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Humphrey Moseley and the Politics of Early Modern Publishers

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Abstract

The essay reassesses the ways in which book historians define the politics of early modern publishers by examining a selection of books published during the late 1640s and 1650s by Humphrey Moseley, a prominent London bookseller whom modern scholars have routinely characterized as a Royalist stationer. It argues that starting in 1648 Moseley's publishing began to shift away from the overt Royalism of his earlier career just as Parliamentary and republican forces were consolidating their victories over King Charles I. From that year onwards, Moseley increasingly published material that repackaged the social, political and cultural values of former Royalists for inclusion within the intellectual and discursive spheres of republican England. His political flexibility during this period of Parliamentary supremacy and republican rule received expression through publishing strategies of contingency, conformity and collaboration. These publishing strategies offer modern scholars a set of critical methods for making sense of seemingly contradictory evidence within the historical archive. Rather than inconsistency, such evidence may signify that a publisher was changing their specialization or simply adapting to the times. With the shifting developments of his career after 1648, Moseley's example ultimately cautions us against assigning fixed political identities to early modern publishers.

Keywords: Humphrey Moseley, Interregnum, Republicanism, Royalism, Stationer

1. Introduction

Over two decades ago, David Scott Kastan issued a clarion call within early modern literary studies. In *Shakespeare After Theory*, Kastan pushed for a grounded rather than theoretical version of historicist criticism that would engage more extensively with the particularities of the archive (1999, 18). Perhaps no group of scholars followed that imperative as vigorously as those working on the history of the book. Through meticulous research into the production and reception of imaginative writing in the material form of print publications, these scholars have enriched our understanding of the historical specificity of early modern literary

texts as well as of the cultural and political functions that such texts were made, or thought, to possess.¹ Much of this scholarship has explored the role of early modern publishers, with particular attention to how individual publishers both construed and shaped the meaning of a literary text as they positioned it within the marketplace of print.² Although book historians have offered compelling explanations of the publishing strategies and political specializations that contributed to this process of meaning-making, such efforts to classify the politics of different publishers, and by doing so to gain an interpretive foothold on the ideological significance of their printed editions of literary texts, have arguably risked oversimplification. In particular, these studies have often assumed that publishers maintained stable political identities which seldom, if ever, changed over time.³ The present essay queries the fixity of such political identities as well as the scholarly procedures through which political labels have been attributed to early modern publishers by examining a selection of books issued by the London bookseller Humphrey Moseley during the late 1640s and 1650s. Routinely depicted by modern scholars as a committed Royalist, several of Moseley's politically resonant publications in fact defy categorization along a Royalist-Parliamentarian binary. The publishing strategies he used for these books, moreover, can point us towards a set of critical methods for probing historical particularities within the archives that would enable modern scholars to better account for the kind of political complexity that Moseley exhibited. Moseley's publications not only provide important insights into the challenges of publishing during a period of unprecedented social upheaval; they also invite us, more generally, to reconsider how we ascertain the politics of early modern publishers.

As one of the most prominent English publishers of the early modern period, Moseley has not escaped scholarly scrutiny. Throughout the mid-seventeenth century, he published a wide range of poetry and drama (see Reed 1928), including a slim volume of early poems by John Milton (see Coiro 1992; McDowell 2009, 69-90), assorted Jacobean and Caroline dramatists in an innovative serialized format (see Kewes 1995), several selections of Cavalier verse (see Zajac 2015), and the monumental folio of Beaumont and Fletcher's plays (see Štollová 2017). For these reasons, Moseley has been credited with preserving imaginative writing during the English Civil Wars and Interregnum, and some critics have even posited that he was instrumental in helping to construct English literature as a rarefied category of writing with important aesthetic and cultural value (see Kastan 2007). Given the connections between imaginative writing and political Royalism during this period, Moseley's extensive involvement in literary publishing has been regarded as evidence that he explicitly targeted likeminded readers who sided with King Charles I in the English Civil Wars of the 1640s before spending the Interregnum period of the 1650s coping with their defeat.⁴ Subtler interpretations of Moseley's politics have suggested that his printing of dramatic works, continental romances, and court-affiliated poets constituted a quietly subversive effort to sustain the beleaguered supporters of the King while Parliamentary forces gained increasing control of the country.⁵ Whether seen as a staunch advocate of the

¹ While these studies are too numerous to count, notable recent examples include Bourne 2020; McCarthy 2020; Calhoun 2020.

² See Lesser 2004; McCullough 2008; Straznicky 2012; Hooks 2016.

³ Political readings of early modern publishers have proliferated and include several of the previously cited works. For additional examples, see Andrews 2011; Melnikoff 2012.

