ROBERT APPELBAUM

Literature and Utopian Politics in Seventeenth-Century England

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LITERATURE AND UTOPIAN POLITICS IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

Hundreds of writers in the English-speaking world of the seventeenth century imagined alternative ideal societies. Sometimes they did so by exploring fanciful territories, such as the world in the moon or the nations of the Antipodes; but sometimes they composed serious disquisitions about the here and now, proposing how England or its nascent colonies could be conceived of as an "Oceana," a New Jerusalem, a "City on a Hill." *Literature and Utopian Politics* provides a comprehensive view of the operations of the utopian imagination in England and its nascent colonies from the accession of James VI and I in 1603 to the consolidation of the Restoration under Charles II in the late 1660s. Appealing to social theorists, literary critics, and political and cultural historians, this volume revises prevailing notions of the languages of hope and social dreaming in the making of British modernity during a century of political and intellectual upheaval.

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ROBERT APPELBAUM

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To the memory of Sandy Solomon,
a man who tried

And to my loving and beloved mother

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Acknowledgments

The idea for this book was hatched one afternoon while I was in the midst of working an eighteen-hour shift, harried and cranky, as a limousine driver in the San Francisco Bay Area. The final draft but one was completed while I was unemployed, hopefully "between jobs," and living on the dole in Cincinnati, Ohio. It has not been easy to complete this project. But along the way I have been the beneficiary of many, many kindnesses and a good deal of direct and indirect institutional support.

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Miller, Carolyn Dinshaw, and Catherine Gallagher, who showed me at Berkeley what a dedicated literary critic could be. James Turner, another model, helped to orient me to the world of seventeenth-century England and guided the project along during its earliest stages. Stephen Greenblatt inspired me from afar to become a Renaissance scholar; later he did me the kindness of understanding what I was trying to do, and volunteering to be my dissertation director. Donald Friedman and Randolph Starn were there as well, rounding out my dissertation committee and keeping my work on track, giving me invaluable, painstaking guidance. In addition, Hugh Richmond was both a mentor and a patron. And I am further obliged to Nigel Smith, Michael C. Schoenfeldt, and Anna Nevsky, who helped me with various stages of the manuscript and provided me with models of scholarly commitment, friendship, and generosity. I am grateful, too, to the gang at NEH Summer Seminar at the University of Michigan, including Valerie Traub, and the gang at the NEH Summer Institute at the Folger Library, beginning with Karen Kupperman, Kathleen Lynch, Carol Brobeck, and Constance Jordan. Nor can I omit the valuable friendship and intellectual stimulation given to me by Marty Wechselblatt, Kathy Smits, Andrew Keitt, Robert Cassanello, Cassandra Ellis, and Peter Herman.

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If I could, I would like to conclude by noting once again the importance of the indifferent, impersonal, social domain of the institutional system in our lives, for it is the institution, for better or worse – the unemployment bureau, the foundation, the university, the publishing house – that nurtures our lives as creative workers. But I cannot. I have to conclude by expressing my deepest thanks to Terri Zucker and Meredith Appelbaum, the two loves and twin pillars of my life.

Introduction

"Literature and Utopian Politics." Or is that "Politics and Utopian Literature"? Either one would do; for utopian politics as exercised in seventeenth-century England – whether in the sublime ideology of the Stuart Court, in the charterism of separatist Puritans, or in the revolutionary agitations of the Levellers, the Fifth Monarchists, and the Diggers – was always grounded in literary expression. And by the same token, utopian literature in the seventeenth century – whether among activists like William Walwyn or among retired scholars like Robert Burton – was always grounded in the political conflicts of the day. One engaged in utopian politics in keeping with impulses and goals articulated in literature; indeed the engagement itself was often primarily literary: a matter of letters, of words, of written "acts," of poems, of recited addresses from the pulpit, of stage plays and pamphlets and books. But conversely, one essayed an adventure in utopian literature in keeping with impulses and goals derived from the political domain, a domain which was itself, in the seventeenth century, a location of not only the policies and procedures of the state but also the conduct of social life and the dissemination of cultural forms.

