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Milton and Cromwell: Another Look at the Evidence

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Abstract It is often claimed that John Milton grew politically disaffected under the Protectorate government, which he served as Latin secretary. This article reviews the evidence for said disaffection. It finds that the passages in Milton's writings that have been taken to show disaffection with Protectorate or Protector, most of which postdate Cromwell's death, have little to do with Cromwell and mainly to do with the rapidly shifting political conditions of 1659–60. While the Cromwellian religious settlement fell short of the disestablishment Milton wanted, Cromwell favored religious toleration more strongly than his parliaments did, and Milton supported him in foreign affairs. Most likely Milton had no such thing as a single view of the Protectorate regime; his views of its various actors and interest groups, its successes and failures, would have been detailed and complex.

John Milton was appointed secretary for Foreign Tongues by the newly formed Council of State on March 15, 1649, and remained in that office through the eleven-year Interregnum.[1] Under the Rump Parliament, Milton reported to the Council of State. Under the Protectorate, he reported to John Thurloe, Cromwell's secretary of state, intelligence director, and right-hand man. Milton worked, therefore, at one remove from the Lord Protector himself, as a senior member of a small secretarial corps. The relationship between Cromwell and Milton is naturally intriguing and has prompted imaginative reconstructions; J. W. Shorthouse's historical novel *John Inglesant*, for instance, has "Mr. Secretary Milton" briefing Cromwell on the examination of royalist prisoners.[2] In fact there is no evidence that the two were personally close. Cromwell never mentioned Milton in his writings. Milton praised Cromwell effusively in his *Second Defense of the English People*, printed in late May 1654, in the first months of the Protectorate; thereafter, apart from one passing reference the following year, he never mentioned Cromwell again.[3]

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[1] It is not known just when Milton ceased his government duties. His last recorded salary payment is dated 25 October 1659. See Gordon Campbell, *A Milton Chronology* (New York, 1997), 186.

[2] J. W. Shorthouse, *John Inglesant: a Romance*, 6th ed. (New York, 1882), 150–51.

[3] "*Cromuellus,* eo quidem tempore nostrorum exercituum Imperator, nunc totius Reipublicae vir summus" ("Cromwell, at that time the leader of our armies, now the first man in the state"). *Pro Se Defensio* (1655) in Frank Allen Patterson et al., eds., *The Works of John Milton* (New York, 1931–42), 9:12. Hereafter cited in notes by volume and page as *CM*.

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"There is a consensus," writes Joad Raymond, "that at some point between 1653 and 1659 . . . Milton became disillusioned with Cromwell."[4] The consensus account runs as follows. Milton's praises of Cromwell in the *Second Defense* were accompanied by advice, suggesting conditional support and grounds for future disappointment. Milton would have been disappointed by Cromwell's refusal to disestablish the church; by his purging of "commonwealthsmen" from his two parliaments; by the quasi-regal trappings that the Protectorate assumed in its final phase under the revised constitution, the *Humble Petition and Advice*; and by the succession from Oliver Cromwell to Richard. Evidence for Milton's disillusionment with Cromwell has been found in his reduction of duties in the mid-1650s; in his 1658 publication of a collection of political aphorisms attributed to Sir Walter Ralegh, *The Cabinet-Council*; in his silence upon Cromwell's death; and in his insistence on the "abjuration of a single person" in his political writings of 1659–60, culminating in his proposals for a "free commonwealth" in *The Ready and Easy Way*, published on the eve of the Restoration. Austin Woolrych and Blair Worden have provided the most influential statements of this view; it has recently been elaborated by the late Kevin Sharpe, who attributes to Milton a "republican aesthetic" to which the increasingly regal style of Protectorate would have proved uncongenial.[5]

While some version of this account is accepted by most Milton scholars, it has its skeptics.[6] These have pointed out that while many other allies and supporters of Cromwell quarreled with him or left his service, Milton never did. He continued to translate state correspondence throughout the Protectorate, drew his government salary, and marched in the Lord Protector's funeral. It is unclear how far Milton scaled back his government duties in the later 1650s, and if he did scale them back he may have done so for nonpolitical reasons: his blindness, or concentration on other projects. Milton wrote nothing critical of the government while Cromwell

[4] Joad Raymond, "The Rhetoric of Milton's Defenses," in *The Oxford Handbook of Milton*, ed. Nicholas McDowell and Nigel Smith (Oxford, 2009), 283.

[5] See Austin Woolrych, "Milton & Cromwell: 'A Short but Scandalous Night of Interruption?,'" in *Achievements of the Left Hand: Essays on Milton's Prose*, ed. Michael Lieb and John Shawcross (Amherst, MA, 1974), 185–218; Blair Worden, "John Milton and Oliver Cromwell," in *Soldiers, Writers, and Statesmen of the English Revolution*, ed. Ian Gentles, John Morrill, and Blair Worden (Cambridge, 1998), 243–64; Blair Worden, *Literature and Politics in Cromwellian England* (Oxford, 2007), chapters 11–13; Blair Worden, *God's Instruments: Political Conduct in the England of Oliver Cromwell* (Oxford, 2012), chapter 9; Kevin Sharpe, "'Something of Monarchy': Milton and Cromwell, Republicanism and Regality," in *Reading Authority and Representing Rule in Early Modern England* (London, 2013), 173–91. For other statements of this view, see, for example, David Armitage, "Milton Against Empire," in *Milton and Republicanism*, ed. David Armitage, Armand Himy, and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge, 1995), 206–25; Martin Dzelzainis, "Milton and the Protectorate in 1658," in *Milton and Republicanism*, 181–205; John Coffey, 'The Brand of *Gentilism*': Milton's Jesus and the Augustinian Critique of Pagan Kingship, 1649–1671," *Milton Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (2014): 67–95.

[6] See Robert Thomas Fallon, *Milton in Government* (University Park, PA, 1993); Robert Thomas Fallon, "*A Second Defense*: Milton's Critique of Cromwell?," *Milton Studies*, 39(2000):167–83; Paul Stevens, "Milton's 'Renunciation' of Cromwell: The Problem of Raleigh's Cabinet-Council," *Modern Philology* 98, no. 3 (2001): 363–92; Laura Lunger Knoppers, "Late Political Prose," in *A Companion to Milton*, ed. Thomas N. Corns (Malden, MA, 2001), 309–25; Gordon Campbell and Thomas N. Corns, *John Milton: Life, Work, and Thought* (Oxford, 2008).

