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Robert Appelbaum. *Literature and Utopian Politics in Seventeenth-Century England.* Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002. xi + 256 pp. $55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-81082-1.

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Utopia and the Construction of Modernity

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Between James VI and I's accession to the English throne in 1603 and the consolidation of the Stuart Restoration in about 1670, English society witnessed an extraordinary outpouring of utopian political writing. So Robert Appelbaum maintains, and his claims go further. The period, he says, comprises "a unique epoch," one which promoted political idealism through a wide literature in ways both unprecedented and never again repeated (p. 8). For Appelbaum, this utopian literature eventually extended to speeches, political pamphlets, sermons, constitutions, systematic treatises–in addition to more imaginary works such as dramas, poetry, and "utopias" as commonly understood.

All these writings were responding to a "utopian impulse" that manifested itself through an ostensibly coherent "utopian discourse" (pp. 6-7, 10-11). "Something happened in the seventeenth century" that led to this eruption of idealism, speculation, and fantasy. What that something might be is never indicated. But Appelbaum sees this emergent discourse as characterized by two properties, ideal politics and "utopian mastery." The latter involves the writer's ambivalent relationship to the world he envisions and (normally) seeks to realize. There is an inherent tension between the creator and his creation, between imagining an alternate world on the one hand and either constructing it or inhabiting it on the other. It is, he says, the tension between "the eye and the I"–a phrase with which Appelbaum is visibly much taken. Precisely this tension does not appear in Thomas More's *Utopia*, published almost exactly a century before this period. If seventeenth-century writers, on occasion, adopted the name and even some of the ideas found within More's original, their concern with "mastery" separates them fundamentally from More's undertaking. Appelbaum seems to suggest (though he does not quite say) that his own focus on just this concern in turn separates him from so many other scholars who have recently written about politics and literature during the seventeenth century and who "have plowed the field before me" (p. 6).

Although Appelbaum makes an occasional aside to utopian writers on the continent, the phenomenon is treated as fundamentally English. That is, as his title indicates, English and not British. Although he speaks briefly about colonial New England and, most notably, seeks to locate John Winthrop within his framework, Scotland and Ireland simply do not surface. Some of his sources speak of Britain and of British preoccupations, but Appelbaum does not. Readers may find it surprising to encounter a discussion of the politics of the Republic of Ragusa, now Dubrovnik, on the Dalmatian Coast–prompted by John Streator's *Government Described* (1659)–while contemporary Scotland's highly charged and influential political idealism goes neglected.

Although the new British history plays no role in this study, current historiographical and critical issues do inform its analyses. Appelbaum adopts a relatively sympathetic view of utopian thought, despite the epistemological problems he sees as inherent within it, and consequently his work is at odds with much of today's regnant revisionist conservatism. Appelbaum portrays his project, albeit with evident hesitation, as "post-revisionist." That is, he departs, tepidly, from views, extremely prominent since the 1970s, that have discounted early modern radicalism and emphasized enduring, authoritarian continuities throughout the period. For Appelbaum, it seems, seventeenth-century utopi-

anism holds a deep connection with modernity, serves as a significant catalyst to its creation, and, just possibly, shares a number of its central ambiguities. Appelbaum's views here are difficult to assess because his study hangs back, making intimations rather than argument, offering hints rather than exposition. Many readers will find it painful, if not exasperating, to read a text where some of its seemingly central claims derive only from inference.

If Appelbaum declines to tell us what motived this exceptional and exceptionally important period in English history, he makes his views about its initiating moment very clear indeed. James Stuart's claim to the English throne was far from self-evident or manifestly compelling. Political expediency and sheer opportunism drove his accession which was actually "an illegal power grab" (p. 201). The king's authority therefore needed to be legitimated, celebrated, and idealized, apparently in ways well beyond the requirements in previous reigns. James himself, no less than his councillors, was acutely conscious of the need to articulate and promote archetypal monarchy and had already done so with *The True Lawe of Free Monarchies* (1598) and his widely read *Basilikon Doron* (1599).

Probably no writer did more to endow the monarchy with a utopian character than did the chancellor Francis Bacon. By linking the royal prerogative to the program for science (and we might add, redemption), Bacon projected James as a prophet-legislator of potentially eschatological proportions. Although Bacon's thinking was informed by "Puritan ameliorism"–one of many unexplained and elusive terms that dot this volume–his expectations utterly conflicted with the dominant otherworldliness of "orthodox Calvinist pessimism" which foreclosed the possibility of earthly perfection. The crown of course never launched this great "refounding" of human purpose and capacity. James was portrayed as a "utopian master," but never became one. This circumstance, according to Appelbaum, illustrates the central problem of utopian thought, the disconnect between imagining and actualizing. Characteristically, Bacon's was a lonely, "Columbusoid" (!) undertaking. So, too, was the scientific practice he hoped to establish. Community and the self emerged radically disjoined.

