Peacemaking, Parliament, and the Politics of the Recent Past in the English Civil Wars

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ABSTRACT This essay examines how the past was used during a crucial period of Parliamentary peacemaking in Civil War England. Gary Rivett focuses on William Aylesbury and Charles Cotterell's translation of Arrigo Caterino Davila's The Historie of the Civill Warres of France and Thomas May's The History of the Parliament of England, both endorsed by Parliament and published in 1647. Both works constructed particular images of Parliament, government, and political behavior according to the peacemaking expediencies of the mid-1640s. They formed part of a broader politics of the recent past in which competing visions of a peaceful future were a dynamic feature of political discussion. Keywords: liberty and the Parliamentary cause; Solemn League and Covenant; Protestation Oath; Civil War settlement negotiations; early modern peacemaking

Using the past in public discourse was a defining and dynamic feature of political discussion during the English civil wars, and an important mobilizing tactic.¹ There was a vibrant politics of the recent past: a set of politics encompassing the interpretation of recent events, the forms these interpretations took, the meanings imposed on events and contested for partisan purposes, and the arguments and ideas these meanings supported. During the peacemaking process of 1646–47, this impulse to produce historical interpretations intensified as partisans sought to influence the terms of settlement between Parliament and Charles I. The Houses of Lords and Commons were alive to the need to constrain interpretations of the recent past for the purpose of

securing peace. To this end, in 1647, Parliament endorsed two histories. One was *The Historie of the Civill Warres of France*, translated by William Aylesbury (1612–1656) and Charles Cotterell (1615–1701) from Arrigo Caterino Davila’s dense fifteen hundred-page history recounting the sixteenth-century wars of religion. The second and the shorter was *The History of the Parliament of England*, by the poet, dramatist, and classicist Thomas May (1595–1650), containing a historical narrative of, mostly, the years of conflict between Charles I and Parliament.2

These two texts are clear examples of histories produced by relatively elite, scholarly, and erudite men, and produced for an audience likely made up of similarly placed contemporaries. However, rather than fetishize distinctions between elite and popular uses of the past, this essay demonstrates how these histories can be fruitfully located alongside other, contemporaneous practices for historicizing the recent Civil War past. When properly contextualized, historical narratives produced during the 1640s illustrate the interpenetration of social memory and history in public discourse.3 Indeed, May gestures quite explicitly toward this confluence in the preface to the *History*:

I appeale only to the memory of any English man, whose yeares have been enow [enough] to make him know the actions that were done; and whose conversation has been enough publike, to let him heare the common voice, and discourses of people upon those actions, to his memory I say, do I appeale, whether such actions were not done, and such judgements made upon them, as are here related. (Sig. Br)

May’s comments use a rhetoric that appeals to an idea of a “collective memory” of the recent past. Or, put differently, he refers to a preexisting body of knowledge about the past, which, May pleads, should be used to test the veracity of his own historical account.

However, I posit that it is useful to think in terms of the full range of practices that contemporaries used to continuously calibrate, manage, and orient understandings of the relationships and connections between the past, present, and future. In this context, and throughout this essay, I use “historicizing” as a shorthand to indicate the practices that authors used to suggest to their publics that an issue, person, event, or institution of vital present concern should be thought about historically. These prac-

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3. There is ample scholarship on the relationship between memory and history, and on conceptualizations of “social memory,” much of it touched on in Matthew Neufeld’s introduction. For a recent summary and thoughtful critique of memory studies, see Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester, 2007). Arguably, though, the extent to which modern historiographical discussions surrounding the relationship between history and memory, and concomitantly between past and present, can be useful for conceptualizing, examining, and understanding historical processes and practices may be limited.
tices were certainly politicizing, but they were also specifically historical in nature. Extended and expansive works of history of the kind represented by May and Davila are only the most explicit of these historicizing practices. Furthermore, to identify a series of historicizing practices at any given time, it is essential to explore the diversity of formats, objects, narratives, and discourses through which the past becomes present for people. Such presence is, furthermore, closely linked to how people think about the future. Recent scholarship on memory focuses on exploring the past–present nexus, omitting the crucial presence of the future—or, more precisely, various expectations of it—in the construction and use of the past and present.4 As this essay will suggest, though, the past could appear, almost willy-nilly, in the present and serve as a crucial marker for shaping visions of the future. For example, momentary references to a past event, person, idea, or institution—often in the service of a broader argument and partisan agenda—may receive little overt exegesis in a text, but the fact of their announcement indicates an act of historicizing is being performed.5 These acts may inform the basis of arguments or assist in the dissemination of ideas, or even suggest ways of thinking about—for the purposes of this essay, at least—politics, government, and authority. In short, for early modern people the past was used as part of a problem-solving process. The phrase historicizing practices captures the ways in which the creation of usable pasts was a continual and situated act, performed repeatedly and not always overtly definable as history or memory. It also gestures toward the constant interpenetration of past, present, and future in everyday life.

These histories and their authors have received some treatment by scholars in the field of the history of historiography. Examining influences over the Earl of Clarendon’s historical style and writing, Paul Seaward has provided a brief overview of Davila’s Historie. Rightly identifying its style as Tacitean and Machiavellian, Seaward makes important connections between Clarendon’s uses of Davila’s work, arguing that it served as a template for Clarendon’s own efforts to represent England’s civil wars. As Seaward notes, Aylesbury was Clarendon’s brother-in-law, and the earl thought highly of him. Cotterell, who collaborated with Aylesbury, was also known to the earl. What emerges from Seaward’s account is that a network of individuals were using Davila’s Historie as a model for how to understand the phenomenon of political rebellion. However, despite a brief comment about the Historie’s course through Parliament, Seaward overlooks its

significance in a broader sequence of Parliamentarian historicizing acts. Likewise, J. G. A. Pocock’s and David Norbrook’s erudite readings of May’s History provide helpful introductions to the text, but they underplay the text’s relationship to the Parliamentarian cause. Daniel Woolf, in the process of describing May’s claims to impartiality, only discusses the History as part of a general phenomenon: how the ideological conflicts of the 1640s fractured a consensual and unified view of England’s past. Nigel Smith focuses less on May’s claims to impartiality than on his reliance on classical republican ideas. Neither history has been located within the crucial context of its production and publication: the imprimatur of Parliament during a tense period of peacemaking.

Peacemaking during the English civil wars remains an overlooked topic, despite its prominence in contemporary public discourse. Sustained analyses of how contemporaries discussed, debated, negotiated, conceptualized, and sought to practice peace and resolve conflict are rare beyond the realm of high politics or treaty negotiations. Such a historiographical landscape contrasts sharply with the detailed work available on the cultural and intellectual background of peacemaking in France before, during, and after the sixteenth-century religious wars. Despite the lack of studies on peacemaking in England during the 1640s, there is a substantial body of literature on early modern peacemaking, covering a longer period and various fields of interest: religious,

6. Paul Seaward, “Clarendon, Tacitism, and the Civil Wars of Europe,” Uses of History, ed. Kewes, 285–306. Seaward also examines Strada’s history for the same reason, but overlooks the fact that on the same day that Aylesbury received his copyright—January 7, 1647—Robert Stapylton’s translation of Famiano Strada’s De bello Belgico was also ordered. See Parliamentary Archives, HL/PO/JO/10/1/222. For a fuller treatment of similar texts, see Gary Rivett, “‘Make use both of things present and past’: Thomas May’s Histories of Parliament, Printed Public Discourse and the Politics of the Recent Past, 1640–1650” (PhD diss, University of Sheffield, 2010), chap. 5.


social, political, and intellectual. This work has broadened our understanding of the scope of practices that contemporaries performed to open up or constrain opportunities for peace. This essay discusses how peacemaking processes could engender a number of cultural practices, some of which were used to shape interpretations of the recent past. These practices could be located in a variety of contexts. Rather than eschew entirely the context of “high politics” when studying early modern historical culture, and examine the interventions of Aylesbury, Cotterell, and May in isolation from the processes of their production, I suggest that Parliament’s endorsement of their histories was part of a broader attempt to create usable pasts for institutional purposes.