This book is a study of the interaction of literature and politics in their utopian dimension from the accession of James VI and I in 1603 to the consolidation of power in the late 1660s during the Restoration under Charles II. In focusing on this shared dimension I concentrate on a pair of complementary phenomena I call "ideal politics" and "utopian mastery." By "ideal politics" I refer to discourse in any of a number of forms which generates the image of an ideal society – a society that exists predominantly in the imagination and usually in the shape of an optimal alternative to a real society in the here and now. By "utopian mastery" I refer to the power a subject may exert over an ideal society, whether as the author or as the imaginary founder or ruler of an ideal political world. Usually these phenomena are studied in view of the genre of utopian fiction, a form of writing held to have been invented by Thomas More in his *Utopia* (1516), although it is commonly understood that there were a number of precedents for More's work and even plenty of utopian fictions written before him. In this book, however, I am concerned with the genre only in passing. Instead of taking the genre as a reference point against which other texts are to be measured, so that only those texts with enough affinities to *Utopia* may be included for discussion, I take utopian fiction on the Morean model as only one of several options available to writers concerned to exercise the rights of ideal politics and utopian mastery. I take it as my working hypothesis that between 1603 and 1670 there is traceable, narratable history of the ideal politics and utopian mastery, a history which registers significant changes in political subjectivity over the course of the century – significant changes, that is, in what it means to be an individual capable of thinking about political life and imagining political conditions and ideals. When texts resembling More's *Utopia* appear in the first two-thirds of the seventeenth century, I try to account for them; much of this book, in fact, is devoted to the conventional practice of providing interpretive readings of literary texts, utopian fictions being among the most prominent of them. But after years of studying the phenomenon of ideal politics I have become convinced that there is little stability to the genre of utopian fiction in the seventeenth century, that what it means to be utopian, to write a utopian fiction, or to expand the imagination utopistically is subject to continual dispute and variation throughout the century, even with regard to the difference between what is "imaginary" and what is "real." What is constant is not the genre, the legacy of the Morean ideal, or the particular politics that the people in More's Utopia happen to practice. What is constant instead is a disposition. To think and write about an ideal society on any of a number of models (the earthly paradise, the millenarian future, the ancient Age of Gold, the happy constitutional democracy, the world turned upside down, the primitive Church, the ideally munificent court of the ideal monarch) and to assert, while thinking and writing about an ideal society, a sense of one's potential mastery over a social or natural world were goals toward which a surprising number of people in the seventeenth century aspired. The terrain of the ideal, in turn, was a phenomenon over which a surprising number of people thought it important to contest proprietorship. This book tries to tell the story of that disposition and the contestation it inspired, and to trace the development of what I will later define (in chapter one) as "the look of power" among English authors during the first two-thirds of the seventeenth century.