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lived; nor did he criticize Cromwell directly after his death; his silence may indicate political satisfaction as well as disaffection.[7]

Milton's view of Cromwellian government matters beyond our interest in the personalities involved; it affects our sense of Milton's evolution as a political thinker, and of the politics of his later writings, including *Paradise Lost*. Since Milton left no direct statements on the subject, arguments about their relationship are built on two types of evidence. First, there are passages in his post-Protectorate writings that have been interpreted as posthumous repudiations of Cromwell. Second, there is indirect evidence, wherein Protectorate policies are compared with positions Milton took or can be presumed to have taken, and areas of concord or discrepancy noted. This essay considers the former sort of evidence in its first part, the latter in its second, and attempts to sum the matter up afresh. Its conclusions largely support the minority view. The first part examines the principal Miltonic passages that have been taken to show disillusionment with Cromwell. It finds them to have little to do with Milton's retrospective judgment of Protectorate or Protector, and mainly to do with the rapidly shifting (and, for Milton, increasingly dire) political circumstances of 1659–60. The second part finds the indirect evidence a mixed bag. Milton supported some Cromwellian policies (particularly in foreign affairs, the area in which he was employed) and disliked others (particularly the religious settlement, which fell short of what he wanted). The matters alleged by Worden, Sharpe et al. to have disappointed Milton probably did so; the question is what these disappointments amounted to. There were also substantial areas of accord, and the fact that Milton continued in his office does not suggest that his disappointment was overwhelming. In any case, such disappointments as Milton experienced under Cromwell became less and less pertinent in the period of "anarchy" that followed Cromwell's death, with its multiple changes in government culminating in the Stuart Restoration. By the time Milton arrived at his overtly republican stance in *The Ready and Easy Way*, Oliver Cromwell's Protectorate was a distant memory, though the Lord Protector had died but a year and a half before: so much had happened in the meantime, and so grave was the immediate threat to the Commonwealth itself.

■■■

Where in his writings did Milton reject, deplore, or protest Cromwell or Cromwellian government? The usual Exhibit A is a longstanding crux. In the preface to his tract *Considerations Touching the Likeliest Means to Remove Hirelings out of the Church*, written in the summer of 1659, Milton addressed the Rump Parliament, which had been newly restored to power on May 7 of that year. He saluted its members as "the authors and best patrons of religious and civil libertie, that ever these Ilands brought forth. The care and tuition of whose peace and safety, after a short but scandalous night of interruption, is now again by a new dawning of Gods miraculous providence among us, revolvd upon your shoulders."[8] The phrase "short but scandalous night of interruption" may refer to the six-year interval

[7] An exception is alleged by Dzelzainis, "Milton and the Protectorate," which finds anti-Cromwellian implications in Milton's publication of *The Cabinet-Council* in 1658. For a rebuttal, see Stevens, "Cabinet-Council."

[8] Don M. Wolfe, et al., eds., *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton* (New Haven, CT, 1953–82), 7:274. Hereafter cited in notes by volume and page number as *CPW*.

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between Cromwell's dissolution of the Rump on 20 April 1653, and its restoration in May 1659. If so, it would appear to condemn the Protectorate in retrospect. It may refer instead to the fortnight between the Army's forced dissolution of the Third Protectorate Parliament on 21–22 April 1659 and its restoration of the Rump on 7 May. If so, the phrase is a reaction to immediate affairs, and tells us nothing about Milton's 1659 view of Protectorate or Protector. There are difficulties with both readings. If Milton was referring to the six-year interval, it is hard to see why he would describe it as "short." If he was referring to the recent fortnight, the problem becomes making sense of "interruption," since the dismissed Third Protectorate Parliament and the restored Rump were substantially different bodies. David Masson subscribed to the fortnight view, followed by Robert Fallon and by Milton's recent biographers Thomas Corns and Gordon Campbell. The majority opinion, sustained by Woolrych, Worden, and others, takes the phrase to cover the full six years.[9]

Milton made a similar reference to "interruptions" in the first edition of *The Ready and Easy Way*, (February 1660) drafted while the Rump was once again in power:

> After our liberty thus successfully fought for, gaind and many years possessd, except in those unhappie interruptions, which God hath remov'd, and wonderfully now the third time brought together our old Patriots, the first Assertours of our religious and civil rights, now that nothing remains but in all reason the certain hopes of a speedy and immediate settlement to this nation for ever in a firm and free Commonwealth.[10]

Woolrych and Yale Prose editor Robert Ayers take "those unhappie interruptions" to include the whole of the Protectorate.[11] Because the phrase "our old Patriots" refers to the Rump, Ayers concludes that Milton meant "interruptions" to cover those parts of the Interregnum when the Rump was not in power: that is, 20 April 1653 to 7 May 1659, and then the two months of chaotic military rule during the autumn of 1659 (13 October–26 December), before the Rump was "wonderfully now the third time brought together." The period of "interruption," on this reading, would be longer than the liberty "many years possessed" of the Commonwealth. In his political writing Milton often stretched a point for rhetorical purposes; if this interpretation is correct, he would here have stretched quite

[9] See David Masson, *The Life of John Milton* (Cambridge, 1875–94), 5:606–07; Fallon, *Milton in Government*, 184–85; Don M. Wolfe, *Milton in the Puritan Revolution* (New York, 1941), 289–90; Woolrych, "Milton & Cromwell," 201–09; Woolrych, "Introduction," *CPW*, 7:85–87; Worden, "Milton and Cromwell," 243; Worden, *Literature and Politics*, 41–44; Corns and Campbell, *John Milton: Life, Work, and Thought* (Oxford, 2008), 287–88. On the one hand, Woolrych, followed by Worden, explains "short" by reference to an anonymous anti-Cromwellian pamphlet, dated by Thomason 18 May 1659, whose title refers to the Protectorate as a "short, sharp night of tyranny and oppression;" here is a precedent whose language Milton might have echoed, consciously or not ("Milton & Cromwell," 209). On the other hand, explanations have been offered for "interruption": Robert Fallon notes that around half the members of the restored Rump had previously sat in Richard's parliament (*Milton in Government*, 184) and Corns and Campbell observe that Milton "appears to regard parliament as a sort of Platonic ideal variously and imperfectly embodied in several manifestations" (*John Milton*, 288). A third possibility raised by William B. Hunter, that the phrase refers to Richard's eight-month Protectorate, supposedly usurped from General Fleetwood contrary to Oliver's dying wishes, is evaluated in detail and found implausible by Woolrych ("Milton & Cromwell," 202–09).

[10] *CPW*, 7:356.

[11] Ibid., 356, n8; Woolrych, "Short but Scandalous Night," 210–11.

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far. It is not clear, however, what he would have gained from doing so in this case. The interpretation produces a Swiss-cheese view of recent history whereby the decade-long Commonwealth experiment would have seen more interruption than legitimate government. This is at odds with Milton's broader rhetorical aim in *The Ready and Easy Way* to represent the English revolution as a great and solid achievement—"our liberty thus successfully fought for, gaind and many years possessd"—that should not be abandoned in haste, as he sees the multitude dangerously ready to do. In the tract's second edition, printed in April 1660, Milton revised the sentence as follows:

> After our liberty and religion thus prosperously fought for, gaind and many years possessd, except in those unhappie interruptions, which God hath remov'd, now that nothing remains, but in all reason the certain hopes of a speedie and immediat settlement for ever in a firm and free Commonwealth.[12]

Milton added "and religion," his deepest concern, and he removed the reference to the Rump ("our old Patriots"). The latter change responds to altered political circumstances, since the Rump MPs no longer controlled Parliament after Monck had reinstated the formerly excluded members on 21 February. We can see from this revision that when Milton dictated that sentence he was not thinking of the Rump as the sole legitimate governing authority, and the other regimes as "interruptions": if he had been, he would have deleted the sentence rather than revised it. It seems most likely, then, that in both versions of *The Ready and Easy Way* the "unhappie interruptions" he had in mind were the two military coups of April and October 1659, not the full six-year interval between Cromwell's dissolution of the Rump in 1653 and its reinstatement in 1659. This reading best suits the delicate balance Milton tried to strike in *The Ready and Easy Way*. He wanted to minimize while deploring the intervals of anarchy, which had led most of the political nation to conclude that stability could only return with the Stuarts, and to emphasize, however unrealistically, the ease with which a commonwealth government could be placed on a permanently stable footing, with no more "interruptions"—hence the title *The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth*.

