

## Abstract

'Mass Politics and Tory Anxieties: Thomas Durfey's The Royalist' was an essay written during April and May 2005 as an assessed essay for the second-year undergraduate module *Seventeenth Century Literature and Culture* at the University of Warwick, convened by Dr Elizabeth Clarke. The task of this assessment was to research into the literary and/or historical background of a seventeenth-century text which had hitherto been largely neglected by critics, and evaluate its worth and place in its literary and historical context.

This paper argues that the 1682 play The Royalist, written by Thomas Durfey, reflects a mood at the time amongst the Tory faction: of rejoice over the Whig failure to exclude James II from the succession of the English throne, but also of anxiety that, with the changing times, the support of the people was now something which had to be won. It argues firstly that the play is an active engagement in the mass politics which Tories feared, an attempt to at once kill off Whig support by negative association with the Parliamentarians of the 1650s, It then goes on to show that Durfey demonstrates an astute understanding of the element of self-security within mass politics, and so upholds the Tory cause as stable and constant, It finally argues that the play is also a means of educating the masses about conservatism, morality and most importantly loyalty to the current monarch.

Accessing the EEBO database has helped me conduct my research into the main text studied, The Royalist, while also helping me to get a wider feeling of its contemporary literature upholding both the Whig and the Tory cause, something which would have been difficult to access otherwise. It helped me not only conduct a wide review of texts now obscure, but provided a database of immediate sources which helped with the speed of my research. In seeing documents as they really were, unedited, I was able to get a more profound sense of what the seventeenth-century public would have seen and read.

This paper can help with similar fields of study, both literary and historical. It deals with the work of a writer who was extremely popular in his day, but now generally forgotten and who needs further illumination. It also investigates a changing point in English social and literary history, where the printing of text not only opened up a huge market of ordinary people to politics, but simultaneously created a new power in the common reader himself, who now became the focus of both Whig and Tory persuasion.

Mass politics and Tory anxieties: Thomas Durfey's *The Royalist*

Written in the aftermath of the Exclusion Crisis of 1678-1681, Thomas Durfey's *The Royalist* is a work of Tory Propaganda which revels in the Whigs' failure to change the line of succession from Charles II's Catholic brother to his illegitimate, Protestant son, on account of the dissolution of the 1681 Oxford Parliament. It is also a play highlighting how the Whigs were still a cause for concern even after their Parliament was taken from them: their policies were socially inclusive, demonstrated largely through the amount of literature printed, as it appears, for public consumption after the expiration of the Licensing Act in 1679; a Whig, one Tory publication in 1681 insists, "endeavours to poison the People, and Scare the Nation into Rebellion" (The Character of a modern Whig, or, An alamode true loyal Protestant, Image 2). J.R. Jones' essay 'Parties and Parliament' contends "Whig strength depended on their achievement in restoring a popular dimension to politics that had been missing since 1660 and in creating an awareness of political issues" (p60). This included speaking out to those below the Parliamentary classes, including the mercantile classes and below. *The Royalist* reveals two main Tory anxieties over this Whig drive towards mass politics: the fear of a subsequent rebellion and civil war, and of the social upheaval which would result from making more ordinary people involved in the political affairs of state. However, Durfey's play is a work which also engages in mass politics, that attempts to undermine the Whigs while presenting a more moral and conservative way of life. I will argue that Durfey's anti-Whig message and conservative disapproval of the spread of mass politics is mainly a concern that the Whigs had the support of the people which, even after the dissolution of Parliament,

was a great stronghold for them, and therefore essential to harness for the Royal and Tory cause. The play ultimately accepts the rise of mass politics which had become so important by 1682, and marks the Exclusion Crisis' final battle, that of winning back public support.