Parliament had marshaled the past throughout the 1640s when having to demonstrate that, as an institution, it could legitimately confront Charles I. In short, it had to manage expectations about its constitutional role in light of its history and the present political reality. These interventions were marked most famously by the Remonstrance of the State of the Kingdom in December 1641. As David Cressy notes, the Remonstrance represented an effort to establish narratives legitimating and justifying the legality and necessity of the actions and decisions Parliament had taken to maintain its security. In a similar way to how it used specific political languages to define itself, for example employing “malignancy” as a term of enmity, Parliament used the past as a resource to legitimize statements and arguments. From an early stage, then, Parliament took great care to frame interpretations of the recent past. Parliament continued its historicizing impulse when it supported in 1643, and ordered in 1644, the compilation of two volumes containing an extensive collection of official documents. In March 1643, Parliament ordered An Exact Collection to be printed by...


15. Tom Leng, “The Meanings of Malignancy: The Language of Enmity and the Construction of the Parliamentary Cause in the English Civil War and Revolution” (unpublished paper). I am grateful to Dr. Leng for allowing me to read this paper and for our discussions relating to it.
Edward Husbands, and, as Michael Braddick suggests, the tract probably formed part of the ideological escalation in the Parliamentary cause.\textsuperscript{16} Seventeen months later, on August 5, 1644, Parliament commissioned Husbands to produce another collection, which appeared in late 1646.\textsuperscript{17} These collections contain a vast number of documents that Parliament had published, or had exchanged with Charles I, between December 1641 and November 1646. The documents ranged from lengthy remonstrances, declarations, or proclamations to shorter notices of specific Parliamentary votes or orders and letters between the king and his highest court.

The production of these collections marked the confluence of several historicizing activities: collecting, archiving, cataloguing, categorizing records, and chronicling. Thus, the collection is more than an archive: it offers a relatively novel form of historicizing the recent past. Taken as a whole, the collection is a chronicle containing a historical narrative.\textsuperscript{18} Parliament further ordered the creation and publication of The Kings Cabinet Opened in July 1645; that work combined historical narratives with collected documents. It demonstrated how Charles I and Henrietta Maria—and not a set of “evil counselors”—were largely responsible for their own decisions.\textsuperscript{19} Containing private letters exchanged between the king and queen that had been captured after the battle of Naseby in June 1645, the text also included historical annotations that contrasted Charles’s public statements with his private expressions of his intentions. This critical review of the king’s actions created a series of stories detailing the king’s past duplicity. The result was that the Kings Cabinet offered a narrative of the recent past that reiterated and justified the Parliamentary cause. In all three cases, then, Parliament’s use of stories about the past was part of a broader process of institutional identification and legitimation: a process that sought to identify Parliament with responsible governance and protection of the kingdom. However, while these interventions projected Parliament as a unified institution, the publication of these texts obscured the variety of voices that made up Parliament.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{16} See Journal of the House of Commons [hereafter CJ], 6:15–17, March 24, 1643. This order was reprinted as the final document in An Exact Collection of all remonstrances, declarations, votes, orders, Ordinances, proclamations, Petitions, Messages, Answers, and other remarkable Passages betweene the Kings Most Excellent Majesty and his High Court of Parliament (London, 1642), 955v. See also Braddick, “History, Liberty, Reformation,” 131.

\textsuperscript{17} A Collection of All the Publicke Orders Ordinances and Declarations of Both Houses of Parliament (London, 1646).


Parliament could be said to represent the internal politics of either House, or its
decision making and personnel. As John Adamson has demonstrated, debates sur-
rounding the Remonstrance were fractious affairs.\textsuperscript{21} However, when printed, the text
betrayed no trace of its troubled beginning; instead it produced an image of Parliament
as an institution speaking in unison.\textsuperscript{22}

In what follows, then, I examine how Aylesbury, Cotterell, and May constructed
usable pasts that did at least three things: informed processes of political identification
and legitimacy (especially Parliamentary); contested the claims and arguments of
opponents; and provided foundations from which to promote peace and security.
Three themes will animate this essay: the cultural practices that contributed to peace-
making after a brutal internecine war; the ongoing processes through which Parlia-
ment was produced as an institution; and, acting as a connecting theme, the important
contribution that historicizing practices had to how people and institutions communi-
cated ideas about politics and peace. They were integral components of public dis-
course during the mid-1640s.

For the histories to receive official endorsement, Parliamentary scrutiny was neces-
sary. However, no \textit{direct} orders to translate or write either history have been found.
Only the Stationers’ Register records the possible existence of any orders. On Febru-
ary 3, 1647, “Mrs Raworth” made the entry for a translation of Davila’s work as “The
History of the civill wars of France in the reignes of Francis the second, Charles Xth,
the third and then fourth etc.” According to the record, it was entered by “order of the
Lords, House of Parliament.” Two weeks later, on February 19, May’s \textit{History} appeared
in the register; entered by “Master Langley and Master Whitaker,” the book was appar-
ently “written by Order and command of the honorable House of Parliament.”\textsuperscript{23} The
entry in the Stationers’ Register for May’s \textit{History} appears to indicate a direct order to
publish the text was passed by the Commons. However, it is only the \textit{entry} of Aylesbury
and Cotterell’s translation of Davila’s work into the register that appears to be ordered
by the Lords. Neither the Lords’ nor the Commons’ \textit{Journals} record the orders for
either text. Omissions of such orders from the \textit{Journals} were not unusual. Their
absence could suggest that questions surrounding the production of either history
were not discussed in the Lords or the Commons. Nonetheless, in the space of a little
over two weeks, both histories appear to have received Parliamentary endorsement.

The journals and other evidence do reveal an altogether more interesting pro-
cess of how the texts came to the \textit{attention} of Parliament, hinting at a series of practices

\textsuperscript{22} Here, I draw from Phil Withington’s helpful discussion of “public discourse.” See Phil Withing-
\textsuperscript{23} \textit{A Transcript of the Registers of the Worshipful Company of Stationers, from 1640–1708 A.D.}, vol. 1,
formulated for the purposes of adjudicating works. Aylesbury and Cotterell had worked on their translation for several years, with Charles I as patron. On its eventual completion, the book was sent to the House of Lords, where, on December 14, 1646, it passed to the Earl of Denbigh and Dudley North, the third Baron North. They were “appointed to peruse the said translation, and if they in their Judgements approve of the said Translation, that then the said Wm Aylesbury shall have the sole Printing thereof for the Space of Fourteen Years, and that none else shall print the same.” Aylesbury was asking, that is, for a copyright. The book passed scrutiny, and, on January 7, 1647, the Lords ordered it published on Aylesbury’s terms. The order was printed facing the title page. The appearance of May’s History in the Commons was brief. On May 14, 1647, he petitioned the Commons for sole printing rights to his work, an attempt that failed after it was put to a vote. Nothing else in the journals, at this time, records any comment about the History. Yet May evidently was confident enough of Parliamentary support, stamping the phrase “Published by Authority” on his title page. While Aylesbury and Cotterell clearly received endorsements from two lords, the source of May’s “authority” is more obscure.