If Milton's "those unhappie interruptions, which God hath remov'd" in *The Ready and Easy Way* referred to the two 1659 coups, it then appears more likely that the phrase "short but scandalous night of interruption" in *Likeliest Means*, written in the summer of 1659, referred to the two-week aftermath of the April 1659 coup rather than to the six-year Protectorate. Milton was using "interruption" to mean "forced dissolution of parliament," common usage in the political writing of the 1650s.[13] This usage need carry no implication that the parliament restored after

[12] *CPW*, 7:421.

[13] See, for example, *The Parliaments plea, or, XX reasons for the union of the Parliament & Army presented to publick consideration wherein the whole matter betwixt Parliament and Army is argued and this new interruption condemned* (1659) (Early English Books Online; hereafter EEBO); *Some animadversions upon the declaration of, and the plea for the army: together with 16 queries thence extracted Or, an essay by way of answer to the plea for, and declaration of the army, in reference to their interruption of the Parliaments sitting, October the 12. Written November 4.1659* (EEBO); *The Christian Commonvvealth: or, The civil policy of the rising kingdom of Jesus Christ. Written before the interruption of the government, by Mr. John Eliot, teacher of the Church of Christ at Roxbury in New-England*, Thomason E1001[10] (1659) (EEBO).

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the "interruption" was identical to the one in session before it. The scandal lay in the army grandees' taking power arbitrarily into their own hands, leaving the country for two weeks with no government at all. The phrase "short but scandalous night of interruption" has long puzzled scholars, and I would scarcely claim that the foregoing reasons should settle the matter. The point is that Milton's references to "interruptions" in his late political prose provide no firm foundation for a case that he came to turn against Protector or Protectorate.

The same uncertainty applies to Milton's seeming change of position on Cromwell's original dissolution of the Rump in April 1653. In the *Second Defense*, printed in May 1654, Milton praised the action as a matter of necessity. Following his victories over the Scots, Cromwell returned to serve his nation in Parliament:

> Then, but not for the first time, we perceived that you were as mighty in deliberation as in the arts of war. Daily you toiled in Parliament, that the treaty made with the enemy might be honored, or that the decrees in the interest of the State might at once be passed. When you saw delays being contrived and every man more attentive to his private interest than to that of the state, when you saw the people complaining that they had been deluded of their hopes and circumvented by the power of the few, you put an end to the domination of these few men, since they, although so often warned, had refused to do so.[14]

Milton mentioned the first dissolution of the Rump again in passing in the unpublished "Letter to a Friend" dated 20 October 1659, a week after Lambert's troops had expelled the Parliament for the second time in six months. In this document, Milton deplored the latest coup as an act of backsliding by the army leaders, the more surprising since they had repented of their previous coup in April, and shown "the fruits of their repentance in the righteousnesse of their restoring the old famous parlament, which they had without just autority dissolved."[15] The last phrase, "which they had without just autority dissolved," apparently refers to the original April 1653 dissolution of the Rump by Cromwell; it looks as if Milton reversed himself on one of the most controversial acts of Cromwell's career. But notice "they," not "he." Why? Milton's sentence alludes to a public statement released by the army grandees, the Declaration of the Officers of the Army of 6 May 1659, in which the Council of Officers who had held control of the government since Fleetwood's coup invited the Rump to return.[16] In this document, Fleetwood et al. represented their decision as stemming from godly repentance:

> And also observing to our great grief, that the good Spirit which formerly appeared amongst us, in the carrying on of this great work, did daily decline so as the Good old Cause itself became a reproach; We have been led to look back and examine the

[14] *CPW,* 4:67. See *CM*, 8:220, "tum te, sed neque tum primum, non minus consiliis, quam belli artibus valere sensimus: id quotidie in senatu agebas, vel ut com hoste pacta fides servaretur, vel uti ea, quae ex republica essent, mature decernerentur. Cum videres moras necti, privatae quemque rei, quam publicae, attentiorem, populum queri delusum se sua spe, & potentia paucorum circumventum esse, quod ipsi toties moniti nolebant, eorum dominationi finem imposuisti."

[15] *CPW,* 7:324.

[16] Ibid., 324–25, n5.

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> cause of the Lords withdrawing his wonted presence from us, and where we turned out of the way, that through mercy we might return and give him the glory.
> And amongst other things, calling to minde, that the long Parliament consisting of the Members which continued there sitting until the 20th of April, 1653, were eminent Assertors of that Cause, and had a special presence of God with them . . . we judge it our duty to invite the aforesaid Members to return to the exercise and discharge of their trust.[17]

Milton's phrase "which they had without just autority dissolved" was his paraphrase of the officers' claim that "the Good old Cause itself became a reproach"; that is, that God had turned away from them because they had turned away from the Cause when the Rump was dismissed six years previously.[18] There was indeed a distancing from Cromwell's act in both the officers' words and Milton's, but in both cases it was a by-product of more immediate concerns. The army grandees, who restored the Rump in early May 1659 under pressure from their junior officers, seeing no alternative, were providing pious color for their actions. It was convenient for them to suggest that the nation's present troubles derived from the April 1653 dissolution of Parliament, associated in all minds with the dead Protector; they could thereby represent themselves as agents of reconciliation, righting Cromwell's original wrong. Milton, writing in October, alluded to the officers' words of early May by way of reproach: here they are doing again what they had apologized for once having done only five months earlier, namely turning out the Rump by force. The army's turning out the Rump by force troubled Milton in fall 1659, whereas it had not in 1654, not because of republican commitments he had developed in the meantime, but because by that point he feared, with good reason, that the power struggle between army and parliament will prove "the readiest way to bring in again the Common enemie, & with him the destrucion of true religion & civill liberty."[19] That was the heart of the matter, in this "Letter to a Friend" and throughout his political writing of the next few months.

There was undoubtedly a shift in Milton's political thinking between 1654, when he wrote of Cromwell in the *Second Defense* "that nothing is more reasonable or pleasing to God than that the worthiest should rule" and February 1660, when he wrote in *The Ready and Easy Way* that "I doubt not but all ingenuous and knowing men will easily agree with me, that a free Commonwealth without single person or house of lords, is by far the best government, if it can be had."[20] The question is how to understand the change. Does it indicate a political philosophy altered by Milton's disillusion with the Protectorate, or an ad hoc response to changed and swiftly changing political conditions? While the "single person" in power was Oliver Cromwell, Milton never objected, in word or in deed; nor did he object when Richard Cromwell succeeded his father upon his death in September 1658. Milton's abjurations of government by "single person" are first to be found in the "Letter to a

[17] *A Declaration of the Officers of the Army* (6 May 1659), 3–4 (EEBO).

