

“Under our Cedar’s Shadow”: Royalist Women Poets and the English Restoration

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Abstract

This paper compares the work of three lesser-known royalist women poets (Rachel Jevon, Ann Lee, and the anonymous female author of *The Sacred Historie*) to explore the subtle ways in which these writers connect their personal literary projects to the specific requirements of the Restoration regime. Despite the strategic emphasis on masculine authority within the numerous panegyrics addressed to the king in the aftermath of the Restoration in 1660, an alternative impulse in female-authored texts configures the return of the monarchy as an event which women are especially qualified to celebrate. In elevating conventionally feminine values, these poets were able to associate themselves with the social and political agenda of the Restoration government, which aimed to reconcile the English people to their past, and ease tensions associated with the Restoration Settlement, the General Pardon, and the Act of Oblivion. Since the civil wars had created distrust and resentment concerning politics and polemic, women poets could exploit their position as literary and political “outsiders” to justify their rehearsal of the role of “public” poet. However, in promoting their own specific interests, as loyalists whose families had suffered for the Crown, women poets also assert their own hopes for the future path of the monarchy, reminding the king of the significance of his traditional supporters, and emphasising his duty to subordinate himself to God and the English Church.

Key words: absolutism; loyalty; paternalism; subjection; forgiveness; humility; conservatism; integrity; faction; Anglicanism; praise

The Restoration of the English monarchy in 1660, after almost twenty years of civil war and Commonwealth government, was celebrated by many contemporary royalists as a return to the “natural”, patriarchal order - an order heralded by the return from exile of the country’s royal governor, King Charles II. A flood of literary texts (both printed

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and presented in manuscript) produced to welcome the king sought to re-interpret England's "Great Rebellion" in the light of its subjects' willing return to obedient subjection. As R. Malcolm Smuts has noted, many of these verses strategically emphasise Charles's masculine qualities. Dryden's *Astraea Redux* (1660), for example, "stresses the vigour and martial proclivity of the new king", depicting Charles as a "lion" preparing to conquer his foreign enemies (Smuts, 148). The deliberate construction of a virile, masculine king was designed to promote confidence in the new regime and intimidate England's foreign enemies. It also helped to erase readers' memories of the defeated monarchy's impotence and incompetence during the Interregnum. At the same time, royalist panegyrics frequently depict the king's renewed ascendancy over his subjects in gendered terms, as England's amorous capitulation. Therefore, John Dryden's London is "an unequal bride" preparing to accept the superior authority of her lord (*Astraea Redux*, ll. 232-3), and Edmund Waller's England is "fainting Esther", surrendering her autonomy to the king (*To the King, Upon His Majesties Happy Return*, ll. 15-16).

Despite the renewed emphasis on masculine, monarchic authority, women poets outside the sphere of the court appear to have been stimulated by the Restoration to rehearse the traditionally masculine role of "public poet". Women had become increasingly visible during the civil war period. At the Restoration, the "revolutionary" women who had opposed the king were increasingly reviled for their apparent rejection of masculine authority. However, prominent royalist women (including the queen, Henrietta Maria) had also attained notoriety for their political exploits during the wars. The willingness of women across the political spectrum to intervene in the public sphere had been matched by their increasing activity in the literary world. As well as the pamphlets by anti-monarchist Puritan women, the Interregnum had witnessed the publication or popular circulation of works by royalist women writers, including Margaret Cavendish and Katherine Philips. These women had connections to the court and aristocracy. However, at the Restoration women from humbler social backgrounds were inspired to use verse to explore their commitment to the new regime, identifying themselves with the broad aims of the Restoration government, while working to promote their own specific communities and interests.

Despite its festive tone, Restoration literature is infused with a sense of England's guilt and a need to cleanse itself from associations with a disloyal past. The reconstruction of the loyal self in speeches and texts produced to welcome the new regime was intensely self-conscious and contrived. In 1661 Charles I's former supporter, Roger Boyle (who had reconciled himself to Cromwell's regime in the 1650s), welcomed the steadfastly royalist Marquis of Ormonde to Ireland by asking him to

...pass by what we did when we were not our selves, and to accept of what we now do when we are our selves...we were then unfit for you and we now know you only are fit for us. We need all your goodness to forget the ill that is past, and all your abilities to act the good which is to come (Lynch, 115-16).