One person appears responsible for endorsing May’s History: John Langley. It was Langley who entered the book in the Stationers’ Register. Furthermore, according to a statement printed opposite the title page, Langley had judged the History “fit for publike view by the printing.” While Langley was nominally a schoolmaster at St. Paul’s, he was also a Parliamentary licensor who was ordered by the Commons, on June 20, 1643, and alongside Sir Nathaniel Brent and a Mr. Farnaby, to license “Books of Philosophy, History, Poetry, Morality, and of Arts.” In the same order, licensors for several other genres were named. The order formed part of Parliament’s attempt to establish control over printing, which the Commons had begun with An Ordinance for the Regulating of Printing, passed on June 14. A petition from the stationers and printers of London to the Lords in December 1648 casts helpful light on the nature of their work. This later petition complained of a lapse in the efforts of Brent and Langley (Farnaby was by then dead) to license books that “would be beneficial to the commonwealth.” It seems these licensors had to identify appropriate works that would fulfill that aim. For Langley, then, May’s History clearly met that criterion.

The criteria Langley used to assess and authorize the History are not known, but his power as a licensor and decision maker ensured the credit of the book and its con-

26. Parliamentary Archives, HL/PO/JO/10/1/222. EEBO does not contain the version of the text with the reprinted order. However, the British Library holds a copy at shelf mark 596.K.2. Available at https://archive.org/details/historieofcivill00davi.
30. For the petition, see Parliamentary Archives, HL/PO/JO/10/1/279.
tent. Similarly, the Earl of Denbigh and Baron North’s criteria for judging the translation of Davila’s text is difficult to establish. While outlining this process demonstrates how the histories came to the attention of Parliament, it also hints at a largely obscured set of criteria by which the histories were judged worthy of institutional support. The adjudicators presumably received some guidance on how to assess the histories’ quality and utility. Recognizing how these texts were “ordered” not only highlights how responsibilities were delegated within Parliament, it is actually crucial for understanding how the histories were entwined in a broader set of institutional practices that were established to define and shape visions of the commonwealth and a post–Civil War polity. In the 1640s, these visions were fluid, mutable, and frequently contested by partisans within and without Parliament. Whatever the source and nature of any advice given to designated readers on assessing the suitability of an endorsed work, those readers probably also had to account for how a book might relate to the problems of any given political moment. Thus, in particular circumstances, the process of providing licenses to specific texts might also elevate those that reproduced and advanced prevailing political narratives and discourses.

If Parliament was willing to endorse Aylesbury and Cotterell’s translation of Davila’s Historie and support May’s History, then its designated readers and licensors probably accepted that both texts provided narratives that were supportive of Parliament, that conveyed a particular image of it as an institution, and that were suitable for the precise context of peacemaking. Indeed, that they were acceptable in these ways is evident from the content of both histories. Broad differences exist between the texts: the focus on the French civil wars as opposed to the English civil wars is only the most obvious. The narrative scope of the texts also differs. Davila’s Historie contains a narrative that fully resolves the civil wars in a final peace. May’s History only takes the story part of the way, into the 1640s. This difference, as I will discuss, underpins one of the significant aspects of both texts. However, there are some important similarities between the histories. First, both Davila and May were writing about wars and events through which they had lived, lending them a complementarity of sorts. Second, and more significantly, both exhibit the presence of Tacitean and Machiavellian understandings of politics, emphasizing the political machinations and intrigues of personalities as influences over the course of a civil war. Tacitus and Machiavelli had inspired an earlier generation of English historians to produce what F. J. Levy called “politic history.”

However, neither Davila’s nor May’s text directly imitated this model of historical

writing, which was partly based on precept or example, type and analogy, and the use of the past as a guide to the present. Nonetheless, broadly, their style and content certainly conformed to a humanist-inspired narrative historiography, and in the 1640s, as Daniel Woolf has observed, this historical method was directed to understanding the recent past.33 When endorsing these texts, then, Parliament supported the production of civil histories designed to shape contemporary perceptions of the recent past and of the peacemaking process.

Part of the reason Aylesbury and Cotterell’s translation received the Lords’ endorsement was probably that, as Paul Seaward has noted, there was much in Davila’s Historie that contemporaries, having lived through a bloody civil war, would have found familiar.34 Thus, the production of the translation was, in the first instance, timely. Davila narrates, in great detail, the causes, course, and end of the French civil wars. Large sections of the book describe discussions over military strategy and political decision making, and the Historie carefully details battles, sieges, skirmishes, and troop movements. Beginning with a short description of the origins of France, rising from the ruins of the Roman Empire, the Historie describes, in particular, the “first original and foundation stone of” monarchy, the bloodline of which remained unchanged into the sixteenth century. The laws of the kingdoms are given a similar provenance, sense of continuity, and perpetual hue (Historie, 6–7). Three of the most significant elements of the French polity—territory, government, and continuity of laws—are established before Davila discusses the origins of the divisions and tensions that led to the onset of the first Civil War in 1562. The Historie continues in this vein until 1598, when Henri IV finally reaches a peace settlement.

The underlying structure of the narrative is based on the relationships between various members of the royal families, with the death and accession of kings—from Henry II, through Francis II, Charles IX, and Henri III, closing with Henri IV—and subsequent uncertainty and power vacuums providing the general backdrop to the Historie. The early pages of the book, however, establish an important characteristic that comes to define the entire narrative: the instrumental role of personalities. These drive the machinations and political intrigues performed by various members of the royal families and their closest supporters and advisors, with the Dukes of Guise and the Princes of Navarre chief among them. Most prominent among these personalities is Catherine de’ Medici, the queen mother. Soon after Henri II’s death in 1559, she established herself as the queen regent to the young King Francis II, becoming an increasingly important influence over the course of events until her death in 1587 (Historie, bk. 9).

Factionalism, according to Davila, dominated the political atmosphere. The shifting allegiances between kings and princes, and military and religious figures, are discussed at length. Short alliances, betrayals, and plotting underpin these relationships. Foreign alliances and enemies are discussed in the same manner, with the Eng-

lish, Spanish, Germans, and the Vatican all drawn into political tensions and military actions. The central cause of factionalism and alliance building is broadly described in terms of religious grievances. For example, the *Historie* describes the origins of the Huguenot, so-called “because the first conventicles they had in the City of Tours (where that belief first took strength and increased) were in certain Cellars underground near Hugo’s gate, from whence they were by the vulgar sort called Hugonots [sic]” (*Historie*, 41). From this characterization, the Huguenots are frequently positioned as a sectarian force of division. Likewise, the influence of Calvinist teaching, which received early support only from a minority interest consisting of a few “wits,” is cast as a widespread source of sedition: “these opinions [Calvin's] sowed in Gods Church, so crept up, that they were greedily embraced and obstinately believed by a great number of people and persons of all qualities” (*Historie*, 40). The Huguenots therefore become the manifestation of Calvinism in France, resulting in conversions among members of the royal family and precipitating alliances to defend the Huguenot right to worship and liberty of conscience. When conversion to Protestantism does not occur, allegiances could still be formed between various members of the royal family and the Huguenots, with the queen mother, for example, voicing her support at times, before renouncing her support when it was politically expedient. Furthermore, support for, or conversion to, Protestantism does not preclude later conversion to Catholicism and, consequently, opposition to the Huguenots. Henri IV’s conversion to Catholicism in 1593 is the most significant of these religious affiliations in the entire *Historie*, and Davila states in unequivocal terms that “the King’s conversion was certainly the most proper, most powerfull remedy that could be apply'd to the dangerous disease of the Kingdom” (*Historie*, 1241). Implied here is a concept of religious unity that precipitates and makes possible political concord: if religious factionalism can be overcome, then peace will ensue.

