "what authority this unbeleeving husband hath over the conscience of his beleeving wife." Her own answer is that such a husband's authority is not total: although "he hath authority over her in bodily and civil respects," he is *not* entitled "to be a Lord over her conscience" (26). Chidley's insistence on the separation of spiritual and worldly authority is typical of arguments favouring liberty of conscience for Christians, but the social and political implications of her argument are immediately apparent.

Female prophets and their apologists were well aware of the potentially subversive appearance of their unusual conduct and thought and so took pains to minimise the apparent threat their behaviour posed to the all-important institution of marriage. Contemporary defences of their activities typically contend that there is no conflict between the freedom of women to speak out in church when filled with the Spirit, and their necessary silence and subordination to their husbands at all other times. This is the argument of The Woman learning in Silence, published by Quaker founder George Fox in 1656. Its subtitle, the Mysterie of the Woman's Subjection to her Husband announces the work's affirmation of Pauline doctrine. But Fox introduces one crucial qualification: "If you be led of the spirit," Fox says, "then you are not under the law" (1). By setting limits on "the law" governing relations between men and women, and by offering women

a means of transcending its authority, Fox opens a portal through which Edwards and his allies glimpsed a lurking chaos.

Notes

[1] Given the frequent and extreme reactions to the participation of women in the sectarian movement, a reader of the literature would be tempted to assume that the practice of women's preaching was far more widespread than it actually was. Indeed, one gets the impression from Edwards and many less conservative writers that the Separatist movement as a whole was consuming the country. But modern historians offer a very different picture: J.S. Morrill estimates that no more than 5% of the population were involved in that movement between 1643 and 1654. Furthermore, while a number of sects invited women to participate in the government of the church, only the most radical actually allowed women to preach (Dow 65). It would seem that only a very small section of the world needed to be turned upside down (or at least appear so) to provoke a reaction by more orthodox theologians. If the spread of lay preaching in London in 1641 was sufficient to provoke a sense of outrage among the upper classes and members of Parliament (Lindley 117), how much more outrage could the spectacle of preaching women provoke?

[2] Winstanley's conventional understanding of the family hierarchy is evident in the following passage from The Law of Freedom in a Platform:

> Though the Earth and Storehouses be common to every Family, yet every Family shall live apart as they do; and every mans house, wife, children, and furniture for ornament of his house, or any thing which he hath fetched in from the Storehouses, or provided for the peace thereof. And

if any man offer to take away a man's wife, children, or furniture at his house without his consent, or disturb the peace of his dwelling, he shall suffer punishment as an Enemy to the *Commonwealths* Government. (60)

3/ Revolution, Regicide, and Divorce:
Marriage as a Political Metaphor
in the Conservative Revolution

The intensity of the reactions that greeted women who appeared in any way to be contesting their assigned roles suggests that the implications of their actions extended well beyond the domestic sphere. The challenge to domestic order implicit in women's encroachments on public life or their demands for liberty of conscience necessarily became a challenge to the social order within which the family existed. One consequence of the prevailing doctrine that all forms of authority were connected was the common practice of envisioning the social order in domestic terms. Metaphors of parent and child, and husband and wife abound in seventeenth-century political thought. Their customary effect is to naturalise and thus justify the unequal relationship between rulers and ruled. By mid-century, the line of thought that likened familial and civic authority--patriarchalism--reached its apogee in the work of Sir Robert Filmer, whose Patriarcha contends that civil and domestic authority are not merely alike, but are one and the same; for Filmer the connection is not just metaphorical, but literal.

The ability of the marriage metaphor to naturalise the uneven distribution of power in the nation would obviously be compromised if inequalities within the institution of matrimony itself were recognised and addressed. Given the tautological nature of the marriage/state analogy, the reverse is also true: circumstances like the civil wars, the trial and execution of the king and the founding of a republic would diminish the

usefulness of government as a metaphorical support for marriage in its existing state. Whether civil or domestic government acts as the vehicle in the metaphor, it must be stable if the tenor is to be so regarded. If all forms of authority support each other, then the undermining of one form entails the collapse of all others.

Obviously, this is an extreme statement; yet it does derive logically from the premise that all forms of authority are mutually supportive. The possibility of a simultaneous breakdown of civil and domestic authority is frequently and hysterically articulated by Presbyterian extremists like Thomas Edwards, but the potential for social transformation also comes into view elsewhere, sometimes just beneath the surface, in the writings of men and women who in many ways share Edwards's socially conservative views. This chapter will attempt to bring such instances into clearer focus by considering some uses of marriage as a political metaphor during the upheavals of the 1640s and 1650s.

According to Gordon Schochet, the notion that civil government had its origins in the government of the household had become the prevalent view by the Stuart period (Patriarchalism 54). Although the idea had been in circulation for centuries--Schochet traces it back as far as Aristotle's Politics--it was only in the seventeenth century that the structure of the family came to be used as a direct *justification* of political obligation (19). For Filmer, defender of "the Natural Power of Kings Against the Unnatural Liberty of the People" (53), the idea that "the people" could be free from obligation was a patent absurdity in a world where all save Adam were born subject to a father (57).

