

Introduction

The Other Voice

The voice of Elizabeth Poole (1622–1668?) is truly “other.” The daughter of a householder, she was not formally educated for a life of letters. A girl who ran away from home to join an Independent Baptist congregation, she was a dissenter from both her family and the established church. A seamstress, she earned her own living. A student of radical ministers and mystics, she imbibed teachings derived from alchemy and theosophy. A prophet, she both enjoyed respect for her wisdom and experienced denigration as a seductress and a witch. The author of prophecies and commentaries, she vexed conventional distinctions among literary, religious, and political writing. But she is worthy of being recognized as a significant “other voice” today because she wrote about the unexpected role she played as a prophet in one of the most dramatic moments in history: the unprecedented beheading of an English monarch, Charles I, by his own Parliament in the winter of 1649.¹

The daughter of Robert Poole, Elizabeth Poole was baptized in the London parish of St Gregory by St Paul’s on December 20, 1622.² She became a seamstress by trade. While sewing for a living may have gained her a degree of self-sufficiency, it was not known to be easy or lucrative. As was said of “the Distressed Seamstress” in an old ballad of the same name: She abides in “a sad wretched state, / Laboriously toiling, both night, noon, and morning, / For a wretched subsistence.”³ If this in any way characterizes Poole’s life as a young woman, it is even less surprising that she, like a number of men and women who worked in trades, was attracted to the radical religious groups springing up all over England in the mid-seventeenth century.

These groups were known for their “enthusiasm,” that is, for seeking a transcendent experience of ecstatic union with one another and with God.⁴ Their

1. For an outline of Elizabeth Poole’s life, see Manfred Brod, “Poole, Elizabeth (bap. 1622?, d. in or after 1668), prophetess,” *ODNB*, ed. Lawrence Goldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004–).

2. Parish records, St Gregory by St Paul’s, London, Guildhall Library, MS 10231. In Manfred Brod, “Politics and Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England: The Case of Elizabeth Poole,” *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 31, no. 3 (Autumn, 1999): 395–412, Brod also cites the International Genealogical Index. As he additionally notes, a Robert Poole was “reported in 1638 living at the West End of St. Paul’s, where he paid £20 per year in rent, about average for the district.” Brod’s source for the information regarding Robert Poole is T. C. Dale, *The Inhabitants of London in 1638*, 2 vols. (London: Society of Genealogists, 1645), 1:65.

3. Roy Palmer, *A Ballad History of England: From 1588 to the Present Day* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1979).

4. For vivid accounts of radical sectarian activity, see J. F. McGregor and Barry Reay, eds., *Radical Religion in the English Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); and Andrew Bradstock,

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preachers were often self-styled and unschooled, electing to depart from ecclesiastical scripts and to preach extemporaneously and passionately as the spirit moved them. They believed in visions and other signs that the age of miracles was not over. They allowed women to speak in church and at times to prophesy. Some even allowed women to preach, at least to other women.⁵ Because their meetings were illegal, they met in barns, fields, taverns, and homes. Baptists, the denomination to which Poole gravitated, also baptized one another in rivers and streams and healed themselves through ceremonies involving the laying on of hands. Fifth Monarchists believed that Christ was due to return and establish the New Jerusalem in England. Ranters believed that in the age of the new spirit, life was governed by spiritual and physical love and sin was no more. Adamites were said to practice nakedness as a return to Edenic purity. Muggletonians followed the example of the two witnesses from Revelation in believing in the power of prophecy and the inevitability of witnessing the end-times and the onset of a new dispensation. Ranters denied the authority of institutions and upheld the divinity of the spirit within each individual. They ranted or cursed in their preachings, holding all speech to be divine when uttered in a state of grace. Diggers founded agrarian communes and hoped to establish communism in England. These groups' experiments with alternative practices and belief systems scandalized polite society to the point that its adherents believed "the world had been 'turned upside down.'"⁶ In reaction, they had dissenters arrested, fined, and/or subjected to various forms of corporal punishment. Some groups, such as the Diggers, died out; others, such as the Baptists, persevered.

Like Poole, many members of alternative congregations moved from religious dissent to political activism when they participated in the English Civil War of the 1640s.⁷ The civil wars were a struggle for power waged by Royalist Cavaliers, on the one side, and Parliamentary Roundheads, on the other.⁸ Their military confrontations were only one dimension, albeit a violent and costly one, of their all-encompassing conflicts with one another, conflicts that dominated English culture and debates about religious and political ideas for decades. Royalist Cavaliers were the king's men, dressing in lace and velvet, wearing their hair long and curled, celebrating the leisured life of wine, women, and song, attending

Radical Religion in Cromwell's England: A Concise History from the English Civil War to the End of the Commonwealth (London: I. B. Taurus, 2011).

5. For a report on women preaching to other women, see Anonymous, *A Discovery of Six Women Preachers* (London: 1641), pp. 136–141, in appendix 1.

6. Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1984).

7. Blair Worden, *The English Civil Wars: 1640–1660* (London: Phoenix, 2010).

8. Christopher Hibbert, *Cavaliers and Roundheads: The English Civil War, 1642–1649* (New York: Scribner, 1993).

mandatory church services, honoring the seasonal festivities and rituals established by their lords and clergy, and touting the virtues of “court and country.”⁹ Their supporters were a combination of peasants and aristocrats who generally came from the shires and other rural areas in the agrarian north and west of England. The Parliamentary Roundheads came from cities, including London, port towns, commercial and industrial centers, and other developed areas in the south and east. They were known as Roundheads because they cut their hair short to signify their commitment to God above all others, including the king. They promulgated godliness, righteousness, and industry and believed they were upholding the ancient English customs of liberty and a balance of power between sovereign and Parliament. They rejected Charles I’s growing absolutism, and it was their constant challenges to his authority that led him to declare war on Parliament and its supporters in 1641. After eight years of bloody warfare, his Royalist troops admitted defeat and he was held prisoner while awaiting trial.

