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**“A LATE COURT-POET” REVISITED: MILTON, CLEVELAND, AND *THE READIE AND EASIE WAY***

James Loxley, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, Scotland

ORCID ID <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5587-8633>

School of Literatures, Languages and Cultures  
50 George Square  
Edinburgh EH8 9LH  
[James.loxley@ed.ac.uk](mailto:James.loxley@ed.ac.uk)

James Loxley is Professor of Early Modern Literature at the University of Edinburgh. He is the author of several books and many articles on the poetry and drama of the seventeenth century, with a particular focus on the cultural politics of the 1640s and 1650s.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

*The author reports there are no competing interests to declare*

## “A LATE COURT-POET” REVISITED: MILTON, CLEVELAND, AND *THE READIE AND EASIE WAY*

### ABSTRACT

This essay makes a case for identifying the “late court-Poet” to whom Milton alludes in both editions of *The Readie and Easie Way to Establish a Free Common-wealth* as the royalist poet John Cleveland, who died in 1658. Beginning with the difficulties critics and editors have previously encountered in identifying possible referents for Milton’s allusion, it proposes a new interpretative framework for the reference which is consistent with Milton’s polemical strategies, and which supports the suggestion that Cleveland might well have been his target. Drawing on new archival and textual evidence, as well as on recent scholarship, it sets out reasons for considering Cleveland a rival and enemy of interest for Milton from the 1630s onwards, and especially in the fraught moments of early 1660 when a restoration of the Stuart monarchy seemed – to Milton’s evident horror and despair – increasingly likely. In doing so, it revises familiar perceptions of Cleveland’s writings, readership, reputation and networks, offering a fresh view which illuminates a key aspect of Milton’s polemical focus in early 1660.

### KEYWORDS

Milton, John; Cleveland, John; poetry; polemic; cipher; Restoration; monarchy

In both editions of *The Readie and Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth*, published in 1660, Milton's polemic against the idea and, increasingly, the prospect of kingly rule includes an arithmetical reference to the general uselessness of monarchs that he attributes to an unnamed poet of the time. In the first edition, he phrases his key contrast between the sober austerity of the governors of a free commonwealth with the grotesque luxury and idolatry associated with monarchy:

Whereas a king must be ador'd like a Demigod, with a dissolute and haughtie court about him, of vast expense and luxurie, masks and revels, to the debaushing of our prime gentry both male and female; nor at his own cost, but on the publick revenue, and all this to do nothing but bestow the eating and drinking of excessive dainties, to set a pompous face upon the superficial actings of State, to pageant himself up and down in progress among the perpetual bowings and cringings of an abject people, on either side deifying and adoring him who for the most part deserves none of this by any good done to the people (for what can he more then another man?) but even in the expression of a late court-Poet, sits only like a great cypher set to no purpose before a long row of other significant figures. Nay it is well and happy for the people if thir King be but a cipher, being oft times a mischief, a pest, a scourge of the nation, and which is worse, not to be remov'd, not to be contrould, much less accus'd or brought to punishment, without the danger of a common ruin, without the shaking and almost subversion of the whole land.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Readie and Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth*, in Keeble and McDowell, eds, 486, 488.

Cipher, here, means a zero – a numeral which, if placed ahead of other “significant figures” in standard arithmetical notation, adds or does nothing. It is a figure of emptiness, the hollow of a big nought. In the second edition the account of royal expense and waste is considerably expanded, and the minor concession in the suggestion that a king does not “for the most part” deserve such honour is ruthlessly expunged so that Milton now has his “abject people ... deifying him for nothing don that can deserve it”.<sup>2</sup> Such additions and emendations serve to intensify the force of the figure of the “great cipher” when it arrives, stretching the contrast between the deification of monarchs and their utter emptiness and pointlessness to its extremes.

This intensification might be a function of Milton’s growing desperation – by the time the second edition was completed, the restoration of the Stuart monarchy was all but assured. Milton evinces a fierce sense of frustration at the sheer heedlessness of compatriots who are willingly reopening the door to all the vices of a system of rule which had been overthrown with so much blood and trouble only a decade earlier. Milton, of course, had committed himself to that overthrow, and had been one of its loudest champions both nationally and internationally. He had sought to dismantle the martyrological imagery of Charles I in *Eikonoklastes*, and to articulate the case against monarchy in general in a series of formidably argued works defending the regicide and the new republic. The Cromwellian regimes that followed on from the dissolution of the Rump had tested his loyalty even as he continued to labour for them, but they remained obviously preferable to a monarchical dispensation; now, though, suddenly and maddeningly, the undoing of all his labours was imminent. As we might expect, Milton’s frustration at this

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<sup>2</sup> *Readie and Easie Way*, 489.

prospect has a distinctly personal dimension. “To fall back or rather to creep back so poorly as it seems the multitude would to thir once abjur’d and detested thraldom of Kingship”<sup>3</sup> is not just a national disaster but an unbearable humiliation for English republicans who had gloried in their seizure of the state in 1649, their subsequent conquest of Ireland and Scotland, and their assertion of the power of the English Commonwealth overseas. The restoration of monarchy, he complains in both editions,

will render us a scorn and derision to all our neighbours. And what will they at best say of us and of the whole *English* name, but scoffingly as of that foolish builder, mentiond by our Saviour, who began to build a tower, and was not able to finish it. Where is this goodly tower of a Commonwealth, which the English boasted they would build to overshadow kings, and be another *Rome* in the west?<sup>4</sup>

In the second edition, though, in another moment of intensification, he adds a domestic voice to this international chorus of scorn: the return of monarchy will “verifie all the bitter predictions of our triumphing enemies, who will now think they wisely discern’d and justly censur’d both us and all our actions as rash, rebellious, hypocritical and impious”.<sup>5</sup> As a Stuart restoration looms, Milton finds himself bitterly contemplating the prospect of all his old royalist enemies glorying now in the turning of the tables.

Given such emphases, it is interesting that Milton chooses to attribute his figure of the “great cipher” to just one such enemy, to make it “the expression of a late court-Poet” whom he will not, it seems, deign to name. It is a strange sideswipe, though its peculiarity

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<sup>3</sup> *Readie and Easie Way*, 483.