[18] For a contrasting view, see Don M. Wolfe, *Milton in the Puritan Revolution* (New York, 1941), 289–90. For Wolfe, this passage shows that Cromwell had come to seem tyrannical in Milton's eyes, and shows that the "short but scandalous night of interruption" in *Likeliest Means* refers to the whole Protectorate.

[19] *CPW*, 7:329.

[20] Ibid., 364–65. See *CM*, 8:222, "nihil esse in in societate hominum magis vel Deo gratum, vel rationi consentaneum, esse in civitate nihil aequius, nihil utilius, quam potiri rerum dignissimum."

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Friend," a manuscript dated 20 October 1659, and were reiterated in his writings of the next six months.[21] By that October, Oliver Cromwell had been dead for over a year. Richard Cromwell was out of politics, having vanished into obscurity after his resignation in May. The "single person" most visible on the political horizon at that point was Charles II.[22]

The major shift in Milton's late political prose did not occur at Cromwell's death, or between the Protectorate and restored Commonwealth, but between the summer and fall of 1659. In his first two tracts of that year, *Of Civil Power and Hirelings*, Milton pressed his longstanding religious agenda, arguing anew for positions he had held for years. *Of Civil Power*, printed in February and addressed to the newly convened Third Protectorate Parliament, argued for the noninterference by the state in religious affairs. *The Likeliest Means to Remove Hirelings out of the Church*, written that summer and addressed to the newly restored Rump, argued for the abolition of tithes.[23] Through the summer Milton was still on the offensive, urging the Parliament to complete what he saw as the Commonwealth's most pressing unfinished business, disestablishing the church; from October on, Milton was playing defense, urging whatever stopgap measures he could lest the Commonwealth itself be swept away. Milton's two surviving manuscripts of that fall, the "Letter to a Friend" dated 20 October, and the short list of talking points "Proposalls of Certaine Expedients for the Preventing of a Civill War Now Feard, & the Settling of a Firme Government" (written during the second 1659 "interruption," probably in November) allow us to pinpoint when Milton's concerns shifted from offense to defense: the turning point was Lambert's coup of 13 October.

Keeping the king out by any available means was the common purpose of Milton's political writings of the next six months: "Letter to a Friend," "Proposalls," the two editions of *The Ready and Easy Way*, a short unpublished letter to General Monck, and the last gasp, *Brief Notes upon a Late Sermon, Titled, The Fear of God and the King*, Milton's angry response to a prematurely triumphalist sermon by the royalist divine Matthew Griffith, who had jumped the gun by a few weeks.[24] These texts are often described as Milton's most thoroughly "republican" writings, but it would be more accurate to describe their politics as "anti-Stuart," and their common first principle as "any government rather than a Stuart restoration." Their various, improvised, and authoritarian constitutional proposals were all devised as means to that end, with any of their details negotiable, as Milton admitted at the start of the first *Ready and Easy Way*: "and so the same end be pursu'd, not insisting on this or that means to obtain it."[25]

While anti-royalist, this phase of Milton's political writing expressed no commitment to representative government—to the contrary—nor to the sovereignty of Parliament. In the *Letter to a Friend*, after Milton deplores the army's October

[21] "The terms to be stood on are Liberty of conscience to all professing Scripture the rule of their faith & worship, And the abjuration of a single person" (*CPW,* 7:330).

[22] For a contrasting view, see Worden, *Literature and Politics*, 340, n45.

[23] The Rump re-opened the question of tithes in June, and Milton most likely began *Hirelings* in the hope of lending his voice to the debate; but the parliament voted to continue tithes on 27 June, before the tract appeared. See Woolrych, in *CPW,* 7:77–83.

[24] "The Present Means, and Brief Delineation of a Free Commonwealth, easy to be put in practice, and without delay. In a Letter to General Monk," *CPW,* 7:392–95.

[25] *CPW,* 7:355.

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dissolution of the Rump, he made clear that he was willing to do without this Parliament if need be:

> If the parlament be thought well dissolv'd, as not complyeing fully to grant liberty of conscience & the necessary consequence thereof, The Removall of a forc'd maintenance from Ministers, then must the Army forthwith chuse a councell of State, whereof as many to be of the parlament as are undoubtedly affected to these two condicions proposed.[26]

In October 1659 Milton was still urging a commitment to the abolition of tithes as a precondition for reinstating the Parliament; his sense of emergency had not yet overcome his focus on this issue. If the Parliament lacked such a commitment, he recommended that the Army purge it again and install a Council of State made up of well-affected MPs who could be relied upon to do so. Here and in the "Proposalls of Certain Expedients," drafted a few weeks later, Milton suggested that the Rump Parliament and leading army officers be confirmed in their positions for life, a proposal designed to end the power struggle between them at the expense of giving the rest of the country a say in its choice of governors. Large-scale disenfranchisement was the object of Milton's proposal for a "perpetual Senate" in *The Ready and Easy Way*. Since the "full and free elections" urged with growing fervor throughout England would return a pro-Restoration Parliament (as all observers realized, and as would shortly come to pass), Milton's most immediate goal was to prevent such elections. He would do so by restricting election to those pledged against a "single person"—qualifications that would, by design, have excluded the majority of likely candidates, and that would have struck most of the political nation as a Hobson's choice: elect any MP you wish, as long as he votes the way I want him to on the fundamental constitutional questions at issue. In his letter to Monck, Milton frankly admitted that free elections must be prevented because they will return the wrong result: "If these [that is, the qualifications] be not such, who foresees not, that our Liberties will be utterly lost in this next Parlament, without some powerful course taken, of speediest prevention?" [27] In place of a freely elected parliament, Milton proposed a permanent council of well-affected men serving life terms: its core presumably the Rump, recruited to full strength "according to the just and necessarie qualifications . . . men not addicted to a single person or a house of lords." [28] This permanent council would be assisted by local assemblies in the provinces, to which routine governance within their several jurisdictions would be devolved. Perhaps Milton convinced himself that increased local autonomy might induce the political nation not to mind its lack of representation at the center; but we see in the "Present Means" letter to Monck, written at the end of February between the two editions of *The Ready and Easy Way*, that he expected his proposals to be unpopular enough to require imposition by force:

> "[I]f these Gentlemen convocated, refuse these fair and noble Offers of immediate Liberty, and happy Condition, no doubt there be enough in every County who will

[26] Ibid., 330.
[27] Ibid., 393.
[28] Ibid., 368.

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> thankfully accept them, your Excellency once more declaring publickly this to be your Mind, and having a faithful Veteran Army, so ready, and glad to assist you in the prosecution thereof."[29]

By April, in *Brief Notes upon a Late Sermon*, Milton was even ready to waive his opposition to a single person, implicitly offering a crown to General Monck:

> if . . . despairing of our own vertue, industrie, and the number of our able men, we may then, conscious of our own unworthiness to be governed better, sadly betake us to our befitting thraldom: yet chusing out of our own number one who hath best aided the people, and best merited against tyrannie, the space of a raign or two we may chance to live happily anough, or tolerably.[30]

One can hear how unenthusiastic he sounded about this prospect, but anything would have been better than the return of the Stuarts.