Much more conservative thinkers like William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson also idealized the king within a utopian vocabulary. Their purpose was not only to secure the monarchy but to preclude alternative utopian visions and thereby alternative politics and alternative worlds to the one they inhabited. Jonson's court masque, *News from the New World Discovered on the Moon* (1620), provides a key example. The ideal already is in place; alternate visions, whether on the moon, in Galilean-Keplerian science, or with the Rosicrucians amount to no more than distracted absurdities. At just this moment, however, such on-going efforts to harness and thereby contain utopian idealism began to come apart. The Thirty Years War, with its news of catastrophe and of desperate hope (combined perhaps with the patent inadequacy of the Stuart kings), reoriented the attentions of English people. It led to competing ideals, conflicting visions, and also to efforts at articulating them in North America no less than in print. During the 1620s and 1630s utopian reflection, as exemplified in the writings of Robert Burton and Francis Godwin, assumed a visibly non-monarchical, if not anti-monarchical, character. In these new visions the king became marginal, perhaps irrelevant, possibly even an obstacle to human potential.

With the revolution in the 1640s–with the end of effective censorship and the opening of what seemed to be infinite possibilities–the line between speculation and political activism became blurred. Moreover, in time activism looked less to institutions, whether crown, church, or parliament, and became self-generating and self-legitimating. The people of England, now a people in arms, would create their own world and in the process create themselves. As we might expect, the Levellers feature prominently in this development. Quite traditionally, Appelbaum sees the high point of activist utopianism and experiment as occurring between 1649 and 1653, between the execution of Charles I and the closing of the radical nominated parliament. Still, signs of transition appeared earlier within the odyssey of Gerrard Winstanley's thinking. In 1649 the Digger leader looked to the rising spirit within men to enable them to regenerate both themselves and nature itself. By 1652 he looked to Oliver Cromwell as a latter-day Moses to lead the people of England and subsequently the world into a final era of justice and self-fulfillment. But Winstanley's Cromwellian England, while communist and liberating, was also constitutional, rule-bound, and increasingly authoritarian–an exemplary instance, for Appelbaum, of "the eye and the I."

Utopian thinking continued to flourish under the Cromwellian Protectorate, and to flourish with remarkable sociological sophistication, but its focus had shifted. For thinkers like James Harrington and Henry Vane the object was not to expand liberty but to formulate the intellectual and moral categories by which its re-

publican bases might be "settled" and stabilized. This claim becomes less persuasive when we consider the role of Judaism within the radical Anglophone imagination. Cromwell's unquestionably idealistic efforts in 1655 to readmit the Jews into England surely constitute an expansion of liberty. Moreover, Cromwell's undertaking found its roots in 1653 radicalism and apocalyptic philo-Semitism. It comprises the culmination of a powerful utopian tradition reaching back into the 1620s (in which Bacon's *New Atlantis* formed a part) and even into the 1590s.[1] It is unfortunate that English preoccupation with the Jews and their role in the ideal world to emerge at the end of days never enters Appelbaum's discussion.

1659 saw an extraordinary outburst of apocalyptic and utopian writing, much of it seeking to revitalize the earlier radicalism of "the good old cause," but much of it also seeking to incorporate the massive intellectual achievements of the 1650s. The year also witnessed an efflorescence of anti-utopian, anti-apocalyptic writing that emerged from a competing tradition in which Henry Hammond, the answer to Parliament's nineteen propositions, and even archbishop William Laud had played a large role.

With the Restoration, utopian literature again became transformed. The retreat from politics, from a world that one might create rather than simply inherit, brought with it a de-politicized utopianism. Utopia now looked within, looked to personal self-discovery, to aesthetic reflection, to escape, and to resolute political detachment. Bacon's *New Atlantis* and Shakespeare's *Tempest* would be re-read and re-edited to promote the new temper: inward change validated the social status quo, discounted politics, foreclosed public life. So too did the hugely self-absorbed and self-indulgent Margaret Cavendish in her *Blazing Worlds* (1666). In the end, English utopian thought in the seventeenth century describes an extraordinary arc, from legitimating monarchy through an idealized reading of it, to subverting monarchy by presenting proto-modern alternatives to it, to promoting monarchy once again through an emphatic assertion of its own irrelevance. On this telling, utopia opened the door to modernity only to abdicate the undertaking. But even at its most radical and most inventive, utopianism in this account embodied a severe ambiguity, an ambiguity that it apparently shares with modernity itself.