⁴ References to Moseley's avowed Royalism abound, including in several of the studies cited above. Other major studies of mid-seventeenth century literature that have reinforced this political narrative include Smith 1994, 12; Norbrook 1999, 159.

⁵ The most influential account of Moseley's Royalist subversion can be found in Potter 1989, especially 19-22. See also Lindenbaum 2010, 395-396. Recent studies express similar sentiments about Moseley's implicit Royalism.

Stuart cause or as a discreet purveyor of Cavalier culture, Moseley has been inextricably linked by modern scholars to the ebb and flow of political Royalism during the mid-seventeenth century.

When considered more broadly, however, Moseley's publishing record challenges the consensus view of him as invariably Royalist. The evidence for this political complexity can be found not in Moseley's frequent paratextual addresses to the reader, which often focused on the preeminent quality of each work's contents, but rather in the books that he chose to publish and in the timing of their release. Indeed, what has not received sufficient attention among modern scholars is that a shift in Moseley's publications started to occur in 1648. Whereas Moseley's earlier books had tended to be more avowedly Royalist, particularly in their promotion of Cavalier writers, from 1648 until the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660 he also published multiple books in a diverse array of genres that explored political concerns relevant both to kingless governance more generally and to the specific conditions that held sway under the various Parliamentary and republican regimes of the period. Some of these publications attempted to justify switching allegiance from the Stuart cause to the Parliamentary victors – or, later, from the Stuart cause to the republican state. Others theorized how social, political, and cultural values associated with former supporters of the King could be adapted to the English Republic. One publication even had Moseley working directly with the republican administration. All these books, taken together, suggest that Moseley's publishing after 1648 played a significant role in conceptualizing how erstwhile Cavaliers and previously Royalist ideas might have fit within, and been able to exert influence upon, the new republic. After the apparent defeat of the Stuart cause, this group of books articulated a vision of social, political, and cultural conservatism within the republican state.

Ultimately, these books indicate that a certain degree of political flexibility entered Moseley's calculus once Parliament triumphed over the King. As I demonstrate below, Moseley's political flexibility was expressed through publishing strategies that embraced contingency, conformity and collaboration. These strategies allowed Moseley to navigate the dynamic and unsettled political environment of the mid-seventeenth century. For modern scholars, however, they offer critical procedures for grappling with seemingly inconsistent political details within a publisher's body of work.

2. *Contingency*

Moseley's publishing career peaked during the 1640s and 1650s, a tumultuous stretch of civil war and political revolution characterized by intermittent regime change, social dislocation, pervasive radicalism and cultural upheaval. That Moseley thrived amid the uncertainty and instability of the mid-seventeenth century attests to the efficacy of his publishing strategies. One of those strategies, however, specifically addressed the fluid conditions that prevailed during that time. At multiple points throughout the era, Moseley sought to exploit abrupt shifts in the political landscape, some of which favored Parliament or the republican state, others the Stuart cause. Although Moseley operated his business during a unique period of extraordinary volatility which practically demanded such pivots, his nimble publishing of texts in response to new political developments highlights the role of contingency in the early modern book trade more generally. Taking a cue from the revisionist movement in early Stuart historiography, we might say that

In a monograph on early modern drama during the Civil Wars and Interregnum, for instance, Heidi Craig observes that Moseley qualifies as a Royalist publisher not because of any overtly political texts supportive of the Stuart cause but rather due to his 'belletristic publishing' of high culture, which carried with it tacit political meanings (2023, 140-141; see also Štollová 2017).

publications had short-term implications reflective of the immediate circumstances of their release as well as long-term meanings that crystallized over time.⁶ The short-term implications of Moseley's contingent publishing demonstrate the extent to which early modern books were embedded in their original historical moments, while also revealing how adaptive – and how politically complex – early modern publishers could be.

After the First Civil War, Moseley published an influential text that justified submission to Parliament on the basis of its *de facto* control of the realm, Anthony Ascham's *A Discourse: Wherein is examined, What is particularly lawfull during the Confusions and Revolutions of GOVERNMENT* (1648). Written while the defeated Charles I was negotiating with Parliament, Ascham's *Discourse* argued that subjects owe political allegiance to a victorious party – even if its triumph was not technically legal – so long as the party can provide for the common defense, a line of reasoning that would be deployed by no less a figure than Sir Robert Filmer, the infamous theorist of royal absolutism, when he himself attempted to justify obedience to the republican government in 1653 (see Cuttica 2012, 173).⁷ The specific political goal of Ascham's text was to consolidate support for the *Heads of the Proposals*, a constitutional settlement presented to the King by the political Independents in charge of Parliament's army.⁸ According to Marco Barducci, 'Ascham was a writer on the payroll of the moderate Independent group in Parliament, and his political doctrine was aimed at convincing lay Presbyterians and royalists to adhere to the policy of national pacification implemented by his patrons since 1648' (2017, 38; see also Barducci 2015). Ascham's text, therefore, was oriented toward precisely the type of readership Moseley had been cultivating up to that point.⁹