The great utopian impulse of Western thought was first explicated by writers whose sensibilities were formed in the first half of the twentieth century, when Marxian hope was a dominant impetus: Karl Mannheim, Lewis Mumford, Ernst Bloch, and Paul Tillich among others.[1] In these writers the utopian impulse, however burdened by accretions of cultural residue, local prejudice, and historical interest – the stuff not of "utopia" but of "ideology" – was a prime motor force in the story of human liberation and social progress. Beginning among the Greeks, among whom the impulse was widely exchanged, rallying among the Romans, finding rebirth during the Renaissance and coming into its modern form at the hands of the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment and the activists of the nineteenth century, from Saint-Simon to Marx, the utopian impulse challenged and enlarged the horizons of hope of Western humanity, leading toward the self-conscious aspirations of socialist movements in the twentieth century. But such an optimistic and, one is tempted to say, self-satisfied view of the history of utopia and utopianism is clearly a thing of the past by now. More recently, in the last notable attempt to take the measure of the utopian impulse of Western civilization as a whole, Frank and Fritzie Manuel take a more skeptical, bemused, and even sarcastic attitude toward the phenomenon – which comes to an end for them in the realism of Freud, the oppressiveness of the Soviet regime, and the fatuities and failures (as they see it) of the cultural revolutions of the sixties and seventies.[2] Nor has the attitude been mitigated in the realm of political theory. There is perhaps a utopian dimension to the still widely influential *A Theory of Justice* by John Rawls.[3] For Rawls justice begins by virtue of a disinterested act of the imagination, an engagement with a hypothetical ideal. How, if I were to design the rules and principles of a society, would I design them, given the condition that I do not know what position I myself would occupy in it? Thus the imaginary dimension of an ideal politics stands at the core of Rawls's relatively concrete system of justice. And the example of Rawls may thus remind us that in most of the major traditions of political thought in the West – including the Platonic, the Aristotelian, and the Augustinian – political theory always already includes elements of idealization serving utopian purposes. The science of politics, as Aristotle observed, is by nature a reflection both on what is and on what ought to be. Hence it is a consideration of the nature of both political states (as they are) and the ideal state (as it ought to be). But the main tenor of political thought in the last twenty-five years has shed even the last vestiges of an ideal "ought," having been dominated instead by the idea of what Habermas called the "exhaustion of utopian energies" in the West.[4] We live in an age of the End of Utopia. "It seems far easier for us today," Frederic Jameson writes, "to imagine the thoroughgoing deterioration of the earth and of nature than the breakdown of later capitalism."[5] Hence we worry little about what we ought to be, as a whole: even the word "we" has become suspect, while the future in which an "ought-to-be" might be brought to life stands before us more as a memory of futures-past than as a real site of hope and expectation.[6] If scholars of literature, politics, culture, and society can still reflect on a phenomenon like the history of utopian ideas, they generally begin with the notion that though it may entail a story, it is not *their* story that they are reflecting upon.

For students of the early modern period and especially seventeenth-century England the notion of a discourse of ideal politics is nonetheless inescapable. It was part of the mental landscape of the time. Literally thousands of individuals participated in the discourse of ideal politics during the seventeenth century, if in no other way than in signing their names to the petitions circulating during the days of the Interregnum, or in demonstrating before the halls of Parliament, or in reading tracts attempting to redefine the political and cultural ideals of the English people, or even simply in attending the theater, for as long as the theaters were open. And there were literally hundreds of writings engaged to some extent with the discourse that they could draw upon: petitions and pamphlets, stage plays, court masques, prose fictions, sermons, treatises, platforms, occasional memoirs and letters. Sometimes, of course, writings engaged in ideal politics only to mock or forestall or pre-empt it. And even the most fervent exponents of ideal political agitation were frequently aware that there was something strange about what they were doing – something risible, something unbelievable, something impossible. How *can* one engage in the conversation of ideal politics, after all? The distinction between what is and what ought to be was seldom absent from the minds of educated writers, and the word "utopia" was more often a term of disparagement than encouragement; it signified hopeless impracticality. Speaking of the practice of lending money at interest, for example, Francis Bacon, himself one of the foremost utopists of the century, wrote that "to speak of the abolishing of usury is idle. All states have ever had it, in one kind or rate or other. So as that opinion must be sent to Utopia."[7] Utopia could thus be assumed to be a location of idle dreams. Moreover, although the idea of a utopian space in the imagination was common currency, there were few if any indications of a consciousness of the discourse of ideal politics as such. Perhaps a handful of intellectuals, such as Robert Burton, James Harrington, and John Milton gave evidence of such a consciousness, as when Milton wrote of the "largenesse" of spirit exhibited in the work of Plato, More, and Bacon, which taught the world of "better and exacter things."[8] But such individuals were exceptional. Ideal politics was neither a generic convention nor a commonly approved, cohesive body of doctrines and goals. In an age when revealed religion was still the primary framework of social thought, many of the most radical political fantasies were derived from the Bible, and the visions they entailed were thus thought to be expressive not of things as they ought to be, of political life raised to the condition of a speculative ideal, but of a hitherto hidden or misunderstood reality, prophetic history, against which conventional, secular political values could be shown to be mere illusions. Utopia was in fact the millennium, whatever the millennium was. So the discourse of ideal politics, again, though a common domain of cultural conversation, was inconsistent and contestatory. Not only contests over the content of the good life, but even contests over the nature of reality and ideality and the relation between the two were at stake when individuals participated in the discourse of ideal politics.