Milton's use of the republican formula "no single person or House of Lords" in his 1659–60 political writings had less to do with retrospective judgment of the late Lord Protector, and much more to do with preventing a Stuart Restoration. Whatever Milton's reservations about the Rump Parliament, he saw it from the summer of 1659 forward as his best bet for maximal religious freedom, and so he supported it while continuing to lobby it for disestablishment, just as he had supported the Commonwealth and Protectorate governments, with similar exhortations, through the 1650s.[31] That lobbying effort was his focus through *Hirelings*, printed in August 1659, until his attentions were diverted by the October coup. By that November, when Monck's and Lambert's armies were facing each other across the Tweed, the relative stability of Oliver Cromwell's regime must have seemed, to Milton and everyone else, like a bygone age. In January, with the Rump "wonderfully now the third time brought together" and Monck marching south ostensibly in its support, Milton still had reason to hope that it might hang on to power until some firmer arrangement could be reached. But once Monck readmitted the excluded members and heeded the calls on all sides for "full and free elections," the game was up. At this point Milton could only hope for another military coup, which in *The Ready and Easy Way* he urged upon anyone who might be in a position to pull it off. Whenever Milton thought of Cromwell that dark spring, we can imagine how fervently he would have wished the Lord Protector alive and in command again.

■■■

There is no doubt which Cromwellian policy disappointed Milton most: the continuation of public maintenance for the clergy. Twice he had exhorted Cromwell on this

[29] Ibid., 395.

[30] Ibid., 482.

[31] In the October "Letter to a Friend," written in protest of the Army's dissolution of the Rump, Milton adds the qualification "I call it the famous parlament, though not the blameless" (*CPW*, 7:324–25). Nor will he fully condemn the October coup: "I presume not to give my censure upon this action, not knowing, as I doe not, the bottom of it" (*CPW*, 7:326–27).

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point. He did so in brief at the conclusion of his panegyric sonnet to the Lord General of May 1652: "Help us to save free conscience from the paw/ Of hireling wolves whose gospel is their maw." He does so at greater length in the *Second Defense*, urging the Lord Protector to "leave the church to itself" and to "drive those money-changers out of the temple, vendors not of doves but *the* dove, the holy spirit itself."[32] Milton's disappointment would have been the stronger because the Instrument of Government, the constitution under which the Protectorate was established in December 1653, gave reason to hope that the question of public maintenance would be addressed.[33] But the Cromwellian religious settlement left tithes intact. The revised constitution of 1657, the Humble Petition and Advice, took the issue off the table and called for the drawing up of a national confession of faith, both steps in the wrong direction as far as Milton was concerned.

Since disestablishment was a matter so close to Milton's heart, Cromwell's lack of support for it may look like a strong motive for his disaffection. But while Cromwell refused to discontinue tithes, no other government during the Commonwealth era would do so either: not the Rump Parliament, which confirmed public maintenance in April 1652; not the Nominated Parliament, which foundered on that issue; and not the restored Rump, which voted to continue tithes in June 1659, while Milton was writing *Likeliest Means*. What Milton wanted would have amounted to a massive disruption of the status quo: elimination of the Church of England, dismantling of the parish system, ejection of thousands of ministers from their livings, and significant loss of property for the many lay owners of impropriated tithes. For all the sectarian and taxpayer opposition to tithes, doing away with them would have come at a higher political cost than any Commonwealth government was willing to pay. Milton may not have fully recognized the political obstacles that the anti-tithe movement faced, but he had no reason to single out the Protectorate government for blame in failing to deliver on the issue.

There was, moreover, much for Milton to approve in the Cromwellian religious settlement, and in Cromwell's own attitude toward religious freedom. The Instrument of Government allowed for broad doctrinal and liturgical latitude within the established church, and toleration for Protestant worship outside of

[32] *CPW*, 4:678. See *CM*, 8: 234–36, "Deinde si ecclesiam ecclesiae reliqueris . . . ejeceris ex ecclesia nummularios illos, non columbas sed columbam, sanctum ipsum spiritum cauponantes."

[33] The *Instrument*'s thirty-fifth article stipulates:

> That the Christian religion, as contained in the Scriptures, be held forth and recommended as the public profession of these nations; and that, as soon as may be, a provision, less subject to scruple and contention, and more certain than the present, be made for the encouragement and maintenance of able and painful teachers, for the instructing the people, and for discovery and confutation of error, hereby, and whatever is contrary to sound doctrine; and until such provision be made, the present maintenance shall not be taken away or impeached. (Gardiner, *Constitutional Documents of the Puritan Revolution*, 3rd ed. [Oxford, 1906], 416)

The language of the article, based on the Army's 1649 *Agreement of the People*, would not have been fully to Milton's liking, since it assumes a role for government in maintaining ministers, and keeps the "present maintenance" in place until a new system should be established, which never happened. Opponents of tithes, however, could hear "as soon as may be" and "less subject to scruple and contestation" as indications that the question would at least be open to discussion by the new Protectorate parliament.

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it, excluding only popery, prelacy, and "licentiousness."[34] The major ecclesiological changes Cromwell introduced were the Triers and Ejectors, the two bodies that vetted candidates for church livings. These changes did not go far enough for Milton, who wanted no national church at all, and given his Arminian views may have shared the widespread complaint that the Triers were too committed to Calvinist orthodoxy.[35] But he would have allowed the Cromwellian system an improvement on the failed Presbyterian settlement of the late 1640s, in that it allowed for broad freedom of worship outside of the parish church, imposing no penalties on non-disruptive independent Christians like himself. Like Milton, Cromwell belonged to no identifiable denomination or sect; like Milton, he was suspicious of "formality" in religion; like Milton, he urged mutual tolerance among the godly, and tried, with limited success, to reduce the mutual animosity between the "godly interest" and everybody else.[36] While Cromwell was not an intellectual, he thought about politics, as Milton did, in pervasively biblical terms.[37] In both domestic and foreign policy, Cromwell aimed at the pan-Protestant unity that Milton urges from *Areopagitica* forward, whereby differing sorts of Protestants should set aside their "neighboring differences" and join to advance the incomplete work of the Reformation. Since Cromwell shared the Puritan majority view that a Christian magistrate had the duty to support godly teaching and combat irreligion, he understood liberty of conscience more narrowly than did Milton, who took it to entail disestablishment. But Cromwell understood liberty of conscience more broadly than most of the political nation, including the majorities in both his parliaments. The Protectorate government, a limited monarchy from its inception, was more than the Protector, and within it Cromwell himself was the strongest bulwark of toleration for Protestant radicals.[38] Milton was well positioned to appreciate these political dynamics. He

[34] See articles 36 and 37:

> XXXVI. That to the public profession held forth none shall be compelled by penalties or otherwise; but that endeavours be used to win them by sound doctrine and the example of a good conversation.
>
> XXXVII. That such as profess faith in God by Jesus Christ (though differing in judgment from the doctrine, worship or discipline publicly held forth) shall not be restrained from, but shall be protected in, the profession of the faith and exercise of their religion; so as they abuse not this liberty to the civil injury of others and to the actual disturbance of the public peace on their parts: provided this liberty be not extended to Popery or Prelacy, nor to such as, under the profession of Christ, hold forth and practise licentiousness. (Gardiner, *Constitutional Documents*, 416)

[35] For the latter suggestion I am grateful to John Coffey. In *Likeliest Means*, Milton takes at least one clear swipe at the Triers: "And for the magistrate in person of a nursing father to make the church his meer ward, as alwaies in minoritie . . . her to subject to his political drifts or conceivd opinions by mastring her revenue, and so by his examinant committies to circumscribe her free election of ministers, is neither just nor pious." (*CPW*, 7:307–08).