With its careful distinction between past and present, the true, loyal self and the alienated, disloyal self, the speech mirrors the strategy of many literary approaches to Charles II in 1660. Naturally, most of these approaches represent strategic bids for favour. However, established male poets who were also aspiring politicians or courtiers (writers like Roger Boyle, Abraham Cowley and Edmund Waller) frequently struggled to justify their temporary allegiance to, or at least passive acceptance of, Oliver Cromwell's government. In his panegyric, Edmund Waller claims that "Our guilt preserves us from excess of joy" (*To the King*, l.13), insisting that his poem for Charles is less effusive and expansive than that composed for Cromwell in 1652, since the presence of the true king precludes the need for linguistic extravagance.²

The sense that a purer, more transparently loyal voice was required to welcome the new era was significant for women writers since, despite their activities during the wars, most women were still technically excluded from the notions of political culpability and ambition. The female authorial voice could therefore be deployed as a vehicle by which families could attempt to gain the attention of the king without seeming to pressurise the government. Despite the fact that the Restoration settlement was celebrated as a harmonious "marriage" between king and people, it was riddled with tensions and inconsistencies. The new government was faced with the problem of uniting royalist extremists, who supported the absolute authority of the monarchy and feared faction and rebellion, and non-absolutists, who wished to see a more equal and flexible contract between king and people (Smuts, 137-38). On the one hand, the government introduced increasingly strict measures to stamp out religious dissent, re-imposing Episcopacy and the Book of Common Prayer in 1662, and outlawing puritan and Roman Catholic worship with the 1664 Act of Uniformity. The 1662 Licensing Act also reinstated literary censorship (a significant feature of the old regime under Charles I), thus attempting to stop the flood of unlicensed printed texts unleashed by the civil wars. On the other hand, these oppressive measures were tempered by an overall ethos promoting forgiveness and tolerance. While the regicides (those responsible for executing Charles I) were harshly punished, The Act of Free and General Pardon, Indemnity, and Oblivion forgave many of the king's former enemies, and few of the monarchy's loyal supporters regained the land and property confiscated by the parliamentary governments.

From the date of the king's return in May 1660, some of these contradictions were already apparent. Those who had suffered on the king's behalf sought compensation for their losses, but for those without access to court, competition for the king's favour was daunting. The Restoration court was increasingly condemned by "old" royalists (those who sought to recover and forge a sense of continuity between the new reign and that of Charles I) for being peopled by shallow and corrupt pleasure-seekers and fortune-hunters.³ At the Restoration, female authors were able to present themselves as mouthpieces for a studiously non-political, disinterested response to the king's return, while functioning to remind Charles of his moral obligations to his father's loyal supporters.

Therefore, in 1663 the Wyndham family of Somerset published a narrative account of their successful efforts to conceal and protect Charles II during his escape from Parliament after the Battle of Worcester (A. W. Wyndham, *Claustrum Regale Reseratum or The Kings Concealment at Trent*, 1663/1667). The text had originally been presented to Charles in 1660, under the name of Colonel Francis Wyndham. However, the 1663 text was printed under the name of his wife, Anne, probably in response to the arrival in England of Charles's new queen, Catherine of Braganza. The royal marriage provided an opportunity for women from families who had so far failed to win recognition and compensation for their sacrifices during the wars to make a new approach to the court. By offering their work as a gift to the queen, women writers and artists could promote themselves while remaining within the terms of propriety. The text's consistent emphasis upon women's resourcefulness, selflessness and unadulterated loyalty, combined with its strategically playful, ingenuous tone, suggests that in the immediate aftermath of the Restoration, women's testimonies might also have been perceived as more direct and disinterested than those published by men.⁴