The debates over what to do with the defeated king and how to settle a new government in his stead were tense and prolonged.¹⁰ They took place most intensively during the years 1648–1649 at the royal palace of Whitehall and involved members of Parliament, officers of Parliament’s New Model Army, rank-and-file soldiers, religious radicals, and political activists. The story of how a young runaway Baptist seamstress came on two different days to deliver visions to the General Council of the Army—styling herself their “servant in the Church and Kingdom of Christ”¹¹—during their deliberations of England’s future forms one of the most fascinating chapters in the history of “other voices” in English literature and history. Poole’s visions were delivered in a combination of spoken and written form. They consisted of advice “concerning the KING in reference to his being brought to Trial, what they are therein to do, and what not, both concerning his Office and Person,” as Poole puts it.¹² She had these visions printed a short time thereafter, and then, when her divinely inspired advice was, as she states, “disobeyed,” she felt compelled by subsequent attacks on her character to follow that publication up with two other pamphlets, *An Alarm of War* and a second *Alarm of War*, both affirming her commitment to her original messages and defending her reputation as a godly spokeswoman.¹³ Her pamphlets are complicated

9. Perez Zagorin, *Court and the Country: Beginning of the English Revolution* (Sydney, Australia: Law Book Company of Australasia, 1969).

10. Austin Woolrych, *Soldiers and Statesmen: The General Council of the Army and Its Debates, 1647–1648* (New York: Clarendon, 1987); Charles Spenser, *Killers of the King: The Men Who Dared to Execute Charles I* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

11. Elizabeth Poole, *A Vision: Wherein Is Manifested the Disease and Cure of the Kingdom* (London: 1649), p. 68. Page number refers to the present edition.

12. Poole, *A Vision*, p. 60.

13. Elizabeth Poole, *An Alarm of War* (London: 1649), pp. 69–81, and *An[other] Alarm of War* (London: 1649), pp. 82–103. Page numbers refer to the present edition.

combinations of prophecies, political and religious commentary, letters, complaints, self-vindication, self-promotion, and lament. They challenge us to expand our definition of literature to the furthest extreme in order to accommodate their eccentricities and to accept that political theory can come in the most unlikely of forms from the most unlikely of actors on the historical stage, especially political theory that is critical of the royal creed of patriarchalism and interested in promoting a more democratic alternative. Poole's "other voice," then, speaks at not only an intriguing moment in history when a king is executed but also at a pivotal juncture in history when ancient forms of paternalistic government begin to give way to modern forms of popular rule.¹⁴ As Poole writes, "the Conquest was not without divine pleasure, whereby Kings came to reign, though through lust they tyrannized, which God excuses not, but judges, and his judgements are fallen heavy, as you see, upon *Charles your Lord*."¹⁵

The "Fiercest Furies": Elizabeth Poole's Historical Context

When King James VI of Scotland assumed the English throne in 1605 and became James I of England, he was following in the wake of decades of Elizabeth I's self-representation as a "virgin queen." Thus he was eager to establish his persona through the traditional figures of fatherhood, marriage, and headship.¹⁶ To do so, he crafted a number of documents laying out his "patriarchalist" political philosophy.¹⁷ His 1609 speech to Parliament provides a particularly stark articulation of rule by the father-king. "The state of monarchy is the supremest thing upon earth," James declared, for "kings are not only God's lieutenants upon earth, and sit upon God's throne, but even by God himself they are called gods."¹⁸ As a god, "a king is truly *parens patriae*, the politic father of his people."¹⁹ Thus, he, like God, enjoys the right over his "children" to "create, or destroy, make, or unmake at his

14. For a useful overview of the revolution, see the introduction in Michael J. Braddick, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the English Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

15. Poole, *An Alarm of War*, p. 67.

16. For an excellent account of the life of King James, see Alan Stewart, *The Cradle King: The Life of James VI and I, the First Monarch of a United Great Britain* (London: St. Martin's, 2003). See also J. Wormald, "James VI and I (1566–1625), king of Scotland, England, and Ireland," *ODNB*.

17. Along with speeches to Parliament, James wrote two major treatises on kingship: *The True Law of Free Monarchies* (Edinburgh: 1597; rpt. London: 1642) and *Basilikon Doron* (Edinburgh: 1599). See also Gordon J. Schochet, *Patriarchalism in Political Thought* (London: Basic, 1975); and Gordon J. Schochet, "Patriarchalism, Politics and Mass Attitudes in Stuart England," *Historical Journal* 12, no. 3 (1969): 413–41.

18. James VI and I, *The King's Majesty's Speech to the Lords and Commons of this Present Parliament at Whitehall* (London: 1609), 6.

19. James VI and I, *The King's Majesty's Speech to the Lords and Commons of this Present Parliament at Whitehall*, 6.

pleasure, to give life, or send death, to judge all, and to be judged nor accountable to none.”²⁰ Subjects owe both their souls and bodies to their king because he also functions as “the head of this microcosm of the body of man,” thereby possessing the power of “directing all the members of the body to that use which the judgement in the head thinks most convenient.”²¹ As the head, the king is also the body’s “physician,” responsible for resolving its “ailments” by “applying sharp cures,” cutting off “corrupt members,” and/or letting “blood in what proportion it thinks fit, and as the body may spare.”²² As James elaborates in *The True Law of Free Monarchies* (1597), all kings, starting with the first king of the Old Testament, Saul, are endowed with these powers. This means all the land is “wholly theirs” and by them “distributed” and that, “of necessity,” they are “the authors and makers of the laws” rather than subjects to them.²³ Even tyrants must be endured because kingship is a “yoke” that is “laid upon” the people by God and can never be removed regardless of “how hard that ever it seem to be.”²⁴ Thus when “malefactors or rebellious subjects” endanger the “health of the commonwealth,” the king “must care and provide for their remedy, in case it be curable; and if otherwise, cut them off for fear of infecting the rest.”²⁵