As notorious as Filmer's ideas have become, his was hardly a lone voice in the

wilderness; on the contrary, the notion that the basis of patriarchalism was to be found in nature enjoyed some very powerful institutional support. The Anglican Church, a longtime advocate of obedience to political superiors, unfailingly linked filial submission with political compliance. Schochet's analysis of Tudor and Stuart catechisms reveals that "without fail . . . whenever the Decalogue was discussed, political duty was extracted from the Fifth Commandment" ("Patriarchalism" 429). The honour due to the father was equally due to the king. The potency of such arguments (ignoring for the time being the captive nature of the audience and the general unavailability of any counter-arguments) lies in their apparent incontrovertibility. They justify a particular form of government--monarchy--on the basis that it is natural, God-given. If civil government in its existing state grew out of a familial organisation decreed by God, and continues to resemble that original model, then it is doubtless the *only* natural form--all others are groundless.

Since filial obedience was apparently beyond question, the fashioning of a strong analogy between it and civil obedience could only serve to strengthen the latter. Even those who disagreed with the patriarchal doctrine granted the natural and inherent rights of parents to control their children, refusing only to infer the rights of a monarch from the family relationship (Schochet, Patriarchalism 14). However, the apparently unshakable parent/child (or, more typically, father/son) relationship was not the only source of political metaphor. The relationship between husband and wife in the patriarchal household--in many ways comparable to that of the father and his children--also provided fertile ground for such analogies.[1]

The metaphor of marriage, like the parent/child metaphor, permeates the political discourse of the period. During his first address to the English Parliament in 1603, James I famously declared, "I am the husband, and the whole Isle is my lawfull Wife" (272). Years later, the House of Commons addressed his son Charles I as the husband and father of the commonwealth (Hinton 296). Yet this metaphorisation of government was more complex than either James or the Members of Parliament were on these occasions willing to acknowledge. For while one cannot disagree with the premise upon which Filmer grounds his defence of patriarchalism--that the parent/child relationship is a natural and inescapable one--marriage is distinguished by a contractual element whose presence can complicate, if not undermine, the metaphor's naturalising intent. Even the most ardent defender of patriarchalism would have difficulty denying the possibility of a state outside of marriage. Doubtless the homosexual King James could envision at least one obvious alternative to a conventional heterosexual union.

However, the potential difficulties inherent in the metaphor were not always obvious to those who made use of it. A political pamphlet by the Anglican archbishop James Ussher, Primate of Ireland under Charles, provides one instance of an author's ability to overlook such inconvenient obstacles. The title of Ussher's tract--which was written during the first civil war but not published until after the Restoration--The Power Communicated by God to The Prince, and The Obedience Required of The Subject is an unambiguous announcement of the author's belief in an emphatically non-contractual theory of obligation. Nonetheless, his defence of natural obligation is grounded in part upon a comparison between the relationship of prince and subjects to that of husband and

wife. Ussher grants that "the Wife, we know, maketh choice of her Husband, and the mutual consent of the parties makes up the Matrimony," but his interest in the subsequent nature of the relationship distracts him from any complications that might lie in its foundations:

> . . . yet . . . *God* it is that *joyneth them both together*: and the conjunction being once made, the Wife by vertue thereof standeth bound to . . . *submit her self unto her own Husband as to the Lord.* And as God by saying to our first Mother *Eve* . . . *Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee*, (as the Apostle out of that Law infers) commanded women to . . . *be in subjection*, and thereby established an headship in every single Family: So after the posterity of *Eve* began to be distinguished into Families, the same God, by using like speech to *Cain* concerning his brother *Abel* . . . may seem to have constituted a principality in one man over divers Families, and thereby laid the foundation of political government. (10-11)

Ussher moves quickly and effortlessly from the establishment of the marital relationship with a contract involving "mutual consent" to its continuance based upon the "subjection" of woman to man. It is *that* relationship, severed from its contractual origin, which eventually forms the "foundation of political government." What enables Ussher to use marriage as a political metaphor in support of the king is his failure to consider the possibility that the marriage contract could be terminated. Apparently, once a woman freely accepts her subordinate marital role, no other role is available to her.[2] As we have

already seen, though, some of Ussher's contemporaries--most prominently, Milton--*did* seriously contemplate the possibility of a severance of matrimonial bonds. Furthermore, that the political equivalent of divorce was a possibility is very clearly evidenced by the political conflict that prompted Ussher, along with so many other monarchists, to defend his beliefs in print. In fact, the status of marriage and monarchical government as natural and immutable institutions was so profoundly compromised by events of the mid-century that a chorus of voices needed to be raised in support of them.