The Tory anxiety over how mass politics could lead to another civil war is evident in how The Royalist attempts to subvert the Whig movement with the aim of making people grow disillusioned with their cause. Durfey connects the Whigs with the regicide Parliamentarians of the 1640s and 1650s, explicitly in his Preface, where he links the "Old Stanch Whigg" with a "Common-wealth Monger" (Image 3). The concern that the Whigs were capable of instigating and encouraging such a feat as popular rebellion was voiced by Charles II himself upon dissolving their Oxford Parliament the year before, when he hoped that "the Example of the ill Success of former Heats will dispose you to a better Temper" ("The King's Speech to Both Houses"). The Tories' and Charles II's awareness of the threat of the crowd would have already been noted in the mass pope-burning processions towards the end of the 1670s, which, according to Tim Harris in London Crowds in the Reign of Charles II, "reached vast numbers of people...according to one report, 200,000 witnessed the burning of the pope at Temple Bar on 17 November 1679" (p104). The Whigs had gained growing support from the masses since the Popish Plot of 1678, through attention-grabbing propaganda which, as Harris notes, emphasised "the threat to lives, liberties and properties that the Popish Plot entailed" (p97).

The Royalist's context is the final year of Cromwell's interregnum rule, with the civil war and the Battle of Worcester in its background: a reminder and rewriting of Interregnum history for a new generation twenty four years on. It shows how

ordinary, mercantile people can manage to defeat order and reign in social chaos. Oldcut, one of “the Dirty Cubs of Reformation” (Image 9), is from a line of lowly artisans; as Sir Charles Kinglove points out: “Thy mother, if my memory fail me not, sold Turnips” (Image 9). Oldcut has benefited from the “popular dimension to politics” in the 1640s and 1650s, and Durfey’s anxiety that common people could have a similar chance in the present day is expressed in his Preface, terming a butcher “a great Common-wealths man”, and chastising a tailor for “railing at the Government with great animosity and fury, for not calling a Parliament” (Image 3). Oldcut is mercenary and immoral: his first words, upon sequestering Kinglove’s land and possessions, are a complaint he expected more: “But three tierce of Claret and one little runlet of Sack to all that Beef and Mutton” (Image 9). As a sequester and thus a disturber of the social order, he seems only interested in self-gain, dismissing any moral reasons for being a Parliamentarian, exclaiming “Conscience! When, didst thouever know a thriving States-man have a Conscience!” (Image 12). The character of Captain Jonas develops these negative characteristics of a Whig further. He is used to undermine the very face of the Whig faction, as he is not a defender of truth, but a scaremonger:

He is the Author of Intelligences – ‘Tis he that invents all the Miracles, the fiery Dragons, Armies in the Air, Common-wealth Comets and so forth, to confound and disturb the People.

(Image 12)

Almost certainly modelled on Titus Oates, who disclosed the Popish Plot of 1678 that the Whigs seized to gain a hold over a society terrified by the threat of Catholicism,

Jonas is a representational Whig, who “confound[s] and disturb[s] the People” with lies to manipulate the masses the Whigs claim to protect. He is also drawn as side-shifting and changeable, again like Oates, who, according to his entry in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, changed his religion four times throughout his life. Jonas shifts from a Jesuit to a Protestant in Act III Sc1 in an attempt to gain Kinglove’s favour, putting the Whig’s trustworthiness further in doubt, especially when he claims that the Jesuit cause and other suspicious factions are actually aligned with the Whigs: “Your Quaker is the Anvil on which we forge our designs, and the Phanatick the person that uses them” (Image 16). A “Phanatick”, which the Oxford English Dictionary reveals to be a term “applied in the latter half of the 17th c. to Nonconformists as a hostile epithet” is the Tory Durfey’s term for a Whig, and so would be an outrageous accusation against a party which arose in response in defence of the Church and State against the Catholic threat. The foundational undermining of the Whigs is a deliberate strategy of Durfey’s to make the common people, to whom the Whig cause was largely attractive given the widespread fear of Catholicism on all social levels throughout the seventeenth century, reconsider their support.

Durfey may distrust the power that politics could give to the masses, but his play also registers that the masses are also changeable, and could easily be swayed back. For example, the turning of Kinglove’s tenants against him once they see him losing against the Parliamentarians in Act 1 scene 1, and the two country fools Copyhold and Slouch’s decision on entering London to show allegiance to who they “zee which is the strongest side” (Image 18) shows awareness by Durfey that mass politics revolves around the desire for self-security. His undermining of the Whigs is to turn the public towards the supposedly more stable cause of the Tories, who, as Kinglove remarks at

the end, “would never change” (Image 37). His anxiety over the dangers of mass politics is predominantly a fear that such a useful power was in the wrong hands, and needed to be conservatively contained.