<sup>4</sup> *Readie and Easie Way*, 484, 485.

<sup>5</sup> *Readie and Easie Way*, 483, 485.

has been overlooked for the seemingly more immediate issue of who, exactly, this poet might be. It is all the more significant given that this is the only ostensibly identifiable person that Milton chooses to single out in the whole tract, despite the elements of indirection in his citation. The puzzle has two sides: firstly, the question of who might fit such a designation, and secondly, the matter of whether any poet who does can be found to have used the “expression” which Milton attributes to them. The meaning of “Court-poet” seems obvious enough, but there is perhaps a question over whether this denotes someone who was literally a Stuart courtier, or whether their courtliness is more a cultural association with the spaces, structures, attitudes and vices of monarchical rule that Milton is here conjuring up so vividly. William Camden had described Thomas Churchyard as a “poore Court-Poet” in his *Remaines* which suggests that such a title might not indicate either institutional centrality or success.<sup>6</sup> In Richard Brome’s *A Jovial Crew*, the rural “hedge musemonger” Scribble is contrasted with “city or court” poets, again indicating association via a cultural topography rather than clear institutional belonging.<sup>7</sup> Then, of course, there is the matter of this poet’s lateness, which would most obviously denote that they were dead, though might be more loosely used to indicate that such an association belongs in the past. It was on this basis that Elsie Duncan-Jones suggested in a brief article of 1954 that Milton’s referent was the very much still alive William Davenant,<sup>8</sup> who had been formerly or lately associated with the Caroline court and had deployed the figure of the cipher in the context of monarchy in *Gondibert*:

Nature too oft by birthright does preferr

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<sup>6</sup> Camden, *Remaines*, “Certaine Poemes...”, 59.

<sup>7</sup> Brome, *A Jovial Crew*, 1.1.448-9.

<sup>8</sup> Duncan-Jones, “Milton’s “Late Court-Poet”, 473.

Less perfect Monarchs to an anxious Throne;  
Yet more than her, Courts by weak Counc'lers err,  
In adding Ciphers where she made but one.<sup>9</sup>

While Davenant's erstwhile courtliness is not in question, there are other grounds on which to doubt the attribution. The most important of these is probably that Davenant isn't necessarily calling the monarch a cipher here – the lines apply that term, in the plural, to the weak counsellors added to the figure of the less than perfect ruler, and it is only if “one” is read as referring back to ciphers, rather than contrasting an actual number, i.e “one”, with a series of zeros, that the claim is plausible. And even if we do read it in this way, what we have is a long line of noughts, not a zero set before significant figures. This uncertainty, coupled with Davenant's somewhat questionable lateness, gives us reason to be unsatisfied with Duncan-Jones's suggestion.

As Robert Ayers notes in the Yale edition of *The Roodie and Easie Way*, the figure of the insignificant cipher in the context of monarchical rule was far from uncommon.<sup>10</sup> He gives as an example George Chapman's *Bussy d'Ambois*, in which the character of Monsieur remarks,

There is no second place in Numerous State  
That holds more than a Cipher: in a King  
All places are contained.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Davenant, *Gondibert*, ed. David Gladish, Book 2, Canto 2, 14.

<sup>10</sup> Ayers, ed. *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton: vol 7, 1659-1660*, 361.

<sup>11</sup> Chapman, *Bussy d'Ambois*, 1.1.34-6.



Again, though, the identification of monarch and cipher is uncertain, or unlikely – it is the “second place”, not the first, that is as empty as a zero, while the king, containing all places, is clearly not empty at all. Ayers notes Polixenes’s likening of himself to a cipher in *The Winter’s Tale*, but the fit here is also not exact:

And therefore, like a cipher,  
Yet standing in rich place, I multiply  
With one “We thank you” many thousands more  
That go before it.<sup>12</sup>

Polixenes is at least a king, but the cipher in this instance is anything but insignificant – rather than being set before a number to no purpose, it follows “in rich place” as a multiplier. More ingeniously, Mark Eccles highlights the occurrence of the figure in *I Sir John Oldcastle* when King Henry upbraids the rebels Acton, Beverly and Murley for their attempts to justify their actions.<sup>13</sup> Beverly claims that “We meant no hurt unto your majesty, / But reformation of Religion”, to which the king replies:

Reform religion? was it that ye sought?  
I pray, who gave you that authority?  
Belike then we do hold the sceptre up  
And sit within the throne but for a cipher.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Shakespeare, *The Winter’s Tale*, 1.2.6-9.

<sup>13</sup> Eccles, “Brief Lives: Tudor and Stuart Authors”, 95-6.

<sup>14</sup> Munday, Drayton, Hathwaye and Wilson, *I Sir John Oldcastle*, 4.2.15-20.

Ayers' aim is not to identify Milton's target; he is only concerned to point out that the figure is a commonplace. However, Milton's reference is specific. He is not invoking a commonplace, he is attributing the sentiment it to a particular writer, so the key problem remains. In his "Brief Lives: Tudor and Stuart Authors", Mark Eccles offered an alternative to Duncan-Jones' suggestion. *Sir John Oldcastle* had first been published anonymously by Thomas Pavier in 1600, then again in a falsely dated edition of 1618 with a new attribution to Shakespeare. The play was to be included in the third folio of Shakespeare's works in 1664, suggesting that the attribution was at least still current at the time Milton was writing *The Readie and Easie Way*. As Milton refers to Shakespeare in *Eikonoklastes* as "one whom wee well know was the Closet Companion" of King Charles during his imprisonment, Eccles states that "the 'late court-poet' was probably Shakespeare".<sup>15</sup> But Shakespeare had been dead for more than thirty years by the time that Milton was writing, making him very late indeed – which is to say probably too long ago to be "late" in Milton's sense here; moreover, despite the sneers at "the polluted orts and refuse of *Arcadia's* and *Romances*" in *Eikonoklastes*,<sup>16</sup> which might suggest a tactically anti-literary pose, it is unlikely that Milton would seek thus to diminish a writer he admired as much as he did Shakespeare. After all, he had written a reverential epitaph for the publication of the second folio in 1632, and the recent discovery of his own copy of the first folio suggests he was still carefully reading and annotating the plays deep into the 1640s.<sup>17</sup> The references to Shakespeare in *Eikonoklastes* are respectful rather than dismissive, and Milton's familiarity with the canon as established in the first two folios might make him doubtful of Pavier's

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<sup>15</sup> Eccles, "Brief Lives", 96.

