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The Civil Wars after 1660: Public Remembering in Late Stuart England

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On his restoration to the throne in 1660, Charles II faced a tricky balancing act between the impulses of retribution and reconciliation. Although swept back to power on a tide of popular support, it was difficult to pretend that Humpty Dumpty had been made whole again by the return of monarchy. The civil war had divided communities throughout the land and the physical and mental scars ran deep. This was a fragile and volatile situation and initially the king's preferred medicine was a kind of official amnesia, articulated first in the Declaration of Breda and then enshrined in the Act of Indemnity and Oblivion. Passed by the Convention Parliament in 1660, the Act's stated desire was to 'bury all seeds of future discords' by wiping the slate clean, outlawing even 'terms of distinction [and] words of reproach any way tending to revive the memory of the late differences'. But this public face of oblivion and toleration failed to endure in the face of the profound religious and political tensions which remained after the devastating civil war. The government subsequently put in place an apparatus of religious discrimination and persecution which helped rapidly undermine the broad coalition of support which had brought about the 'miracle' of Oak Apple Day 1660.

Running through the public affairs of the Restoration was the politics of memory, and it is the nature of

'public remembering' that has been tackled by Matthew Neufeld in a monograph that derives from his doctoral thesis. The book scrutinises a variety of sources to discuss the nature of public memory of the civil wars from the Restoration down to the coming of the Hanoverians. These range from 'official' printed histories to the manuscript petitions of disabled royalist soldiers. An important aspect of the book's argument is that this public remembering of the conflict was not concerned with fighting the civil wars anew in different party uniforms, but rather with justifying or undermining the Restoration settlement itself.

We begin in the 1660s and 1670s with historical discourses published by loyalists like James Howell and James Heath, which identified clearly the royalist heroes and puritan villains of recent decades. Neufeld observes that the histories of this time were overwhelmingly royalist, and there was little in the way of an alternative vision of the past available – an exception being the clandestine production of the first part of John Rushworth's *Historical Collections*. The book then considers the petitions of (mostly) royalist maimed veterans who requested pensions from the Restoration authorities because they were unable to work or support their families on account of injuries sustained in the king's service. In their applications these soldiers had to narrate a story of loyalty that met the requirements of the pension scheme erected by the Cavalier Parliament. As these petitions were considered before county quarter sessions, Neufeld argues that their 'rhetoric of resilient royalism was very much involved in defining publicly the nature of loyalism, and the identity of the loyal, for the post-Restoration polity' (p. 73).

We return to rather more 'traditional' historical discourses in the next two chapters which cover the period of the Exclusion Crisis and Charles II's 'personal rule', and the post-Revolutionary period down to the accession of George I, respectively. Neufeld draws attention to the growing use in historical texts of visual imagery to represent the civil wars and Interregnum, such as the arresting image of 'The Commonwealth ruling with a standing army' from Thomas May's *Arbitrary Government* of 1683, which also provides the volume's cover illustration. After the Glorious Revolution, histories of the mid-century crisis are seen to have contributed to contemporary discussions about religious toleration. Generally those more inclined to support the Revolution downplayed puritan responsibility for the civil wars in their historical treatises. Some commentators increasingly emphasized accident and contingency in causing the wars, and used their historical narratives as a means of building a new consensus around the more inclusive settlement of 1689. Others supported the Revolutionary settlement by being more openly critical of the Stuarts, as in John Toland's 1698 work, *King Charles I. No such Saint, Martyr, or Good Protestant*. What better way to argue against the return of the dynasty than by showing how innately hostile their DNA was to England's moderate Protestant settlement? Such perspectives in turn produced a reaction in works that re-emphasized the guilt of the puritans and Presbyterians in the calamity of the 1640s and 1650s, and lauded their exclusion from the political sphere under the Restoration settlement.