In presenting the public with the safe option of conservatism over Whig changeability and manipulation, Durfey also combats Tory anxiety over the potential social upheaval which would result from mass politics giving people ideas above their station. As the first step of disillusioning the people with the Whigs takes effect, Durfey aims to guide his audience towards a safer and apparently more morally rewarding mode of thought. While there is no way of telling exactly who supported the Whigs and who the Tories, or exactly which classes attended the theatre in 1682, Durfey suggests in his prologue that the theatre world had decidedly changed, including the audience. He describes the pit as “like a Commonweal” (Image 4), presumably full of Whig wits ready to heckle the action, indicating that a year after the disillusion of the Oxford Parliament they were still vocal enough to challenge Tory rule. He also recognises that a lower, mercantile class, with probable Whig sympathies, was attending the theatre, in his sarcastic amazement at seeing “the House full! And at a *Loyal* Play!” (Image 4). The once elitist realm of the playhouse, attended by those on the court fringes such as Durfey, had evolved, in a shift which as early as 1668 Samuel Pepys had commented upon:

Here a mighty company of citizens, 'prentices, and others...when I begun first to be able to bestow a play on myself, I do not remember that I saw so many by half of the ordinary 'prentices and mean people in the pit.

(Vol. IX, p2)

The “ordinary ‘prentices and mean people”, however, are the sort which the Tories now are fighting to win support from. The Tory backlash was to undo any damage Whig propaganda had caused, and, as the fellow Tory songwriter Nathaniel Thompson put it in his Preface to A Choice Collection of 180 Loyal Songs, a conscious effort to “undeceive the people” (Image 3). The Royalist upholds the conservative values of the Cavaliers amidst the social disorder of the Parliamentarians, and Kinglove, the eventual victor in this comedy, is a testament to the idea that politics should revolve around the values of duty and honour, and not the supposed self-interestedness the Whigs represent. He is the quintessential Cavalier, who supports the absent Prince Charles in his worship of the Royal Oak. His world decidedly doesn’t revolve around self-gain, and he, on the loss of his estate and the anticipation of a meagre meal, merely exclaims

Content has made it rich and riotous...Oh! May I feed on Grass, Roots, Berries,  
Acorns...rather than for the Luxury of Emperors, do the least Act dishonourable  
or disloyal.

(Image 13)

Kinglove sacrifices luxury for honour and loyalty, and puts his words into practice, when, upon marrying Philippa, he sacrifices her dowry to help fund Prince Charles’ return, for “strong in my zeal beyond Mortality, with my own hands I’d crush the trembling Lump, until the Noble Loyal Debt was paid”(Image 32). The Cavaliers are witty and stylish, winning the affections of Oldcut’s wife, Camilla, who appreciates

Kinglove's "gracefull Carriage" over her "Lump" of a husband (Image 10). Respect for authority is set very attractively for Durfey's audience to realise and imitate.

Meanwhile, Durfey sets about making an example of those who do not respect authority, particularly the tailor in the coffeehouse scene of Act 4 sc 2, who is ironically condemned for engaging in political debate by the Whig Eitherside. Brandished as an "impertinent fellow to pretend to talk about State-affairs", the tailor replies "this place is free for any one, and I'll have my pennyworth of Politicks as well the Best of you...I care not this for your Honour and Authority" (Image 30). If a tailor cannot respect "Honour and Authority", neither would he respect the divine right of the King. Without subservience, social order and hierarchy would collapse, leaving Tory elitists such as Durfey rather superfluous. Durfey recognises the danger of political arenas such as coffeehouses, which are places "where your Mechanick may vent sedition at an easie rate, and look as big as an Alderman or Grandee" (Image 29). They encourage class interaction, resulting, as in the tailor's case, in the lower classes getting ideas above their station. His contemptuous portrayal aims to make the audience aware of their own place, and, while decidedly not criticising the lower class audience for their attendance, Durfey decides to use the medium of the theatre as more than simply a political soapbox on which to stand, but, through the attractive Cavaliers, as a means of proactive education for the masses.