<sup>16</sup> *Eikonoklastes*, in Neil Keeble and Nicholas McDowell, eds, *The Complete Works of John Milton*, vol. 6, 293.

<sup>17</sup> Bourne and Scott-Warren, "'thy unvalued book': John Milton's copy of the Shakespeare First Folio", 12-21, 61.

opportunistic attribution of *Sir John Oldcastle* to the playwright. Given such considerations, it is safe to say that Eccles's "probably" is more than a little overstated.

The more fundamental problem, though, is that Milton implies that his late court-poet has in essence asserted or affirmed the likeness of king and numerical cipher, or zero, thus in Milton's view conceding his emptiness or insignificance – and as Duncan-Jones acknowledges, this is just not a sentiment that a royalist of any stripe would avow.<sup>18</sup> The king of *Sir John Oldcastle* is not actually affirming that he is or should be an empty cipher; he is saying that this is what the rebels would make of him if they usurped his prerogative powers. Similar sentiments are expressed by multiple royalist wielders of the figure during the civil wars and commonwealth. As early as 23 January 1641, in a speech to the Lords and Commons at the Banqueting House in Whitehall, the King himself spoke of how petitions for church reform included "great threatnings against the bishops, that they will make them to be but ciphers, or at least their Voices to be taken away".<sup>19</sup> In his celebrated *Observations upon Some of his Majesty's Late Answers and Expresses*, printed in June 1642, Henry Parker credited his royalist opponents with the claim that "*the king hath a power of dissent, he may use it at his pleasure, if hee have none, then he is a meere Cipher*".<sup>20</sup> One of those opponents, John Bramhall, makes precisely this point in his *Serpent Salve* of 1643:

There is a vast difference between giving counsell when the King licenseth, yea and requireth it; and intruding into Counsell without calling: between an approbative consent such as the Saints give to God Almighty, the onely Authoritative Judge of Heaven and Earth;

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<sup>18</sup> Duncan-Jones, "Milton's "Late Court-Poet", 473.

<sup>19</sup> "His Majesties Speech to both Houses at the Banqueting House in White-hall", in *Reliquiae Sacrae Carolinae*, "Several Speeches Delivered by His Majesty", 5.

<sup>20</sup> Parker, *Observations*, 22.

and an active consent, without which the Kings hands should be so tied that he could do just nothing. The former all good Kings doe desire, so farre as the exigence of the service will give way to have their Counsells communicated: But the latter makes a great King a Cipher and transformes an Emperour into a Christmasse Lord.<sup>21</sup>

Recalling the constitutional struggles of the early 1640s in *A Short View of the Life and Reign of King Charles*, published in 1658, Peter Heylyn remarked that the “XIX Propositions” sent by the parliament to the king at York in 1642 “did declare sufficiently that there was no peace to be expected on his part, unlesse he had made himself a cipher, a thing of no signification in the *Arithmetick* of State”.<sup>22</sup> And in his *Vindication of King Charles*, first printed in 1648, Edward Symmons suggested that by 1644 the king believed the alliance of the Parliament and the Covenanters intended to seize control of all three kingdoms, “and so his whole Authority in all his Dominions being totally rent from him, and divided amongst them, he was like to be but a *Sans terrae*, or a Cipher signifying just nothing”.<sup>23</sup>

### John Cleveland’s Cipher

We are not, then, going to find someone fitting the description of a “late Court-poet” affirming that monarchs are ciphers, in the sense of “things of no signification in the arithmetic of state”. The best option we have appears to be the ambiguously late Davenant’s ambiguous reference in *Gondibert*, which on both grounds is not entirely satisfactory. So perhaps we need to shift the interpretative frame. Milton’s reference is to “the expression of

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<sup>21</sup> Bramhall, *Serpent Salve*, 103.

<sup>22</sup> Heylyn, *Short View*, 91.

<sup>23</sup> Symmons, *A Vindication of King Charles*, 181.

a late Court-poet”, which readers have reasonably taken to refer to the whole phrase used here, “a great cipher set to no purpose before a long row of other significant figures”. But given the extreme unlikelihood of locating a plausible royalist referent for such an “expression”, we might reasonably construe Milton as referring more to the word “cipher” itself. While “expression” is more commonly understood to denote a more complex linguistic unit than a single word, it can in this latter sense apply either to words or phrases.<sup>24</sup> In *Of Prelatical Episcopacy* Milton describes single words as “expressions”;<sup>25</sup> similarly, in his attack on set forms of prayer in *Eikonoklastes*, “expressions” is used as a synonym for words.<sup>26</sup> If this is the case in *The Readie and Easie Way* too, then what we have here in this singular sideswipe at a now triumphing enemy is likely not a faithful citation of a rhetorical figure and its significance but an instance of polemical wordplay. James Egan has noted the complexity of the tract’s “oratorical identity”, and how it deploys key elements and capabilities of “low style” in the cause of epideictic, the rhetoric not of deliberation but of praise and – here, mostly – blame.<sup>27</sup> If his aim in *Eikonoklastes* was the careful and methodical dismantling of royal self-mystification, here he is less restrained. The goal of epideictic vituperation licences rhetorical violence, and a key Miltonic strength is his ability to exert his power over an opponent by turning their own “expressions” against them. As Egan states, he uses both “word play and double-entendres” to attack William Prynne in *Considerations Touching the Likeliest Means to Remove Hirelings out of the Church*, written shortly before *The Readie and*

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<sup>24</sup> OED, “expression”, II.4.c.

<sup>25</sup> Milton, *Of Prelatical Episcopacy*, in Wolfe, ed., *Complete Prose Works ... vol. 1: 1624-42*, 632.

<sup>26</sup> *Eikonoklastes*, 372.

<sup>27</sup> Egan, “Rhetoric and Poetic in Milton's Polemics of 1659–60”, 79.