The book's penultimate chapter considers a complex work of polemical history which is ripe for an in-depth and intertextual analysis, Reverend John Walker's *An Attempt towards Recovering an Account of the Numbers and Sufferings of the Clergy of England* (1714). A response to Edmund Calamy's hagiography of the dissenting clergy ejected in 1662, Walker distributed questionnaires throughout England requesting accounts of royalist clerical ejections and sufferings from the 1640s and 1650s. The fascinating collection of responses which flowed back to him, now housed in the Bodleian Library, is utilised by Neufeld to excavate some of the ways in which communities remembered the civil wars half a century after the conflict. Although Walker's volumes were not as successful as he would have wished, Neufeld observes that High Anglican animus to dissent at the opening of the 18th century 'stemmed in part' from a sense of historic vulnerability that clearly lingered at the parochial level in communicative memories?, which Walker 'aimed to transpose into a more public memory' (p. 187).

Neufeld's final chapter turns to the printed texts of sermons preached on 29 May to celebrate the Restoration of monarchy. Many of these, of course, reflected on the historical circumstances of Charles II's exile and return, and it is suggested that the tone and purpose of these texts shifted over time. Before 1679 they were scripts of thanksgiving for the miraculous restoration of the king, but also exhortations to conform to the 1662 Act of Uniformity. Between 1680 and 1685, it is argued that the sermons were more polemical in using the historical narrative of deliverance to secure the blessings of 1660 at a time when it seemed they were

under threat from political and religious dissidents. The final period down to 1715 is seen as a time when such public commemorations became increasingly enmeshed in contemporary party political debates.

This is a welcome addition to a burgeoning field of study – the nature and role of memory in pre-modern cultures – and it also speaks to a growing interest in the nature of post-war societies and the processes of post-conflict reconciliation. The settlements in South Africa and Northern Ireland are obvious contemporary reference points, while one barometer of academic trends is the Shelby Cullom Davis Center for Historical Analysis at Princeton, whose analytical theme for 2014–16 is ‘In the aftermath of catastrophe’. For such a timely intervention, then, it is strange that the volume should seem as historiographically detached as it does. Neufeld mentions in an early footnote how a ‘prospectus for work’ on the memory of the civil wars was set out by Mark Stoyale, but is not inclined to challenge, endorse or augment Stoyale’s arguments. Similarly, although there are references to other historians’ treatment of the Restoration and its relationship to the recent past, the tendency is to argue past them rather than engage with them directly. The case is made for seeing the Restoration not as a ‘prisoner’ of its public memory, as Jonathan Scott has claimed, but instead to see the Restoration moment imprisoning the immediate past in an agreed narrative, yet the point is rather hurriedly made and not developed as fully as one would have hoped. Certainly a more explicit and extended positioning of the text within scholarly debates about Restoration political and religious cultures would have been welcomed and would have helped sharpen and emphasise its central arguments.

The structuring of the text raises issues of methodology and interpretation. The individual chapters are, broadly, arranged around different types of source material. While this highlights some impressive work on both printed and archival materials, it can cause some rather jarring juxtapositions which detract from the homogeneity of the volume and the coherence of its argument. We need a greater sense of how to place the petitions of ordinary soldiers alongside John Nalson’s *Impartial Collections*, or how the Walker correspondence sits within the same interpretative frame as, say, Sir Philip Warwick’s *Memoires*. Rather more attention needed to be given to the generic shifts of the different media under review, and the necessary adjustments which have to be made in our reading and assessments of them. The chapters on soldiers’ petitions and the Walker volume struggle to gel satisfyingly with the discussion of highbrow printed histories considered elsewhere. Moreover, at several points it would have been welcome to have had more contextual information on a number of works and their authors; these often fly past rather too quickly.