Similarly, by advertising their freedom from literary tradition, women poets could justify their engagement with momentous public events, usually the preserve of men. Women poets were able to exploit the perception that, since the Restoration was an unprecedented "wonder", it could legitimately be celebrated by new, unconventional voices, brought into being by a sudden reversal which elevated the values of peace, reconciliation and obedience over war, rebelliousness and political strategy. A manuscript poem by Ann Lee engages strikingly with the sense that women's disinterested loyalty and literary purity were somehow connected. Lee compares the miraculous metamorphosis of England at the Restoration with her own artistic transformation into poet:

If an enthusiastick cup can fire
Cold blood, and raise low brains to storyes higher
...
Why may not Joy dub me a poet too?
Tis not impossible, all our good newes
Are wonders, and those wonder will infuse
Becoming Raptures, who is he can't sing?
Without a Muse whose Subject is a king? (Ann Lee, 'On the returne of King
Charles 2nd', c. 1660, Stevenson and Davidson, 393-95, ll. 3-12)⁵

Lee insists upon the private and spontaneous nature of her verse in order to assert her integrity as a “true” royalist, distancing herself from the materialistic agenda of courtier-poets. In depicting herself as an outsider from the court, and eschewing the motive of favour-seeking, Lee asserts an alternative kind of value for her literary labour, which she identifies as stimulated by duty rather than desire for self-promotion. Despite the fact that her poem was not printed, Ann Lee appears to compare her role self-consciously to that of more “public” male poets:

Tis duty guides my pen, nor doe I run
With flattring lines to court the rising Sun:
For when my prince labour'd against the streame
He was my prayers that is now my theame (ll. 28-31)

Manuscript poets could frequently attract a dedicated readership. Katherine Philips had also defined herself as a private poet, but became famous in royalist circles after circulating her poems in manuscript during the Interregnum. Some of these were printed anonymously, as part of formal collections of royalist verse associated with cultural and political resistance to the Commonwealth and Protectoral regimes. Similarly, Anne King, sister of the poet and Anglican minister, Henry King, had also seen some of her poems printed anonymously alongside those of her brother (Crum i-x; Greer et al, 19-20).⁶ Therefore, there is no reason to suppose that Ann Lee never intended her poem to be widely read.

As a woman poet, Lee has to confront the difficulty of depicting a male monarch, an enterprise which might be seen as transgressive in early modern England. By insisting on her own marginality, she figures herself as a model of loyal, unambitious literary service:

I am not eagle-sighted, he that pryeth
Into too glorious light hazards his eyes
My quill soars noe such heights, my walke shall be
To blaze on th'outward skirts of Majesty (ll. 40-43)

By displacing herself from the centre of the poem (the sun and the king) to the "outward skirts of majesty" (the shadow), Lee manipulates the conventional self-effacement common in early modern women's writing (the "modesty topos"). But in choosing the verb "blazing" Lee also stresses her own poetic powers in illuminating and upholding the power of the monarchy. Moreover, as a woman, officially excluded from the political realm, Lee suggests that she can recover a language and poetic expression uncontaminated by the political polemic that has corrupted art and literature:

Come unincumbred thoughts from those soft beds
Where silence dwells and the fat olive spreads
His peace-emblemizing-branches, where
No eye e're spoke the language of a teare
Noe hand hath learn't to write in blood, noe tongue
To argue for a profitable wrong (ll. 13-18)

Lee distances herself from both the aggressive partisanship of the civil war poets and the trivial flattery of court poets in order to reconstruct the role of loyal counsellor and truth-teller. Her deliberate focus on the structural simplicity and clarity of her verse, combined with her promotion of the values of plain-speaking and integrity, recalls the poetic self-presentation of Ben Jonson earlier in the century. However, Lee also strategically genders the conventional opposition between "Nature", loyalty and unadulterated poetic expression, and rebellion, artfulness and courtly self-display:

Natur's recover'd and is (let art not flout her)
Fayre, tho' shee hath not one black patch about her. (ll. 74-5)

In contrast to the sombre court of Charles I in the 1630s, the Restoration court was increasingly reviled for its frivolity and sexual immorality. By asserting the value of her transparent loyalty over courtiers' flattery (the artificial courtly lady with her cosmetic "patches"), Lee critiques the court's superficiality and reminds the king of his less conspicuous, but more steadfast supporters. In arguing for the superiority of her "straight lines" she also opposes the increasingly sophisticated and ironic tone of the new court literature, heavily influenced as it was by continental court fashions. Lee's poem therefore promotes the broad values of peace, forgiveness and harmony by which the government wished England to be guided after 1660, while asserting the female subject's special and timely ability to construct art which lacks artifice.