[36] See J. C. Davis, "Cromwell's Religion," in *Cromwell and the Interregnum*, ed. David Smith (Malden, MA, and Oxford, 2003), 139–66.

[37] On Cromwell's Biblicism, see John Morrill, "How Oliver Cromwell Thought," in *Liberty, Authority, Formality: Political Ideas and Culture, 1600–1900*, ed. John Morrow and Jonathan Scott (Exeter and Charlottesville, VA, 2008), 89–111.

[38] See Austin Woolrych, "The Cromwellian Protectorate: A Military Dictatorship?," in Smith, *Cromwell and the Interregnum*, 61–90.

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would have noted, for example, Cromwell's intervention in 1655 on behalf of the outspoken antitrinitarian John Biddle—a case that for Milton would have hit close to home, given the overlap between his own (unpublicized) views and the opinions that landed Biddle in trouble. Milton was disappointed that the hirelings retained their benefices; but to conclude that this disappointment moved him to silent disaffection with the regime he served, we would have to suppose that he drew no distinctions between proponents of greater and lesser religious toleration within the government, and that he saw a glass half full as fully empty.

When we turn to foreign affairs the glass is fuller still. This was the area of government in which Milton worked. While the Council of State employed him in a variety of ways while he still had his eyesight, Milton's core duties as Secretary for Foreign Tongues consisted of translating state correspondence to and from Latin. This work continued through the 1650s. Some one hundred and fifty of Milton's state papers survive and were printed in the seventeenth century.[39] Their chronological distribution suggests that there were periods of greater and lesser activity, but does not suggest that Milton disengaged under the Protectorate. 1654 shows a "marked decline over earlier years," followed by thirteen letters in 1655, thirty-two in 1656, twenty-two in 1657, and twenty-two in 1658; under the Protectorate, Robert Fallon concludes, Milton was "quite clearly as active as ever in his office."[40] Once Milton became fully blind in early 1652, his work became more difficult, since everything had to be done through amanuenses, and much of it may have been performed at home. Campbell and Corns suggest that his work on official correspondence may have amounted all along to less than a full-time job; certainly he found the time for substantial amounts of other writing during his decade in government, including *Eikonoklastes*, the Latin Defenses, *De Doctrina Christiana*, the *History of Britain*, and the beginnings of *Paradise Lost*.[41] On the matter of Milton's putative disengagement under the Protectorate, their conclusion is more cautiously worded than Fallon's: "It seems safe to assume that there was some diminution in his activity because of Milton's disability, but also that his duties changed with the restructuring of government, and that some of his activities cannot now be identified, because a department whose duties include intelligence-gathering is unlikely to keep records for posterity."[42] At minimum the state papers make it clear that Milton's government service continued through Richard's Protectorate. The latest of them is dated 15 May 1659, under the signature of speaker Lenthall of the restored Rump.[43]

[39] On the textual history of the State Papers, see *CM,* 13:593–600; Fallon, *Milton in Government*; Stefano Villani, "Le lettere di Stato inglesi scritte al Granduca di Toscana tra il 1649 e il 1659 e tradotte in latino da John Milton," *Archivio Storico Italiano* 618, no. 4 (2008): 703–66. Villani has recently located the originals of seven of Milton's letters to the Grand Duke of Tuscany, previously unknown, in the Archivio di Stato di Firenze.

[40] Fallon, *Milton in Government*, 124.

[41] Campbell and Corns, *John Milton*, 210–11.

[42] Ibid., 255.

[43] During the Protectorate years Milton's name is largely absent from the Order Books of the Council of State. Robert Fallon has argued that this absence results not from inactivity but a bureaucratic realignment: he was no longer working for the Council, but for the secretary of state. See Fallon, *Milton in Government*, 123–39. Worden finds this explanation unconvincing: see *Literature and Politics in Cromwellian England*, 298, n29.

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The state papers are perhaps the easiest of Milton's writings for scholars to overlook because Milton was not responsible for their contents. His role in composing them was somewhere between translator and speechwriter, and we can only guess how much latitude he was given in the wording; it probably varied according to the sensitivity of the matter at hand. His nephew Edward Phillips, who translated Milton's state papers back into English in 1694, observes in a preface that "Mr Milton is not to be thought to have Written his own Sense, but what was dictated to him by his Superiours. The Language of the Long Parliament was more Imperious and downright; Oliver's Vein more full of Cants; and where he concluded with Threats, he began with Godly Expostulations."[44] Even if Milton's state papers are only "his" in an extended sense of authorship, he considered them sufficiently his own to preserve them among his papers over a period of nearly twenty-five years. (That is our primary means of knowing which state papers Milton wrote; authorially preserved drafts were the main sources for the seventeenth-century editions.) And even without assuming that Milton had any say in their contents, those contents help to explain what bound him to the Protectorate government.

Cromwell was sincerely committed to furthering the Protestant interest overseas, and made international Protestant unity one of the principal aims of his foreign policy. When news of the Piedmont massacre by Savoyard troops reached England in May 1655, Cromwell wrote to nine European heads of state, condemning the massacre and exhorting the Protestant nations to collective action in support of the Vaudois. He contributed a large sum of own money to the relief effort. Milton drafted the letters, and wrote the sonnet "Avenge O Lord thy slaughtered Saints" of his own accord: here is clear alignment between his sentiments and Cromwell's.

When, later in 1655, Cromwell chose to side with France in the ongoing Franco-Spanish conflict, England entered into war with Spain. Cromwell justified this conflict to Parliament in ideological terms as a defense of Protestantism against Europe's preeminent Catholic power and England's old enemy, an argument Milton would have credited.[45] The Baltic was another theater of concern in the Protectorate years, due to Charles X of Sweden's propensity for attacking his neighbors. The letters Milton wrote for Cromwell to the bellicose Swedish king repeatedly stress the interest of peace among Protestant nations, and the need for Protestants to pull together against the common enemy—a line Milton took independently in his arguments for intra-Protestant religious toleration at home. We may be confident that Milton supported his government in these endeavors. They appealed to his anti-Catholicism and also to his robust Protestant nationalism: the sense, which he shared with Cromwell, that the English nation should raise itself to play a leading role in advancing the Reformed religion abroad as well as at home.[46]

[44] *Letters of State, written by Mr. John Milton, to most of the sovereign Princes and Republicks of Europe, from the year 1649. Till the year 1659*, A3r.

[45] See Stevens, "Cabinet-Council," 377–78. For Cromwell's speech at the opening of the Second Protectorate Parliament, see W. C. Abbott, ed., *Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, (Cambridge, MA, 1947) 4:260–79.

[46] "It is this interest in the fate of liberty and religion abroad, this willingness to defend the freedom of individual conscience central to Milton's understanding of Protestantism, that enabled him, despite whatever disillusionment he may have felt with many of Cromwell's domestic policies, to devote so much energy and skill to the articulation of his foreign policies." Stevens, "Cabinet-Council," 375.