While Davila acknowledges that factionalism derived from confessional identity, it is clear that for him religious belief is secondary to the real cause of the civil wars, which is competition for political power. While the Huguenots are frequently portrayed as demanding the right to worship and liberty of conscience—granted with the Edict of January in 1562—and continuously voice their fear at the derogation of these rights by various regions and governors, Davila portrays their resources and interests as complementing the political and military stratagems of different members of the royal family. Certainly, contemporaries understood the need to suppress religious plurality, by arms if necessary. Davila, when describing a debate between Charles IX and the Duke of Alva, narrates the duke’s argument “that a Prince could not do a thing more unworthy or prejudicial to himself” than to permit liberty of conscience. The *Historie* continues: granting such liberty was “bringing as many varieties of Religion into a State as there are capricious fancies in the restlesse mindes of men; and opening a door to let discord and confusion, mortall accidents for the ruine of a state” (*Historie*, 195). Ultimately, for Davila the problem of religious pluralism is a political question about security and order and not a matter of conscience. Davila tellingly narrates how
the names of the factions in the early years of the first Civil War (1562–63)—Huguenots and Catholics—were merely cover for private interests. Davila writes: “So by degrees the discords of great men were confounded with the dissentions of religion; and the factions were no more called the discontent Princes and the Guisarts; but more truly and by more significant names, One Catholike and the other the Hugonot Party” (Historie, 93–94). This trope—religion as a camouflage for political interests—continues throughout the Historie. However, the deleterious effects of heretical religion and sectarianism are all discussed at various points. When describing how printed works had contributed to fierce debates about the legitimacy of the king’s authority, Davila outlines Huguenot arguments that amounted to a resistance theory: “the people of France were no longer obliged to be obedient to the king, because he was turned Idolator; and this reason affirmed, that it was lawful to kill him” (Historie, 216–17). Nonetheless, despite the ongoing presence of religion as fuel to the fire of civil war, the Historie is clear that politics and political intrigue were the spark and chief combustible.

Tacitus and Machiavelli are the main influences on Davila’s political analysis. What Davila’s Historie provides is a comprehensive description of political decision making and a picture of French governance that is largely performed by a few individuals guided by their desire to arrogate power to themselves. In extensive passages throughout the text, the Historie details the minutiae of debates and discussions surrounding the most important decisions: the virtues of certain alliances or military strategies, the complications of particular relationships or the removal of specific princes, the prudence of suppressing or appeasing the Huguenots, and the problems of accommodation. Such discussions are usually characterized as debates about possible outcomes of a specific decision (e.g., Historie, 35–39, 39–45, 117, 156). Importantly, for Davila, acts of “dissimulation” underpin interventions into debates, discussions, and decision-making processes (e.g., Historie, 185). Moreover, such acts also frame relationships between individuals, especially in the formation of alliances. The queen mother is the exemplar of this practice, using her “dexterity” (Historie, 72; see also, e.g., 77, 78, 87) and “wonted arts of dissimulation” (Historie, 79) to fashion decisions and alliances that benefit her interests. Many decisions are therefore taken to serve a “present expedience” (Historie, 107) with little consideration for long-term consequences. This scenario is repeated throughout, with confusion, limited solutions, and the ongoing presence of underlying tensions recurring themes.

Throughout most of the Historie, royal power predominates, with any extraregal arrangement usually absent. When Davila does refer to the broader structures of government, it is in terms of three orders of the kingdom—the clergy, the nobility, and the common people—and the convening of these “estates.” Early in the Historie, he offers a brief description of their purpose and function (Historie, 66–67). However, the estates merely play a part in the broader political intrigues of kings, princes, and the queen mother (Historie, bk. 2). Moreover, when the estates are convened, discussion

35. For a general discussion of these influences over sixteenth- and seventeenth-century historical writing in Europe, see Jacob Soll, Publishing the Prince: History, Reading and the Birth of Political Criticism (Ann Arbor, Mich., 2005).
focuses on pursuing preexisting agendas, alliances, and interests, and not substantive issues of government. In short, a meeting of the estates has little power to influence the course of events. Davila’s depiction of French government constitutes two of the abiding elements of political decision making in the Historie: uncertainty and suspicion.

Throughout the Historie, peacemaking efforts are frequently encumbered by the problems inherent within the French system of government. Efforts to find peace, agreements, and accommodation are disappointed by private interest, betrayal, and conspiracy, with few peace settlements surviving for any length of time before conflict—whether armed or not—breaks out. On several occasions, peace treaties initially succeed because their advocates, on surveying the political terrain, recognize the strength of their position and the weakness of their opponents. According to Davila, personal interest motivated the queen mother to support peace when her primary opponents—the king of Navarre and the duc of Guise—and the enemy—the prince of Condé, were in substantially poorer positions. To end the “first” Civil War in 1563, it was reasonable and expedient to reach a peace. However, once terms were agreed, any enforcement was quickly undermined by parties who were largely absent from peace negotiations: the Huguenots, for example, rejected any diminution of their religious freedoms as guaranteed by the Edict of January (Historie, 177–78). Similarly, an agreement for peace could be achieved only to be undermined immediately by its adherents.

In 1568, according to Davila, all sides appeared to have no difficulties agreeing to a peace settlement and then “endeavouring what they could to hinder interposed difficulties and impediments upon every the least thing whatsoever”; especially guilty were the Huguenots, “who consented to the Accommodation against their wills” (Historie, 258). Only Henri IV, in 1598, finally reaches a peace with all warring parties, which was agreed to in all sincerity—a characteristic lacking from all previous attempts at meaningful accommodation (Historie, 1474–78). Ultimately, for Davila, the serial failure of peace agreements was caused by poorly negotiated settlement terms and the unwillingness of participants to compromise their private interests. In short, while finding the terms of pacification could be a relatively straightforward process, enforcing them and making them endure proved far more difficult.

Davila’s history of the French civil wars provided a pertinent parallel to England’s own internecine conflict. Aylesbury and Cotterell, in their dedication to Charles I, express their hope that the events narrated in the Historie would be repeated in England, “not in length of continuance, but in Joyful conclusion; and may Your Majesty . . . soon re-establish as happie a Peace in all Your Kingdomes, as the Great Henry Your Queen’s Heroic Father did in France” (Historie, sig. A). The dedication hints at a reason for the king’s support of the publication—Henrietta Maria’s father was the hero of peace—and, pursuing the comparison with Henri IV, suggests that Charles might assume the peacemaking role. Dedicatory epistles were highly rhetorical para-texts, and such effusiveness on the grandeur of a monarch were common.36 Nevertheless, both translators understood that their work was intervening in a contemporary

political discourse surrounding peace and wanted the importance of Charles to the process of peacemaking to be recognized. More generally, translations of histories recounting European civil wars provided broad analogies to the recent past for contemporary readers, thereby complementing translated Roman histories.37

Of course, the precise audience for the translation of Davila's Historie is hard to identify. However, this lengthy folio-sized text was probably intended for readers with means.38 Indeed, it may have targeted those individuals who were engaged in settling a peace. Davila's Historie discussed factionalism, sectarianism, and political intrigue and behavior in a broad context. Readers could use Davila's Historie to assess England's recent past, seeking guidance on the problems of peacemaking. Furthermore, contemporaries who read the translation of Davila's Historie may have had their assumptions about the fragility of the French constitution—with its apparently weak Parliament, unable to work with the monarch—confirmed.39 When comparing the estates general with the English Parliament, they may have recognized the necessity of a monarch for a stable government but also Parliament's own importance. May's History brought similar themes into sharper focus when discussing the specific English experience of civil war.