This language of curing and protecting sounds benevolent. However, when James makes such claims, he is referring to the fact that he—like monarchs before him—is licensed to literally torture and kill people deemed threatening to his welfare or that of the kingdom at large. This policy of *peine forte et dure* (pain strong and long) was not officially legal in England but was rationalized as an “instrument of state” and used by the Common Law Courts and the king’s extra-legal Privy Council (the so-called court of the Star Chamber).²⁶ During the sixteenth century, torture had been deployed by the Catholic Queen Mary against Protestants and by the Protestant monarchs Henry VIII, Edward VI, and Elizabeth I, respectively, against Catholics and radical Protestants. In the last years of Elizabeth’s reign, “the rack seldom stood idle in the Tower.”²⁷ When James was in power, he used his 1610 speech to reassure Parliament that the king’s power over matters of

20. James VI and I, *The King’s Majesty’s Speech to the Lords and Commons of this Present Parliament at Whitehall*, 7.

21. James VI and I, *The King’s Majesty’s Speech to the Lords and Commons of this Present Parliament at Whitehall*, 6, 10.

22. James VI and I, *The King’s Majesty’s Speech to the Lords and Commons of this Present Parliament at Whitehall*, 10.

23. James VI and I, *The True Law of Free Monarchies*, 41.

24. James VI and I, *The True Law of Free Monarchies*, 6.

25. James VI and I, *The True Law of Free Monarchies*, 10–11.

26. E. G. Black, “Torture Under English Law” (1927). https://scholarship.law.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=8145&context=penn_law_review/.

27. Black, “Torture Under English Law.”

life and death was limited, since it was “ordained by God *ad aedificationem, non ad destructionem*,” meaning, for constructive rather than destructive purposes. But James continued to “cure” the problems he believed plagued his kingdom by making liberal use of the power of *peine forte et dure*. And as he made clear, the decisions regarding who or what constituted a disease were his alone: after all, no entity would remove its own head; much less would a head cut itself off. Even if a king is so “monstrously vicious” that “his inordinate lusts and passions carry him away,” it must be understood that it is the king’s subjects who are at fault, because “a wicked king is sent by God for a curse to his people, and a plague for their sins.”²⁸ The “only lawful means” of dealing with a tyrant is for his subjects to “move God to relieve them of their heavy curse” through “patience,” “earnest prayers,” and “amendment of their [own] lives.”²⁹

We can only imagine how, less than four decades later, in 1648, James’s pronouncements would have resonated in the mind of his son and heir, Charles I, as he languished in prison, waiting to learn if he would face trial and even possibly execution for tyranny after declaring war on Parliament in 1641.³⁰ Something had occurred in history that made it possible for his subjects to lay claim to the royal power of *peine dure et forte* and to diagnose their head as the corrupt member of the body politic that needed to be cured, possibly cut off, if the body politic was to survive. What had Charles I done? As was charged against him by the January 6th *Act of the Commons of England Assembled in Parliament for Erecting of a High Court of Justice for the Trying and Judging of Charles Stuart, King of England* (1649):

Whereas it is notorious that Charles Stuart, the now King of England, not content with those many encroachments which his predecessors had made upon the people in their rights and freedoms, hath had a wicked design totally to subvert the ancient and fundamental laws and liberties of this nation, and in their place to introduce an arbitrary and tyrannical government, and that besides all other evil ways and means to bring this design to pass, he hath prosecuted it with fire and sword, levied and maintained a civil war in the land, against the Parliament and kingdom; whereby the country hath been miserably wasted, the public treasure exhausted, trade decayed, thousands of people murdered, and infinite other mischiefs committed; for all which high and treasonable offenses the said Charles

28. James VI and I, *The True Law of Free Monarchies*, 13, 14.

29. James VI and I, *The True Law of Free Monarchies*, 14.

30. To learn more about the fraught life of Charles I, see Christopher Hibbert, *Charles I: A Life of Religion, War, and Treason* (London: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2015). See also Mark Kishlansky and John Morrill, “Charles I (1600–1649), King of England, Scotland, and Ireland,” *ODNB*.

Stuart might long since justly have been brought to exemplary and condign punishment.³¹

Because Charles had been defeated after his attempt to deploy the power of life and death by declaring war on his subjects, he was now “subject” to his conqueror’s will and submissive to their declaration that he was the sick member in need of removal by way of execution.

Charles was bitter and dismayed: in his eyes, he had followed his father’s dictates in believing it was he, as the king and patriarch, who possessed the power of life and death over his subjects, rather than the other way around. For even as James had also declared that kings who transgressed their “limits” would be dealt with as tyrants, he insisted they would not be punished by Parliament or the people, for these entities possessed no right to pass judgement upon their sovereign. Rather “wicked kings” would be “remitted” to God for he is “their only ordinary judge.”³² Those who believe they have the right to call their king to account and possibly even to behead him are Satanic usurpers of divine power—hardly freedom fighters. As Charles I insisted right up to the moment of his beheading, it is “sedition in subjects to dispute what a king may do in the height of his power.”³³ If the people possess any “liberty and freedom,” it “consists in having the government of those laws, by which their life and their goods may be most their own.”³⁴ It is “not for having share in government,” for a “subject and a sovereign are clean different things.”³⁵ Because Charles’s execution took place in 1648/9, he did not live long enough to read the treatise supporting his assertion that a subject and a sovereign were “clean different things,” written by Robert Filmer in 1680 and titled *Patriarcha*.³⁶ In this tract, Filmer grounds subjection to the patriarch in the “original grant of government” that God bestowed upon Adam after Eve ate the forbidden fruit. In this first act of submitting one person to another’s rule, God commanded Eve to obey her husband. From that point forward, the fates of women and all social subordinates resided with their heads as those heads consisted of fathers, brothers, husbands, masters, lords, and kings. Those subjects who mistook themselves for sovereigns were, as Charles I put it some thirty years

31. Parliament of England, *Act of the Commons of England Assembled in Parliament, for Erecting of a High Court of Justice, for the Trying and Judging of Charles Stuart, King of England* (London: 1648/9).