The marriage metaphor, an old and familiar tool of monarchs and monarchists, was typically employed in support of the king's right to rule. During the months leading up to Charles's execution it was put to use most effectively in the Eikon Basilike--a well-known piece of royalist propaganda then widely regarded as the work of the king himself. However, the metaphor did not remain the sole property of the royalist faction; writers of other political stripes also attempted to bend it to suit their purposes. That apologists for parliamentary rule should try to describe the new political arrangement in conventional matrimonial terms is not only ironic, but inconsistent. However, the inconsistency is informative. This continued reliance upon an implicitly conservative metaphor points to a conflict between their advocacy of limited political and religious change, and their support for the maintenance of the current social order. The social conservatism of England's new rulers has been brought more clearly into view by historians David Underdown, Blair Worden and Austin Woolrych, whose recent work has demonstrated that "even after the crisis of 1648-49 there was little that was genuinely revolutionary, at least in intent, about the revolution" (Davis 131).[3] It did not necessarily

follow, then, that the champions of parliamentary rule, the new republic, or even those who supported the regicide were any more in favour of marital reform than their royalist opponents. In parliamentarian hands, however, the use of marriage as a political metaphor could not help but involve some attempt to justify the termination of the "marriage" between the king and his subjects.

Two such instances have been noted by Ernest Sirluck in his introduction to Milton's divorce tracts (Milton CPW 2.152-53). Although neither directly addresses the divorce question, both William Bridge (in The Wounded Conscience Cured [1643]) and Herbert Palmer (in Scripture and Reason Pleaded [1643]) are drawn into a consideration of the grounds that would justify divorce. Both contend that there are indeed situations in which wives are entitled to break the divine covenant of marriage. Sirluck observes that in spite of their indirect approach to the divorce issue, "they have brought separation of man and wife on grounds other than adultery into relation with Parliament's case for resistance to Charles" (2.153). Attempting to use the marriage metaphor for its familiar, naturalising purpose, but in order to justify a government made possible by its usurpation of the king's power, they expose its double edge. While their intent is to vindicate the rule of Parliament and assist in the consolidation of its power using marriage as a *model*, their arguments simultaneously de-naturalise marriage and reveal it to be susceptible to radical change.

Milton also draws upon the analogy between marriage and government. Yet unlike Bridge or Palmer, he appears fully conscious of this doubleness; indeed, in the letter to Parliament and the Westminster assembly that prefaces The Doctrine and

Discipline of Divorce, he exploits it for his own ends. Where his fellow parliamentarians had been drawn incidentally into a discussion of divorce by their reliance upon a conventional political metaphor, Milton's acknowledgement of the social implications of the political "divorce" is deliberate. Where the royalist Ussher assumed that marriage is the fixed term in his metaphorical equation, Milton, the author of four divorce tracts, obviously makes no such assumption. Implicit in Milton's use of the metaphor is a recognition that both civil and domestic government are at least in part contractually based and are thus subject to change. In his address, Milton reminds Parliament and the Assembly that they are in no position to deny that the basis of government is contractual or that contracts are not inviolable:

> Advise yee well, supreme Senat, if charity be thus excluded and expulst, how yee will defend the untainted honour of your own actions and proceedings: He who marries, intends as little to conspire his own ruine, as he that swears Allegiance: and as a whole people is in proportion to an ill Government, so is one man to an ill mariage. (CPW 2.229)

The gist of Milton's warning is clear: the "supreme Senat," with the king conspicuously absent, is in danger of undermining the ground on which it stands, should it choose to oppose his pro-divorce arguments. If a monarchical government *can* be legitimately dissolved, so too can a marriage. Milton inverts the conventional use of marriage as a political metaphor. Taking as a given that circumstances may warrant the dissolution of the covenant between ruler and ruled, he asserts that the equally sacred marriage covenant must be similarly changeable.

Milton seizes the opportunity that the altered political situation presents, pursuing the practical implications, for the institution of marriage, of a political language in which civil and domestic government have become so intertwined as to be inseparable. But his strategic inversion of the marriage metaphor is exceptional in its open acknowledgement that some degree of social change might emerge as a result of the political and religious revolution. More typical among uses of the metaphor by parliament's supporters are those which, like Bridge's and Palmer's, seek simplistically to naturalise the new order, to characterise it in entirely conservative terms rather than recognise it as something new. The Commonwealth government's unwillingness to redefine the parameters of sexual propriety is indicated by the unprecedented severity of its Adultery Act of 1650. Formulated in part to counter the alleged sexual licence among members of the antinomian sects, the ordinance was obviously intended to secure social order; its exclusive concern was "with adultery as a public crime, not as a private injury" (Thomas, "The Puritans and Adultery" 262). In spite of the notoriety he attained following the publication of the divorce tracts, their author was no apologist for the unbridled sexuality that both the Presbyterian faction and the new Commonwealth government seem to have feared. Yet in his attempt to persuade Parliament and the Assembly that his views on divorce are indisputable, Milton points out how dubious their claim to moral authority is. Only by embracing inconsistency can England's new governors contain some of the forces that propelled them into power.