Because Ascham's *Discourse* was designed to appeal to moderate and conservative opinions, the way that he frames his arguments can shed light on Moseley's publishing considerations during the entire period of Parliamentary supremacy and republican rule. Ascham is careful to note his own preference for kingship – 'The state of Monarchy is of all the rest most excellent' (1648, 70), he says – and he condemns democracy in no uncertain terms, expressing the commonplace fear that civil society would degenerate into a 'diffolute multitude' (69) and warning that 'in confuſion there is a rage which reaſon cannot reclame' (*ibid.*). Such 'confuſion', he adds, 'ariſes moſt out of the reflexion which particular men may make on their particular rights and liberties', a comment that undoubtedly glances at populist movements like the Levellers (70). Ascham thus makes clear that he approaches his claims for Parliament's supremacy not only from a distinctively anti-radical standpoint, but also with a view towards preserving political order. Within the context of the entire *Discourse*, these concerns about political order provide further justification for submitting to a conqueror's authority. Whatever partisan convictions one may hold, obedience to an 'usurper' – the term Ascham uses consistently in reference to Parliament – would safeguard the internal stability of the body politic.

Above all, according to Ascham, switching allegiance can be seen as a rational, even necessary response to political events beyond one's control. This idea informs the providential logic of his assertion that 'Wee are bound to owne Princes ſo long as it pleaſes God to give them

⁶ On the lessons that early Stuart revisionist historiography can offer to early modern literary studies, see Zwicker 2015.

⁷ In this respect, Ascham anticipated and helped give shape to the arguments used in the Engagement Controversy during the early 1650s, when the government pressed its citizens to take an Oath of Engagement to the new republican regime. For an influential treatment of the engagement controversy, see Skinner 1972.

⁸ For more information on the background, contexts and ramifications of the *Heads of the Proposals*, see Como 2020.

⁹ Nevertheless, Barducci suggests that Moseley's decision to publish Ascham could have been strategic, 'a way for keeping a foot in both camps (a royalist one and a parliamentary one)' given the 'flood of political events' after the First Civil War and the 'developments of current policy' (2015, 39–40, n.14).

the power to command us, and when we see others possess of their powers, we may then say, That the King of Kings hath chang'd our Vice-Roys' (88). A few pages later, Ascham drives this point home with the example of a conquered village, remarking that if 'Townes are reduced to the jurisdiction of those to whom they were sworn not to submit, but to destroy' (92), then 'In such cases the Prince to whom they were first obliged, releases them of all imaginable duty to him. For he cannot expect that which is impossible for them to doe, viz. acts of former Allegiance to him' (93). By drawing attention to the vicissitudes of political affairs, Ascham impresses upon his readership the inevitably contingent nature of partisan loyalties.¹⁰ As Royalists suffered further losses and then the decisive blow of the regicide, Ascham's reasoning must have grown increasingly compelling, and it is easy to see how this perspective could have shaped the publishing practices of a canny stationer like Moseley throughout the late 1640s and 1650s. Even before the trial and execution of Charles I, however, the publication of Ascham's *Discourse* in 1648 marked a conceptual shift in how moderates and conservatives grappled with the political repercussions of Parliament's ascendancy. For Moseley in particular, it functioned both as theory and as event – as a rationale for adapting to the changing circumstances of a tumultuous age and, by publishing the text during this key turning point in a decade-long conflict, as a conspicuous moment in which he himself adapted to the political situation at hand.

It would not be the last moment of adaptation for Moseley. Throughout the rest of his career, he remained attuned to the fluctuating state of affairs within England. In 1651, just a few years after his edition of Ascham's *Discourse*, Moseley attempted to capitalize on a revival of the Stuart cause by releasing a book with Royalist political implications more akin to his pre-1648 phase of textual production. That year he published an octavo collection of *Comedies, Tragicomedies, with other Poems* (1651) by William Cartwright, a young Oxford-educated writer with clerical aspirations who had died in 1643. The collection is notable for including over fifty commendatory poems, exemplifying to an unparalleled degree the Cavalier 'practice of contributing verses to each other's volumes of poetry as a means of maintaining a sense of cultural identity' (Wilcher 2001, 321). Though these prefatory poems and indeed the publication as a whole served as a belated epitaph for Cartwright, after the regicide such memorializing efforts had taken on greater political significance, providing a means through which committed Royalists processed their losses. As Nicholas McDowell observes, the paratextual materials of Cartwright's collection represented 'the early death of a figure who combined the offices of poet, priest, and scholar ... as symptomatic of the devastation of learning, religion, and poetry during the war' (2009, 79). By mourning Cartwright, Cavalier writers were also mourning the demise of a particular social formation, a way of life that had become increasingly linked to and symbolically dependent on a King recently executed for treason.

