Coda: the popular apocalyptic context

For the English political nation these were special times indeed; each event was replete with ideological significance. Apocalyptics were convinced they were witnessing the dawning of the last days. "All things conspire to shew that the end of the world is at hand," the editor of the *Weekly Intelligencer* told his readers, "for not only in Christendom, but beyond it the presages have manifested themselves." "Antichrist shall be destroyed by the brightness of Christ's coming," Culpeper knew from the stars, "neither shall you see the effects of that Eclipse [of] 1654 passed, before it be accomplished." This was no time to be lukewarm.[1] Naturally these shakings in the world were not compatible with earthly monarchy. "You shall shine forth to other nations," Cromwell told the Rump, "who shall emulate the glory of such a pattern" of Commonwealth "and through the power of God turn into the like." Nicholas Culpeper knew that the time had come to "bring a new Government into the world different from Kingly Government."[2] These opinions could easily be turned against the Dutch whose Protestantism was now seen to be lukewarm, whose republicanism was perceived to be nominal, for Englishmen had been taught to believe that before "God destroy the Pope, he shall pour out his vial on some Protestant or Lutheran

1 *Weekly Intelligencer*, 17–24 June 1651, p. 208; Nicholas Culpeper, *An Ephemeris for the Year 1652* (London, 1652), Thomason: November 1651, p. 19. See also John Owen, *The Advantage of the Kingdome of Christ in the Shaking of the Kingdomes of the World*, sermon preached to Parliament 24 October 1651. (Oxford, 1651), pp. 25–26; *A Perfect Diurnall*, 22–29 September 1651, p. 1326; ; Stephen Marshall, *A Sermon Preached To The Right Honourable the Lord Mayor, the Court of Aldermen of the City of London, at their Anniversary Meeting on Easter Monday April 1652* (London, 1653). Thomason: 11 May 1653, p. 19. All of these themes are commented on by a sermon of William Ames reprinted on 30 November 1651, *The Saints Security, Against Seducing Spirits*. (London, 1652). Thomason: 30 November 1651, p. 1.

2 Cromwell to William Lenthall, 4 September 1650, in *The Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell with Olucidations by Thomas Carlyle*, edited by S. C. Lomas (London, 1904) Vol. II, pp. 108–109; Culpeper, *An Ephemeris for 1652*, p. 15. See also *Weekly Intelligencer*, 2–9 September 1651, p. 273; William Lilly, *Monarchy, or No Monarchy in England*. (London, 1651). Thomason: 6 August 1651, p. 55; memoranda to Hyde, Bod., Clar. 41, f. 28.

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Church which made profession of the Gospel against Popery, but obeyed it not."[3]

Classical republicans also saw the urgency in combatting any who supported a restoration of the Stuarts. As a newly formed republic, England "must look to have all those for enemies, that were familiars and retainers to the tyrant." The Dutch, one pamphleteer explained, had shown just such "unnatural ingratitude" by "fomenting ... the Royal party against the Parliament of England." Clearly they were prepared to "become an Egyptian plague unto us."[4] Although the Dutch had once seemed like "the Israelites passing the Red Sea," they now appeared to be dominated by "imperiousness of spirit." William Lilly consequently predicted defeat for the "ambitious Hollander." "It is God's way," warned the *Mercurius Politicus* ominously, "to suffer the rabble of his enemies by seeming advantages to grow very insolent before their ruin."[5]

Certainly the navy did not see the war against the Dutch as a battle fought for economic gain. All indications serve to vindicate the claims of *Mercurius Politicus* that there was "a very great resolution in all the officers of our fleet, to stand up for the interest of the Common-Wealth." "The Lord (appearing mightily for his people in times of greatest danger)," wrote one naval man in the wake of the battle of the Downs, "wonderfully preserved the life of our admiral." Robert Blake himself invoked the blessing of "righteous God." "We had the strong God on our side," agreed Rear Admiral Nehemiah Bourne, "who would judge between the nations." "This is the first of God's appearing for us by sea," he ecstatically proclaimed, "giving us great boldness to believe that the war was his." "I am very confident upon very safe grounds of faith," wrote Bourne drawing the obvious corollary, "that [the Dutch] should be as driven stubble before the whirlwind of the Lord."[6] The entire fleet, joined by "some particular congregations in London," "kept several days of humiliation" to put them in the right frame of mind to do God's work.[7]

[3] Robert Parker, *The Mystery of the Vialls Opened.* (London, 1650), Thomason: 21 August 1650, p.5. Much of this argument, indeed eschatological thinking in general, was refined in the two-year struggle against Charles II and Covenanting Scotland. That these arguments had been current for so long makes it exceedingly likely that these arguments were neither hard for Englishmen to understand nor believe. See for example Cromwell's letters in *Letters and Speeches to Cromwell*, Vol. II, pp. 109, 123, 137, 140–141, 151.

[4] *Mercurius Politicus*, 10–17 April 1651, p. 719; *A Seasonable Expostulation with the Netherlands* (Oxford, 1652), Thomason: 12 June 1652, pp. 1–2.

[5] *Faithful Scout*, 28 May–4 June 1652, p. 564; *Mercurius Politicus*, 23 September–1 October 1651, pp. 1099–1100; John Lilly, *Merlini Anglici Ephemeris* (1651), n.p.