32. James VI and I, *The True Law of Free Monarchies*, 16.

33. Charles I, “Speech at His Trial” (<https://constitution.org/1-History/primarysources/charles.html>).

34. Charles I, “Speech at His Trial.”

35. Charles I, “Speech at His Trial.”

36. Sir Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha; or, the Natural Power of Kings* (London: 1680), chapter 1, section 4. See G. Burgess, “Filmer, Sir Robert (1588?–1653), political writer,” *ODNB*.

earlier in a poem he allegedly wrote while still a prisoner in Carisbrooke Castle, “the fiercest furies.”³⁷

So who were these “furies” who refused to recognize the power of the patriarch? On what terms did they accrue to themselves the power of life and death over their father? In no small part, they were the architects of democracy—men *and women* from a wide range of backgrounds who voiced a chorus of shared precepts that rejected patriarchalism and asserted instead that all were rights-bearing “sovereign individuals” or heads unto themselves.³⁸ To earn this claim, they drew upon a strain of “resistance theory” that originated with such ancient philosophers as Cicero and was adapted by such Renaissance thinkers as John Major, who representatively stated, “A people may deprive their king and his posterity of all authority, when the king’s worthlessness calls for such a course, just as it first had power to appoint him king.”³⁹ Renaissance-era resistance theorists frequently cited the Christian precept that the one true king was Christ. Human kings ruled by the consent of the people and so were not simply the makers of laws but were also subject to God’s higher law. If they transgressed that higher law, then their subjects were free, indeed obligated, to define them as the true Satanic rebels and remove them. The myriad of individuals who articulated these ideas in a wide variety of modes and situations paved the way for the writings of John Locke, who in *Two Treatises of Government* (1698) declared that because humans were “all the workmanship of one omnipotent, and infinitely wise maker,” then “they are his property, whose workmanship they are, made to last during his, not one another’s pleasure.”⁴⁰ And “unless it be to do justice on an offender,” no one can “take away, or impair the life, or what tends to the preservation of the life, the liberty, health, limb, or goods of another.”⁴¹

The individuals who anticipated Locke by drawing upon earlier resistance theories and developing them in the circumstances surrounding the trial of Charles I included Elizabeth Poole. The two meetings at which Poole appeared

37. Charles I, “Majesty in Misery; or, An Imploration to the King of Kings, in *The Memoirs of the Lives and Actions of James and William, Dukes of Hamilton and Castle-Herald*, ed. Gilbert Burnet, 379 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1852). On *EEBO*, this work is attributed to the poet George Wither. See George Wither, “Majesty in Misery; or, An Imploration to the King of Kings” (London: 1648).

38. Gary S. De Krey, *Following the Levellers*, Vol. 1: *Political and Religious Radicals in the English Civil War and Revolution, 1645–1649* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

39. John Major, *John Major’s Greater Britain* (Edinburgh: T. and A. Constable, 1892), 213–14. See also A. Broadie, “Mair [Major], John (c. 1467–1550), historian, philosopher, and theologian,” *ODNB*.

40. John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (1698, Online Library of Liberty: <https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/locke-the-two-treatises-of-civil-government-hollis-ed/>), treatise 2, chapter 2. See J. Milton, “Locke, John (1632–1704), philosopher,” *ODNB*. See also Julian Franklin, *John Locke and the Theory of Sovereignty: Mixed Monarchy and the Right of Resistance in the Political Thought of the English Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

41. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, treatise 2, chapter 2.

(under the auspices of her known role as a prophetess) before the officers of Parliament's army as they occupied Whitehall Palace took place after their victory over the king in the civil wars. At these meetings, the officers exercised what they believed was their right to decide whether or not the king should live or die for warring against his own people. Poole certainly felt empowered to participate in this mission, and to do so while believing her message was given to her by God. Far from seeing herself as a fury or a guilty and powerless subject such as Eve, Poole, like her army brethren, believed she possesses the sovereign right to "cure" the nation by advising the officers to try the king "in his conscience," for in her estimation, and that of many others, he had surely exceeded his limits as their husband and father. Unlike a number of her fellows, however, Poole urged the council to refrain from killing him. Instead, she offered the novel solution of "divorcing" the king rather than executing him. As we shall explore in greater detail, this unique encounter between the patriarch and the prophetess represents no less than an encounter between a divine right theory of kingship that was increasingly under siege and an emergent philosophy of popular sovereignty in which individuals claimed the right to resist, depose, and separate themselves from a ruler who did not acknowledge or respect their liberties. Wives, too, it would seem—insofar as they represented not only women but all subordinates—had rights.