The complexities that attach themselves to this double-edged metaphor in a time of profound political and social change are nowhere more acutely revealed, though, than

when it is employed in the service of the current civil order by a woman who would herself have embodied the potential threat to domestic government. Here the metaphor is stretched to breaking point, unable to clothe new circumstances adequately in traditional attire. Such a circumstance arose on December 29, 1648 and again on January 4, 1649 when Elizabeth Poole, a sectarian visionary, appeared before the General Council of the Army at Whitehall. Poole's own published account of her speeches appeared shortly thereafter in a pamphlet entitled A Vision: Wherein is manifested the disease and cure of the Kingdome. The event was also recorded in some detail by William Clarke, then secretary to the Council (Clarke Papers 150-54, 163-69). The purpose of these visits was, remarkably enough, to advise and offer support to the Council, which was not only preparing for the king's trial, but also engaged in crucial debates over the revised Agreement of the People, the Leveller constitution.

Of course, Poole neither presents herself nor is received as a woman presuming to advise powerful political and military leaders. Like her fellow prophets, male and female, she derives her authority from a vision. What makes Poole's vision particularly intriguing is that it is so clearly influenced by contemporary thought regarding gender, and civil and domestic politics. Like the reasoned writings of Ussher, Palmer, Milton and others, Poole's prophetic vision--whose message is an affirmation of the army's right to rule--relies upon the assumption that civil government involves a type of marriage between rulers and ruled. Likening England in its current state to a sick woman "of whose dying state I was made purely sensible . . . being a member in her body," Poole sees in her vision the possibility of a cure in an army properly counselled as to its role:

> A man who is a member of the Army, having sometimes much bewailed her state, saying, *He could gladly be a sacrifice for her*, and was set before me, presenting the body of the Army; and on the other hand, *a woman crooked, sick, weak and imperfect in body*, to present unto me, the weak and imperfect state of the Kingdome: I having the gift of faith upon me for her cure, was thus to appeal to the person on the other hand, That he should improve his faithfulness to the Kingdome, by using diligence for the cure of this woman, as I by the gift of faith on me should direct him. (1)

Poole envisions a metaphorical marriage between the army and the war-torn kingdom. Acting as a sort of visionary marriage counsellor, she advises that the improved faithfulness and diligence of the army towards its "spouse" will restore the state to health. In other words, Poole makes use of a metaphor that is implicitly conservative to illuminate a political situation without precedent: never before had the subjects of an English king brought him to trial on a charge of treason.

Poole's intent is clearly not to challenge the army's right to rule. On the contrary, she implies that since "the Kingly power is undoubtedly fallen into your hands" (2), that rule must be divinely sanctioned. Drawing on the language of primogeniture, she insists that neither Parliament nor the "people" (she is referring specifically to those included by the Leveller Agreement) are to be any more than "younger brethren, who may be helpfull to you" (2). As her use of primogeniture might lead us to expect, Poole attempts to exploit the marriage metaphor's conservative implications alone; seeking only

to justify the replacement of one ruler by another, she leaves the essential relationship between ruler and ruled--and husband and wife--unchallenged.

The happy timing for the Council of Poole's visits and the remarkable coincidence of her allegorical vision and the interests of the army Generals have led to some speculation that Poole was a mere pawn of Cromwell and Ireton. A royalist pamphlet of 1651 entitled A Brief Narrative of the Mysteries of State carried on by the Spanish Faction in England presents this interpretation at its most extreme, painting Poole as "a monstrous Witch full of all deceiptfull craft" who "had her lesson taught before her beforehand by Cromwell and Ireton" (Clarke Papers 2.xx). But more credible sources have also called the source of her counsel into question. Although Antonia Fraser staunchly defends Poole against the charges in A Brief Narrative (Cromwell 277), David Underdown remains open to the possibility that Cromwell may at least "have detected in her some possible political value" (183).

Dismissing as it did the competing claims of Parliament and the Leveller faction in the army, Poole's advice was not surprisingly welcomed by the Army Council. "This was presently adjudged very seasonable advice," wrote one dubious observer, "but had God himselfe come and bid them desist, he should not have been believed; they would have bidden him withdraw; begone Malignant! Nay (were it possible) have sent him to Peter-house" (Mercurius Elencticus no. 58 [26 Dec. 1648 - 2 Jan. 1649], 556). The accounts of Poole's first visit in The Clarke Papers as well as the other news-sheets confirm that her support was welcomed by the Council with little question (A Perfect Diurnall of Some Passages in Parliament no. 283 [25 Dec. 1648 - 1 Jan. 1649], 2280;

The Kingdomes Weekly Intelligencer no. 292 [26 Dec. 1648 - 2 Jan. 1649], 1207). Why, after all, should the army--so fortunately matched in Poole's allegorical vision--call into question "that testimonie which," in the words of Colonel Rich, "God hath manifested heere by an unexpected Providence" (Clarke Papers 2.152).

If Poole's use of the marriage metaphor is up to this point convincing it is because she evades the question as to how, and more importantly, from *whom* the kingly power had fallen. But this question must have been foremost in the minds of the army leaders, poised on the verge of the trial and execution of their king on a charge of treason. It was only two days after Poole's second appearance that the Rump Parliament established a high court to which they nominated the 135 judges who were to hear the case. In short, when Poole appeared before the Council, the fate of the kingdom's former husband, Charles I, was--at least officially--undecided.