*Easie Way*, recalling the animadversive techniques used to such devastating effect against Joseph Hall nearly twenty years previously.<sup>28</sup>

If this is a credible approach to his citation of the late court poet's "expression", then the word "cipher" is obviously vulnerable to such wordplay. Indeed, its arithmetical meaning was probably eclipsed in the context of the civil wars by its other key meaning denoting secret forms of writing used to encrypt information. Such ciphers were of great utility in protecting sensitive knowledge in military and political communications, and were widely deployed by key partisans on all sides. Lois Potter some years ago drew attention to the heightened place such forms of secret writing came to occupy in the wider cultural consciousness of the period.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps, then, Milton is wresting this expression from its use by a royalist poet in its cryptographic sense to turn it back on them as an image of the king as a great big nothing?

Indeed, if we entertain this possibility a highly credible candidate for the late court poet immediately emerges. John Cleveland had died in April 1658, less than two years prior to the composition of *The Readie and Easie Way*. His extreme royalist partisanship, given particular form in a series of striking polemical poems and his prose "characters", would qualify him as a "court-Poet" in the sense described above, even had he not in fact spent time in Oxford during the court's residence there and served with the rank of colonel within the royalist army. The height of Cleveland's military service was as judge advocate general in the garrison at Newark from May 1645 until its surrender a year later.<sup>30</sup> He also appears to have operated as a garrison orator or spokesperson, penning a celebrated "Answer" in the

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<sup>28</sup> Egan, "Rhetoric and Poetic in Milton's Polemics of 1659-60", 94-5; Egan, "As His Own Rhetorick Shall Persuade Him: Refutation and Aesthetic Self-Construction in Milton's Antiprelatical Tracts", 58-9; Egan, "Oratory and Animadversion: Rhetorical Signatures in Milton's Pamphlets of 1649", 204.

<sup>29</sup> Potter, *Secret Rites and Secret Writing*, 38-42.

<sup>30</sup> Cousins, "Cleveland, John".

governor's name to the summons issued by the Parliamentarian and Scots besiegers in March 1646.<sup>31</sup> After the military and political failure of the Royalist cause he was, perhaps, the archetypal court poet in his refusal to try and find a place for his writing within the post-war public realm, a refusal which distinguishes him from Cowley, Davenant, Dryden and Waller, among many lesser others. So in 1659-60 Cleveland was highly pertinent both in his court affiliation and in his lateness. Crucially, he had also memorably affirmed that the king was indeed a cipher, in his 1646 poem "The King's Disguise", first printed separately in 1647 and subsequently included in every edition of Cleveland's poems ever published. The poem meditates on the paradoxes generated by the refulgent monarch's adoption of a muffling disguise to evade his surrounding parliamentarian enemies and make his way from Oxford to the Scots at Southwell in May 1646. If his garrison roles brought him into the confidence of the Royalist governor of Newark, Sir John Bellasis, then he might well have known that the king was communicating with the garrison via letters sometimes or partially written in cipher, and indeed have had foreknowledge of Charles's plan to make his escape from Oxford in disguise. According to Joshua Moone, Bellasis's secretary, the letter notifying the governor of this plan was "brought him in a man's belly, being writ in cyphers and put in lead which he swallowed, lest he be taken in attempting to pass the Scot's army".<sup>32</sup>

In its polemical mode, "The King's Disguise" insists that the disgrace or shame evident to some in Charles's desperate move in fact restates or reinforces the mystique, and therefore the unique power, of monarchy. It is to this extent an early instance of the Christological comparisons that were to be deployed so effectively by royal propagandists in *Eikon Basilike*, which Milton was to take so much trouble to debunk in *Eikonoklastes*, and

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<sup>31</sup> "The Answer to the Newark-Summons", in Cleveland, *Clevelandi Vindiciae*, 169-72; *A Letter to the Honorable William Lenthall Esq*, 5-8; Gapp, "Notes on John Cleveland", 1079-80.

<sup>32</sup> Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, *The Manuscripts of the Marquis of Ormonde*, vol. 2, 391-3.

which he could clearly see exerting their power over his credulous countrymen in early 1660. Towards the end of the poem Cleveland defiantly insists that all his opponents' attempts to demystify, disenchant or disrobe Charles are futile – he is writing in the aftermath of the publication of *The King's Cabinet Opened*, a parliamentary exposé of private letters by Charles and his Queen that appeared to confirm some of the most damaging accusations levelled at him, and which called forth a torrent of indignation and refutation from the royalist press. Recalling these controversies, Cleveland issues a dismissal of the “brats of this expounding age”, whose presumptive determination to pry into the *arcana imperii* embodied in the king himself involve not the exposure and laying out of anything so grand as truth, as the rhetoric of the opened cabinet would suggest, but deliberate distortion and misprision:

Hence Cabinet-Intruders, Pick-locks hence,  
You that dim Jewells with your Bristoll-sense:  
And Characters, like Witches, so torment,  
Till they confesse a guilt, though innocent.  
Keyes for this Cypher you can never get,  
None but S. Peter's op's this Cabinet.  
This Cabinet, whose aspect would benight  
Critick spectators with redundant light.  
A Prince most seen is least: What Scriptures call  
The Revelation, is most mysticall.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Cleveland, “The King's Disguise”, in Morris and Withington, ed., *Poems*, ll. 105-14.



Milton, of course, made ample use of the king's "Cabinet letters" in his efforts to expose the truth behind the royal image in *Eikonoklastes*, including a defence of their publication in exactly the terms Cleveland is attacking:

The Kings Letters taken at the Battell of *Naseby*, being of greatest importance to let the people see what Faith there was in all his promises and solemn Protestations, were transmitted to public view by special Order of the Parlament. They discover'd his good affection to Papists and Irish Rebels, the straight intelligence he held, the pernicious & dishonorable peace he made with them, not solicited but rather soliciting, which by all invocations that were holy he had in public abjur'd. They reveal'd his endeavours to bring in forren Forces, Irish, French, Dutch, Lorrainers, and our old Invaders the Danes upon us, besides his subtleties and mysterious arts in treating: to summ up all, they shewd him govern'd by a Woman. All which though suspected vehemently before, and from good grounds beleev'd, yet by him and his adherents peremptorily deny'd, were, by the op'ning of that Cabinet, visible to all men under his own hand.<sup>34</sup>

For Milton, here, the letters reveal the king's hidden truth, whereas for Cleveland this is exactly the deception: the letters, as compositions made up of words or "characters", to use Cleveland's term, are vulnerable to what Milton and other "Critick spectators" might insist was merely "exposition", but his enemies would instead call malicious misreading. The king himself, however, is not: no one on earth can open that cabinet, or unlock that cipher.