Many Americans associate the idea of a principled revolt against monarchy with the American Revolution of 1776. But England's Parliament waged its own cultural and martial wars against Charles I in the 1640s and, after defeating his troops and beheading him for treason, experimented with republican government in the 1650s, over a century before colonists overthrew King George III and founded the American republic.⁴² Elizabeth Poole's appearance on the historical stage in the late 1640s as an "other voice" thus places her at one of the most dramatic junctures in not only English history but also world history as it has evolved to define liberty as freedom from unelected forms of government. As Michael Kirby explains,

The trial and execution of a king is a remarkable event in the history of any nation. The trial and execution of a King of England is so extraordinary a happening, in one of the world's oldest and most successful monarchies, that it ought not to be forgotten. The vivid events of the trial and execution which followed, meant that no absolute monarch could again successfully claim the autocratic powers which King Charles I had enjoyed. These facts resound even today throughout the world. They underlie the rights of the people which

42. Kevin Phillips, *The Cousins' Wars: Religion, Politics, Civil Warfare, and the Triumph of Anglo-America* (London: Basic, 1999).

give ultimate legitimacy to the constitutional arrangements in countries still unknown when the King faced his end.⁴³

To be sure, not all historians have agreed that the English Civil Wars—or what Poole referred to as the “distresses of this land”—represented an authentically republican revolution against monarchy. The idea that it did was established by the “Whig” historians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who argued that the wars were the culmination of centuries worth of desire on the part of Parliament’s House of Commons to limit the increasingly absolutist ambitions of the Crown in order to protect the “ancient” rights of *freeborn* Englishmen.⁴⁴

Marxist scholars of the 1960s and 1970s concurred that the wars represented a revolution, but they attributed the revolt to a class struggle between the aristocracy and tradesmen, emergent industrialists, yeomen farmers, and liberalized members of the gentry who participated in the religious and political dissent movements that played a part in a larger battle for the ultimate goal of communist emancipation.⁴⁵ Both Whig and Marxist views were challenged in the 1970s by “revisionist” historians who countered that the wars had less to do with long-term conflicts among readily articulated sets of ideas—whether those ideas comprised liberal aspirations for liberty and rights or Marxist endeavors to achieve absolute class equality within a propertyless social order—than they did with internecine disputes and power grabs within the court itself. These disputes stemmed from historically specific circumstances and the vicissitudes of particular personalities and practices rather than the long historic unfolding of a political or economic “logic.”⁴⁶

43. Michael Kirby, “The Trial of King Charles I: Defining Moment for Our Constitutional Liberties” (London: Anglo-Australian Lawyers’ Association, January 22, 1999): http://www.hcourt.gov.au/assets/publications/speeches/former-justices/kirbyj/kirbyj_charle88.html/.

44. The classic texts of Whig history include Samuel Gardiner, *The Fall of the Monarchy of Charles I, 1637–1649*, volumes 1–2 (London: Longmans, Green, 1882); Samuel Gardiner, *The History of England from the Accession of James I to the Outbreak of the Civil War, 1603–1642*, volumes 1–10 (London: Longmans, Green, 1883); Samuel Gardiner, *History of the Great Civil War, 1642–1649*, volumes 1–4 (London: Longmans, Green, 1901); and Samuel Gardiner, *Oliver Cromwell* (London: London: Longmans, Green, 1901). See also Charles H. Firth, *Oliver Cromwell and the Rule of the Puritans in England* (New York: Putnam, 1900); Charles H. Firth, *Cromwell’s Army: A History of the English Soldier during the Civil Wars, the Commonwealth, and the Protectorate* (London: Methuen, 1902); and Charles H. Firth, *The Last Years of the Protectorate* (London: Longmans, Green, 1909).

45. See, for example, A. L. Morton, *The Story of the English Revolution* (London: Communist Party of Great Britain, 1948); Christopher Hill, *The Century of Revolution: 1603–1714* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992); and Christopher Hill, *Liberty Against the Law* (New York: Viking, 1996).

46. For examples of revisionist history, see Conrad Russell, ed., *The Origins of the English Civil War* (London: Palgrave, 1973); and Conrad Russell, ed., *Unrevolutionary England, 1603–1642* (London: Hambledon, 1990).

David Norbrook has taken issue with this approach, stating that “a cultural theory ought not to lead to the logical decision that the English Revolution cannot have happened.”⁴⁷ Indeed, Norbrook argues that students of American history need to be more aware of the American revolution’s roots in and indebtedness to its English counterpart of a hundred years earlier. What is more, in his statement regarding cultural theory, Norbrook criticizes not only revisionists but also 1980s “new historicist” and “cultural materialist” scholars who asserted that any revolution, waged in any context, including Renaissance England, did not represent true dissent or “subversion” but was rather a “scare tactic” generated by institutional authorities so that they could “contain” their own manufactured threats in ways that allowed them to rationalize their authority. In keeping with this perspective, new historicists and cultural materialists, like revisionists, tend to focus less upon the literatures of the Civil Wars and more on literatures produced by and for the court—a corpus constituted through patronage that, in their analyses, illustrated how dissent was generated by authorities who could then heroically resolve it. In this “closed economy” of deference and subjection, real historical change was difficult.⁴⁸

Like Norbrook, James Holstun has challenged this analysis, reasserting the value of both Whig and Marxist interpretations by drawing attention to the numerous voices of dissent that populated the newly emergent public sphere of print and debate of the mid-seventeenth century, whether those voices represent proto-liberal, proto-communist, or other genuinely heterodox views. As Holstun argues, if we ignore the concerns of these disputatious voices and focus instead upon the court’s internal struggles and/or its wishful fantasies of complete control over increasingly discontented subjects, then we fail to craft a complex model of the ideational dimensions of the remarkable events that comprised this truly revolutionary period: “the two Civil Wars, the rise of [Parliament’s] New Model Army and the Putney Debates, the regicide and its aftermath, the formation of a Royalist counter-culture in exile, the Leveller Rising of 1649, the appearance of female prophets, the proliferation of political theory (patriarchalist, Hobbist, casuist, democratic, socialist, republican) and religious sects (Independents, Separatists, Baptists, Ranters, Quakers, Muggletonians, and millenarians of various stripes).”⁴⁹ And as Gaby Mahlberg and Dirk Wiemann add, while the ideas that drove these events and groups varied, there is an identifiable “core logic” of “revolutionary