Still, though, individuals and movements participated in the discourse. Something happened in the seventeenth century that led to an outburst of political fantasy and speculation – an outburst related to what became the invention of modern political thought in the period. The ideal states of Independents, Commonwealthmen, and the radical sectarians participated in the same debate over the nature of politics as the very unideal state (in most respects) of Thomas Hobbes. All of these contested positions lie at the heart of Locke's synthetic *Second Treatise of Government.* Moreover, for all the complexities involved in the political imaginary of the seventeenth century, modern scholars can still find that the study of it resonates with present-day concerns. The many valuable books by Christopher Hill on the seventeenth century, most notably *The World Turned Upside Down* and *The Experience of Defeat*, repeatedly turn, though in empirical rather than theoretical terms, to the prevalence of utopian aspirations among various sectors of the English population during the period; and throughout Hill's work there echo experiences of utopian, Marxian hope in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s.[9] Revisionist historians, who dominated the scene of British historiography in the generation after Hill's, either ignored or dismissed the significance of the utopian dimensions of social and political life in early modern England, minimizing the importance of radicalism of any stripe in the history of the nation;

but clearly a sort of presentism was at work in their studies as well, a presentism of reaction, advanced in the name of an astute if unprogressive realism. Silence about utopian hope is a way of causing the past to resonate with the present too. And when members of a new generation of progressively minded scholars have turned to the inescapable reality of utopianism in the period, they also have found resonances with the present. Nigel Smith and David Norbrook, among others, *pace* revisionism, have been reviving our sense of the deeply radical, republican and communitarian strains in English history and letters, a strain which always depended on assertions concerning the visionary "ought-to-bes" of early modern life.[10] J. C. Davis, turning specifically to *Utopia and the Ideal Society 1516–1700*, repeatedly finds in sixteenth- and especially seventeenth-century thought reminders not only of the republican and communitarian traditions and the roots of the modern welfare state, but also of the dangers utopian thought could pose to what Karl Popper called the "open society" – dangers to which we still must be alert. James Holstun, in *A Rational Millennium* finds roots of modernist estrangement, after the fashion of the Frankfurt School's "Dialectic of Enlightenment" in Puritan utopias of the seventeenth century, as well as in the example set by Thomas More. And Amy Boesky in *Founding Fictions* and Marina Leslie in *Renaissance Utopias and the Problem of History* have found illustrations and parables of identity politics, early modern style, in the writings of More, Bacon, and their successors, the example of Margaret Cavendish's *Blazing World* being particularly pertinent for them in this respect. We learn about the conditions of modern science, of modern gender formation, and of modern social stratification by visiting the utopian tracts of the seventeenth century.[11]

Exactly how my own work responds to literature and utopian politics in the seventeenth century as well as to the scholars who have plowed the field before me will appear in what follows. The most important procedural difference, as I have already indicated, begins with my rejection of the Morean fiction as a primary model of utopian speculation, and my concentration instead on interactions between political life and literature with a view to articulations of ideal politics and utopian mastery. From that procedural departure another kind of field of study emerges, and another kind of story (or history) of the utopian impulse ensues: a field and a story somewhere between politics and literature, somewhere between historical circumstances and the experience of social ideas. What results with regard to the subject matter at hand might be thought of as a new variety of new historicism, where narration becomes the medium of both textual exegesis and historical explanation; except that in many respects I am returning to the topics and procedures (if not the governing philosophy) of Ernst Bloch in his *Philosophy of Hope*. As I am looking at the documents of an impulse, so I am also looking at the documents of hope: worldly but idealized hope, projected into imaginary spaces and imaginary futures. The mentality not of specific texts and individual authors but of whole movements of thought, of literature, and of political struggle become the dominant concern in this case – movements of the *langues* of the movements as well as their *paroles*. That, in a nutshell, is the difference – and the ambition – distinguishing this study. But two other specific points should be made about my approach to the utopian impulse in the seventeenth century.