The shape of this study is the product of a key methodological decision which has significant implications for the picture of ‘public remembering’ that emerges here. Neufeld has decided to concentrate on the *production of public* remembering, and this imparts a very particular perspective to Restoration views of the civil wars. For one thing, it serves to produce a rather Whiggish privileging of the state as the principal protagonist in fashioning public memory. There are several potential issues that derive from this, but an important one is the tendency to neglect some sophisticated recent scholarship on the variegated, diffuse and multifaceted nature of the early modern state, and to collapse different perspectives and interest groups into an overly homogeneous and unified ‘political nation’, ‘regime’, or ‘polity’. Across the turbulent five decades under review, the state is often reified as a political actor possessing a single voice, while dissenting positions are also silently amalgamated into a kind of binary ‘other’. This can serve to flatten out the complex negotiations of public memory into a set of competing archetypes which operate functionally in relationship to a set of (mysteriously) consistent ideological positions. One can see this in action in the first chapter which refers frequently to the idea of ‘sanctioned’ histories. The nature of this ‘sanctioning’, however, who does it, how it operates, what its rules are, is sketchy at best. The underlying assumption seems to be that if something was published then it had the implicit support of a government which was able to censor dissenting positions. Although there is an element of truth to this, greater discussion of the mechanics of production and publication would have been welcome, while at least some attention to reception or voices in other media would have modified the picture of a government able to broadcast a consistent and approved ‘party line’. While the author avers that questions of reception and diffusion lie beyond the purview of the study, this nevertheless produces a view of ‘public remembering’ that comes perilously close to a Manichean world view. Moreover, it is hard to see how such an avowed focus on production rather than reception permits conclusions such as the ‘reading public would learn the lessons

these [?sanctioned?] writings offered, and embrace the principles they exemplified? (p. 25), without more evidence to support such a sweeping claim.

If this statist perspective produces a too-uniform view of ?official? remembering, it also serves to generate a suspiciously standardized vision of alternative positions. This is presented as the amorphous (and awkward) ?puritan impulse?, which is defined early on but not in a manner that allays unease about the concept?s ability to carry the heavy interpretative weight required. We are told that it represents a ?strand of piety and politics with roots in England?s Reformation?, and the ?consistent and evolving realities of puritan piety and political action from the accession of Elizabeth I to the return of Charles II, and the intent of the exclusive Restoration settlements, which was to remove a political and ecclesiological agenda that was judged capable for blowing up the Tudor regime and the Elizabethan Reformation settlement? (pp. 11?12). It seems questionable whether such an explanation clarifies matters or obfuscates them. Certainly it seems to do some violence to the complex picture of puritan politics which has emerged in much recent scholarship, while again tending to smooth out the differences and discontinuities in Anglian attitudes. Although scholars need to be alive to the kinds of unifying and simplifying caricatures deployed in Restoration polemic, they also need to be wary of transforming them into categories of academic analysis. What did it *mean* to be (or to be seen as) ?an adherent of the puritan impulse? (p. 2), and was that even possible?

Just as this study concentrates largely on the perspectives of ?the regime?, so it is also a problematically Anglo-centric account. While it is true that calls for a more ?British? perspective in early modern histories can be rather trite genuflections towards *de rigueur* historiographical fashions, and while it is equally true that scholars can only do so much and that England?s story deserves its star billing, there is nevertheless a serious point to be raised in a study of the public remembering of the civil wars that does not have an index entry for ?Ireland?. The harrowing memories of 1641, or of Drogheda, surely had their place in the public consciousness of the period, while Scotland?s rather cursory treatment in a period that witnessed the Act of Union also requires rather more justification and discussion than it receives.

Neufeld?s account, then, is not without its problems of interpretation and framing. Yet there is also a good deal to commend here. There is an impressive amount of research underpinning the entire study, and the author handles some abstruse and dense treatises with admirable concision and clarity. The work in the Walker archive is pioneering and has some suggestive ideas about the relationship between ?private? correspondence and ?public? print in early modern England. At its core this has an interesting and controversial argument about the politics of historical production in Restoration England. The author is disarmingly candid about the work that remains to be done on the ?sub-cultures of public and semi-public remembering? (p. 248), as well the responses which the works under discussion here elicited. But it is problematic to treat production and reception as separate entities rather than as a dialogic process of feedback and response, and one finishes this study with the impression of one hand clapping.

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