47. David Norbrook, “The Life and Death of Renaissance Man,” *Raritan* 8 (1999): 89–110 (108).

48. See, for example, Stephen Orgel, *The Illusion of Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology, and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*, 3rd ed. (London: Red Globe, 2010); and Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

49. James Holstun, ed., *Pamphlet Wars: Prose in the English Revolution* (London: Frank Cass, 1992), 4.

republicanism” that links them, “namely[,] that absolute monarchy—whatever its adherents might claim to the contrary—was inherently arbitrary, and thus enslaved its subjects.”⁵⁰

Elizabeth Poole’s remarkable life intersects with an astonishing number of the factors that constitute this more dynamic model of anti-patriarchalist contestation that Holstun describes, and her writings help constitute the opposition to absolutely monarchy that unites the otherwise diverse and at times fragmented opposition to the king. The fact that she was a woman has made her especially interesting to scholars. Indeed, debates over the causes and effects of the wars produced corresponding debates over the power that women may have had to participate in and affect the civil wars. There is no explanation for Poole’s presence at the Whitehall debates over the king’s fate. This omission has led scholars such as David Underdown and Brian Patton to surmise that she was a mere pawn of major male power brokers.⁵¹ Because these power brokers brought her to Whitehall to exploit her reputation as a prophetess for their own political ends, they contend, Poole herself had little effect on the proceedings. But as scholars such as Diane Purkiss and Sue Wiseman have argued, women were not just victims of the wars but helped to make them and Poole was no exception.⁵² Even though she was a woman and an obscure seamstress from a small village, Poole’s “other voice” could not be contained and is with us today because, as an early adapter of print capitalism, a religious dissenter, a recognized prophet, a partial ally of the Levellers, and a critic of patriarchalist monarchy, she became an unlikely but noteworthy spokesperson for republican precepts as they were frequently advanced through a synthesis of political, philosophical, and religious discourses. If we follow Holstun and others in moving from a “great man” theory of history to an understanding of history as a phenomenon forged by broader-based movements, forces, and subcultures, then we can identify Elizabeth Poole as part of an influential culture of opposition that affected such early liberal republican English thinkers as John Locke and the American revolutionaries.

50. Gaby Mahlberg and Dirk Wiemann, eds., *Perspectives on English Revolutionary Republicanism* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

51. David Underdown, *Pride’s Purge: Politics in the English Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 183.

52. Diane Purkiss, *The English Civil War: Papists, Gentlewomen, Soldiers, and Witchfinders in the Birth of Modern Britain* (London: Harper Perennial, 2007); Susan Wiseman, *Conspiracy and Virtue: Women, Writing, and Politics in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

“The Lord Has a Controversy with the Great and Mighty Men of Earth”: The Historical Context of the English Civil Wars

The Civil War battles of the 1640s were brutal.⁵³ As Elizabeth Poole would later characterize these exceptional years in her messages to Parliament’s officers, it was a time when “the Lord has a controversy with the great and mighty men of earth.”⁵⁴ There were three rounds of such “controversies”; each conveys the degree to which the desire to limit or abolish patriarchalism informs the actions of those who fomented them. The first began in 1641 when, after a decade and a half of heated confrontations with Parliament, King Charles I declared war on his own people. The war lasted until 1646. Supporters of the king believed he had the right to exercise the power of life and death over his rebellious subjects, while his opponents upheld the idea, dating back to the Magna Carta, that as Parliament stated in its *Petition of Right* (1628), the people possessed their own “rights and liberties, according to the laws and statutes of this realm.”⁵⁵ While England’s Parliament had not yet become the sort of democratic or representative body it is today, it did act as a balance of power that held the sovereign to some semblance of a higher rule of law. Even more to the point regarding Charles I, Parliament tried to hold him to some semblance of fiscal restraint. The *Petition of Right* was issued in no small part because from the time Charles took power in 1628, he issued such extreme demands as insisting that Parliament give him the ample funding he needed to continue his father’s involvement of England in Europe’s Thirty Years’ War (1618–1648).⁵⁶ Parliament’s resistance to funding this long and costly dynastic conflict was so staunch that Charles was emboldened to dissolve Parliament and declare martial law over large parts of the kingdom. When he recalled Parliament in 1628 to again demand funding, Parliament used the *Petition of Right* to ask Charles to concede to their new law that “from thenceforth no person should be compelled to make any Loans to the King against his will because such Loans were against

53. Michael Braddick, *God’s Fury, England’s Fire: A New History of the English Civil Wars* (London: Penguin, 2009).

54. Poole, *A Vision*, p. 62.

55. Parliament of England, *Petition of Right* (1628, Constitution Society: <https://constitution.org/1-History/eng/petright.htm>), clause XI.

56. The war was waged by Charles’s brother-in-law, Frederick V, Elector Palatine (married to Charles’s sister, Elizabeth of Bohemia), and Christian IV of Denmark to try to retake their hereditary lands and titles from the Habsburg Monarchy. Charles’s intervention consisted of warring with Spain in hopes that he could coerce its Catholic king, Philip IV, to persuade the Holy Roman Emperor, Ferdinand II, to return the disputed territories to Frederick in conjunction with his title as “the Electorate of the Palatinate.” See R. Asch, “Elizabeth, Princess [Elizabeth Stuart] (1596–1662), queen of Bohemia and electress palatine, consort of Frederick V,” *ODNB*.

reason and the franchise of the Land.”⁵⁷ Charles was enraged to the point where he felt justified in not only dissolving Parliament yet again but in governing alone under a policy of “Personal Rule” until 1640. While Charles asserted his right to do so on the basis of ancient custom, his detractors saw it as further proof of his growing absolutism, referring to it as his “Eleven Years’ Tyranny” and launching special objections to the fact that, deprived of Parliament funding, he continued to raise monies through such “extralegal” means as imposing naval taxes—or “ship money”—on inland counties.