(1) In the first place, it proceeds on the assumption that *the first three-quarters of the seventeenth century form a single unit with regard to the history of social thought and the experience of what I call utopian mastery*. This assumption may be controversial, on both empirical and theoretical grounds. What beginnings and endings should we attribute to the lived experiences and ideas of English or European history? For example, is not the politics of sublimity promoted under James VI and I (with which the study to follow begins) a continuity of conventions already well in place in the previous century, in the age of François I and Henry VIII? And is not the whole idea of alternative, utopian polities originally the invention of the earlier humanists, going back not only to Sir Thomas More, who was himself (along with Erasmus and Vives) responding to the long tradition of utopian thought beginning with ancient Greeks, from Hesiod to Plato to Lucian, but also to the civic humanism of early Italian republicanism? And at the other edge of the time period under consideration, are not the utopian fantasies of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, whether expressed on the dissenting side by the likes of Daniel Defoe or on the establishment side by the founders of the Royal Society, a response to and a continuation of the discourses of the mid-seventeenth century? Does anything really come to an end in the 1660s? Is not such periodization as this study assumes at best a convenient fiction, which falsifies the chronological significance of the material in question, arbitrarily cutting it off from the past which preceded it and the future which followed it? My answer is that these objections are valid. Periodization is mainly a convenient fiction, and the study could have begun or ended at different points in time. But even so, if we look closely at what people wrote and said when they entered the terrain of ideal politics, if we look at how frequently they entered that terrain during the first seven decades

of the century, if we look at the patterns of expression and ideation that developed over those seven decades, and if we look at the significance of what they were saying and doing, we find that for all its connections with the past and the future, the period from 1603 to 1670 constitutes a unique epoch, in which literature and utopian politics conjoin in ways both unprecedented and never again repeated.

(2) However, even if we settle on the exceptional character of English history in the seventeenth century – England being in fact the only Western nation where such an explosion of utopian writing occurred (although there are, to be sure, occurrences of utopian speculation in Italy, the Low Countries, Bohemia, and France), not to mention the only one to experience something like a revolution – it is also an assumption of this study that *the phenomenon of utopian subjectivity in seventeenth-century England needs to be understood within the context of the general structure of Western modernity*. It is one of the lamentable side-effects of revisionist versions of English history and even of many of the recent studies in early modern English literary studies that English experience has been cut off from the rest of the world. In spite of the recent growth of early modern cultural studies, work on the English experience is still insular: we study early modern England as if its own rhetoric of nationhood was wholly reliable, and England was indeed a "world apart." I cannot adequately remedy the situation here; space is limited and even if it were not I am not sufficiently equipped to do the job. But there are occasions when I follow the thread of England's ideal politics abroad both to the Continent and to America. And throughout, I am trying to place the utopian subjectivities of seventeenth-century England in a context at once historical and theoretical which embraces not just England but Europe and the North Atlantic world: the context of what historians, sociologists, and theoreticians loosely term "modernization." The history of ideal politics and utopian mastery in seventeenth-century England is a chapter in the history of modernization. This is true both in a political and a phenomenological as well as a literary sense. Though the continuities in English life between the Stuart accession and the Stuart Restoration are not to be underestimated, there are decisive changes in the political and social mentalities of England during this period, as absolutism gives way, under duress, to more democratic, rationalizing impulses. The experiences of colonial experimentation, of religious struggle, of civil war and revolution, and of scientific and literary innovation all have a decisive impact on the mentalities of the peoples of England. Indeed, it is a hallmark of the world of the Restoration, whose differences from earlier

periods in the realm of expression are so obvious to literary and cultural if not to social and political historians, that leading intellectuals argue again and again among themselves how best to assimilate the innovations of the previous decades while avoiding their socially subversive and culturally destructive effects – in the interest of consolidating and safeguarding the very processes of modernization current in the century that might otherwise threaten the social order.