But while the culture of the Stuart court lay in ruins when Moseley published the collection in June of 1651, the Stuart cause itself had not yet suffered total defeat.¹¹ Earlier that year Prince Charles, later Charles II, had accepted the Scottish crown. Over the ensuing spring and summer, as Moseley prepared *Comedies, Tragicomedies, with other Poems* for print, Charles embarked on a military campaign to recover his lost kingdoms, hoping to gain reinforcements from anticipated Royalist uprisings once he entered England.¹² With a Stuart invasion on the horizon, Moseley

¹⁰ Ascham's stance reflects what historians have recently begun to argue: that partisan affiliation was more malleable and less ideologically rigid than has been supposed, often contingent upon fluctuating political circumstances. See McElligott 2007, 93-149.

¹¹ The Thomason Copy of the Cartwright volume dates it to 23 June, 1651.

¹² On this period of Charles II's military campaign during the Third Civil War and his life in Scotland more generally, see Hutton 1989, 49-70.

published the Cartwright volume, a book that prominently featured an entire host of disaffected Royalist poets mobilized toward a 'reaffirmation of Cavalier ideals and a gesture of defiance against the society which had repudiated them' (Thomas 1969, 177). Not only could these sentiments express discontent with English republican culture, but prior to Charles' final defeat in Worcester that September, such defiance could also work to marshal ideological and material support for an active Royalist offensive. As with Ascham's *Discourse*, Moseley strategically published a text responsive to a recent shift in the country's political terrain. Through the Cartwright collection, he sought to profit from conditions that had become favorable to Royalist enthusiasm. Following the Republic's triumph over Prince Charles, however, the collection's elegiac function, which honored the halcyon days of Cavalier fellowship, solidified into the predominant understanding of the book, while its political backing for a Royalist resurgence faded into obscurity. The short-term considerations behind a text's publication can recover such layers of meaning as well as provide fresh insights into the careful political maneuverings of stationers like Moseley.

3. *Conformity and Collaboration*

While the Royalist politics of *Comedies, Tragicomedies, with other Poems* marked a reversal from the Parliamentary leanings of the *Discourse*, Moseley's publication of the Cartwright collection was nevertheless consistent with Ascham's logic of partisan contingency. Moseley continued to abide by that logic after Royalist forces were routed at Worcester in 1651, but increasingly he would do so with a view towards adjusting to the reality of kingless self-rule. Indeed, as the decade progressed, Moseley published material that conformed in various ways to the republican culture of the 1650s.¹³ During the momentous regime change that established the Protectorate, he even collaborated with republican authorities on a text the government wanted to print. Yet these publications, far from demonstrating a commitment to the ideological underpinnings of the republican project, remained largely congruent with the conservative attitudes expressed elsewhere in Moseley's body of work. If these publications held larger political significance, they represented a broader effort to take previously Royalist values, particularly the aesthetics of the Stuart court and the emphasis on social and political hierarchies, and rehabilitate them for English republican culture. In synthesizing republicanism and former Royalism, however, these publications confound a key political distinction that modern literary critics have used to grapple with the revolutionary period. Moseley's publishing strategies of conformism and collaborationism call into question the utility of such distinctions as well as the political categories that reify them.

Most significantly for literary scholars, Moseley's overtly conformist publications included a volume of poetry. This genre of book has often been considered by modern critics to carry subversive Royalist connotations whenever Stuart sympathizers, particularly Moseley himself, published an edition during the 1640s and 1650s (see Potter 1989). Moseley's release of Abraham Cowley's *Poems* (1656a), however, challenges that interpretive paradigm. The poetry collection contains a Preface in which Cowley, much like Ascham, makes peace with the political circumstances of the times and urges other writers to do the same. Unsurprisingly, Cowley's Preface occasioned controversy among devoted Royalists – particularly those living in exile – and to this day the question of its sincerity provokes vigorous debate among critics.¹⁴

¹³ It might be objected that such conformism was the result of the republican government's censorship and control over the printing press. Republican authorities certainly had the mechanisms for such enforcement and the ability to do so if it was deemed necessary, but they seldom intervened directly except in cases of incitement to violence. See Peacey 2006.