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<sup>34</sup> *Eikonoklastes*, 390.

Interpretative or expository iconoclasm, in other words, cannot accomplish its aims, because it mistakes the nature of its object. It makes a category error, and in doing so shows its continuity with the idolatry it claims to break.

This, then, is the context for a late court poet's affirming description of the king as a cipher, a moment of royalist self-assertion which would have been more painfully pertinent on the eve of the Restoration than it was during the later 1640s, when such self-assertion would have been defiant but forlorn. Milton's frustration with those who would surrender their liberty by restoring monarchy is underpinned by an awareness that its mystifying power has been suddenly revealed as potently at work among the populace. His repeated references to "gentilism" in *The Readie and Easie Way*, as much as his *cri de coeur* at the "deluge of epidemic madness" of a "misguided and abus'd multitude" are sufficient evidence that he knows the – to him – idolatrous spell of monarchy to be as potent as it ever was, maugre his own extensive efforts towards disenchantment.<sup>35</sup> It would be no surprise if Cleveland's characterisation of an inviolable and unique kingly power were indeed on Milton's mind at this point; and his violent appropriation of Cleveland's figure of the royal cipher for his own purposes would then constitute a small gesture of polemical defiance of his own, anchored in the larger such gesture that is *The Readie and Easie Way* itself.

#### Cleveland's Cultural Presence

Why, though, might Cleveland figure here as the sole identifiable exemplar of his triumphing enemies? He was, after all, dead, and there were surely much bigger fish for

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<sup>35</sup> *Readie and Easie Way*, 486, 467, 490, 491, 507, 522, 523.

Milton to fry. But there are, in fact, ample reasons to think that Cleveland could readily have loomed larger for Milton in these years than modern perceptions of their radical difference in cultural weight and status would indicate. One of those is the evident popularity of his verse, attested both by the number of editions emerging from the presses and by the ready expansion of the canon with dubious works, indicating an appetite on the part of printers and readers for more Cleveland than the poet himself could ever satisfy. The first editions of his poetry appeared during the political ferment following on from the end of the first civil war, apparently without authorial licence or input. They were orphaned in other ways, too: none of these early editions appears with an imprint, or is claimed by a bookseller or printer in the register of the Stationers' company. Six quarto editions emerged from unidentified presses within little more than four months early in 1647. Four similarly unattributable editions of an octavo volume entitled *Poems* appeared in 1651. A further four appeared between 1653 and 56, the titlepage now ornamented with the device of the bookseller William Shears. Shears was also presumably responsible for the similar but unornamented edition published in 1657. Two duodecimo editions were then published in 1658, the year of Cleveland's death, before Shears finally put his name to five further octavo editions printed between 1659 and 1669. Meanwhile, Nathaniel Brooke put out a rival volume entitled *J. Cleaveland Revived*, which went through four editions between 1659 and 1668. In the process, the canon of his poems was frequently augmented by compilers and booksellers keen to distinguish a new edition from competitors and predecessors. The earliest edition of 1647 contains 17 poems; the *Works* of 1687 has 140, the vast majority of which are only spuriously attributed to Cleveland.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> The complicated history of the print publication of Cleveland's poems is succinctly summarised by Morris and Withington in *Poems*, xli-xlix.

Such inflation is not the only printed mark of Cleveland's popularity among his contemporaries. Even allowing for the fact that unregistered and unlicensed publication might well have necessitated a relatively small print run for each edition, it is unusual for there to have been so many within such a short period, and the concentration of publishers' activities in 1647, 1651 and throughout the rest of that decade testifies perhaps to spikes in topical interest. The earliest editions were reasonably widely and efficiently distributed – a copy now at Harvard contains the original owner's comment on the reverse of the titlepage that it was purchased in Rotherham in May 1647, very shortly after it was published<sup>37</sup> – and they clearly sold well enough for the printers and booksellers to judge any political and commercial risks involved worth taking repeatedly; their popularity is also indicated by an early attempt to cash in with an imitative volume claiming to be by the same author (coily and deceptively indicated by the use of his initials), in which the poetical element is in large part supplied by cut and paste extracts from poems by Abraham Cowley.<sup>38</sup> That the poems found a wide readership is also shown by the application of Cleveland's name to an identifiable, and not infrequently imitated, style of vigorously dense satirical writing, as well as by the echoes and allusions to the poems that occur in a range of contemporary tracts and pamphlets, and the tributees paid in the wake of his death in 1658.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, a prefatory poem by J. Parry printed in the second edition of *J. Cleaveland Revived* suggests a more popular fame – it is an "elegy made upon Mr *J. Cleaveland's* death, cryed i' th' streets, he being then in good disposition of Health".<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Cleveland, *The Character of a London-Diurnall*, 1647; Houghton Gen \*EC65 C5993 645cg.

<sup>38</sup> "J.C.", *The Character of a Moderate Intelligencer, with Several Select Poems*. Thomason dated his copy (BL E385(9)) "Aprill 29. 1647".

<sup>39</sup> Dryden spoke disparagingly of "Clevelandism" in *Of Dramatic Poesy*, but the coinage predates this work: Fuller writes of his imitators as "such who have *Clevelandized*" in his *History of the Worthies of England*, 135. See also Jacobus, *John Cleveland*, 31-68.

<sup>40</sup> *J. Cleaveland Revived*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (1660), 7.