The gift of poetry to facilitate a physical introduction to the court or a request for favour or compensation was a common strategy in the early years of the Restoration, as indicated by Ann Lee's condemnation of the flattering courtiers who "run to court the rising sun". In contrast to Lee, the author of *Exultationis Carmen, To the Kings Most Excellent majesty upon his most Desired Return* (1660/1662) self-consciously figures herself as a courtier, "The Unworthiest of His Majesties Hand-Maids". Rachel Jevon excuses her decision to publish under her own name by presenting the poem as a personal gift to the monarchy.⁷ Like Lee, Jevon emphasises the special circumstances of the Restoration in order to justify her unusual enterprise:

Though for my Sexes sake I should deny,
Yet exultation makes the verse, not I (ll. 9-10)

Once again, the adaptation of the modesty topos, through the suggestion that the poem is both involuntarily produced and unstudied, assists the woman poet to negotiate a legitimate poetic voice. Like Lee, Rachel Jevon appears to wish to counsel and guide the monarchy. However, her work is strategically aimed at gaining support for her family, which had been severely punished by the Interregnum regime. The poem deliberately attributes the Restoration to the support of God and the efforts of ministers like her father, the Anglican royalist clergyman, Daniel Jevon of Staffordshire, to maintain loyalty to the old Church during the Interregnum. Rachel Jevon's literary efforts were accompanied by two petitions to the court emphasising her father's heavy financial losses during the civil wars and his paternal efforts to prevent his flock from taking up arms for the enemy (Stevenson and Davidson, 317).

Jevon advances her agenda by focusing intensively on Charles's role as governor of the Church of England, emphasising his moral and spiritual strength in adhering to his religion despite being urged to convert during his years in exile. Charles's controversial alliance with the fiercely Protestant Scots, which had led to his catastrophic defeat at the Battle of Worcester, and the frequent intrigues with Henrietta Maria's Catholic court in France failed to achieve his definite conversion to either the Presbyterian or the Roman church. Jevon suggests that by protecting his country's religion during his exile Charles retained God's favour, while being supported and protected in turn by the Anglican Church and its true followers in England. The king's pious resistance of attempts to seduce him away from his religion associates him with Virgil's Aeneas, who demonstrated his allegiance to his "paternal gods" by rescuing them from burning Troy (Stevenson and Davidson, n. 325).⁸ Jevon suggests that Charles has proved his own loyalty to his father and to the traditions of the past, while she takes care to emphasise the important role of the Church in upholding the monarchic regimes of the future:

Much Honour hath both Church and State adorn'd,
Since You, our Faiths Defender, are return'd;
For of the Church the Honour and Renown,
Are unto Kings the strongest Towre and Crown; (ll. 109-12)

By stressing the reciprocal dependence of king and Church, Jevon warns the king of the danger of allowing puritan dissenters and Roman Catholics to flourish. Charles's broadly conciliatory approach to many of his former enemies led to fears that another rebellion could occur (in fact, despite the government's formal imposition of Anglicanism with the Act of Uniformity in 1664, in practice Charles would move gradually towards religious tolerance). Jevon deliberately identifies the power of the monarchy as inseparable from, and dependent on, that of the church she identifies herself with.