¹⁴ On contemporary and modern responses to Cowley's text, see Wilcher 2001, 340-346. More recently, Niall Allsopp has argued that Cowley's *Poems* demonstrates a genuine effort to accommodate himself to the political reality

Whatever Cowley's private intentions, though, his Preface offers a public manifesto on how a literary aesthetic identified with the Stuart court could be accommodated to the English Republic, and his thinking may even help to explain and contextualize Moseley's voluminous output of poetry, plays and romances during the 1650s. Cowley's Preface emphasizes the necessity of healing after a traumatic decade of conflict and bloodshed. To that end, Cowley defends his decision not to print what he had written during, and about, the Civil Wars, claiming that he 'would have it accounted no less unlawful to *rip up old wounds*, then to *give new ones*' (1656b, a4v). He argues against either producing or circulating '*Representation[s] of Places and Images*' that would 'make a kind of *Artificial Memory* of' the conflicts of the 1640s, conflicts which he describes as 'those things wherein we are all bound to desire like *Themistocles*, the *Art of Oblivion*' (a4r). He also pushes for the renunciation of partisan coding, presumably within literary as well as political discourse, since abandoning such antagonism would be conducive to the necessary work of national reconciliation: 'The *enmities of Fellow-Citizens* should be, like that of *Lovers*, the *Redintegration* of their *Amity*. The *Names of Party*, and *Titles of Division*, which are sometimes in effect the whole quarrel, should be extinguished and forbidden in peace under the notion of *Acts of Hostility*' (a4r-a4v). What appears to underlie Cowley's concern about partisanship, then, is the possibility that it would inflame tensions within the country and thus provoke civil unrest. While some critics have interpreted Cowley's Preface as an elaborate ruse to evade the suspicions of republican authorities,¹⁵ it would hardly strain credibility to take Cowley's interest in political order at face value given that it echoed similar stances adopted by former Royalists like Hobbes and Davenant in addition to Parliamentary monarchists like Ascham.¹⁶ As I point out throughout the present essay, this stance also accorded with several publications by Moseley.

Like that of other former Royalists, Cowley's stated position derives from an acceptance of the reality of England's situation after the end of the Civil Wars. In a line of argument that recalls Ascham's *Discourse*, Cowley asserts that 'when the event of battle, and the unaccountable *Will of God* has determined the controversy, and that we have submitted to the conditions of the *Conqueror*, we must lay down our *Pens* as well as *Arms*', and he goes on to take note of the '*General Amnestie*' which former Royalists received 'as a *favor* from the *Victor*' (a4r). Owing to these significant developments, Cowley insists, writers who once supported Charles I ought to direct their talents elsewhere: 'we must *march* out of our *Cause* it self, and *dismantle* that, as well as our *Towns* and *Castles*, of all the *Works* and *Fortifications* of *Wit* and *Reason* by which we defended it' (*ibid.*). Cowley's ideological disarmament takes the literary values typically associated with Royalist poetics and decouples them from their partisan connections suggesting, as a result, that 'wit' and 'reason' can serve entirely new purposes. Based on his comments about national reconciliation, such purposes, if they tended toward the political, could potentially involve the peacemaking process or even the quest for stability like Ascham. As the preeminent publisher of literary texts during the mid-seventeenth-century, Moseley was undoubtedly securing his own material interests by issuing a book that attempted to make the imaginative writing of former Cavaliers and other Stuart court wits acceptable to the political circumstances of the times.

of the Stuart monarchy's defeat. In addition to a close reading of the collection, Allsopp's discussion provides a detailed review of archival material from contemporaries who doubted Cowley's commitment to the Stuart cause, including Royalists-in-exile such as Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon and Tories writing later during the Restoration (2020, 111-138).

¹⁵ Cowley's imprisonment at the time of his writing might indicate that his Preface was insincere, but it would not necessarily preclude the ideological commitment to political stability that seems to underwrite the Preface.

¹⁶ In his study of formerly Royalist poets navigating the political terrain of the 1650s, Allsopp (2020) helpfully contextualizes the intellectual reasoning behind such poets' decisions to make peace with the republican state, highlighting the importance of theories of sovereign power developed in response to Royalist losses.

Through this act of conformity, however, Moseley's Cowley publication proposed changes to the curation and composition of literature that went even further. Rather than merely grafting Stuart court aesthetics onto the sanctioned discourses of the 1650s as a marginalized, if tolerated, addition, the preface aimed at a more cohesive political integration, working to situate a formerly Royalist poetics within the burgeoning culture of republican England.