This print profusion might be thought to minimise any demand for manuscript transmission, and when Brian Morris and Eleanor Withington published their edition of the poems in 1968 the manuscript remains did indeed appear somewhat meagre: they listed only 36 contemporary manuscripts in which Cleveland's poetry appeared.<sup>41</sup> The *Catalogue of English Literary Manuscripts* has expanded that to 70, excluding manuscripts that only feature poems now thought not to be his such as the verse "Character of a Protector" found among Major General Robert Overton's papers in Leith in January 1655, a poem which contributed significantly to Overton's political downfall and was attributed to Cleveland in print from 1660.<sup>42</sup> Further copies of Cleveland's poems continue to emerge, taking the known total at the time of writing to 72 separate manuscripts, often containing copies of more than one poem, a doubling of Morris and Withington's figure.<sup>43</sup> Among these manuscript witnesses is a copy of his "Dialogue Between Two Zealots", a poem occasioned by the "Et Cetera Oath" of spring 1640, which has the annotation "these verses were given to me by my cosen John Bennett the 11 of November 1640".<sup>44</sup> This is the earliest known copy of the poem, preceding its appearance in print by two years, and confirming that some, at least, of Cleveland's works were in manuscript circulation for a significant period prior to achieving popularity in print. The discoveries of recent years also suggest that the "Dialogue" was the most widely circulated of his works in manuscript – we now know of 24 separate surviving witnesses, with textual variants suggesting multiple chains of

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<sup>41</sup> Morris and Withington, eds., *Poems*, I-IV.

<sup>42</sup> Overton's travails have been recounted by Andrew Shifflett in "A Most Humane Foe': Colonel Robert Overton's War with the Muses", 161-5. The text of the poem as recorded in Thurloe's papers differs considerably from the version printed as Cleveland's, though it is close to a copy in a miscellany with clear connections to the English occupying forces in Scotland in the early 1650s. See NLS Adv MS 19. 3. 4, f.49r.

<sup>43</sup> To those listed in the *Catalogue of English Literary Manuscripts* we can add copies of "A Young Man to an Old Women Courting Him" and "Upon an Hermaphrodite" in a mid-seventeenth century miscellany, Yale MS Osborn b 465, pp. 10-11, 121-3, and a copy of "The Rebel Scot" together with *The Character of a London Diurnal* among the papers of Evan Edwards of Rhual, Flintshire (Flintshire RO, Rhual Ms D/HE/926).

<sup>44</sup> Nottingham Univ. Pw V 178; see Duffy and Wilson, "Two Manuscripts of John Cleveland", 163.

transmission. His satires “Smectymnuus” and “The Rebel Scot” also survive in 12 and 13 known copies respectively, so that his print reputation as an excoriator of the opponents of Caroline rule in general, and ecclesiastical policy in particular, is also borne out by the evidence of the surviving manuscripts.

From the earliest collections of 1647, Cleveland’s poems were often accompanied by his polemical writings in prose, for which he was almost as celebrated. With the notable exception of Lee Jacobus, though, modern critics and editors have often overlooked them.<sup>45</sup> The best known, and most widely circulated, was *The Character of a London-Diurnall*, which first appeared early in 1645 (George Thomason’s copy is annotated “In February”).<sup>46</sup> The poems published in 1647 were presented as additions to a reprint of this tract. The *Character* provoked several Parliamentary counterattacks, including *A Character of the New Oxford Libeller*, which according to its titlepage was “published according to Order”, and was received by Thomason on 11 February, suggesting that a very swift response to Cleveland’s satire was judged to be necessary. *The Character of a London-Diurnall* was republished alongside two other Cleveland characters in the editions of his *Poems* printed in the 1650s.<sup>47</sup> During his imprisonment in 1655 Cleveland penned a wittily defiant plea for his release to Cromwell, which made its way into print in at least two broadsheet impressions during the autumn of 1657, both printed by the royalist stationer and publisher of his *Poems*, William Shears.<sup>48</sup> A pamphlet edition followed, and Thomason preserved a scribal manuscript, dated October 1657, the same month inscribed on one of the broadsheet issues

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<sup>45</sup> Jacobus, *John Cleveland*, 114-45.

<sup>46</sup> Cleveland, *The Character of a London-Diurnall*, BL E.268(6).

<sup>47</sup> Morris and Withington, ed., *Poems*, xliii-iv

<sup>48</sup> *Cleveland’s Petition to His Highnesse the Lord Protector*.

he also collected.<sup>49</sup> The survival of a scribally published copy suggests that there was a commercial demand for manuscripts of Cleveland's non-poetic works, though further research to determine both the canon of his prose writing and the extent of its distribution remains to be undertaken.<sup>50</sup> The popular interest in Cleveland's writing clearly remained high throughout the 1650s, and his death may even have given it a further boost. The stationer Nathaniel Brooke, who published what were claimed to be poems taken from Cleveland's papers as *J. Cleaveland Revived* in 1659, accompanied them with a collection of Latin orations made during his Cambridge years. These were presumably obtained from the same source, the volume's compiler, "E. Williamson", who also provided imperfect English translations. This man was most likely Edmund, a son of Sir Richard Williamson, who had been a Master of Requests under James VI and I.<sup>51</sup> Edmund was admitted to Emmanuel, Cambridge, in 1612, and then to Gray's Inn in 1614; in his preface to his collection he claimed to have been in the garrison at Newark with Cleveland in 1645-6, and to have known him well after the war.<sup>52</sup> Williamson's family were from Gainsborough, twenty miles north of Newark, from where he signed his preface on 21 November 1658.<sup>53</sup> Other members of the wider Williamson family, including the baronet Sir Thomas, and the clergyman Dove

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<sup>49</sup> The pamphlet edition went by the same title as Shears' broadsides but also included a letter by Cleveland addressed to the Earl of Westmorland which was first published in a 1656 edition of the *Poems*. The scribal manuscript obtained by Thomason is BL E746(4); the dated broadsheet is BL 669.f.20/69.

<sup>50</sup> It has sometimes been assumed or asserted that Cleveland played a role in the writing and production of newsbooks in London in the later 1640s, a claim argued by "J. B. Williams" (alias J. G. Muddiman) in his *History of English Journalism*, 83-6, accepted by Gapp in his "Notes" (1082-84) and echoed by some recent scholarship (see, for example, Amos Tubb, "Mixed Messages: Royalist Newsbook Reports of Charles I's Execution and of the Leveller Uprising"). This assertion, however, ultimately rests on a single contemporary claim in an issue of *Mercurius Anti-Mercurius* of April 1648 (sig. A2r) that Cleveland was the author of *Mercurius Pragmaticus*. Subsequent attributions by Muddiman and Gapp were based on an erroneous understanding of the extent of his verse canon, crediting him with authorship of verses in issues of *Mercurius Pragmaticus* that we now know to have been written by Marchamont Nedham.