With the timing of that second appearance in mind, we can see without much difficulty why the army leaders became a bit flustered when Poole proceeded to complicate her metaphor by introducing into it the troublesome king. Two unusual features of this episode provide some intriguing material for speculation. First, the medium of Poole's prohibition against regicide differs obviously from that of its predecessors--she submitted it to the Council in writing, while her other messages were delivered as speeches. Second, this new advice provoked a sudden interest on the part of the Council members as to the precise source of Poole's wisdom--it appeared to *this* point that they had readily accepted her as a messenger of God.

Poole rightly anticipated a cooler reception for her new message. "I have yett

a[nother] message to declare," she announced as she submitted her note, "which itt's very possible may bee very strangely look't uppon; butt in the law of the Lord I present myself to tender itt, and lett itt finde acceptance as itt is" (Clarke Papers 2.164). Suddenly, Council members were much more curious about the source of Poole's advice, as the following exchange between Poole and Colonel Deane indicates:

> Col. Deane.
>
> I must desire to aske one question: whether you were commanded by the spiritt of God to deliver itt unto us in this manner?
>
> Woman.
>
> I beleive [sic] I had a command from God for itt.
>
> Col. Deane.
>
> To deliver this paper in this forme?
>
> Woman.
>
> To deliver in this paper or otherwise a message.
>
> Col. Deane.
>
> And soe you bringe itt, and present itt to us, as directed by his spiritt in you, and commanded to deliver itt to us?
>
> Woman.
>
> Yea Sir, I doe. (Clarke Papers 2.164-65)

The high level of interest among council members is underscored when, shortly after, another member, Sadler, feels the need to reiterate Deane's already repeated question. For the obviously suspicious army leaders, the written medium itself may have borne a

message contradicting Poole's claim to divine inspiration. Prophecy, after all, is conventionally associated with the spontaneously spoken utterance. The published prophecies of the 1640s and 1650s were frequently presented as accounts recorded by witnesses rather than the prophet herself. Sadler and Deane appear to be seeking assurances that Poole's message is completely untainted by the woman who claims to be its mere vehicle.

We should admit at least the possibility, as David Underdown does, that Poole was a pawn of Cromwell's. If we accept Underdown's contention that the future Lord Protector was a moderate voice among the regicides until almost the last moment, her advice is consistent with Cromwell's own wishes at the time (Pride's Purge 184). It is also possible, though, that this uncharacteristic and provocative second message derived from Poole's own sources, mystical or otherwise. It seems unlikely that the motives of either the prophet or her audience will ever be entirely clear to us; nonetheless, would-be regicides among the army leaders, having vouched for Poole's credibility as a prophet, were placed in the awkward position of having to impugn that credibility in order to save their own.

Even more awkward, though, is the curious manner in which their metaphorical marriage is transformed when Poole seeks a place in it for the prodigal husband. When she offers advice to the army on the limits of their authority over the king, England's new patriarchs suddenly find themselves carrying the bridal bouquet. Poole instructs the Council members in her written message that

> You have all that you have and are, and also in Subordination you owe

> him all that you have and are, and although hee would not bee your father and husband, Subordinate; but absolute, yet know that you are for the Lords sake to honour his person. For he is the Father and Husband of your bodyes, as unto men, and therefore your right cannot be without him, as unto men. (4)

Here, defining the relationship between the king and the army, Poole puts the conventional marriage metaphor to work once again, but in *this* context, patriarchal logic requires that the authority of the king be acknowledged, and Poole does so, emphatically. Charles I is now necessarily the husband and father from whom the authority of the subordinate and feminised army Generals derives. Echoing St. Paul's famous pronouncements on the role of women, she reminds the assembly that "you were given him an helper in the body of the people" (5), and urges them to play the praiseworthy wife, Abigail, to Charles's neglectful Nabal.

This wifely role limits considerably the options available to the army. Poole concedes that their position is a difficult one and that the prevention of continued fighting is extremely important. Nevertheless, she insists that the army does not have the authority to take the king's life, even for the good of the kingdom. At this point, Poole's reliance upon the language of marriage logically brings her--as it had brought Bridge and Palmer--into an indirect discussion of divorce. The act of regicide, she contends, would be as unnatural as a divorce initiated by the wife of an abusive husband. Poole cautions the Council, "you never heard that a wife might put away her husband, as he is the head of her body; but for the Lords sake suffereth his terrour to her flesh, though she be free

in the spirit to the Lord" (5). Still, the army is *not* defenceless against the threat represented by the king. Palmer had argued that active resistance to a king or a husband could be justified if such a measure was necessary to protect a state or a wife. A wife

> cannot recall wholly her Husbands authority over her . . . *Yet for her necessity, she may* by the Law of God and Conscience . . . *secure her Person from his violence by absence* (though that ordinarily be against the Law of Marriage, and the end of it.) or *any other meanes of necessary defence*. (35-36; qtd. in Shanley 84; emphases Shanley's).