A year after his Cowley publication theorized how previously Royalist literature could be reconstituted within the republican state, Moseley released a text that similarly reconciled the priorities of a social elite to the conditions of kingless governance. The publication, *Politick Discourses* (1657), the translation of a book by the Italian statesman Paolo Paruta, examines the ancient Roman Republic in relation to the modern Venetian Republic, a subject that would have had broad appeal in England during the 1650s. Following a typology popularized by Machiavelli in his *Discourses upon the first decade of T. Livius* (1663),¹⁷ the two republics had often served as contrasting models of representative self-rule, with Rome typically thought to exemplify a relatively democratic and decidedly imperialist form of republicanism and Venice a patrician and isolationist form. Arguing against Machiavelli, who like many English republicans favored a Roman model, Paruta assesses the weaknesses of the ancient republic while highlighting the stability of its modern-day counterpart, asserting that Rome's downfall can be blamed on the composition of its government which, unlike Venice's aristocratic structure, was 'too much inclining towards the corruption of a Popular State' (1657, 12). As with other commentaries about Venice from throughout the decade, Paruta's book cast a system of noble rule and its implied social hierarchies into a viable option for representative governance (see Kuhn forthcoming). In doing so, his text echoed the line of thinking that attracted some former Royalists to Venetian republicanism during the 1650s (see, for instance, Howell 1651). By publishing an English translation of Paruta's commentary, Moseley actively facilitated the development of a conservative politics not within the bounds of traditional kingship, but rather within the new intellectual horizons of republican discourse. Moseley's publishing strategy for books like Paruta's and Cowley's involved reorienting around the circumstances of Royalist defeat without abandoning the social and cultural elitism of formerly Royalist ideology. These publications conformed to the hegemonic politics of the 1650s even as they contested the class and cultural assumptions of prevailing republican thought.

Moseley, however, went beyond conforming to the political circumstances of the decade; in at least one instance, he effectively collaborated with republican authorities. In December 1653, the government commissioned Moseley to publish an English translation of Georges de Scudery's *Discours politiques des roys*. Moseley's translation was published in 1654 with the title *Curia Politia: or, The Apologies of Severall Princes: Justifying to the World Their most Eminent Actions, by the strength of Reason, and the most Exact Rules of Policie* (Scudery 1654a). First published in France in 1647 as *Discours politiques des rois* (Scudery 1647), this work of political counsel, whose Latin part of the title, *Curia Politia*, translates roughly to 'Court Policy', discusses 'the most eminent actions' of twenty famous monarchs and purports to disclose 'those reasons and causes which overruled them to their resolutions', aiming above all to 'discover those secret and concealed mysteries of State, and so to remonstrate the events of Councils and grand Enterprises, undertaken with so high deliberations' (B2r).¹⁸ In short, Scudery sought to confer political wisdom to his readers

¹⁷ The first Italian edition is *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio*, Firenze, Giunti, 1531.

¹⁸ The title of the original French printing of Scudery's book differed substantively from the English translation published by Moseley; for *Discours politiques des Rois* translates to 'Political speeches of the Kings'. Perhaps owing to the republican government's commission of the text, the title of Moseley's edition, while acknowledging Princely

through the insights that could be gleaned from the decision-making of notable kings and their courts. At a cursory glance, then, *Curia Politiae* would seem a natural fit for a publisher with Moseley's supposedly ardent Royalism. The monarchical subject matter certainly aligns with modern critical understandings of Moseley as a purveyor of courtly and Cavalier texts.

Yet the fact remains that the republican government, not Moseley, made the initial decision to have Scudery's courtly text printed. This puzzling detail raises questions about the intended purpose of the publication and about Moseley's ties to republican authorities more generally. Bibliographic evidence and the circumstances surrounding the book's publication may provide some answers. The government's commission takes up the final page of Moseley's printed edition of *Curia Politiae*, in two separate sections documenting the entire bureaucratic process. The top section notes that the Council of State tasked its Secretary, John Thurloe, with choosing a stationer to publish *Curia Politiae*:

Tuesday 6. December, 1653. At the Council of State at Whitehal. Ordered, That Mr Thurloe be appointed by the Council, to assigne such persons as he shall think fit, to print the Book, entituled CURIA POLITIÆ; and that no other Person whatfoever do presume to print the same without leave first had from Mr. Thurloe, for the doing thereof. JOHN THURLOE, Secr. (n.p.)

The bottom section, dated a week later, records Thurloe's official decision:

I Do appoint Humphrey Moseley to print this Book, and that none else do print the same. John Thurloe. 13 December. 1653. (Ibid.)

Jason Peacey, in his study of political propaganda during the English Civil Wars and Interregnum, explores 'the possibility that the appearance of certain political texts was supported' by the government 'at key moments in the 1640s and 1650s in order to set the political tone for important constitutional change' (2004, 249), and he cites *Curia Politiae* as an example of this practice. Indeed, the Council of State's commission of *Curia Politiae* coincided, that December, with the formation of the Protectorate, itself the culmination of a rapid succession of regime changes which began earlier that year with the dismissal of the Rump Parliament and then continued over the interim with the creation and subsequent dissolution of the Nominated Assembly or 'Barebone's Parliament' (see Woolrych 1982). Given Scudery's promise to divulge 'secret and concealed mysteries of State', the publication of *Curia Politiae* may have functioned to clarify precisely the kind of inscrutable and seemingly erratic processes of high politics that had recently embroiled England's central government, affirming not only the prudence of civic officials, but also the stability of the very institutions that had just been subjected to a series of upheavals. For republican authorities, the ostensible monarchism of this text apparently mattered less than its capacity to legitimize the inception of a new regime by highlighting similar 'events of Councils and grand Enterprises, undertaken with so high deliberation' (B2r). Like Ascham's *Discourse* and the Cartwright collection, Moseley's edition of *Curia Politiae* resonated with the short-term contingencies of the political moment.