In distancing the king from aggressive political or military policy, Jevon also recreates the amorous, festive version of the king constructed by most popular panegyrics. The "bloodless" (non-military) nature of the Restoration led some writers to attribute the king with virtues more traditionally associated with women, such as pacifism, patience, hope and mercy. The Restoration odes to royalty composed by Katherine Philips, for example, associate the king with passive endurance and forgiveness:

Revenge to him no pleasure is,
He spar'd their blood who gap'd for his... (Katherine Philips, 'Arion on a
Dolphin, To his Majesty at his passage into England', 1660, ll. 37-8,
Saintsbury, 580)

While the valorisation of masculine government and hierarchy was an important element in the process of reconstructing England as an obedient monarchy, this tendency is balanced by an alternative emphasis on the king's mild, peace-loving nature. Such an emphasis qualifies the construction of the king as an unassailable masculine governor, and helps to justify women's boldness in offering a response to the public world. Like Philips, Jevon presents Charles's negotiations with his own subjects and with foreign powers during the Interregnum in terms of beneficent mediation and peacemaking:

For every Kingdom he subdu'd by Charms
Of Love and Piety, more strong than Armes. (ll. 73-74)

Charles functions as a “Deity of Peace”, using his alliance with Philip IV to bring peace to Spain, and repairing the rifts caused by the wars of the Fronde in France before being rejected by France’s ungrateful government.⁹ Recalling the monarch’s role in the court masques, Jevon depicts the king’s exilic manoeuvres as part of a divine scheme by which he could heal Europe before taking up his rightful throne. Again, while this schema accords with the interests of the Restoration government, erasing the memory of Charles’ sometimes contradictory and duplicitous negotiations with foreign countries, it also supports the poet’s personal agenda, by suggesting that fate and God’s will, rather than the monarchy’s own political agency, were ultimately responsible for the monarchy’s survival and recovery.

Like Dryden and Waller, Jevon genders the relationship between the king and his subjects, in terms of feminine subjugation and masculine dominance, while describing a reconciliation prompted by England’s choice, rather than military or political force. Presenting the king’s exile and return as an optimistic conclusion to the tragicomic romance of the Stuart monarchy and its wayward subjects supported the immediate aims of the Restoration government, promoting the theme of forgiveness, and easing the tensions associated with a return to a paternal, authoritarian government. Charles is a benign domestic governor rather than conquering emperor:

At length Druina ravished with love,
Humbly recalls Him to His native Grove,
In peace to triumph, and to Reign a Lord
O’re hearts subdu’d by Love, not by the Sword. (ll. 91-94)

Edmund Waller had also depicted a subjugated, feminised England to welcome the king; but as an ex-Parliamentarian he also urged Charles to use the practical lessons learned during his exile to rule his subjects with flexibility and tolerance, circumscribing his powers within the rule of law. Like Dryden, however, Jevon chooses to celebrate Charles in a series of images promoting absolute and intrinsically masculine government (“royal hunter”, “lion king”, and “Royal oak”). The king takes possession of a pastoral England willing to surrender her powers to those of the monarchy:

O thrice, thrice happy they!
Who have the Honour, their faint Limbs to lay
Under the shadow of th’Illustrious Oak
Expanded, to despell from Saints the Stroke
Of Tyrants tempests... (ll. 171-75)

The sexualised image of the “nymphs” of England reclining under the masculine protection of the king apparently returns the subject, and specifically the female subject, to a state of eclipse. However, Jevon also constructs a vision of a monarchy tempered and strengthened by its own subjection to the established Anglican Church. The image of the “expanded” oak (the intertwined power of Church and State, strong enough to withstand the destructive force of puritan dissent- the “Saints”) functions to remind Charles of his obligation to uphold the Church and acknowledge the sacrifices its representatives have made on his behalf. Jevon also concludes with a prayer reminding the king that he is himself a subject of God, the “Lord of All”.

Like Ann Lee, Rachel Jevon articulates a specifically feminine poetic voice to celebrate the return of the king, identifying her interests with the overall ethos of the Restoration government, while using her specific status as member of a dispossessed Anglican community to explicate the past and express her hopes concerning the future course of the monarchy.