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"What Milton did at his masters' bidding is not to be confused with his views on them," claims Blair Worden.[47] But Milton's government service is a matter of record, his private disaffection a matter of conjecture; that Milton stayed in office while many others did not places the burden of proof on Worden's side. Cromwell lost old friends and supporters at various stages: when he dissolved the Rump in April 1653, when he assumed the title of Lord Protector that December, when he purged and then dismissed the first Protectorate Parliament in January 1655, when he purged the Second Protectorate Parliament of oppositional members before it convened in 1656, and when he was ceremonially reinstalled under the new constitution in 1657. Had Milton wished to break with Cromwell at any of these points, he could have done so. In his blindness he had an unassailable excuse. Worden proposes that Milton's disaffection set in early in the Protectorate, and that he stayed on for the salary.[48] No doubt the salary helped—it was substantial, with potential for bribes on top, as Campbell and Corns note—but Milton did not need it to live on; he had other sources of income, sufficient that he remained financially comfortable even after his losses at the Restoration.[49] Had he found government service under Cromwell overly burdensome to his conscience, he could have retired unmolested into private life. The easiest conclusion is that it did not overly burden his conscience.

We need not assume that he had deep misgivings to overcome. Milton was never an MP or a politician of any sort, so Cromwell's heavy-handed treatment of parliaments did not affect him personally, as it affected men he admired such as John Bradshaw and Sir Henry Vane.[50] Under the Protectorate his own position in government did not change, nor had he less reason to support the English foreign policy he helped to articulate. He neither expressed sympathy with the Levellers, nor with the theocratic aims of the Fifth Monarchists, who accused Cromwell of having "taken the crown from the head of Christ and put it on his own." Milton was a bookish, prosperous Londoner whose religious radicalism was of the private, intellectual kind. The toleration he sought was that to interpret Scripture as he pleased and to exchange opinions freely with other learned and godly men, without having to attend church, subscribe to credal statements, or make forced contributions to the upkeep of a minister. In arguing against the less tolerationist majority of the nation Milton was often in the rhetorical position of minimizing the dangers posed by the sects, but he was socially and temperamentally remote from the noisier enthusiasts with whom Cromwell clashed.

Kevin Sharpe argues that "at the centre of Milton's republicanism" was a "republican aesthetic," and that particularly in the latter Protectorate years "representations of Cromwell offended Milton's aesthetic sensitivities and values": portraits that evoked Charles I, an increasingly sumptuous court, elaborate state ceremonies and processions.[51] Sharpe's essay displays his characteristic sensitivity to the power of visual images. One wonders, however, how much impact such images had on Milton, since he never saw them: he was fully blind by spring of 1652. Sharpe's

[47] Worden, *Literature and Politics*, 318.

[48] Ibid., 318–19.

[49] Campbell and Corns, *John Milton*, 208.

[50] Bradshaw, who after presiding at the king's trial served as first president of the Commonwealth Council of State, was one of its few members who was not an MP.

[51] Sharpe, *Reading Authority*, 177, 185, 187–90.

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response to this objection—that Milton "retained in blindness a highly visual sensibility"[52]—does not seem wholly to dispose of it. Official representations of the Protectorate became more king-like; on the other hand, Cromwell refused the crown. Did Milton deplore the Lord Protector for approaching royal dignity, or credit him for resisting it? The glass half full/ half empty question remains.

Whatever misgivings Milton may have harbored, he remained in government under the Protectorate, I suspect, for the same reasons that he entered it under the Council of State: a desire, liberally mixed with ambition and self-interest, to contribute to the godly cause at home and abroad. He shared with Cromwell, and with other formerly private men who had entered public life through the Civil War and revolution, an instinctively providentialist understanding of its successes. The spectacular run of military victories had proved that God favored their cause. The constitutional upheaval of early 1649, the extent of which few had expected even months before, conveyed to its supporters a sense that the new Commonwealth of England was at the fore of a great godly experiment; here, patriotic and religious commitments merged as one. Government service offered Milton a chance to have his hands on the ropes. He took it, and fused his sense of service to God and country with the literary ambitions he had harbored since adolescence. His lot as he saw it was to contribute with the pen, and he consistently represents his writings on behalf of the Commonwealth as a form of patriotic and godly warfare: "liberty's defense, my noble task/ Of which all Europe talks from side to side."[53] He was especially proud of the first *Defense*, his commissioned answer to Salmasius, which he had reprinted in 1658. Translating state letters was lower-profile work, but he would have seen it too as a contribution to the cause. Milton was not a creature of Cromwell's. His fortunes were not tied to those of the Lord Protector, and his commitment to the English and international Protestant cause was stronger than his commitment to any individual or form of government. But he praised Cromwell in 1654 as the foremost sustainer of that cause, and the panegyric passages in the *Second Defense* are far clearer and more effusive than any of the putative statements of disaffection in his later writings.

There was, therefore, no break. Was there a gradual alienation, evident perhaps in Milton's silence upon Cromwell's death? It is plausible, though firm evidence is lacking, that Milton held a dimmer view of the state of the nation at Oliver's death in September 1658 than he had when the Protectorate was established in December 1653.[54] So did many other godly revolutionaries, for there were ample

[52] Ibid., 188.

[53] John Milton, "To Mr. Cyriack Skinner upon his Blindness," lines 11–12. *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Hughes (Indianapolis, IN, 2003), 170.

[54] Hints of disaffection have been found in two pieces of Milton's correspondence. Answering a letter in December 1657 from Peter Heimbach, a young acquaintance who had written from The Hague asking Milton to recommend him as a secretary to the new English envoy there, Milton excuses himself: "I grieve deeply that it is not in my power, both because my influential friends are few (since I stay nearly always at home—and willingly)" (*CPW,* 7:507). For Barbara Lewalski, "'willingly' suggests that Milton is distancing himself deliberately from those now in power—probably in part for ideological reasons as well as to concentrate on more important projects." (*Life of John Milton*, 349). Perhaps. Moses Wall, in a letter to Milton of 26 May 1659, writes "You complaine of the Non-progresency of the nation, and of its retrograde Motion of late, in Liberty and Spiritual Truths" (*CPW,* 7:511). Much depends here on what Wall meant, or took Milton to have meant, by "of late."

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causes for concern. The government remained deeply unpopular, with its lack of traditional constitutional basis an enduring problem. The divisions of war had not healed. The Royalist threat remained, as did the antipathy between the "godly interest" and the rest of the country. The nation's finances were in disastrous shape. Richard Cromwell, in whose inexperienced hands the state now rested, was an unknown quantity with little claim on the nation's allegiance. At that point Milton's sense of the regime's shortcomings was probably at its strongest. When he looked back at the Protectorate years in fall 1658, he focused on unfinished business and missed opportunities. Such a focus might explain, if explanation is needed, his silence upon Cromwell's death. When he looked ahead, however, his hopes still outweighed his fears. That is evident in his choice to return to his longstanding top priority, disestablishment of the church. In the months following Oliver's death he wrote *Of Civil Power* to make that case again to the new Parliament, offering it the same unsolicited advice he had offered Cromwell in the *Second Defense*. He would again be disappointed.