<sup>51</sup> "Williamson, Sir Richard (1563-1615/16), of York and Pottergate, Gainsborough, Lincs", in Thrush and Ferris, eds., *History of Parliament ... 1600-1640*.

<sup>52</sup> Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses; J. Cleaveland Revived*, sig. A3v-4v.

<sup>53</sup> *J. Cleaveland Revived*, sig. A8v.

(who apparently lost a leg to a cannonball during the siege) are known to have been in Newark during the first civil war.<sup>54</sup> Through his mother Edmund was also related to Stephen Anderson, another member of the Lincolnshire gentry and a fellow royalist inhabitant of the Newark garrison who suffered extensive material damage in the Royalist cause, selling one substantial property to provide funds for the king, compounding for £800 at one time, and having his house at Manby sacked three times, “and everything that he had taken away from him, not onely household goods, but also all his beasts and horses”.<sup>55</sup> Dove Williamson was the rector of Fulbeck, 10 miles south east of Newark, and Mildmay Fane, whose brother Sir Francis lived at Fulbeck in Lincolnshire, met Cleveland more than once in Stephen Anderson’s house at Manby at some point after the end of the siege of Newark.<sup>56</sup> While this suggests that Edmund Williamson would certainly have had the necessary contacts to gain access to manuscripts by, or formerly in the possession of, his late acquaintance, it also demonstrates something of the extent and nature of Cleveland’s support network in the years following the end of the first civil war.

#### Milton and Cleveland: Cambridge and Beyond

If the profusion of editions and copies of his works, his public fame, and a posthumous “revival” could have caused Cleveland to intrude into Milton’s consciousness in the worsening of political prospects in the autumn and winter of 1659, then the publication of his Cambridge orations by Williamson and Brooke might have supplied an additional

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<sup>54</sup> Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, *Newark on Trent: the Civil War Siegeworks*, 91; *Clergy of the Church of England Database*, Person ID 135518.

<sup>55</sup> Maddison, *Lincolnshire Pedigrees*, 25; *The Diary of Abraham de la Pryme*, 117.

<sup>56</sup> Withington, “Mildmay Fane’s ‘Fugitive Poetry’”, 71; Cain, ed., *The Poetry of Mildmay Fane*, 256-7.



impetus. Prior to his embrace of public satire, Cleveland had enjoyed an academic life at Cambridge which initially shadowed that of Milton, but soon outgrew him. Cleveland had matriculated at Christ's College in 1627, two and a half years after Milton, and in being invited to compose and deliver a welcome address to the Chancellor of the university, and acting as "Father" for the Cambridge commencement ceremony, he earned honours that may have made him an "anxiety-inducing example of success within his college" to the older man.<sup>57</sup> In 1634 Cleveland was appointed to a fellowship at St John's, and in 1635 he became rhetoric reader – in this role he was called upon to write formal addresses on behalf of the college, which made up the bulk of the orations first published in 1659.<sup>58</sup> He became well-established as a key figure in the Cambridge practice of vernacular poetry during the 1630s, engaging in amicable verse exchanges with contemporaries such as John Saltmarsh of Magdalene and Robert Wild of his own college, St John's, and answering Sampson Briggs' "Song of Mark Anthony" with his own "Mock-Song".<sup>59</sup> Cleveland's poem "On a Hermaphrodite" was printed among the works of Thomas Randolph of Trinity College after the latter's untimely death in 1635, prompting a poem of wry complaint from its actual author.<sup>60</sup> By the same token, Briggs's "Song of Mark Anthony" was attributed to Cleveland in the early editions of his poems, and the "Epitaph on the Earl of Strafford" written by their Cambridge contemporary Clement Paman was also standardly credited to him from the 1640s until very recently.<sup>61</sup> Such crossings testify to the collective nature of poetic composition, exchange and compilation in the pre-war university, an endeavour in which

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<sup>57</sup> McDowell, *Poet of Revolution*, 95.

<sup>58</sup> Cousins, "Cleveland, John".

<sup>59</sup> Loxley, *Royalism and Poetry in the English Civil Wars*, 51-2.

<sup>60</sup> Cleveland, *Poems*, ed. Morris and Withington, 12-13.

<sup>61</sup> Davidson, ed., *Poetry and Revolution*, 547-8.

Cleveland was entirely immersed but to which Milton had his own sometimes oblique relationship.

The best known product of this culture, and of that relationship, is *Justa Edouardo King*, the collection of elegies for one of their number produced by the Cambridge scholar poets in 1638. The volume is of course best known for Milton's concluding vernacular contribution, but Cleveland's elegy for King enjoyed some parity of esteem for much of the rest of the century.<sup>62</sup> The volume also contained an English elegy by Briggs, and two surviving elegies by Paman suggest that he too was among the intending contributors.<sup>63</sup> This was the only time Milton and Cleveland appeared in print together, and it is difficult to imagine that either was unaware of the fact. But if Milton was indeed thinking of this enemy when composing *The Readie and Easie Way*, his thoughts may have also been sharpened by the intertwining of Cleveland's name with that of another contributor whom he would certainly have considered not just hostile but actively dangerous. At Cleveland's funeral on 1 May 1658, the sermon was given by John Pearson, who twenty years earlier had penned a short Latin elegy published in *Justa*, and whose oration for Cleveland preached in front of "many persons of Learning and Loyalty ... made his Death Glorious".<sup>64</sup> Prior to the wars, Pearson was a fellow of King's; he graduated BA in 1636, and received his MA in 1639.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> See, for example, William Hog's *Paraphrasis Latina, in Duo Poemata*, published in 1694, which printed "Lycidas" with Cleveland's elegy alongside Hog's Latin translations of both. A second vernacular elegy, which is printed unsigned immediately prior to Cleveland's elegy in *Justa*, has sometimes been attributed to him (Le Comte, tr. and ed., "Justa Eduardo King", 222), and is included as a poem probably by Cleveland in Morris and Withington's edition of his *Poems*. However, it only appears in two late 1650s editions of Shears's *Poems*, when the canon was being extended with the inclusion of attitudinally plausible attributions, and is excluded from the 1677 *Clievelandi Vindiciae*. The internal evidence for Cleveland's authorship adduced by Morris and Withington is weak, and partially dependent on the poem's connections with a copy of the epitaph on Strafford now persuasively attributed to Paman. For these reasons, it is unlikely that this elegy is in fact by Cleveland. Why it should be the sole unsigned poem printed in *Justa* remains a puzzle.