Appelbaum has written a deeply unsatisfactory book, a book whose central assumptions and claims collapse on inspection. Virtually all English utopian thought prior to 1660, and even much utopian thought prior to 1800, found its bedrock in John Foxe (d. 1587) and his vision of England operating historically within sacred time–and with Foxe's successors such as Thomas Brightman (d. 1607) and Hugh Broughton (d. 1612). Here was Elizabethan orthodoxy, and this apocalyptic vision of the past, England's first historicism, made it possible to imagine the future. It is no accident that the only work Winstanley actually cites other than scripture is John Foxe. That Appelbaum should make no mention whatever of Foxe, his successors, or of the Anglophone apocalyptic tradition is nothing short of astounding.

Appelbaum's notion of otherworldly "high Calvinist orthodoxy" simply will not do. We would find ourselves severely challenged to find a more orthodox high Calvinist than the preacher, professor, and court poet Andrew Melville (d. 1622). Yet his poetry developed a highly articulated apocalyptic vision of the future, one that surely qualifies as utopian, and one that spoke to wide-ranging audiences in both Britain and Europe.[2] Analogous thinking will be found within the English church establishment during the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries.

Nearly all of the early-seventeenth-century utopias were not merely political, but also spiritual and soteriological. Almost without exception they aimed at the historical redemption rather than merely the well-ordered commonwealth. Salvation comprised the whole point of re-founding human cognition. The apocalypse, not some murky "utopian mastery," severely separates these utopias from More's. More sought to imagine how far reason without revelation might carry mankind and thus discover its boundaries. Seventeenth-century utopias seek to do just the opposite, to transcend boundary through the immanent workings of the prophetic in the latter days. Moreover, all these utopias, whether Bacon's, Campanella's, Andreae's, Buraeus's, or the Rosicrucians', embodied a collective undertaking. Their purposes would only be achieved "by public designation … not by private endeavor." They both created public space and depended upon it–and were anything but lonely and "Columbusoid."

To be sure, many people on both sides of the border had great expectations in 1603. Many looked to the new king and still more to his young son Prince Henry to work massive achievements, a new British order and still more cosmic events on the European stage. David Hume of Godscroft (d. 1630?) seems to have regarded the 1603 union not only as a providential moment but also as Machiavellian *occasione*, offering a unique opportunity

for political innovation and creativity. He looked to the forming of a new British people, neither English nor Scottish, and, with that, to a radical civic Britain quite at odds with the hierarchical polity James sought and had outlined in his *True Lawe* and *Basilikon Doron.*[3] Far from being cooped by utopian royalism, competing political ideals, at once utopian and apocalyptic, confronted the Stuart regime right from the outset.

If Appelbaum misses the religious underpinnings and spiritual meanings of the utopias he studies, no less does he have problems with the political context in which they were written. Surprisingly, his understanding of the era derives heavily from older writings that most historians today would regard as long superceded: Perez Zagorin's study of political thought during the revolution (1954), Macpherson's Marxist analysis (1962), Michael Walzer's study of English radicalism (1965), the early essays of Christopher Hill (mainly from the 1960s), among others, and perhaps most notably the dated and discredited work of H. R. Trevor-Roper.[4] Reliance on this earlier historical writing inherently prevents him from engaging much more recent revisionist historians and thereby from writing the post-revision study he apparently intends.

Utopian and apocalyptic thinking undoubtedly did play a crucial role in the creation of modernity. Unfortunately, Appelbaum provides little insight into their connection and history. It is hard to imagine what prompted Cambridge University Press to publish so flawed and poorly conceived a volume.

Notes

[1]. The *locus classicus within a huge literature on apocalyptic philo-Semitism is David S. Katz,* Philo-Semitism and the Readmission of the Jews to England, 1603-1655 *(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982). See also R. B. Waddington and A. H. Williamson, eds.,* The Expulsion of the Jews: 1492 and After_ (New York: Garland, 1994).

[2]. See P. J. McGinnis and A. H. Williamson, eds., *George Buchanan: The Political Poetry* (Edinburgh: Scottish History Society, 2000), pp. 31-40, 276-297.

[3]. P. J. McGinnis and A. H. Williamson, eds., *The British Union* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2002).

[4]. Perhaps most notably, Perez Zagorin, *A History of Political Thought in the English Revolution* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1954); C. B. Macpherson, *Possessive Individualism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962); Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965); and H. R. Trevor-Roper, *Religion, the Reformation, and Social Change* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967). It is unfortunate that Appelbaum does not provide a bibliography.

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