Despite their apparently different motivations, both Ann Lee and Rachel Jevon mark the new reign by associating themselves with the virtues of spiritual and political integrity to counter a corrupt world, celebrating the woman poet’s role in articulating a newly purified, celebratory discourse. The anonymous female author of *Meditations upon the glorious majestie of the holy God; The sacred historie conteined in the First Boooke of Moses called Genesis* (c. 1669) demonstrates a similar engagement.¹⁰ The text is preserved in a manuscript volume designed for presentation to the royal family. However, the work has a less festive and more overtly spiritual agenda than either Jevon’s or Lee’s. The text is ambitious (222 folios), and consists of a verse narrative of the book of *Genesis*, interwoven with a passionately royalist interpretation of recent English history. Completed nearly a decade after the Restoration, the text is marked by the writer’s sense of exclusion and marginalisation from the court, which had become increasingly associated with social elitism and the “libertine” ethos. While Rachel Jevon presents her poem as a gift from the loyal daughter of a beleaguered Anglican clergyman, the author of *The Sacred Historie* frames her text as a gift from a poor widow to the monarchy. The writer claims that she has waited four years before gaining the courage to make her approach, and although her work concerns the story of the Stuart monarchy, like Rachel Jevon she dedicates it to Queen Catherine.

While she insists that her name is not worthy to be made known at court, the extreme

care with which the volume has been presented demonstrates the writer's keen desire for an attentive audience. The boundaries between manuscript and print are also blurred by the inclusion of pasted-in engravings cut from contemporary printed royalist texts, including *Eikon Basilike* (1649), supposedly authored by Charles I during his imprisonment by Parliament, and celebratory texts published to mark the Restoration. These illustrations are carefully annotated by the poet to accord with her overall project of celebrating God's active intervention in restoring Charles peacefully to the throne. The text can be seen as a work of devotion, both to God and to the monarchy, and as a "gift" of time, labour, and loyalty: an expression of the writer's constant engagement and belief in both God's plan for man and for the survival of the monarchy.

Throughout the text, tropes of monarchy and spirituality are combined, recalling the sacred verse of published Anglican royalist poets, such as Robert Herrick, Abraham Cowley and Henry King. The author may have been inspired by Cowley's biblical epic, *Davideis*, printed as the fourth part of the collected *Poems* (1656), and representing four books of a projected epic describing the origins of the Jewish monarchy through the lives of Saul, Jonathan and David. While Book IV of *Davideis* represents a critique of monarchic tyranny, the celebration of David's final ascendancy enables Cowley to assert his support for monarchy as an institution. By entitling her work *The Sacred Historie*, the poet might also have wished to express her engagement with the Restoration texts that depicted the "sacred story" of Charles's preservation after Worcester, an episode with which she engages in detail, and in which, as we have seen, women's personal loyalty was commemorated.

The poem can be identified with the extreme royalist ethos which identified the king as "God's anointed" and therefore regarded the parliamentary regimes as a form of godless tyranny. "England's slavery" during the Interregnum is paralleled with the ordeal of the Israelites in Egypt. Key episodes in *Genesis* (the Fall, the Deluge, the Tower of Babel, the destruction of Sodom, and the lives of the patriarchs) are interpreted as foreshadowing England's story, so that the circular narrative of *Genesis* (the fall of man and man's gradual recovery through God's intervention) is mirrored in England's own fall and recovery.

The narrative of *Genesis* is interrupted by two long royalist digressions, which contrast the restored "golden age" of the Restoration with the fallen "iron age" of the civil wars. The treatment of the story of Joseph (beginning on f. 141) is a precursor to a discussion of Charles II's sufferings in exile, and the miracle of his eventual Restoration. The second digression (f. 187-f.194) consists of a series of poems on the theme of the English civil wars and execution of King Charles I. The Restoration verses

are illustrated by engravings depicting the king's escape after the Battle of Worcester (1651) and his coronation (1660). In the former picture, the king is shown emblematically, high in the branches of an oak tree, surrounded by angels and surmounted by a crown, while the battle rages in the background. The preservation of the king after Worcester, and specifically his famous concealment inside an oak tree on the country estate of one of his followers, is paralleled with God's protection of Joseph:

Our Royall cedar God Did Safely Hide
A Spreading Hollow Oake God Did Provide
That Like A Rocke was Made A Sure Defence
Gods Providence Departed Not from thence
The Pitt Was Neare Lest Joseph Should be Slaine
God Plact that Oake our King Might Safety Gaine (f. 158)

Within royalist iconography, both the oak and cedar were used to symbolise the English monarchy. In *The Sacred Historie* Cromwell is depicted as "the rending tearing Bramble" who attempted to destroy the "root and branch" of the monarchy and the English Church.¹¹ God's provision of the oak tree to preserve the king was therefore viewed by traditionally-minded royalists as proof of divine support for the monarchy:

This Bramble Cut our Glorious Cedar Downe
The Roote and Royall Branch God kept Unknown
(To Him) His Eagles Eyes could Not Descry
The Hiding Place Where Gods Anointed Lie
...
God with our King Did Peace and Plenty Give
Under Our Cedars Shadow Now We Live (f.160)

Like Rachel Jevon, the poet focuses intensively on the role of the Anglican Church in supporting the monarchy, drawing parallels between the exile of the king and the banishment of Anglican ministers during the Interregnum. Sectarianism is reviled as an inevitable consequence of rebellion, while the Anglican church is viewed as the anchor and foundation of loyalty, essential in preventing future conflict. Since this text was written later than Jevon's or Lee's, the author is able to express her satisfaction at the government's formal suppression of religious dissent in 1664:

And Lest wee Should some Future Evils Feare
His Royall Goodnesse tooke all prudent care
Those Grievous Wounds Might Never More Take F[ire] (f. 190)

As in Jevon's text, the masculine political world is presented as insignificant and powerless in the face of God's will. In celebrating God's choice of unexpected, marginal, or unconventional means to bring about the Restoration (in this case, General Monck, the parliamentarian who brought Charles back to England), the author presents English history as a mysterious scheme revealed only to God. By asserting that "God Maketh Choise of A Fitt Instrument/ Guided head and hand to settlement" (f. 192), the poet adds force to her own literary identity as a representative of the marginalised and dispossessed (the "meek" whom Jesus identified for special blessings). The poet suggests that the king's concealment in the oak, like Joseph's in the pit, should remind him of man's need for humility, a quality she identifies with herself:

When In Humilitie Men Low Doe Lie
Then God is Ready to Exalt them High
...
Lord of Humilitie Let Me Partake
It will Me Fitting for thy Mercies Make (f. 181)

The poet also asserts her own worth and value by identifying her voice with the innocent perceptions of "Babes and Sucklings", who are particularly fitted to offer unselfconscious praise. The sense that praise (of both God and the king) were of greater value when offered by the untutored and simple reinforces the sense that poetry, like prayer, should represent a spontaneous, unsolicited or unforced response to divine inspiration. Like Jevon, Philips and Lee, the poet figures her work as spontaneous verbal jubilation, rather than literary "art", stressing the lack of sophistication and ambition inherent in her project, and therefore her fundamental integrity. Here, though, the inspiration for her work is attributed to God rather than the magical powers of the monarchy:

Should they be Sylent Stones and trees would sing
Praise Land and Honour to their Heavenly King
Thus weake Meanes shall thy Enemies Confound
Their pride and their Contempt Cast on the Ground... (f. 228)

The suggestion that "weak means", like the "fit instruments" that brought about the Restoration, should be of value in interpreting and communicating God's will forges an important link between the writer's conception of her literary mission and her spiritual agenda. While Lee's poem had depicted the subject's relationship to the king in terms

of light and shadow, the sun and moon, in the *Sacred Historie* man's relationship to God becomes the primary focus of the poem. The moon is "that lesser reflection of the Sun", which "lights stars", and behaves only in accordance with it; but the sun "is a Ray Divine/ The Reflection of [God's] Glory Makes it Shine" (f. 228). Since beholding God's glory "Blindes Our Eyes", man must be content to live in shadow. For the royalist woman poet, the author suggests, to celebrate a life lived under the shadow of monarchic and spiritual government was to celebrate man's relationship to God.