The title of the May's History is somewhat misleading, for it does not present a history of Parliament per se. William Prynne had done a far more comprehensive job in his four-part history, The Soveraigne Power of Parliaments and Kingdomes.40 Instead, May's vision of Parliament is wholly determined by the institution's involvement in the recent events of civil war. The resulting narrative historicizes how Parliament approached the problem of preserving the peace of England from the threat of royal tyranny. Throughout the History, Parliament's position vis-à-vis Charles I emerges from its consistent commitment to the cause of liberty. Parliament's authority was based on a balanced and mixed-constitution model of successful government. May


38. Such individuals included Sir Robert Heath, a staunch Royalist and exile, who left England in 1646. His departure did not inhibit his ability to read a copy of Davila’s Historie and, before his death in 1649, take copious notes. See British Library, Egerton MS 2982 (Heath and Verney Papers, vol. 5), fol. 252.


establishes this arrangement by beginning the History with an overview of Elizabeth I’s successful collaboration with Parliament in a number of policy areas (History, 1.1). Sir John Fortescue’s elaboration of classical modes of governance, though often augmented, had shaped English interpretations of the mixed constitution since the fifteenth century. In sum, Fortescue, in his De laudibus legum Angliae, had posited that to prevent poor and arbitrary government, it was important to achieve a balanced distribution of sovereign powers between the “royal” and the “political”—the dominium politicum et regale—or in plainer terms, between a monarch and a Parliament. May’s characterization of the pre–Civil War constitution blurred the responsibilities inherent in the mixed-constitution model, casting Parliament as integral counsel to the king and not as an institution to be infrequently, but obligatorily, consulted. May’s most explicit development of the Parliament-as-counsel idea is present in his description of Parliament’s response to the battle of Edgehill in October 1642:

Those Priviledges of Parliament, consisting in three things: 1. As they are a Councell to advise. 2. A Court to judge. 3. A representative body of the Realme, to make, repeal, or alter Lawes. These Privileges have (say they) during the sitting of this Parliament, been all apparently broken, to the view of all men, by the Kings wicked Councell. (History, 3.27)

To reinforce his vision of Parliament’s existence, May weaves Henry Parker’s concepts of emergency, necessity, and absence into his narrative (History, 2.40–44). Parker had

41. May’s History is divided into three separately paginated books; references are to book and page. For the construction of the memory of Elizabeth throughout the early seventeenth century for a range of political interests, see John Watkins, Representing Elizabeth in Stuart England: Literature, History, Sovereignty (Cambridge, 2002).


first discussed these concepts in his *Case of Ship Mony*, published in 1640, and then in *A Discourse Concerning Puritans*, which appeared in 1641. He argued that Parliament could legitimately handle and determine policy, not just offer counsel on it. The implications of Parker’s arguments were made fully clear after Parliament attempted to enforce the militia ordinance in 1642. In May’s narrative, though, the arguments appear as forms of Parliamentary action, rather than as a sequence of debates that took place in 1641 and 1642. Indeed, May underplays the most explicit Parliamentary innovations of the early 1640s: the Triennial Act and the Bill of Continuance, both passed in spring 1641 to ensure the security of Parliament from dissolution. In 1647, the *History* presented these “events” as demonstrative of Parliament’s assumed constitutional position and not as an innovation born of the intellectual or political tumult of 1641 and 1642.

The final theme of May’s narrative, the relationship between the defense and pursuit of liberty and political behavior, has two strands. The first centers on the dynamics of tyranny, especially on a king’s relationship with his closest advisers. The second focuses on the differences in attitudes and character of Royalists and Parliamentarians toward liberty. May’s vision of government and political behavior is heavily indebted to classical views of the relationship between virtue and power. May quotes Roman writers, including Lucan, Sulla, Cicero, Dio Cassius, Seneca, and Tacitus, whose works are interpolated throughout the narrative. More recent models of governance, such as that of the Venetian republic or those described in Machiavelli’s *The Prince* or the *Discourses on Livy*, were also influential. For example, there are similarities between May’s analysis of constitutional bicameralism and the Florentine’s. Moreover, May shares Machiavelli’s belief that the presence of virtues was necessary for establishing peace and defending liberty.

May’s conception of power casts the king’s tyranny as destructive of virtue. This monarch’s influence could corrupt once-virtuous men or sway weak men with wit and eloquence. May’s narration of the Earl of Strafford’s experiences as an advisor is central to his analysis of the tyrannous power Charles had wielded over England in the years and months before the Civil War. Strafford is discussed alongside the observation that “few statesmen have converted Princes from ill courses, but been themselves perverted from that goodness which seemed to be before in them” (*History*, 1.54). For May, the account of Strafford’s life and trial epitomized divisions in allegiances across England. On the one side, there existed the virtues of those contemporaries who supported liberty and the public interest and, on the other, the vices of those who supported the values of tyranny and private interest. Divisions born from the tyranny of Charles’s misgovernment underpinned May’s second analysis of political power and behavior, which focused on the different characteristics of Parliamentarians and Royalists. He considers the virtues of those who remained faithful and constant to the Parliamentary cause and the vices of opponents, who failed to do so. May’s analysis begins with the “defections” of spring 1642: “At that time did the Lords one after another, and some-

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times by numbers, abandon the Parliament sitting, and go to the king at York; inso-
much that in a very short space, those Lords became the greater number.” May con-
tinues, “[M]any of the House of the Commons, though no great number, in respect of
those who continued in that house, did likewise so far break the trust which was
reposed in them, as to forsake their seats” (History, 2.58–59). For May, these “defec-
tions” provoked fears that Parliament might be overthrown, not by open attacks or
conspiracies, but “by her own members.” Uncertainty over Parliament’s future led
many people to suggest Parliament was now “imperfect” or “pretended,” and Charles
himself took advantage of this. May recalls a list of other claims people made after the
defections: Parliament was unrepresentative and “not free enough,” and members who
deserted did so because they were “curbed by a prevalent faction in the Houses” (His-
tory, 2.60). Parliament was perceived to be divided and restrictive, but at this point
May describes those remaining Parliamentarians “as true patriots” (History, 2.62).
May’s description of Parliamentary factions was timely. Accusations of factionalism
and criticism of the control maintained by particular factions in Parliament over the
direction of policy fueled political discussion throughout the 1640s, including contri-
butions by John Lilburne and his “Leveller” associates.46

However, writing in 1647, May suggests Parliament maintained its integrity
despite these “defections” because of the virtues of those who stayed. Parliamentarian
characteristics consist of the virtues of plain wisdom, constancy, and civic-mindedness
in the pursuit of the common good, which ensure the influence of private interest
could not prevail.47 First, May draws a distinction between supporters of the king, who
were corrupted by “adorned” wisdom, and Parliamentarians. May suggests that wis-
dom that is “least adorned” by “eloquence, Wit, polite Learning, and the like” is “most
safe . . . and freest from being corrupted” (History, 2.62). May claims the members of
Parliament who defected to Charles had these corruptible qualities in abundance,
explaining why a king who encouraged these qualities could sway them. It was
inevitable that these men would betray Parliament because they were “most apt to be
proud of” themselves and therefore more susceptible to temptation, or to anger when
their pride was damaged (History, 2.62–63). On the other hand, there “were men of a
plainer wisedom [who] have had the honour in a constant way to do excellent service
for the Commonwealth” (History, 2.63). For May, men of the first sort were more inter-
ested in how their private interests could be promoted by the king. Men of the second
sort were characteristically constant in their service to the commonwealth. Without
stating so explicitly, May strongly implies that Parliamentarians were of this second

46. See, variously, John Lilburne, In the 150 Page of the Book called, An exact collection of the
Parliaments Remonstrances, declarations, &c. (London, 1645); Lilburne, Englands Birth-right Justified
(London, 1645), 33; Richard Overton with William Walwyn, A Remonstrance of Many Thousand
Citizens (London, 1646), 3–9; Lilburne, An Anatomy of the Lords Tyranny and Injustice (London, 1646);
and Richard Overton, An Arrow Against all Tyrants and Tyranny (London, 1646). See also Richard Tuck,
82–105.