Poole reiterates Palmer's assertion that the wife must suffer her husband's terror to her flesh only so long as her life itself is not endangered. Although she forbids the army commanders to take the king's life, Poole grants that "you may hold the hands of your husband, that he pierce not your bowels with a knife or sword to take your life" (5). At that point a wife is permitted to "hold the hands" of her husband to prevent further violence. A question remains, though, as to how far her self-defensive position permits her to go.

Poole neither raises this question nor explicitly answers it. But she has already acknowledged and justified the fact of army rule in England--"The Kingly power is undoubtedly fallen into your hands." So in spite of these restrictions she raises, with no explicit acknowledgment--apparently without even realising the implications--Elizabeth Poole quietly arrives at an orthodox seventeenth-century Englishman's nightmare: a situation in which an abused wife (England's subjects under Charles) usurps the husband's role for the good of the kingdom.

When Poole permits the army to "commit an unsound member to Sathan (though the head) as it is flesh; that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord" (5), she is drawing on the familiar language of radical Protestantism, the movement that so distressed England's social and theological conservatives, in part because of the concessions it appeared to make to women and to men of low social rank. The supreme importance of the spirit is indicated by her willingness to see the body of the kingdom dismembered, even decapitated for the sake of its everlasting health--the spirit's ultimate salvation. That Poole can use the argument for the supremacy of spirit over flesh to justify the army's usurpation of the king's position provides some evidence that the conservatives may have had good reason to fear the social implications of sectarian thought.

Seventeenth-century English society regarded its very basis in terms of hierarchical relationships, and the relative positions of husband and wife provided an obvious and immediate example of such a relationship. Despite the explicit conservatism of her beliefs regarding the subordination of a wife to her husband, Poole implicitly participates in a challenge to those beliefs by adopting a public role. The mere presence of powerful and vocal women like Elizabeth Poole represented, at least potentially, a dangerous challenge to an institution in whose terms English society defined and understood itself. In other words, her social conservatism and religious radicalism are at odds with each other. But this is true not only of Elizabeth Poole; it is equally true of her audience, the army leaders whose Puritan zeal had been instrumental in bringing them to power and would enable them to secure that power by committing the almost

unthinkable act of regicide.

When she seeks to define a radically new social order using the traditional patriarchal metaphor, Poole inadvertently reveals that it is no longer adequate to the task. The stability of vehicle and tenor, essential if the metaphor is to naturalise successfully the world in its current state, is no longer apparent. The movement from monarchy to military rule, exposing the changeability of the one, calls into question the necessary stability of the other. Using the conservative marriage metaphor to describe a moment of significant change in the nation, Poole raises the possibility of an equally radical change in the household, the microcosm of the nation. As a woman who can command the attention of the most powerful assembly in the land, she herself embodies that very possibility.

Coda

While Elizabeth Poole's language is suggestive of some of the radical possibilities of 1648-49, the sketchy details of her life following her public appearances are indicative of the powerful conservatism that continued to predominate in the wake of the "Revolution." Poole's final address to the public was a pamphlet published in 1649 (dated May 17 by Thomason), entitled, like its predecessor, <u>An Alarum of War</u>. The voice that addresses the army and "their High Court of Justice (so called)" rings with as much conviction if not more than that of the earlier pamphlets. The key difference, though, is that Poole's second <u>Alarum</u> addresses an audience that is now, at best,

indifferent to her message. The historical moment that she sought unsuccessfully to influence having passed, Poole nonetheless prophesies God's ultimate victory over the errant human wishes of the regicides: "*The things which are above written,*" she concludes, "*I have showed you my authority for, whether you will heare or whether you will forbeare, they shall overtake you neverthelesse*" (17). For the time being, however, it was Poole herself who had been overtaken. Her ironic (but remarkably gentle) dedicatory epistle to "the pretended Church, and Fellowship of Saints, in London: Who pursued me with their weapons of Warre, to shoot me to death at the Generall Councell of the Army, not regarding the Babe Jesus in mee" discloses that after her appearances before the Council she was not only drummed out of her Baptist congregation, but publicly slandered as one who "went about seducing."[4] The minister of that congregation, William Kiffin, is known to have been a friend of Oliver Cromwell's (Greaves & Zaller 3.49). Elizabeth Poole the prophet celebrated the passivity that made her a fit conduit for the voice of God and thus, paradoxically, lent her great power--but Poole the woman's probable victimisation at other hands reveals just how dubious that route to power was.

Notes

[1] The unfixed position of women in the domestic hierarchy has been explored by Catherine Belsey, who contends that the roles set out for women in the early modern family--wife, mother and mistress--were mutually incompatible. See The Subject of Tragedy, chapter 6.