The government's commission of *Curia Politiae* serves as a reminder that the meaning and ideological significance of such texts was hardly fixed, a point that Moseley himself affirms in prefaces 'To the Reader' that he attached to various other publications during the 1650s.¹⁹

power and the centrality of the court, avoids using the term 'King' and places emphasis on the details of statecraft revealed within the text.

¹⁹ Based on prefatory comments Moseley made in two of the books he published during the 1650s, Moseley seems to have understood that texts could be transposed from one cultural framework to another and that the readers

The fact that an extant copy of *Curia Politiae*, evidently issued after the Restoration, includes a dedication to King Charles II only emphasizes the political ambiguity of Scudery's work.²⁰ That same ambiguity applies to Moseley as well. His collaboration with republican authorities reveals that he was hardly considered a subversive Royalist *provocateur*, least of all by John Thurloe, who had by then begun his tenure as the government's spymaster.²¹ While Moseley himself did not initiate the publication of *Curia Politiae*, his involvement in the republic's efforts to appropriate a courtly text for its own designs underscores the nuances and complications of his publishing practices during the 1650s.

Additional evidence suggests that Moseley attempted to take advantage of these ties to the republican regime. When he entered *Curia Politiae* into the Stationers' Register on 20 December 1653, Moseley also recorded *Politick Maxims and Observations* by Hugo Grotius, a work of political counsel that he would publish in 1654 with a subtitle noting that it was *Translated for the ease and benefit of the English STATES-MEN* (Grotius 1654, title page).²² While the government apparently did not commission the printing of this text as well, Moseley's subtitle implies that *Politick Maxims and Observations* was aimed at those connected to the centers of power, whether they were politicians, civic officials, political thinkers, or republican propagandists. For that reason, Moseley's publication of Grotius may very well have been intended to complement his Scudery book on court policy. The titlepage even echoes *Curia Politiae* by framing Grotius' text as demystifying the workings of governance and administrative decision-making, offering 'ease and benefit' to political figures. During England's transition to a Protectoral government, in other words, Moseley's publication conveniently provided advice about statecraft.²³ If the republican administration partnered with Moseley to publish *Curia Politiae*, Moseley arguably sought to continue that collaboration with *Politick Maxims and Observations*.²⁴

who encountered such texts might critically engage with any meaningful disparities that might arise and even put the texts to entirely different uses than their original authors or audiences might have anticipated. In his address 'To the Reader' in *Catholique Divinity* by Richard Steward (1657), Moseley observes that 'For as the Badger-skins, and Goats-hair were made use of for the service of the Tabernacle in the Jewish Church: So may the Endowments of prophane Infidel-Philosophers, Orators, and Poets, bee employed for the service of the Christian' (Steward 1657, A2r). In a similar address in *The Compleat History of the Warrs of Flanders* by the Roman Catholic Cardinal Guido Bentivoglio, Moseley actually encourages his English Protestant readers to overlook the confessional differences between them and the author, remarking that 'It likely may displease you to see him stile the Enemy *Heretick* and *Schismatick*; but consider 'tis the usuall Language of the Church whereof he was a Member; and Writers who are of the contrary Perswasion, do bestow as sharp Epithets on Him and his Friend's' (Bentivoglio 1654, A2v).

²⁰ Reed (1928, 110) takes note of at least one copy of *Curia Politiae* in which signature A2 has been cancelled and replaced by the dedication to Charles II, written by Edward Wolley, D.D.

²¹ On Thurloe, see Hobman 1961 and Aubrey 1990.

²² On the Stationers' Register entry, see Stationer's Company 1950, vol. 1, 437.

²³ In a recent study on memories of the Civil Wars in republican England, Imogen Peck observes that several historical publications by Moseley 'provided narratives that chimed with Royalist attempts to explain the source of Britain's own domestic troubles' (2021, 76). The Royalist origins of these historical narratives, however, were not necessarily incompatible with Moseley's conformity and collaborationism. As my arguments throughout this essay suggest, Moseley's publications worked to make room within the new republic for the perspectives of former Royalists. Historical texts aimed at political figures within the republic would have formed part of that effort.