Modernization *per se* was not of course an idea with which anyone of the period could have been familiar, although by the end of the century a commonplace of literary life was, as Swift among others put it, "the war between the ancients and the moderns." Modernization is a term of art adopted by twentieth-century sociologists. For most of the seventeenth century, as I will emphasize, following a line of thought first proposed by J. B. Bury, the idea of progress and indeed of the possibility of something like progress – the idea of a linear entry into a world of modernity – is only first being born, and only slowly being absorbed into the mainstream of intellectual life.[12] But modernization is a decisive aspect of the literary and political history this study will discuss, especially regarding that expressive threshold of utopian mastery to which I have been calling the reader's attention. The impulse to join together the eye and the I, to exert a mastery over a world of one's own invention, to assert at once the originary power of the self and the new look of the rationalized society the self is capable of imagining – what else is this but a paradigmatic structure of modern subjectivity? It is paradigmatic for that "Dialectic of Enlightenment" of which Horkheimer and Adorno speak, and whose applicability to seventeenth-century utopics Holstun has brilliantly discussed. It is paradigmatic for the structure of Cartesian speculation, which, as I will begin to show, is so pervasive in the utopics of the seventeenth century, a structure at the foundation of Heidegger's invention of subjecthood, of Blumenberg's philosophical self-assertion or, more sinisterly, of what Jürgen Habermas calls modernity's mistaken "subject-centered reason," and what Stephen Toulmin frames as the oppressive of rationality of the Cartesian "Cosmopolis."[13] And it is paradigmatic, too, more happily, of that foundationalism that lies at the heart of all successful modern revolutions, including the American Revolution, the charterism whose dignity Hannah Arendt perhaps most convincingly extolled.[14] It is paradigmatic of that dream that only the decline of modernity and the onset of postmodernity has apparently put to rest – the dream that humankind, through an act of self-assertion, in the exercise of reason and imagination, can recreate the conditions of its world order, and establish in reality what Kant called humanity's objective yet unpracticed "realm of ends."

At this point, the reader may be impelled to object, it is too paradigmatic. But modernity, as Habermas argues, is "a bundle of processes that are cumulative and mutually reinforcing": "the formation of capital and the mobilization of resources," "the development of the forces of production and the increase in the productivity of labor," "the establishment of centralized political power and the formation of national identities," "the proliferation of rights of political participation," "the secularization of values and norms."[15] The joining together of the eye and the I in exertion of utopian masteries – masteries that reproduce realms of ideal politics that eventually foment an ideology of social, scientific, and technological progress – is one of those processes as well. At the very least, it is one of the processes through which the bundles of modernity, as it were, are formulated and encouraged in the seventeenth century. The utopists of the period are concerned with capital formation, with the productivity of labor, with the proliferations of rights, and so on; for want of a suitable language of modernization, indeed, they turn to the language of ideal politics and utopian mastery in order to articulate concerns like these, which are otherwise difficult to imagine and express. Utopian discourse in this period is itself one of the period's primary discourses of modernity. As such, moreover, it exemplifies still another characteristic of what Habermas calls "the highly *ambivalent* content of cultural and social modernity," with its inevitable fusion of "emancipatory-reconciling" and "repressive-alienating" drives.[16] The utopian visions of seventeenth-century writers both liberate and repress, both reconcile and alienate: they try to articulate systems of sociality through which individuals may become more free, but they do so by imagining social totalities through which freedom itself becomes an object of disciplinary supervision; they try to articulate systems through which individuals may be more united with one another, but they do so by imagining totalities where stratification is all the more rigidly encoded. Or again, conversely (because we need to be aware of this ambivalent envisionment as a positive force of progress as well as a negative force of devolution), the beginning of these acts, even if it entails an invocation of a new disciplining of political subjects, also empowers the beginners, broadening the range of the political imaginary at their command; even as it alienates, it also liberates: it makes the beginners of utopian speculation utopian masters, the foundrymen of an imaginary but nevertheless significant political and social world.

What follows, then, is not the history of a form of writing but the history of a discourse. What follows is a study not of the permutations of a literary tradition but of the articulations of a permutating impulse. It is an impulse through which political mentalities are modernized, but only to ambivalent effect. It is an impulse whose expression puts us in contact with sometimes inspiring and sometimes frightening wills-to-power that lie at the core of much that has been constructive in the development of Western modernity as well as of much that has been destructive. Considered locally, in the context of the English state and its early colonies, it is an impulse that motivated both the efflorescence of absolutism early in the seventeenth century and the outbreak of civil war and revolution in the middle of the century, not to mention what was in effect the domestication and aestheticization of utopian hope in the more realistic, politically oppressive age of the Restoration. The rise and decline of this impulse, the discourses through which it found expression, and the hopes it registered and invented are what I now proceed to document, from decade to decade, beginning with the surprising circumstances of the accession of James I.