[2] In this regard, Ussher's understanding of the contractual basis of domestic government is very similar to that of James I on civil government. In The Trew Law of Free Monarchies (1598), James contends that the people have "by their own consent" put certain privileges out of their own hands and into those of the king. Having done so, they cannot regain those privileges (102). According to Mary Lyndon Shanley, "in 1640 virtually all writers still spoke of the 'contractual' element in marriage as being simply the *consent* of each party to marry the other . . . To contract a marriage was to consent to a status which in its essence was hierarchical and unalterable" (79). Changes in thinking about the bases of the marriage relationship, Shanley contends, were provoked by the political debates of the Civil War and the Restoration.

[3] Davis is referring here to Underdown's Pride's Purge, Worden's Rump Parliament and Woolrych's Commonwealth to Protectorate. See also Davis's "Radicalism in a Traditional Society."

[4] See also the letter by "T.P." appended to Poole's 1648 An Alarum of War, and Dorothy Ludlow's entry on Elizabeth Poole in Greaves & Zaller's Biographical Dictionary.

Conclusion:

Another Jovial Crew

"*Bedlam* broke loose? yes, *Hell* is open'd too:

Mad-men, & *Fiends*, & *Harpies* to your view

We do present: but who shall cure the *Tumor*?

All the world is in the *Ranting Humor*."

-- Samuel Sheppard, The Joviall Crew

"Behold, behold, behold, I the eternall God, the Lord of Hosts who am that mighty Leveller, am comming (yea even at the doores) to Levell in good earnest, to Levell to some purpose, to Levell with a witnesse, to Levell the Hills and the Valleyes, and to lay the Mountaines low."

-- Abiezer Coppe, A Fiery Flying Roll

Samuel Sheppard's 1651 playlet The Joviall Crew, or, The Devill turn'd Ranter is one of a particularly lively series of pamphlets published between 1648 and 1651 that told of the emergence of yet another form of radical protestantism during the critical years in which England rid itself of the monarchy and began groping toward some form of replacement. Like the Richard Brome play from which it probably borrows its title, The Joviall Crew offers curious readers a depiction of a foreign underworld--in this case,

the world of the highly publicised sect known as the Ranters. Since their appearance in the appendix of Norman Cohn's 1957 study of mediaeval millenarianism, the Ranters have risen from relative obscurity to a position of some prominence, and they are now the subject of several books.[1] However, a study exploring the radical possibilities of the English Revolution would hardly be complete without at least some mention of the loosely organised group who, perhaps more than any other oppositional group to surface amidst the confusion of the time, seemed to embody those radical possibilities in their most extreme form. Anti-Ranter offensives were by no means limited to royalists like Samuel Sheppard: even Gerrard Winstanley railed against "the danger of the Ranting power" when the Diggers were "slandered with the Ranting action" that he abhorred (Works 402, 403).

The Ranters of Sheppard's play bear an obvious resemblance to the contemptible creatures populating earlier anti-sectarian pamphlets. In fact, The Joviall Crew is typical of anti-Ranter literature and anti-sectarian literature in general in its emphasis upon sexual libertinism and other forms of moral laxity among members--particularly female ones. The play features two would-be Ranters, Mrs. Idlesby and Mrs. Doe-Little, frustrated with "what our impotent husbands will allow," and "on fire to be acquainted with this new Sect" (4), a throng of smoking, drinking, blaspheming, and otherwise offending ne'er-do-wells under the influence of the Devil and his attendant, Pandorses. Despite its obvious caricatures and exaggerations, though, there is a stirring element of realism in Sheppard's play in that it depicts, in small, the fate of Ranters and other enthusiasts in the wake of the Revolution. The rash plan of Mistresses Idlesby and Doe-

Little finally brings them nothing but grief: by the fourth act, the members of this jovial crew--besotted men and lusty women alike--have been imprisoned; and the play concludes with Mrs. Doe-Little's husband spurning her, and urging her jailer to "Lash my wife well prethee, I'le pay thee for't" (15). It is intended, I think, to be a comical ending.

On August 9, 1650, five months before Thomason acquired his copy of The Joviall Crew, the Rump Parliament had passed its Act for the Punishment of Atheistical, Blasphemous and Execrable Opinions in an attempt to curtail the activities of this newly arrived group who seemed prepared to outdo even the most extreme of their predecessors. Abiezer Coppe, the most notorious of the so-called Ranters (and the author of the apocalyptic epigraph above) was already in Newgate prison by the time the Act was introduced. His A Fiery Flying Roll and A Second Fiery Flying Roule had outlined his Antinomian[2] convictions and conveyed a forceful message to "all the Great Ones of the Earth" regarding the coming day of Judgement (FFR 80). Perhaps of greatest interest to "the Great Ones" responsible for the Blasphemy Act, though, was that Coppe's millenarianism is so clearly an offspring of the political currents through which they had come to power, and that they were now seeking to subdue:

> . . . you can as little endure the word LEVELLING, as could the late slaine or dead *Charles* (your forerunner, who is gone before you--) and had as live heare the Devill named, as heare of the Levellers (Men-Levellers) which is, and who (indeed) are but shadowes of most terrible, yet great and glorious good things to come. (2FFR 87)