In sum, there were Cromwellian policies Milton opposed, above all the commitment to public maintenance; there were others he endorsed, such as support for the Vaudois; there were other matters, such as the Major-Generals' administration, or readmission of the Jews, or Cromwell's strained relations with his two parliaments, concerning which we can only guess Milton's thoughts. The Victorian picture of the blind poet advising the Lord Protector at his right hand is an imaginative construct, but so too is the picture of Milton as a silently disgruntled commonwealthsman carrying on with his paperwork for the sake of the salary. He was a civil servant who occupied a position of considerable trust: not a political player, but a government insider and informed observer. Most likely Milton had no such thing as a single view of the Protectorate regime; his views of its various actors and interest groups, their strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures, would have been detailed and complex. Such disappointment as Milton felt regarding Cromwell himself in the latter phase of the Protectorate was probably that of a hardliner whose party is in power, and who feels that the party leader is moving too cautiously on the key issues, making too many compromises, listening to the wrong people, conceding too much to those outside the movement. One who harbors such feelings may well carry on in loyal service to party and leader, believing in the cause and wanting to contribute. As long as the party's hold on power is secure, he may feel his impatience or disappointment strongly. Once its power is threatened, such feelings will recede, supplanted by the existential dangers of the present. Something along these lines, I propose, is the picture that best fits the evidence: Milton's work on behalf of each successive Commonwealth government, his silence at Cromwell's death, his continuing and unsuccessful lobbying efforts for disestablishment, and then his state-of-emergency writings in the last months of the Interregnum.

■■■

If the evidence for Milton's disaffection with Cromwell is thin, why has the consensus view proved enduring? Robert Fallon has suggested that modern intellectuals tend to dislike military governments and that therefore Milton scholars want to clear their man from unsavory associations.[55] This tendency may have contributed in some

[55] Fallon, "*A Second Defense*," 168.

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cases, but there is also a more local explanation: the consensus view is a byproduct of the recent scholarly focus on Milton's republicanism, which has tended to exaggerate his commitment to, or interest in, constitutional forms. If you start from the premise that Milton was a republican, his support for the Protectorate looks like a puzzle; one ready and easy way to solve it is to decide that he stopped supporting the Protectorate. The puzzle disappears once we recognize that Milton's republicanism emerged from, and was always subordinate to, his religious concerns. As Woolrych observes, Milton was no more "wedded and glued to forms of government" than Cromwell was—indeed less so, since unlike Cromwell he never had to run a government.[56] His main issue first to last was maximal religious freedom for godly intellectuals like himself. He took this freedom to require disestablishment of the English church, and throughout the Commonwealth he supported whichever government he saw as the best available means to that end, while continuing to argue for it without success.

The point is not that Milton lacked principles, but that his firmest principles were not constitutional ones.[57] His so-called late republican tracts are best understood as improvisational lobbying efforts written under increasingly desperate circumstances. Their inconsistencies and cursory treatment of fundamental constitutional issues need not perplex us once we recognize that Milton was writing to avert disaster, not to do political theory; the ad hoc political theorizing he produced in doing so is in effect surface noise. This point is easy to miss when his prose tracts are studied for their place in the history of English political thought; it is especially easy to miss because Milton wrote so well. When he took a position, he threw all of his eloquence and learning behind it, supporting it with principled arguments, literary and historical references, scriptural justifications, memorable images, and phrases that resonate centuries later. The literary and rhetorical qualities of Milton's prose tracts can distract us from their partisan purposes. Take, for example, the famous last sentence of the second *Ready and Easy Way*. One can read it many times without noticing that Milton ends the tract with a call for one more military coup, the one that never came:

> But I trust I shall have spoken perswasion to abundance of sensible and ingenuous men: to som perhaps whom God may raise of these stones to become children of reviving libertie; and may reclaim, though they seem now chusing them a captain back for *Egypt*, to bethink themselves a little and consider whether they are rushing; to exhort this torrent also of the people, not to be so impetuos, but to keep thir due channell; and at length recovering and uniting their better resolutions, now that they see alreadie how open and unbounded the insolence and rage is of our common enemies, to stay these ruinous proceedings; justly and timely fearing to what a precipice of destruction the deluge of this epidemic madness would hurrie us through the general defection of a misguided and abus'd multitude.[58]

If you do not hear the call for another coup, follow the verbs. Some of his persuaded readers, Milton hopes, God may raise (as Milton's Samson declares himself a "person

[56] "Short but scandalous night," 211.

[57] In this respect Milton was typical among godly revolutionaries. See J. C. Davis, "Religion and the Struggle for Freedom in the English Revolution," *Historical Journal* 35, no. 3 (1992): 507–30.

[58] *CPW*, 7:463.

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rais'd/ with strength sufficient and command from heav'n/ to free my country") to become "children of our reviving liberty."[59] These divinely raised agents are to (a) bethink themselves; (b) exhort the people; and (c) unite to "stay these ruinous proceedings"—that is, put a stop to the impending catastrophe, which once the writs for full and free elections had been issued on 17 March could only be accomplished by force. "Stay these ruinous proceedings" makes it clear that Milton is urging immediate action, not prophesying or expressing hope for an indeterminate future. Here at the close of the tract Milton appeals to a diehard remnant within the anti-Stuart minority of the nation—those with the most to lose from the "insolence and rage . . . of our common enemies." How much hope he retained by early April that a Stuart restoration might yet be prevented is hard to say. The second *Ready and Easy Way* is full of acknowledgments of which way the wind was blowing, but in light of the several military interventions of the previous twelve months one more was hardly unimaginable, especially for someone desperate for it to happen. In fact, a last-ditch effort to stay these ruinous proceedings was attempted by General Lambert, but the small force he rallied was easily put down on 22 April, Easter Sunday.

Since Milton's efforts to avert disaster did not succeed, it is easy to say in hindsight that his political proposals were unrealistic. So they were, but Milton was realistic enough about what it would take to get his policies implemented, given their unpopularity. If most of the country wants the king back, to prevent it you would have to disenfranchise most of the country, impose an alternative government by military force (any alternative government, work out the details later) and then be prepared to use the army to keep it in place—all of which Cromwell had been notoriously willing to do when he saw the need, though his greatest disappointment was his inability to bring the nation to a point where such "arbitrary" measures were no longer necessary.

Cromwell, with his personal godliness and his commitments to liberty of conscience at home and Protestant unity abroad, was as sympathetic a head of state as the radical wing of the Independent party was ever likely to get. Unlike more obstreperous radicals who railed at the Lord Protector from what the rest of the country saw as the lunatic fringe, Milton knew it. That knowledge is reason enough to explain why he supported the Protectorate for as long as it lasted, while continuing to push, however vainly, for his radical religious agenda whenever he thought he had the chance to advance it. But from the fall of 1659 that agenda was overwhelmed by the pressure of events: the disastrous power struggle between the Rump and the army grandees, the illegitimacy of both in the eyes of a nation ever more nostalgic for stable and traditional forms of government, and then Monck's reversal and "the general defection of a misguided and abused multitude." It was not Oliver Cromwell who let Milton down. It was England.

[59] *Samson Agonistes* 1211–13, in Hughes, ed., *Complete Poems*, 580.

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