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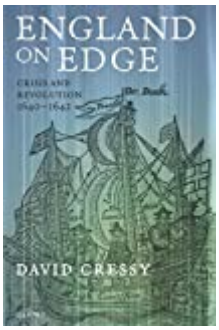

David Cressy. *England on Edge: Crisis and Authority, 1640-1642.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. xiv + 446 pp. $45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-928090-2.

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The Revolution Before the Revolution

David Cressyâs new book revisits that historical conundrum–"What was the English Revolution?" Cressyâs take is to return to the pre-revisionist work of Christopher Hill, Perez Zagorin and Hugh Trevor-Roper in suggesting that the revolution process had already begun before the official outbreak of hostilities in 1642. As with all of Cressyâs published output it is meticulously researched (the book is based upon sources from over forty different libraries and archives) and immensely readable. The range of primary material consulted ensures that Cressyâs analysis of the familiar events of 1640-1642 remains fresh, with much light shed on underexplored moments (the increasing use of the term "revolution" itself in political discourse, the assault on Lambeth Palace and the Kingâs departure from London following the failed attempt to arrest the five members, to name just a few examples). However, the book's great weakness lies in the fact that despite the wealth of material Cressy has uncovered to support his argument, at the end of more than four hundred pages it still remains unclear what this "revolution before the Revolution" (p. 426) amounted to.

The book begins by tackling the impact of the mobilisation and disbandment of the army raised to defeat the Scottish Covenanters–looking at the role of demobilised soldiers in both increasing agitation against the Caroline regime and also, largely via the officer ranks, contributing to the development of a Cavalier movement in defence of the King.[1] It then moves on to a discussion of the controversy over the Church, giving a good overview of the emergence and dominance of Laudianism before moving on to describe its overthrow in the years 1640 to 1642, a process which itself which gave rise to new religious fears, as puritan critics of Laudianism in turn became concerned with the emergence of radical sects and conservatives themselves re-grouped around a Jacobean vision of an episcopal church. Cressy agrees with much recent historiography in seeing popular political and religious unrest as being stimulated by oral, manuscript and, in particular, printed media. As he illustrates with many vivid examples, printed pamphlets presented authority figures, especially Laudian bishops, in an increasingly satirical, not to say scatological, light. The welter of critical material, whether broadsheets, "railing rhymes" or mass petitions, as Cressy convincingly shows, created a

sense of the "world turnâd upside down" long before the emergence of groups like the Levellers and Diggers in the late 1640s. The bookâs final, highly evocative section, covers the crisis of the winter of 1641-1642, as Charles made a final attempt to stifle the Parliamentary opposition only to be hounded by angry crowds out of his own capitol, forced to steal out of London, like his son James 46 years later, accompanied only by a handful of followers.

Though there is much of value in the book, it none the less fails to offer the major re-conceptualising of the English Revolution that the introduction promises. The highly engaging description of the lead up to war is followed by a conclusion that resorts to bullet-points in order to summarise the argument of the previous four-hundred pages (and one of these points–about the restructuring of relations between the different parts of the British Isles–is not discussed in-depth in the rest of the book which, as the title suggests, is heavily focused on England). There is a sense here of a book that sits somewhat uneasily between two stools, attempting, on the one hand, to provide a lively narrative account of the years 1640-1642 and on the other, to offer an analytic treatment of the breakdown of the Caroline government in Church and State and its social, political and religious consequences. This is reflected in the presentation of the book as well. There are copious footnotes, yet the discussion of the current historiography of the 1640s is, in many places, foreshortened. There is a timeline, maps, tables and illustrations that students will find helpful, but no bibliography. Crucially, Cressyâs focus on 1640-1642 means that he implicitly presents, somewhat implausibly, all important political and religious developments as occurring or originating in these two years. Hence, the soldiers sent to fight the covenanting forces only "discover" religion in the summer of 1640 (p. 91) and, we are told, puritans during the 1630s had "become silent and subdued" (p. 144), whereas other scholars, namely Andrew Foster, have convincingly argued that the Personal Rule was a period of religious polarisation and radicalisation.

In attempting to address both popular and academic audiences, Cressy fails to exploit his material as well as he might. Few would disagree with the revolutionary impact Cressy sees in the explosion of popular print, but his analysis of these works is unsophisticated compared to recent work by Jason Peacey, Joad Raymond and others. The same could be said of his discussion of radical religion and heresiography, arguably better handled in new works by Ann Hughes and David Como. Indeed, the greatest problem here is that though Cressy devotes most space to discussing popular politics, as opposed to events within Westminster, he doesnât engage with the sophisticated methodological frameworks that are now being applied to this material (most notably in John Walterâs work). So, though we are given a vivid impression of the unrest developing within English parishes, towns and cities, we gain little sense of what motivated iconoclasts, rioters and seditious talk, how we should understand popular behaviour and, even more importantly, how popular action was integrated into the bigger political picture. Indeed, at points, Cressy consciously retreats from analysis, as when referring to assaults on the physical fabric of churches: "It is impossible to quantify such incidents or fully to explain their background." (p.208). While Cressy may feel that shifting the focus away from Westminster represents a fresh approach to the politics of 1640-1642, it also leaves the reader with the impression that this was a completely unwilled and uncoordinated revolution, leading to a "war that nobody wanted, but nobody knew how to avoid" (p.420). This seems to return to the revisionist agenda that Cressy initially sets out to challenge (even, perhaps, a return to the popular, romantic picture of, in Sir William Wallerâs words, a "war without an enemy"). This is an exciting, enjoyable read that is great to dip into, but what we are left with is a book, the sum of whose excellent parts does not add up to a convincing whole.

[1] But see also H. Langeluddecke, "Law and Order in Seventeenth-Century England: The Organisation of Local Administration during the Personal Rule of Charles I", *Law and History Review*, 15, 1 (1997), pp. 49-76; " 'The Chiefest Strength and Glory of This Kingdom': Arming and Training the 'Perfect Militia' in the 1630s", *English Historical Review*, 118 (2003), pp. 1264-1303.

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