47. Andrew Fitzmaurice, Humanism and America: An Intellectual History of English Colonisation,
sort. Thus, May follows a civic humanist line, which holds that plain wisdom is essential to virtuous government and the pursuit of civic peace. Despite Royalist attempts to promulgate uncertainty about Parliament’s harmony and worthiness to defend liberty, for May, plain wisdom had unified those men who remained constant and true to Parliament. Constancy is, alongside plain wisdom, an integral component of Parliamentarian virtue and integrity.

Commitment to the public and common good completes May’s description of the characteristics of Parliamentarian virtue. Private interests, as May clearly establishes, motivated inconstancy and influenced allegiances. Prior to the battle of Edgehill in October 1642, the “greatest Gentlemen of divers counties,” according to May, had to decide with which side to stand (History, 3.29). He compares what Parliament offered for loyalty with the king’s recompenses:

For on the Parliament side the incouragements were only publike, and nothing promised but the free injoyment of their native Liberty; no particular honours, preferments, or Estates of their Enemies; and on the other side, no such totall ruine could be threatened from a victorious Parliament, being a body as it were of themselves, as from an incensed Prince, and such hungry followers, as usually go along with Princes in those waies.

May finishes this assessment by asking: “[H]ow much private interest will oversway publike notions?” (History, 3.30). In short, some gentlemen decided against joining the Parliamentary cause in favor of their private interest.

May’s account of the virtues of Parliamentary political behavior contrasts sharply with his discussion of Charles and his actions. In the early 1640s, the king’s behavior had been excused with reference to the rhetoric of “evil counselors,” a time-worn political strategy used to claim Charles was being manipulated by poor advice. Parliament made its clearest statement of this charge in the Remonstrance, when it positioned Charles at the center of a plan that was not of his own design. By 1647, it was clear Charles was fully culpable for his decisions. But between 1640 and 1643, the period May covers, this had been far from the case. May demonstrates the king’s

duplicity and his personal and sole responsibility for his actions in several ways. First, he only provides a cursory discussion of the Remonstrance. Second, he explains its emphasis on the influence of “evil counselors” by suggesting it was a result of the care contemporaries took in addressing the person of the king at that time (History, 2.17). Third, when he considers whether the Remonstrance succeeded in rectifying the problems of the kingdom, May states, “For mine own part, I will make not judgement at all upon it” (History, 2.18). May ultimately downplays one of the most important declarations of recent Parliamentary history. He seems to imply that the Remonstrance made little difference to the relationship between the Parliament and the king and focuses instead on contemporary disagreements about its efficacy (History, 2.18).

Following his narration of how Parliament had secured its existence through the Triennial Act, and the positioning of it as the defender of liberty, May presents the king as a ruler addicted to dissimulation. For example, he provides evidence that while Charles delivered statements of his commitment to peace, he was actually seeking to build support before he laid siege to Hull in 1642; in another instance, Charles claimed he had a desire to reach a peaceful accommodation with Parliament, only to raise his standard in readiness for war. In both cases, May draws on the king’s communications with the people and Parliament to document his self-presentation as a king committed to liberty and peace; he then describes Charles’s contradictory actions (History, 2.89–93, 2.122–28). For May, the contrast between Parliament’s virtuous cause and the king’s mendacity is clear.

May’s history produced a very particular vision of Parliament: it was a body devoted to the defense of liberty and to the peace and security of the kingdom; constitutionally necessary, perennial, and essential to the government of the kingdom; and constituted by truly virtuous men dedicated to, and acting in the service of, the public good. More pertinent to the peacemaking needs of 1647, May’s History demonstrates the centrality of liberty to the Parliamentary cause, which he accomplishes in three ways: by stating explicitly that men and women in the early 1640s understood that the pursuit and defense of liberty underpinned all Parliament’s actions; by establishing the constitutional framework within which Parliament confronted Charles; and by describing how liberty informed all “proper” Parliamentarians’ political behavior. Cumulatively, then, May’s narrative historicizes Parliament’s existence as central to the constitution and working of government in the past, and vital to secure a stable and peaceful postwar future, which, in 1647, would have found resonance.

With Parliament in a relatively commanding negotiating position in mid-1646, it had to tackle two key issues. The first was how to find a suitable set of peace terms with the king, a less-than-simple task, given his prior and usually frustrating negotiating tactics. The second and more challenging problem was how to overcome divisions within

52. Compare Millstone, “Evil Counsel.”
Parliament itself.\textsuperscript{53} One key source of tension centered on those who had, in different ways, supported the Parliamentary cause: the Scots and Presbyterians. They and their opponents had different visions and expectations for the future. To varying degrees, they argued that Parliament was jeopardizing the opportunity to agree to a settlement that would support their interests. Arguments over settlement in public discourse were therefore based on anxieties about the possibilities that an unsatisfactory or undesirable future would ensue. An intense debate surrounding the precise foundations for peace followed from these differences, while participants also engaged in a related battle for interpretive hegemony over the recent past.

The \textit{History} followed an earlier historical narrative May had produced for a Parliamentary declaration in 1646, which was supposed to vindicate before “the World the Honour of the Parliament, in this great Cause of Religion and Liberty undertaken and maintained by the Parliament.” The text was to state “the grounds of the current war” and “undeceive the People, concerning two scandalous books, intituled, \textit{Truth's Manifest} and one other, intituled \textit{Some Papers delivered in by the Scots Commissioners}.”\textsuperscript{54} On April 18, the declaration was published, and the subtitle of the text helpfully indicates the full breadth of May’s, and his collaborator John Sadler's, task.\textsuperscript{55} The declaration showed the Commons’ “true Intentions concerning the Ancient and Fundamental Government of the Kingdom, the Government of the Church, the Present Peace, securing the People against all arbitrary government, and maintaining a right understanding between the Two Kingdoms of England and Scotland, according to the Covenant and Treaties.” Here, Parliament was making a concerted effort to ensure that its recent past was properly remembered and not misrepresented. The texts mentioned in the April 13 order—\textit{Truth Its Manifest} and \textit{Some Papers of the Commissioners of Scotland, Given in lately to the Houses of Parliament, Concerning the Propositions of Peace}—were authored by David Buchanan, a Scot who had worked with the Westminster Assembly on behalf of the Scots Commissioners.\textsuperscript{56}

Generally, Buchanan’s interventions were part of a wider argumentative context surrounding the discussion of competing visions of religious settlement as laid down by the Solemn League and Covenant in 1643. Both texts had caused great concern for Parliament between mid-1645 and early 1646. Published in late 1645, \textit{Truth Its Manifest [sic]} criticized Parliament for misrepresenting the contribution of the Scots to the cause.\textsuperscript{57} The text formed part of a broader campaign spanning 1645 and 1646 to counter

\textsuperscript{53} For a clear assessment of these divisions, see Braddick, \textit{God’s Fury}, chap. 17.
\textsuperscript{54} I am the first to ascribe this declaration to May. I am confident of the ascription, given the trail of orders. See the following entries for more: \textit{CJ}, 4:410–11, January 19, 1646; 4:506–7, April 13, 1646.
\textsuperscript{55} A \textit{Declaration of the Commons of England Assembled in Parliament, of their true intentions} (London, 1646).
\textsuperscript{56} Buchanan appears to have published two versions of this text in late 1645. An earlier version titled \textit{A Short and True Relation of Some main passages of things}, which is not mentioned in the Commons’ Journal, was published in September. A later version added the title of \textit{Truth Its Manifest} to the title page and appeared in November. Both titles are anonymous, but according to the Commons’ Journal, Buchanan delivered a copy of the later book to the committee charged with investigating the matter and admitted to authoring it. See \textit{CJ}, 4:507, April 13, 1646.
\textsuperscript{57} David Buchanan, \textit{Truth Its Manifest} (London, 1645).
anti-Scottish pamphlet reports accusing the Scottish military of inactivity and failure in England. In it, Buchanan attacked Parliament for publicly misrepresenting the Scottish military contribution to the war effort. Parliament then spent the months between January and April 1646 attempting to discover the publisher, author, and printer of Truth Its Manifest before condemning the preface to be burnt by the common hangman. As an attendant to the Scots Commissioners, Buchanan appears also to have been responsible for Some Papers of the Commissioners of Scotland, published in April 1646. This tract examined each of the peace propositions that were to be sent to the king. Aside from his expressed preference for the terms of the Uxbridge Treaty negotiated in the previous year, Buchanan argued “that the long delay of the settling of the true government of the Church” had ensured “Heresies and Sects are so multiplied, and schism hath so much prevailed.” The Covenant’s promise of a Protestant federation between the three kingdoms had been betrayed.