CHAPTER I

The look of power

I. NEW BEGINNINGS, 1603

Shortly after the failure of the Essex Rebellion of 1601, James VI of Scotland sent his two best political operatives on the long road back to London, charging them to try to repair the damage the Rebellion might have done to his chances for succeeding to the English throne. James himself may have been involved in the Rebellion, which Essex had led in part in order to assure that a Protestant partisan like James would inherit the crown; James had been in contact with Essex about this for some time. But whether or not James had a hand in it – England's last feudal "rising" in the opinion of many historians – the Rebellion's failure made him afraid for his chances for succession, and worried about the country's stability as a whole. So he decided to take action. He was determined to redouble his agents' efforts at intelligence-gathering and diplomacy, while continuing to try to lobby the Queen. And he was also ready to instigate a number of conspiratorial motions and wrest control of England without the Queen's blessings, by extra-legal means if necessary. "Find out," he told the Earl of Mar and Edward Bruce, in secret correspondence,

> with which of two sorts of discontentment the people are presently possessed: whether it be only against the present rulers in the court (keeping always that due reservation of love and reverence to the Queen which they were ever wont to do), or [whether] the discontentment be grown to that height that they are not able any longer to comport either with prince or state . . .[1]

Next, he says, assuming that "the people" are still loyal to Elizabeth, attempts should be made to get her public support and have her declare him her successor; and barring that, to enter into "private negotiation with the country":

> first, to obtain all the certainty ye can of the town of London that in the due time they will favour the right; next, to renew and confirm your acquaintance

> with the Lieutenant of the Tower; thirdly to obtain as great a certainty as ye can of the fleet by means of [Lord Thomas Howard] and of some seaports; fourthly to secure the hearts of as many noblemen and knights as ye can get dealing with and to be resolved what every one of their parts shall be at that great day; fifthly, to foresee anent armour for every shire, that against that day my enemies have not the whole commandment of the armour and my friends only be unarmed; sixthly, that . . . ye may distribute good seminaries through every shire that may never leave harvest till the day of reaping come; and generally to leave all things in such certainty and order as the enemies be not able in the meantime to lay such bars in my way as shall make things remediless when the time shall come. (175–76)

While still hoping to accede to the throne by simple nomination, in other words, James was planning to wrest control of England by mounting a *coup d'étât* if necessary. He wanted the support of the mayor and aldermen of London, and the "hearts" of the country gentry, their affection secured by bribes, if necessary; but he also wanted to secure the Tower and the militia it controlled, as well as the navy at various ports and the garrisons scattered through the country. If the nation would not be given to him, he wanted to be able to take it – not by violence so much as by a methodical appropriation of the instruments of state, including its instruments of legal violence.

As it happened, James's preparations would turn out to be unnecessary, since within weeks Robert Cecil, Elizabeth's chief counselor, volunteered his support for James and began putting into operation a surer scheme for James's accession than Mar and Bruce could have effected on their own.[2] When James came to throne on 24 March 1603 (new style) the transition of power went smoothly; indeed it has long been seen as one of the most peaceful and efficient changes of dynasty in early modern English history. "If ever," wrote S. R. Gardiner, in a verdict that has seldom been challenged, "there was an act in which the nation was unanimous, it was the welcome with which the accession of the new sovereign was greeted."[3] Within hours after Elizabeth's death the queen's Privy Council proclaimed James the new king and sent instructions to magistrates throughout the country to keep to their posts, proclaim the king, and stifle dissent.[4] The Council's official representative Sir Robert Carey led a mass scramble into Scotland which has taken on the quality of a national legend, a race to be the first Englishman to tell James the news. Within a matter of days, governing bodies and officials throughout the nation had publicly accepted James as the new sovereign by proclamation; James had been reached – nearly