The Royalist's final drive for winning the people over, therefore, is through education. In his essay 'The Battle for the Allegiance of the Common People' Harris indicates that "although the Tories sought to appeal to the people, their propaganda

was designed to teach people their place” (The Politics of the Excluded, p223). With a noticeable change in the class of audience, Durfey adapts the Restoration comedy to cater to this educational design, in two ways. Firstly, he creates a plot which is driven by morality, unlike the 1670s sex comedies such as The Country Wife which were powered by sexual desire and debauchery. Kinglove’s sequestration leads to the Cavaliers’ pursuit of revenge, via ridicule and cuckoldry, in a fashion which is overtly Jonsonian, especially in the tooth-pulling episode of Act 4 Scene 1. Jonson’s own aim with his comedy was that

To these courteous eies oppose a mirror,  
As large as is the Stage whereon we act,  
Where they shall see the times deformity.

(The comicall satyre of euery man out of his humor, Image 5)

While Jonson had an influence throughout comedy of the period, here the influence is far more acknowledged. A strongly moral comedy suggests that the playwright wishes to change the state of the times, and make the audience see the error of their ways. Secondly, the typical rake figure of Restoration comedy is much diminished, and replaced by a moralised version: a sexually promiscuous rake is inexcusable in a play stressing the importance of loyalty and stability. Although he is the hero, Sir Charles Kinglove, his name giving allusions of course to the current monarch, is hardly rakish: he had previously refused Phlippa for being a Protestant’s daughter, exclaiming, “I made a Royal Conquest o’re my Passions!” (Image 8) and then tests

Camilla's loyalty when discovering she is the wife of Oldcut, setting her tasks to prove herself before he accepts her. Heartall may be considered more rakish with his treatment of Aurelia, but does not stray from her. In her essay 'Change, Scepticism and Uncertainty', Jessica Munns argues that such moralised rakes are "demonstrations of aristocratic male power and assertions of that power in the face of City and Whig political ascendancy" (p147). This case can be made in Heartall and Kinglove, who both engage in sexual relationships, but enter into them with a particular strategy behind them, as Philippa herself states in the first scene: "A Roundheads Daughter might have got a Cavalier, that might have liv'd to take his Grandfather by the Beard" (Image 8). They act not out of their own idle passions, but directly to help the Royal cause and safeguard its future. Kinglove would have been made even more attractive by the fact that William Smith played the role when it was first performed, a well-established actor who often played the hero of tragedies as well as the attractive rake Willmore in both parts of Aphra Behn's successful play The Rover.

In going against the grain of earlier sex comedies of the previous decade with this diminished rake, The Royalist marks a change in times. It is no longer the time for the excess and debauchery which so typified the Restoration period, and especially not in a playhouse where such free values could spread to the lower classes, and disrupt the Tory effort to instil a moral framework designed to subdue the masses and keep them in their place. Durfey's Preface expresses this concern for the state of the times, when "Ease, Luxury and Idleness prompt their Flagitious and unthinking Souls to Villany" (Image 3). It was a concern which Etheredge recorded as early as 1676: "Forms and ceremonies, the only things that uphold quality and greatness, are now

shamefully laid aside and neglected” (Man of Mode, 4.1. p166). With an effort to bring back “forms and ceremonies”, and with a hero able to check his passions through obedience to the Royal cause, Durfey is presenting a model for his audience to consider and act likewise.

Tory anxieties are expressed in The Royalist over the Whig drive for mass politics predominantly through the threat the common people could pose if the Whigs managed to keep up support and their cause fresh in the public mind. The Tory battle for the support of people was conducted in plays like The Royalist, and its existence as a printed text for all to buy is evidence that Durfey, despite all his Tory elitism, wanted his message to spread far and wide. His play firstly aims to kill off the Whig grip on the public once and for all, by so fundamentally undermining them by connecting them to the Interregnum Parliamentarians, and establishing them as scaremongers and in league with the Catholic threat which they formed to oppose. It next taps into the public need for self-security, offering in conservative subservience the assurance of always knowing one’s place while finally providing an attractive, moral framework to take away, and in presenting Kinglove as a noble hero, Durfey aims for people to identify not necessarily for the next successor to the throne, be it the Duke of Monmouth or the Duke of York, but with the current King, to which loyalty must be due. Durfey’s final message was clear: that despite the dissolution of the Oxford Parliament, the threat posed by the Whigs to the King and his courtly hangers-on was not over; these were still serious and anxious times.

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