As A.L. Morton has observed, Coppe, along with fellow Ranters Laurence Clarkson, George Foster, and Richard Coppin, was prepared, like Winstanley, "to accept the name of Leveller in its most radical implications." Unlike Winstanley, though, and in spite of their deep concern for the poor, the Ranters had no social programme. Instead, they chose to place themselves in the hands of "the mighty Leveller" whose arrival, they believed, was imminent. Having witnessed the failures of levelling by sword and by spade, Morton ventures, the Ranters turned to one last source of hope: "Levelling by miracle" (71). Official persecution quickly drove the movement underground, and when the aspiring "Great ones" finally did receive their come-uppance a decade later, its source was not the one that the Ranters had anticipated.

Among the hopeful revolutionaries of 1640-1660, the Ranters' experience of defeat was hardly unique. On the contrary, the events of those decades might be regarded as an entwined series of failed revolutions. However, to describe the social conflicts that manifested themselves in the rise of the Leveller and Digger movements, women's petitioning and prophesying, or countless related phenomena as "revolutions" is, perhaps, to doom them to failure from the start. The crises of mid-century burst through a particularly large opening that had been made in an imperfect social fabric, and the conservative reaction was, predictably, to set about repairing the breach. To trace the fortunes of radical thought in the English Revolution may (to borrow from Dollimore's assessment of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama) contribute "not a vision of political freedom, but a searching knowledge of political domination" (Sexual Dissidence 89). However, to recognise that the powerful are so often able to subdue the less

powerful is not to accede to fatalism. "If transgression subverts," Dollimore suggests, "it is less in terms of immediate undermining or immediate gains, than in terms of the dangerous knowledge it brings with it, or produces, or which is produced *in and by* its containment in the cultural sphere" (88-89). Nor is this assertion of a residual "transgressive knowledge" merely an attempt to rescue some fragment of a happy ending from disagreeable circumstances by placing those circumstances in a broader, teleological narrative of history. It involves, rather, a recognition that change does not always come in the guise of revolution, that it may more often emerge as a result of the lopsided and often brutal give-and-take between rulers and the ruled.

Recently, historians have insisted--as I have--upon the profoundly conservative nature of the handful of so-called "revolutionaries" who brought their king to trial for treason in 1649. However, that political conflict between the king, the Long Parliament and the army leaders was only a small, albeit spectacular, component of a much larger set of social and cultural circumstances. In the minds of the powerful, the regicide's political implications no doubt seemed enormous: the king was gone, the house of Lords was abolished, and England was about to embark upon an experiment in republicanism. That this experiment would shortly lead to the creation of a Protectorate government virtually indistinguishable from the discarded monarchy could not have been foreseen. But the *social* and *cultural* repercussions of their political struggle affected a far greater number of English men and women, from royalists to Ranters, from Lord Fairfax to John Lilburne and Elizabeth Poole. Whether the famous events of 1648-1649 can be properly described as a "revolution" or not, it remains clear that the months and years preceding

and following that decisive moment seemed to herald a range of radical and revolutionary possibilities. For many, those possibilities were understandably terrifying. For others, though, the possibility that the world could be transformed, its institutions levelled and made anew, was a source of great hope. For them--for Abiezer Coppe, Anna Trapnel, Gerrard Winstanley, and a host of others who sought in various ways to re-make their own worlds while their rulers contended among themselves--the killing of the king was an important symbol, but one whose implications for their own lives had still to be realised.

Notes

[1] A.L. Morton's The World of the Ranters (1970) and Christopher Hill's The World Turned Upside Down (1972) were both instrumental in placing the Ranters more centrally in considerations of the 1640-1660 period. Nigel Smith's A Collection of Ranter Writings, featuring the works of Abiezer Coppe, Laurence Clarkson, Joseph Salmon, and Jacob Bauthumley, published in 1983, made some relatively obscure Ranter texts readily accessible. Two recent historical studies are Jerome Friedman's Blasphemy, Immorality, and Anarchy and J.C. Davis's Fear, Myth and History. (The latter has placed its author at the centre of new controversy over the actual existence of a definable group of "Ranters." For two of the more informative verbal battles, see Hill's essay "Abolishing the Ranters," and Davis's response to various critiques in "Fear, Myth and Furore.") Finally, James Holstun has tried to prod literary critics into noticing the writing of the Ranters (and of the revolutionary period in general) in his essay "Ranting at the New Historicism." Byron Nelson's "The Ranters and the Limits of Language" is one early response to Holstun's timely polemic.

[2] The Antinomian heresy to which many Ranters adhered is the belief that the death and resurrection of Christ was the source of salvation for all, so that all humankind lives in a state of grace. Nigel Smith notes that although there is evidence of Antinomian thought in England prior to the 1640s, Archbishop Laud worked hard to suppress it. He adds that "it was in the Ranters that critics of Antinomianism were able to see their fears of individual licentiousness, of moral and social anarchy, fulfilled" (9).

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