By the terms of the Covenant, Parliament agreed, in exchange for Scottish military support, that both kingdoms would “endeavour to bring the Churches of God in the three Kingdoms to the nearest conjunction.” This was to be ensured within the framework of the “reformation of religion . . . in doctrine, worship, discipline and government according to the word of God, and the example of the best reformed Churches.” The English and the Scots agreed to the “extirpation” of popery and prelacy and the removal of “superstition, heresy, schism, [and] profaneness” from both kingdoms. Thus, when Buchanan suggested that, in fact, Parliament was allowing heresies to multiply, he was alleging its violation of this covenanted principle. The Covenant had confederated the English and the Scots together in a commitment to uphold and defend international Protestantism. By 1645 or 1646, when it seemed likely the king would be defeated, the Scots and their English Presbyterian allies turned with more confidence to securing a settlement, which for them was bound by the Covenant and so ensured church government based on the Presbyterian model. The Covenant was never a plan for peace, but the Scots made clear their belief that the Covenant had prescribed settlement propositions. They made arguments that were consistently grounded in an unchanging interpretation of the Covenant, one congruent with their

60. David Buchanan, Some Papers of the Commissioners of Scotland, Given in lately to the Houses of Parliament, Concerning the Propositions of Peace (London, 1646). For the Scots papers generally, see Correspondence of the Scots Commissioners in London, 1644–1646, ed. Henry W. Meikle (Edinburgh, 1917).
61. Buchanan, Some Papers, 16.
vision of a postwar Presbyterian settlement. Such statements were, of course, not novel, but as Parliamentary victory looked more assured, negotiations over the details of a Presbyterian-style church government increased in importance. The inherent problems of the Covenant’s interpretation were habitually resurrected and examined afresh, and a range of similar arguments from the Scots and English Presbyterians throughout 1645 and 1647 all deployed the Covenant to historicize their visions of peace.

The Parliamentary declaration of April 18 explicitly raised the problem of the Covenant’s interpretation. It invoked the Covenant to authorize Parliament’s intentions to defend the kingdom and the people, and to maintain concord between England and Scotland. Parliament declared it had no desire to “exceed or swerve from our first Aims and Principles in the undertaking this War, and to recede from the Solemn League and Covenant, and Treaties between the two Kingdoms” (4). It described its intention in settling the question of church government as having “so fully declared for a Presbyterian Government, having spent so much time, taken so much pains for the settling of it” (5). Reproducing the first term of the Covenant, Parliament advocated an Erastian solution to the management of the church (6). This would be achieved “according to the Word of God, and the Example of the best Reformed Churches, and according to our Covenant” (6, emphasis in original). Having stated its position on church government, Parliament declared, “no interpretation of it (so far as it shall be concern the Kingdom of England) shall by any be endeavoured to be imposed on us, other then we ourselves do know to be suitable to the first just ends for which it was agreed.” It continued by cautioning “that the people of England should not receive impressions of any forced constructions of that Covenant, which in case of any doubt arising, is only to be expounded by whose authority it was Established in this Kingdom, who will not depart from those grounds and principles upon which it was framed and founded” (8). In this closing statement, the declaration presented the principles informing Parliament’s interpretation of the Covenant and the importance it had for people living in England.

The Declaration’s emphasis on English understandings and expectations of the Covenant created a polarity between Parliament and those who demonstrated com-

64. See, for example, Samuel Rutherford, The Due Right of Presbyteries (London, 1644); and Rutherford, The Divine Right of Church-Government (London, 1646).


66. A Declaration of the Commons of England, title page. Further references will be given in the text.

peting visions, which, in this case, implicitly referred to the Scots. By 1647, then, the Scots and Presbyterians were arguing that the Covenant was a foundational text, providing a potent memory of what Parliament agreed when it formed an alliance with the Scots against Charles. During this period of postwar peacemaking, the stakes had risen when making these sorts of arguments: Parliament, its opponents, and Presbyterian supporters were all using the past to justify their own expectations of peace. The histories by May and Davila were important interventions in the competing uses of the recent past to ground a future settlement.

While Davila’s Historie locates French religious sectarianism within a broader context of political rebellion, it was probably not originally intended to participate directly with the minutiae of contemporary political public discourse. May’s History, on the other hand, engages directly with debates about the nature of the Parliamentary cause and, by extension, provides a foundational narrative that undermined Scottish and Presbyterian arguments for the centrality of the Covenant to a peace settlement. The general tenor of May’s History, with its emphasis on liberty and its relative lack of discussion of religious problems, appears to indicate efforts to conceal the premises of Scottish and Presbyterian positions. However, two moments in the History—centering on oaths and covenants—demonstrates the closeness of his engagement with contemporary debates surrounding the shape of a future peace.

Toward the end of the first book of the History, May cites an anonymous pamphlet that, according to him, was published in mid-1641. The pamphlet’s author focuses on the complex problems that existed in defining the nature of the Parliamentary cause.68 Was it the defense of liberty or the reformed religion that should be emphasized? The writer argues that Parliament had focused too much on advocating religion as its central cause, suggesting that concentrating on Charles’s religiosity “hath by accident weakened the Parliament, and brought parties to the King” (History, 1.116). The supposed pamphleteer further claims that the defense of liberty should be emphasized as Parliament’s aim because “Religion, remains in the peoples [sic] reason, as a controverted question (the King still protesting for Religion) and the disputes about that amusing the People, make them by degrees forget that crime of the King’s, which was without controversie, and evident, the violation of Lawes and Liberties” (History, 116–17). In other words, the emphasis on religion had concealed the pernicious problem of the king’s tyranny and the threat this posed to the liberties of the people. Just after quoting from the pamphlet in his text, May introduces the Protestation Oath, which Parliament had ordered in May 1641. By implicitly connecting these two events—the publication of the pamphlet and the Protestation Oath—May dates the Parliamentary cause to 1641 and formalizes it with an official act of oath taking.