Despite the anger such measures provoked, Charles insisted that he alone possessed the power to head his “body politic.” While he reconvened Parliament in 1640, he did so not to ameliorate his subjects’ concerns but to pass legislation that would finance yet another war. This war would involve a campaign against Scotland for deviating from the mandatory practices of the Church of England. But this new Parliament also stuck to the commitment made by its predecessors to honor monarchy only insofar as its scope was limited and Parliament’s power as a guarantor of that limitation was respected. Because of its unwillingness to fulfill Charles’s demands for war monies, the newly convened Parliament was dissolved by the bitter king within a mere three weeks of its convening in 1641, thereby earning it the name of “the Short Parliament.” Fortunately for Parliament, the Short Parliament had used its three weeks to pass the Triennial Act, a piece of legislation requiring Parliament to be called at least once every three years and stipulating that, if the king failed to issue the summons himself, members could assemble on their own. This act did indeed allow the members of the former “Short Parliament” to reconvene on their own authority and rule until 1660, thereby earning it the more distinguished title of the “Long Parliament.” This Long Parliament also took advantage of its time by passing more laws limiting Crown power, including ending the king’s ability to levy taxes without Parliament’s consent and abolishing the controversial royal courts of the Star Chamber and the High Commission. It also refused to finance the campaign against the Scots for which it had been reconvened. This Scottish campaign, a series of confrontations that came to be known as the Bishops’ Wars, was a sign not only that the wars resulted from disputes over the extent of royal power but that these disputes extended beyond England and into the other realms of the Crown, inspiring some modern historians to rename the English civil wars as the “Wars of the Three Kingdoms.”⁵⁸ The Bishops’ Wars also signified the degree to which the disputes traversed both the political and the religious spheres.⁵⁹ Indeed, given that the monarchs of post-Reformation Eng-

57. Parliament of England, *Petition of Right*, clause I.

58. John Kenyon and Jane Ohlmeyer, eds., *The Civil Wars: A Military History of England, Scotland, and Ireland, 1638–1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

59. Mark Charles Fissell, *The Bishops’ Wars: Charles I’s Campaigns against Scotland, 1638–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

land were also heads of Anglicanism, challenges to the Crown's power threatened the institutional status of the established church and vice versa. Charles, like the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud, believed in "High Anglicanism" based upon the creed of Arminianism, the idea that grace was available to anyone who expressed their desire for it by following the Church of England's rules of worship.⁶⁰ Laud's strict enforcement of Anglican rules, including his insistence upon the use of the *Book of Common Prayer* in all services, alienated many, but none more so than those radical Protestants or "Puritans" who were increasingly fined, arrested, and even at times tortured by Laud's agents for abstaining from attending mandatory services because, they insisted, Arminian Anglicanism differed little from the Catholicism against which it protested. The outrage among some Puritans was so great that in 1640 around fifteen thousand citizens presented the Root and Branch Petition to Parliament calling for the complete dissolution of the Church of England down to its "root and branches."⁶¹

The Bishops' Wars of 1639–1640 were an important aspect of this larger religious conflict. They began with the expensive and controversial military attacks that Charles launched against the Presbyterian Church in Scotland after its leaders resisted his imposition of the *Book of Common Prayer*⁶² upon their own liturgical practices.⁶³ In 1638, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland voted to reject the *Book of Common Prayer* and to declare bishops unlawful. Charles demanded that they rescind these claims, and when the Scots refused, he launched his two unsuccessful attacks, the first in 1639 and the second a year later. His defeat resulted in a series of humiliations. In turn, these humiliations were

60. Charles Carlton, *Archbishop William Laud* (London: Routledge, 1998).

61. Anonymous, "Root and Branch Petition" (1640) in Henry Gee and William John Hardy, eds., *Documents Illustrative of English Church History* (New York: Macmillan, 1896), 537–55.

62. The *Book of Common Prayer* was originally published under King Edward IV in 1549 to further cement the Church of England's break with Roman Catholicism. It codified the prayers that were to serve as official liturgy on all important occasions, as well as the "provers," the prescribed words for daily church services. The book was eliminated by the Catholic Queen Mary I in 1553. It was reintroduced in a slightly amended form by Queen Elizabeth I in 1559. In 1604, King James I/VI ordered further amendments, but the book proved controversial, not only for Scottish Presbyterians who were punished for refusing to adopt it during the Bishops' Wars, but also for more radical Protestant groups who did not believe that liturgy should be dictated by an established church. See Church of England, *The Book of the Common Prayer* (London: 1549).

63. Like many of the conflicts that Charles faced, the struggle with the Scots was inherited from his father. As James had warned the Scots after they demanded the right to retain their own presbytery structure rather than submitting to the power of the bishops in the English church, if they were saying that there should be "no bishop," then they were also saying that there should be "no king." But as the Scottish Presbyterian, Andrew Melville, replied, King James must remember that the true kingdom belongs to Christ, "whose subject King James the Sixth is, and of whose kingdom not a king, nor a lord, nor a head, but a member." See Andrew Melville, "Two Kings, Two Kingdoms," in *The Life of Andrew Melville*, ed. Thomas McCrie, 391–92 (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1824).

among the many factors that led Charles to recall Parliament in 1641 in hopes that it would supply him with the funds necessary to subdue the Scots.⁶⁴ And yet, as noted, Charles's own Parliament, led by John Pym, refused to side with him, thereby committing yet another *lèse-majesté*, or "offense against the ruler," as Charles viewed it, and signifying once again the degree to which the struggles between Parliament and Crown stemmed from disagreements over the nature and extent of patriarchal power.

