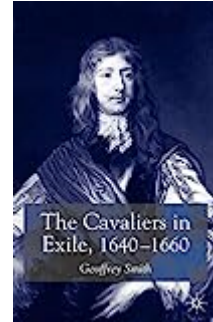


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Jerome De Groot. *Royalist Identities*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. xv + 222 pp. \$65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-4039-1900-7.

Geoffrey Smith. *The Cavaliers in Exile, 1640-1660*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. xiii + 252 pp. \$85.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-4039-1168-1.



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Royalists and Royalism in the English Revolution

Royalism has never been particularly fashionable among scholars of the British civil wars of the mid-seventeenth century. We do possess a number of first-class studies of those who were loyal to the monarch,[1] but when one compares this work to the multitude of books and articles on the various parliamentarians and sectaries of the period one is struck by the great imbalance between the two. Defeat, like familiarity, obviously breeds contempt. The publication of these two books, dealing with very different aspects of the royalist experience during the crises of the 1640s and 1650s, is therefore very welcome.

Geoffrey Smith's *The Cavaliers in Exile, 1640-1660* is an elegant, well-written examination of those who fled England during the turmoil of the civil wars and Interregnum. Smith is a natural writer, who structures his work wonderfully and deploys a crisp sense of humor at appropriate moments; his comment that the frantic actions of one particular royalist agent had a "Mother

Courage" ring to them is the punch line to a joke which he builds up gradually over a number of paragraphs.[2] Many thousands of royalists from a variety of walks of life fled Britain during these years. Some of them ended up as far afield as Transylvania, Persia, Russia, Ceylon, and Bombay. Smith's book, however, is tightly focused on about 200 soldiers and political figures from England who spent two or more years in exile at the various courts maintained by members of the exiled royal family in France, The Netherlands, and Germany. These criteria enable him to provide a detailed pen-picture of the core group of exiles. Anyone who has engaged in prosopographical research will appreciate the considerable skill and panache which Smith deploys in order to bring his cast of characters to life. He has done his job so well that his book will undoubtedly be the starting point for scholars interested in conducting further studies of the exile communities across Europe and beyond. It also sets a very high benchmark against which those scholars will

have to measure themselves.

One of the great strengths of this book is that it eschews the obsession with factions and factional politics which seems to enthrall so many who write on this topic. In the four decades or so since the publication of David Underdown's *Royalist Conspiracy in England, 1649-1660* (1960) it has generally been accepted that there were three factions among royalists in exile. Some scholars, however, have of late wasted much ink and paper in trying to detect and describe different permutations and combinations of royalist factions. Smith, by contrast, does not see faction as the key to royalist politics. He notes that most supporters of the king never adhered to a faction; many people moved between different factions at various times; and there were personal and familial relationships which cut across factions, just as there were intense political and personal disagreements between people who were supposedly members of the same faction. For Smith, the factional struggles of the 1650s were relatively minor matters which merely serve to highlight the insular, claustrophobic, and petty nature of life at the royal court during those years.

Despite its many strengths, there are a number of omissions from this book. Smith misses an important trick by ignoring cultural history in favor of a high political history based on a multitude of biographical details. We catch only fleeting glimpses of the fascinating cultural conflicts among the exiles—intersected as they were by a complex nexus of religion (Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Catholics), nationality (Irish, English, Scottish, and Welsh), and social status or class. The hero of Smith's book, Daniel O'Neill—the son of an Ulster Gaelic lord who had been brought up in England as an anglicized Protestant and acted as an agent for Charles II—would have been the ideal choice to explore some of these issues. One would also like to have seen an examination of how the exiles dealt with the cultures and languages of their adoptive countries, their involvement in the local economies, and their willingness (or otherwise) to learn the local languages and interact in society. Smith certainly does a wonderful job of bringing to life the terse intelligence reports of Cromwell's intelligence chief John Thurloe, but there are a number of occasions when he might usefully have consulted important sources on the continent. For example, his account of the murder of the Commonwealth's ambassador to Madrid by royalist exiles would have benefited enormously from the details of their confessions to the Spanish authorities, rather than merely relying on information received by Thurloe in London about their interrogations and trials.

Smith's reliance on traditional, high political narrative leads to a rather coy and unconvincing examination of what might have been one of the most interesting subjects in the book, the sexual mores of the royal court. He argues against the traditional image of Charles II's court as a place of licentious decadence by citing the surviving letters and correspondence of the courtiers themselves, as if the fact that a man does not record his most intimate or shameful actions is proof that they never took place. He attempts to defend Ned Progers, the libertine servant of Charles II who has been described as the king's pimp and "whore-master," by re-casting him as an extremely busy and trusted courtier who would have had "little time left for fornicating" (pp. 130-31). This rather strange comment brings to mind the contention by a biographer of William III that his subject could never have engaged in the homosexual activities of which his enemies accused him because his "tremendous burden of work left no time for it."³ A less traditional, more imaginative approach to the sources might have provided Smith with useful ways in which to investigate the insistent (and remarkably consistent) stories of sexual licence at the royal court.