The Sacred Historie explores the pattern of recent history to assert a connection between the poet's own patient loyalty to the king during his eclipse, and the king's faith in God during hard times. The sombre tone of her literary project counters the growing secularism and amorality of Restoration court literature. At the same time, in paralleling her own abject condition and humility with that of the Stuart monarchy during the Interregnum, the poet asserts her worthiness to be "raised" temporally, as well as spiritually, by offering a sacrifice of literary labour and a gift of praise to the court.

The poets discussed here were able to exploit their status as political and literary "outsiders", emphasising their lack of formal literary credentials, as well as their distance from masculine literary traditions, to create a space for a specifically female public, or semi-public, poetic voice. Their verse has a self-consciously recuperative agenda, deploying conservative moral and artistic themes (the triumph of nature and virtue over artifice and policy, the legend of the return of an innocent "golden age", and the biblical topos of the ascendancy of the meek and dispossessed), to counter popular perceptions of England as a fallen world in which political duplicity and factionalism has blighted literature. On the one hand, their work accords with the immediate interests of the Restoration government, valorising a benevolently patriarchal monarchy and celebrating the ethos of forgiveness and tolerance within a broadly "absolutist" regime. On the other, it functions to promote the authors' own interests as members of specific religious or political communities, offering advice and guidance to the court, and constructing a mutually beneficial relationship between the new monarchy and its female supplicants.

NOTES

- ² Compare Waller's *To the King...* (1660) with *A Panegyric to my Lord Protector, of the present greatness and joynt interest of His Highness, and this nation* (1652).

- ³ One popular ballad complains of the conspicuous absence from court of the old royalists who had fought for Charles I:
- “I went to Court in hope to find
Some of my friends in place;
And walking there, I had a sight
Of all the crew, but by this light,
I hardly knew one face...” (Hardacre, 146). In her memoir, the royalist Ann Fanshawe complains of the Restoration court appointment of a man who “had never seen the king’s face” (Loftis, 144).
- ⁴ Margaret Cavendish’s biography of her husband adopts a similarly playful tone while stressing the king’s debts to her family (Cavendish, 76; 80).
- ⁵ While Stevenson and Davidson do not identify the Ann Lee in question, she may have been the daughter of Lady Sussex (later Lady Warwick, then Manchester), a prominent and active royalist during the civil wars.
- ⁶ Henry King, *Poems, Elegies, Paradoxes, and Sonnets* (London, 1657); Margaret Crum, ed., *The Poems of Henry King* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), pp. i-x. Like much of the poetry of the period, Anne King’s verse cannot easily be identified (Greer et al, 19-20).
- ⁷ Rachel Jevon, *Exultationis Carmen, To the Kings Most Excellent majesty upon his most Desired Return* (1660/1662), printed in Stevenson and Davidson, 317-325. The printed text is inscribed with the words “Presented with her own Hand, Aug. 16th”, which suggests that there was a presentation copy, followed by publication
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Stevenson and Davidson, n. 325.
- ¹⁰ Recent editors of the manuscript suggest that the author’s name may have been Mary Roper: *The Perdita Project, Early Modern Women’s Manuscript Catalogue*, Nottingham Trent University (<http://human.ntu.ac.uk/research/perdita/index.html>, accessed 10/11/06).
- ¹¹ Rachel Jevon also deploys this schema, which, as Stevenson and Davidson point out, may have been adapted from James Howell’s *Dendrologia. Dodona’s grove, or, the vocall forest* (c. 1640) in which the king is represented by the “royal oak”, his potential foreign allies by parasitic or weaker plants, and the parliamentarians by choking “brambles” (n. 325). The anonymous *Sacred Historie*, and the manuscript volume of poetry by the royalist Lady Hester Ley Pulter (*Poems Breathed Forth by the Noble Hadassus*, Leeds University Library, Brotherton Collection, MS Lt q 32), also make use of the same terms.

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