Another sign that the wars involved all of the Crown's realms and represented a widespread revolt against patriarchal overreach was the fact that many Catholic Irish men and women became involved due to their desire for Catholicism to be "tolerated" by the Crown.⁶⁵ After Charles failed to gain Parliament's support for his plan to force the rebellious Scots to submit to the English church, he turned to Irish Catholic landholders, promising them freedom of worship if they would provide the aid that Parliament denied him. The resulting outrage in England and Scotland was further inflamed when a group of Irish Catholics from Ulster massacred thousands of members of the "New English" (Anglo-Irish Protestant) population. The New English had owned plantations in that part of Ireland for only thirty years, but in the eyes of the native Irish, they were thieves who had stolen "land [that] was theirs and lost by their fathers."⁶⁶ Charles failed to respond to the "Ulster Uprising" against the Anglo-Irish Protestants. This failure, along with the fact that he had actually conspired with the Irish Catholics against the Protestant Scots (not to mention that his wife, Queen Henrietta Maria, was a French Catholic), contributed to the sense that, even before the first shot of the civil wars was fired on English soil, the king was at war with his own Parliament and the English people. Even after Charles finally acted to quell the rebellion in 1642 by sending a large army to Dublin, his Parliament was not appeased. They feared that these twenty thousand troops would soon be used against them. These fears were not groundless, as Parliament's John Pym soon suspected that one of Charles's most highly ranked courtiers, Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford, was urging the king to use the army he had raised in Ireland to force the entire kingdom, including England, to bend to his will. For this and other offenses, Strafford was beheaded in 1641.⁶⁷ The execution of such a prominent courtier fueled fur-

64. Scotland invaded England, occupying much of its northern territories. Charles was forced to pay the Scots £850 a day and to reimburse them for the costs they incurred during his invasions in order to prevent them from taking even more English lands and looting and burning its cities.

65. Michael O'Siochru, *Confederate Ireland, 1642-49* (Dublin: Four Courts, 1999).

66. David Edwards and Pdraig Lenihan, eds., *Age of Atrocity: Violence and Political Conflict in Early Modern Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2007), 154.

67. Strafford had served as the king's lord deputy in Ireland and was granted the title of earl in exchange for persuading Irish Catholic landowners to buy their religious freedom by paying higher taxes that were directed, in defiance of Parliament's opposition, toward the Scottish campaign. When the Ulster Uprising ensued, Strafford's standing was further compromised in the eyes of many Parliamentarians,

ther tensions between Parliament and the Crown. In 1642, Charles marched 499 soldiers into the House of Commons to arrest five of its members for conspiracy. Having been tipped off, the five members escaped, but the Long Parliament still recognized the danger it was courting through its resistance to Charles's ambitions. Since the kingdom did not retain a "standing" army in the modern sense, Parliament, to protect itself, passed the Militia Ordinance to provide itself with the right to appoint lord lieutenants to form the already-existing county militias into an army. At this point, Charles too recognized that the conflicts had escalated to the point of civil war. Departing from London, he drew upon the ancient law of the Commission of Array to gather his own troops. In 1642, these Royalist forces, with the king at their head, raised the royal standard at Nottingham and declared war on Parliament and anyone who supported it.

While some communities remained neutral, a number chose sides. The Royalist Cavaliers proclaimed allegiance to the king in the name of preserving the ancient tradition of "court and country." The Roundheads supported Parliament—in some cases to defend the customary balance of powers in government and in others to abolish monarchy. Parliament was joined in 1643 by the Scots, who wished to fight not only the king but also those Irish Catholic troops who agreed to help the Crown wage war upon them in exchange for their own religious freedom. They composed *A Solemn League and Covenant for Reformation and Defense of Religion, the Honor and Happiness of the King, and the Peace and Safety of the Three Kingdoms of Scotland, England, and Ireland* (1643), a document declaring their military solidarity but also stipulating a set of specific terms upon which that solidarity was predicated.⁶⁸ Once the stipulations were granted, the Scottish aid that was forthcoming enabled Parliament to win control of northern England at the Battle of Marston Moor in 1644.

and it was then that he was arrested and executed. See R. Asch, "Wentworth, Thomas, first earl of Strafford (1593–1641), lord lieutenant of Ireland," *ODNB*.

68. Anonymous, *A Solemn League and Covenant for Reformation and Defense of Religion, the Honor and Happiness of the King, and the Peace and Safety of the Three Kingdoms of Scotland, England, and Ireland* (London: 1643). For a discussion of this vital document, see Stuart Reid, *Crown, Covenant, and Cromwell: The Civil Wars in Scotland 1639–1651* (Havertown, PA: Frontline, 2013). One stipulation laid out by these "Covenanters" was that, if Parliament was defeated, the Scots would refuse to join them in bowing to the king's authority. Another was that, if Parliament triumphed, it would impose Scottish Presbyterianism as the new state religion on England. Later on, this commitment to Presbyterianism in England was further advanced by the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, a document released in 1646 by the "Westminster Assembly," a group of ministers convened by Parliament in 1643 to craft new doctrines for modes of worship and structures of government for a new church in England. Because these new doctrines laid out by the *Confession* were crafted largely by Presbyterians, the more radically Protestant "Congregationalist" groups who believed in a more decentralized system of churches "gathered" through voluntary association refused to adopt them until they were modified to conform more with their vision. This revised document was termed the *Savoy Declaration* and was finally adopted in 1658.