Taken together, May’s narrative strategy and construction of foundational events explains the reasons the English fought against Charles and differentiates them from the Scottish motives. Within his history, the Protestation Oath is a significant

68. Pocock suggests that this anonymous author was actually a surrogate for May’s own arguments. See Pocock, “Thomas May and the Narrative of Civil War,” 127. I have been unable to locate this pamphlet, if indeed it ever existed.
foundational moment for the Parliamentary cause. It contrasts with his very limited comment on the Solemn League and Covenant. May ends the History in September 1643, before the official formulation of the Covenant. Crucially, then, an important cause-defining agreement is largely omitted, concealing a particular vision of the recent past: the centrality of religion to the causes of the Civil War. But May goes even further to disaggregate Parliament's commitment to liberty from the Scottish and Presbyterian pursuit of religious reforms. Early in the History, May draws comparisons between English and Scottish religiosity. He claims that the post-Reformation religious culture of Scotland contributed to the Scots' response to the actions of Charles. He emphasizes the specificity of the Scottish National Covenant and its demands (History, 1.27–38). The account of Charles's attempt to enforce a new Book of Common Prayer in Scotland in 1637 is accompanied by a brief overview of Scotland's religious history after the Reformation. Referring to the close Scottish affiliation with a particular Calvinist interpretation of religious purity, May suggests that Scotland's church had “been ever so much addicted to the Reformation of Geneva” (History, 1.30). In contrast to this image of national religious unity, May describes the three main religious divisions in England as Catholic, Protestant, and Puritan. For May, the Catholics are well known; the Protestants consist of the king, the court lords, and the prelates, all of whom will join with the Papists against the Puritans, whom they hate more; the Puritans consist “of some bishops, of almost all the Gentry and Communalty,” and a majority who believe that the English Reformation is not perfect, especially in light of the Geneva model (History, 1.26 [misprinted as p. 32]). The History draws a comparison between the Scottish and English commitment to this model. England experiences a more complicated and fragmented religiosity, rather than the monolithic and united one he suggests exists in Scotland. For May, the king's actions had much less effect on the religious sensibilities of the English.

On behalf of an English Parliament attempting to make a lasting peace in 1647, May ultimately subordinated the threat of both popery and prelacy to the greater danger from the king: a tyrannous rule that undermined the liberties of the people. By constructing a narrative that essentially ignored the Covenant, May sought to overcome its ambiguities and its significance for interpreting the recent past. In the pursuit of settlement, the Covenant restricted Parliament's ability to settle the question of church government: the king, most crucially, was unlikely to take the Covenant and accept a Presbyterian Church government settlement. In 1647, finding a satisfactory religious settlement was therefore deeply problematic. However, by reminding readers of the cause of the war—the threat from tyranny to England's liberty—the History appears to advocate a settlement oriented toward a civil, rather than religious, peace. Indeed, May's inclusion of the Nineteen Propositions, delivered to the king in June 1642, strongly suggests he sought to promote the case for settling a civil peace as the


central negotiating strategy, especially with an emphasis on constraining the civil authority of the king (History, 1.74–79). In a narrative that dismissed the influence of the Scots over the Parliamentary cause, the Propositions therefore offered a non-Scottish-inflected basis for a specifically English peace.

May’s History ultimately presented a story that removed one of the central causes of division among Parliamentarians in 1647. He also created an image of a unified Parliament, using a past that was not affected by the conflicts that the Covenant produced. A similar, but even more latent concealment, his decision to end the History prior to the creation of the New Model Army in 1645, removed a further divisive antagonist.71 With his exclusive focus on the events preceding September 1643, May implicitly suggests all events, debates, arguments, and activities that took place after that date should be forgotten and not feature as factors in making the peace.

It is tempting to suggest that, given that these two histories appeared in the Stationers’ Register within the space of two weeks, there was some tactical thinking behind Parliament’s endorsements of them. Moreover, the endorsements used the past—in the form of histories—as part of the process of peacemaking. The two texts were different interventions, and although their authors, to some extent, probably worked independently of Parliament, they nonetheless offered visions of the past that seem to have served a particular Parliamentary line of argumentation. One history—Davila’s—demonstrates the problems of weak Parliaments and the consequences that poor peacemaking can cause, threatening years of further political turmoil. The other history—May’s—details the precise dynamics of England’s own Civil War, engaging with the specific problems posed by particular kinds of settlement arguments.

Parliament as an idea and as an institution emerges strongly from both narratives. Of course, Parliament had constructed itself as an institution by passing laws and undertaking various official procedures for decades, including, in 1641, the passing of the Triennial Act, which consolidated Parliament as more than an “institutional event.”72 Institutions are created by more than these formal procedures; as Mary Douglas suggests, they are framed and constituted by conventions that bring together associations for social purposes, an ongoing process.73 Over time, that dynamic process can create an institution as a static, reified object in the “social imaginaries” of ordinary people.74 Importantly, the process of reification is also ongoing, and it is often

71. Braddick, God’s Fury, 466–67, 486.
74. For the concept of “social imaginaries,” see Charles Taylor, Modern Social Imaginaries (Durham and London, 2004).
conveyed through the telling of stories that produce or reinforce particular qualities and characteristics that in turn communicate ideas and expectations of legitimacy. Davila’s Historie is characterized by stories of over-powerful monarchs and poor constitutional safeguards that failed to ensure monarchs worked with Parliament for the benefit of the commonwealth. May’s History provided ample evidence to support the general idea that English Parliaments were strong, offering a powerful account of the mixed constitution. His criticisms of power, and those who wield it, cast Charles in a very dark light. Parliament meanwhile emerges as a virtuous institution serving the common good and containing men who love liberty. In fact, these qualities legitimized Parliament and its actions. These historicizing practices therefore informed ideas about Parliament as an institution.

Throughout the 1640s, Parliament and its supporters and opponents all engaged in a politics of the recent past, creating usable pasts to claim legitimacy for their arguments and to construct political identities. From the Remonstrance onward, a historicizing trend emerged in Civil War public discourse: arguments, ideas, polemic, and, more generally, individual causes were defined using the past. Parliament’s endorsement of Aylesbury and Cotterell’s translation of Davila’s Historie and its support for May’s History were broad continuations of its historicizing activities. Of course, both histories were deviations from Parliament’s previous efforts to shape the ways in which contemporaries interpreted the past. However, as peace was being negotiated in 1647, it seems there was a clear impulse to take stock of the recent past. Among some of the more substantial contributions, titles included The Burning-Bush Not Consumed by John Vicars, published in 1646, a culmination of four years of chronicling work in support of Parliament;75 Josiah Ricraft’s A Survey of Englands Champions, appearing in 1647, a description of the lives of many prominent Parliamentarian officers that provided information on battlefield deaths;76 and Joshua Sprigg’s Anglia Rediviva, produced in the same year, a narration of the heroic exploits of Sir Thomas Fairfax.77 There was, then, no shortage of historical works produced after the end of the first Civil War. More pressing, especially from a Parliamentary perspective, were the serial interventions of Parliament’s supporters—the Scots and Presbyterians; these groups used the past and a significant foundational text and oath—the Solemn League and Covenant—to historicize and make their arguments for a particular kind of future. The works of Aylesbury, Cotterell, and May were answers to this historical vision and its implications for the future. Taken together, though, both histories took a similar line, dismissing the centrality of religion as the primary cause of civil war. Certainly, religious divisions and conflict played a part, but political problems predominated and needed to be solved, while propriety in government had to be addressed, before a truly secure and peaceful kingdom could prevail.

77. Joshua Sprigg, Anglia Rediviva (London, 1647). For a cursory view of these, see Robert Wilcher, The Writing of Royalism, 1628–1660 (Cambridge, 2001), 263. For other historical texts that appeared throughout the 1640s, see Smith, Literature and Revolution, 336–55.
In 1647, during a period of peacemaking, such an understanding of politics and the process of government would have created an important bulwark against the criticism that Parliament should be defending the reformed religion before all else. Indeed, for Parliament, there was perhaps some truth to May’s prefatory claim that readers had to “be put in minde of their owne thoughts heretofore” (*History*, sig. B). In other words, contemporaries needed to be reminded precisely of the recent past. It was a past in which Parliament had itself frequently sought to shape public discourse, and, in the process, had created stories that framed it as an institution. Parliament endorsed two substantial texts that drew on skills—translation and historical writing—to use the past in a highly detailed, heavily evidenced way, grounded in recent traditions of political thought. In short, Parliament mobilized scholarship, creating a usable past for the purpose of establishing foundations on which to pursue peace.

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