Nobody could accuse Jerome De Groot's *Royalist Identities* of being too traditional, opening as it does with an examination of the meaning of "otherness" in a speech by the then U.S. Secretary of State, Colin Powell, in the days after 11 September 2001. The names of theorists such as Homi Bhabha, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Jürgen Habermas are more prominent in the index than almost all of the leading royalists of the 1640s. One can imagine the palpitations which such names will induce in some of the, shall we say, rather conservative scholars who have traditionally been interested in the subject of civil war royalism.

It would be unwise, however, to dismiss this book because of its tendency to theorize, sometimes successfully and sometimes perhaps not so successfully, the material which it examines. De Groot has read widely in the literature of the 1640s and he has an enviable familiarity with the manuscript sources generated by the royal court at Oxford. Scholars have traditionally concerned themselves with the question of what royalism actually was, but De Groot sets out to answer a potentially much more interesting and enlightening question: "What did royalism want to be?" His examination of the books, pamphlets, and manuscripts of the period allows him to describe the striking polarities which the royalists constructed between themselves and their enemies across a whole range of political, legal, religious, and cul-

tural tropes. He describes the royalist ideals of manliness and femininity, the metaphors of medicine and sickness, the languages associated with warfare, and the obsession with law and legality. Some of this has been attempted before by others, but De Groot is particularly good at teasing out the meanings implicit in a number of important tropes such as, say, the rather conventional metaphor of the king as the head of the body politic. The chapter on the cultural milieu of the court in the 1630s is particularly good, but is outdone by the excellent material on the censorship of royalist print at Oxford during the first Civil War. There is much good material here for historians and literary scholars alike.

De Groot, surprisingly, does not seem to like his royalist subjects very much. The royalists were, in his view, a feudal remnant of elitists and hierarchists who attempted to control and censor what readers could read and think in order to defend an “outmoded definition of monarchy” based on the supposedly preposterous idea of an absolute truth. By contrast, Parliament, as the champion of the forces of capitalism, allowed for a fuller, freer debate in its publications because it had a “more fluid, negotiable, permeable concept of nation” (both p. 23). This simplistic dichotomy between the competing sides in the Civil War is both puzzling and disappointing. It is puzzling because almost all of the characteristics which De Groot attributes to the royalists were also exhibited by the parliamentarians. For example, his complaint that royalism “presented a sexual orthodoxy of compulsive heterosexuality within a fixed family unit” (p. 118), seems to imply that parliamentarians like William Prynne or Oliver Cromwell were champions of free love.

On a much more important level, the simple dichotomies described by De Groot in the body of this book are disappointing because they jar with his introduction, which is an exciting and nuanced meditation on the complex collection of attitudes and positions which scholars, rather lazily, label as a single, stable, homogenous entity called “royalism.” He counsels us to be wary of the simple polarities of royalist versus Roundhead because they do not allow for the complexities and differences found during the period. He insists that “royalism” teemed with debate and difference, and that we must be aware of the multiplicity of voices adopted by those who professed to be loyal to the monarch. This is stirring stuff, but unfortunately his central question—“what did royalism want to be?”—does not allow him to develop these important insights. Despite his opening words about the need to move beyond the simple polarities of propaganda, his fo-

cus on how the royalists portrayed themselves and their enemies means that he is forced to confine himself to a consideration of precisely the misleading simplicities of which warns us to be wary. The tension between the body of the book and the introductory and concluding chapters is so great that one cannot but feel that *Royalist Identities* is actually two different books, or perhaps two different ways of approaching the same topic. The first book is an excellent argument about the complexities, nuances, and ambiguities of allegiance which, if it had been properly developed and explored, had the potential to change the way we see royalism and political allegiance during the civil wars. The second book, the one which takes up more than 90 percent of *Royalist Identities*, is a less innovative and challenging, but nevertheless very informative, account of the images and tropes which the royalists deployed in order to distinguish themselves from their opponents.

These two books are to be welcomed in their own right for the light they shed on particular areas of the royalist experience, a hitherto largely neglected area of civil war history. They are, however, also the harbingers of a number of important forthcoming works on royalism by scholars such as, among others, Marika Keblusek in Amsterdam and John Cronin in Florence. Now that almost every conceivable, tedious angle of the sectaries and so-called radicals of the 1640s and 1650s has been studied and revised (and on occasion re-revised) it is becoming increasingly clear that we can never hope to unlock the essential characteristics and dynamics of the conflict which engulfed Britain in the 1640s and 1650s until we know far, far more about those men and women from all levels of society who supported the king and thumbed their noses at the Puritans and Roundheads.

Notes

[1.] Ronald Hutton, *The Royalist War Effort, 1642-1646*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1999); David L. Smith, *Constitutional Royalism and the Search for Settlement, c. 1640-1649* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); David Underdown, *Royalist Conspiracy in England, 1649-1660* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960).

[2.] Those who do not understand the joke should consult what Bertold Brecht says it signifies “when heroics are called for” in *Mother Courage and Her Children*.

[3.] Stephen B. Baxter, *William III and the Defense of English Liberty, 1650-1702* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966), p. 352.

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