²⁴ Moseley would go on to publish additional works of historical analysis, including English translations of Bentivoglio's *The Compleat History of the Warrs of Flanders* (1654) and Paolo Sarpi's *The History of the Inquisition* (1655). The latter publication echoes Moseley's Grotius text by featuring a subtitle declaring it *A Pious, Learned, and Curious Worke, necessary for Councillors, Cafuists, and Politicians*. Moseley apparently aimed to continue cultivating a political readership linked to the republican state.

4. Conclusion: Moseley and the Politics of Early Modern Publishers

Steven Zwicker has proposed that ‘an inexact, fuzzy picture may be just what we need for imagining’ the mid-seventeenth century ‘because a more distinct picture distorts political and ethical uncertainties, the blurred cultural alliances and allegiances that writers and readers occupied in these decades of warfare’ and ‘political revolution’ (2015, 806). Taken as a whole, the books I have discussed yield an inexact picture of Humphrey Moseley, producing a blurrier image than conventional accounts of his publishing have allowed. While Moseley certainly did give a platform to Royalist writers and Anglican divines of various stripes – even after the regicide – in at least one case he assisted the republican government in its propaganda, and he also published important texts that challenged the idea of continued allegiance to the Stuart cause. By attending to patterns of contingency, conformity and collaboration within Moseley’s publishing, however, these seeming contradictions can be resolved. The books examined in this essay indicate that Moseley was willing – or simply able – to adapt to the political changes brought on not only by Parliament’s victory over the King but also by the ensuing turbulence within republican England. At the same time, these publications suggest that Moseley’s strategic accommodations were generally consistent with the conservative tendencies and cultural elitism that characterized the Royalist bent of his earlier career.

Much like Cowley, then, after 1648 Moseley may have been working towards creating conceptual space within the English Republic for a reconstructed Royalism. In an article about book advertisements in the official newsbooks of the English Republic, Marcus Nevitt notes that Moseley placed far more ads in Marchamont Nedham’s republican newsbook *Mercurius Politicus* than any other bookseller (2017). The fact that Moseley aggressively marketed his publications in such venues, whose readership no doubt included a wide range of political views, places considerable pressure on the idea that Moseley’s books were specifically aimed at disaffected Royalists. If, as Nevitt claims, *Mercurius Politicus* with its book ads ‘was instrumental in creating an image of the Commonwealth and Protectorate as a Republic of Letters’ (2017, 219), then Moseley surely contributed to that image as well. His publication of poetry, plays and romances as well as books of humane learning can plausibly be read not as preserving the scattered remains of Cavalier culture, nor as cultivating an apolitical literary domain separate from the affairs of state that had for so long occupied the country, but rather as helping to forge an ecumenical republic inclusive of and influenced by some of the beliefs about society, politics and aesthetics held by previous supporters of the King. The group of books he published which conformed to and collaborated with the Parliamentary and republican governments would have stood at the forefront of this conservative project, clearing the way for the formerly Royalist or politically neutral poems, plays and romances for which Moseley is renowned among modern scholars to be integrated within the new republic.

As we reflect on the history of the book back then in order to consider how best to practice book history right now, the publications I have surveyed demonstrate the limitations of neat political distinctions – like that between Royalism and republicanism – when it comes to classifying a publisher’s specialization. Indeed, Moseley’s political flexibility throughout the period of Parliamentary supremacy and republican rule cautions us against presuming that stationers held stable political identities. Inconsistencies within the archival record may, in fact, point toward change and adaptation as publishers moved between different phases of their careers.²⁵ Even if an

²⁵ In a chapter on Shakespeare’s history plays in Caroline England, Alan B. Farmer (2012) provides an insightful analysis of these kinds of political changes by tracing the career of a stationer, John Norton, who went from publishing books with a Puritan bent in the 1620s to publishing anti-Puritan texts in the 1630s.

ideological throughline can be detected, as in Moseley's conservatism, a publisher's politics may not have remained fixed. By taking a synchronic analysis of a publisher's ideological tendencies and contextualizing it within a diachronic study of their political fluctuations over time, we stand a better chance both of delineating the precise contours of a publisher's specialization and of charting the distinct phases of a publisher's career. Moseley's strategies of contingency, conformity and collaboration reveal some of the ways that we can account for the vicissitudes of historical change within this kind of diachronic study. Because the early modern period was marked by dizzying social, political, and religious transformations – and by a series of bitter conflicts over those transformations – the critical methods inspired by Moseley's strategies can certainly apply not only to stationers who were publishing texts contemporaneously during the Civil Wars and Interregnum but also to those who were publishing throughout the entirety of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in England. By adopting these critical methods, book historians writing now and in the future can refine the political categories that we deploy in our assessments of early modern publishers and their various printed texts. Through these refinements, we would be working to restore some of the dynamism both of early modern political affairs and of the book trade which played a key role in mediating political thought and conduct to an early modern public.

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