[6] *Mercurius Politicus*, 3–10 June 1652, pp. 1651, [1656]; *A Perfect Account*, 19–26 May 1652, pp. 578–579; Blake to Lenthall, 20 May 1652, Gardiner, *Letters and Papers*, p. 195; [Nehemiah Bourne], *The Copy of a Letter of the Reare-Admiral of the English Fleet for the Common Wealth of England, to an Eminent Merchant in London* (London, 1652), pp. 4, 6, 7.

[7] *Perfect Diurnall*, 31 May–7 June 1652, p. 1927; *Several Proceedings*, 3–10 June 1652, p. 2207; *French Occurences*, 31 May–7 June 1652, p. 27.

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The reaction of civilian society was similar. Retribution was the most common theme. "There is nothing like a bastinado to bring these poor Johns and pickled herrings to their senses again," opined the *Mercurius Bellonius*. John Owen lamented that the Dutch "should join with the great Antichristian interest." The Dutch had appealed to heaven to support their cause, "and so heretofore had the Scots" commented the *Weekly Intelligencer*, "but the event hath since taught them which is the cause that Providence will own." "The Lord will make them a rod of his wrath to be chastised" wrote another journalist. Ralph Josselin knew that Holland was the Tyre – the maritime city which was destroyed because of its inordinate materialism and its failure to aid its ally Jerusalem – described in Ezekiel. All of these themes were graphically displayed in a broadside published on the eve of the departure of the Dutch ambassadors. In *Dr. Dorislaus Ghost* all of the canonic tales of Dutch perfidy were retold, using powerful religious imagery. In the center of the print a pristine virgin is matched against a worldly Dutchman, whose pendant represents a Lion's Paw obscuring the sun, representing the efforts of Lord Pauw to obscure the truth of the Dutch attack in the Downs. The print's commentary describes the scene as "Dr. Dorislaus's Ghost representing truth, brought forth of the grave by time." In these last days of the world Dutch crimes would be revealed and punished.[8]

The outbreak of the Anglo-Dutch War, then, appears very different when evaluated in the context of the ideological debates which loomed so large during the Interregnum. The cause of the war was economic only in the sense that the English believed lingering Orangism to have led the previously virtuous Dutch Republic down the path towards a base materialism. Not only was the political language in which the war was justified not the language of economic interest, but every indication suggests that the English economic community was very unhappy with the outbreak of the war. The powerful London merchant John Greene knew that the war "will be fatal to all merchants and trade." A war with Holland, wrote the Canary merchant John Paige, would "give over our trade." "Our merchants will suffer" in war, the *Perfect Passages* admitted. Even the Earl of Leicester thought that a war with the Dutch "probably would ruin both

[8] *Mercurius Bellonius*, 9–16 February 1652, p. [13]; Owen quoted in Blair Worden, *The Rump Parliament, 1649–1653* (Cambridge, 1974), p. 302; *Weekly Intelligencer*, 20–27 April 1652, p. 436; *French Occurrences*, 14–21 June 1652, p. 48; Josselin *Diary*, 15 January 1652, p. 268 – refers to the story in Ezekiel 26; *Dr. Dorislaus Ghost, Presented by Time to Unmask the Vizards of the Hollanders; And Discover the Lions Paw in the Face of the Sun, in this Juncture of Time: Or, a List of XXVII Barbarous and Bloody Cruelties and Murthers, Massacres and Base Treacheries of the Hollanders against England and English men* ... (London, 1652). Thomason: 29 June 1652. Broadside.

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their state and this."[9] In light of the relatively small capital of the English merchants and the instant havoc that a war would wreak these were not unreasonable assessments.

Rather, the war began because the English political nation was profoundly disillusioned by the Dutch refusal to join them in a Protestant and republican alliance. The political and religious vocabulary then current left very few options. Indeed the similarities between the Dutch and the Scots seemed all too obvious to Englishmen, who called for a similar response to both crises. It was the English conviction that the Dutch were fallen Protestants, corrupted by their experience under Orangist tyranny into worshipping gold rather than God, that provoked them into passing the Navigation Act. Only by striking the Dutch where they could still feel the dagger, did the English think they could resuscitate the souls of the Dutch and restore them to a proper republican spirit. By the winter of 1651–1652 so many pamphlets, newsbooks, almanacs and sermons had proclaimed the Dutch to be lapsed Protestants and insincere republicans that even though the Council of State wished to pull back from the brink of war popular opinion pushed them over. This war was not fought for economic motives, because the economic arguments that were made were only a means to reach Protestant and Republican ends. A French newsletter writer was exactly right when he told Mazarin that the Rump acted only upon "motives of religion and principle."[10]

[9] E. M. Symonds (editor), *The Diary of John Greene (1635–1657)* Pt. III, in *English Historical Review* Vol. 44 No. 173 (January 1929) pp. 106–117; Paige to Paynter and Clerke, 16 February 1652, Steckley, *John Paige*, p. 62; *Perfect Passages*, 4–11 June 1652, p. 393; Leicester's Journal, HMC, *DeLisle*, p. 613.

[10] Newsletter to Mazarin, 13 February 1652, PRO, PRO 31/3/90, f. 451 (my translation).

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