<sup>63</sup> Postlethwaite and Campbell, eds, "Edward King, Milton's 'Lycidas': Poems and Documents", 92-5.

<sup>64</sup> Cleveland, *Clievelandi Vindiciae*, sig. A7v.

<sup>65</sup> de Quehen, "Pearson, John".

Initially appointed as a prebendary of Salisbury Cathedral in the same year, he maintained a connection with Cambridge even after surrendering his fellowship, and in 1643 delivered a sermon in which he made a prolonged attack on the impending congregation of the Westminster Assembly – a prose counterpart, to some degree, to Cleveland’s satirical takedown, “The Mixt Assembly”, which probably dates from the same year.<sup>66</sup> By 1645 Pearson was serving as a chaplain to the Royalist general, Lord Goring, in the west of England. After the wars he became a voluntary lecturer at St Clement, Eastcheap, a London parish church which sought to sustain the forms of worship characteristic of Caroline Anglicanism. There he established a reputation as a theologian of note, and his sermons were sought out by conformist laity such as John Evelyn, who may well have taken Hobbes along with him.<sup>67</sup> Pearson’s sermons at St Clement’s formed the basis for a 785 page *Exposition of the Apostles’ Creed* which proved hugely popular from its first publication in 1659, and he was to find both ecclesiastical preferment and intellectual distinction after 1660.

Pearson’s learning, his orthodoxy and his uncompromising royalism and episcopalianism – he defiantly refers to Christ as “the Bishop of our soules” in his discussion of Article IX of the Creed, and from its second edition of 1659 onwards featured a large woodcut of a closed imperial crown on its titlepage<sup>68</sup> – made him a formidable adversary for those, like Milton, who sought to prevent not just a return to monarchy but also to the restrictions and corruptions of the Caroline church. It is unsurprising to find Milton raising the spectre of episcopacy in *The Readie and Easie Way*, warning Presbyterian supporters of the Restoration that the return of one inevitably means the return of the other, and that

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<sup>66</sup> Pearson, *Minor Theological Works*, 2. 97-111.

<sup>67</sup> de Quehen, “Pearson, John”; Martinich, “Thomas Hobbes’s Interregnum Place of Worship”, 233-6.

<sup>68</sup> Pearson, *An Exposition of the Apostles Creed*, 679.

they will “finde the old encroachments coming on by little and little upon our consciences, which must necessarily proceed from king and bishop united inseparably in one interest”.<sup>69</sup>

At stake was the very possibility of liberty of conscience, since liberty is “a word which monarchie and her bishops both fear and hate, but a free Commonwealth both favors and promotes”.<sup>70</sup> In this regard, at least, Milton’s fears and warnings were entirely justified.

Pearson was among those episcopalian divines who refused any compromise with Presbyterianism at the Savoy Conference of 1661, and thus helped to lay the foundations for the highly restrictive Act of Uniformity in 1662.

Thomas Fuller describes Pearson as Cleveland’s “good friend”, and the fact that he was willing to preach a funeral sermon for him clearly testifies to their connection.<sup>71</sup> There is, though, other evidence to suggest its strength and persistence. Throughout the 1640s and 50s, Pearson benefited from the patronage of Royalist members of the Coke family, especially Henry and Sir Robert, two of the sons of Sir Edward, the former chief justice.<sup>72</sup> When Cleveland was arrested at Norwich by deputy major general Hezekiah Haynes on 10 November 1655, during the Cromwellian regime’s repression of known Royalists, the main reason given for his detention was his residence at the house of one Edward Coke. According to Haynes, this was a place “where papists, delinquents, and other disaffected persons of the late king’s party do often resort more than to any family in the said city or county of Norfolk, as is commonly reported”.<sup>73</sup> It has not hitherto been recognised that this Edward was the heir of John Coke of Holkham, and nephew to Pearson’s known patrons Henry and

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<sup>69</sup> *Readie and Easie Way*, 484, 485.

<sup>70</sup> *Readie and Easie Way*, 514, 515.

<sup>71</sup> Fuller, *History of the Worthies of England*, 135.

<sup>72</sup> de Quehen, “Pearson, John”.

<sup>73</sup> Birch, ed., *A Collection of the State Papers of John Thurloe*, 4. 184

Sir Robert.<sup>74</sup> While his father undertook local and county offices under the Parliamentary and Commonwealth regimes, Edward was clearly not a chip off the old block. Several members of the younger generation of Cokes, and possibly Edward himself, had been at Cambridge alongside Pearson and Cleveland in the 1630s; Richard and Roger, sons to Henry, matriculated at King's in 1637 and 1639, and may have been among Pearson's students.<sup>75</sup> Much later, Roger was to write of the repression which his family and other royalists, including Cleveland, suffered in East Anglia during the mid-1650s, and of his father's similar defiance of their persecutors.<sup>76</sup>

This evidence for a sustained connection with Pearson, and through him association with influential royalist patrons, reinforces the claim made here for Cleveland's anything but marginal status during the later 1650s. And there is further such evidence to be adduced. At the time of his death, Cleveland was living at Gray's Inn, where according to Aubrey he and Samuel Butler "had a Clubb every night".<sup>77</sup> Butler himself had maintained a relatively low profile since the 1640s, but also had influential patrons; he was also very well versed in the political discourses of the time, and was already at work on *Hudibras*, in which his satirical attack on the Good Old Cause seriously diminished its dignity and currency for a Restoration

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<sup>74</sup> Carthew, *The Hundred of Launditch and Deanery of Brisley, in the County of Norfolk*, 3.109.

<sup>75</sup> Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*. Venn lists Edward, John and Robert as sons of John Coke of Holkham, matriculating in 1631, 1631 and 1634 respectively, but this cannot be corroborated by the surviving genealogical evidence – and indeed conflates this John with the elder John Coke's namesake heir, who was not in fact born until 1635 ("Coke, John I (1635-71), of Holkham, Norf.", in Henning, ed., *History of Parliament ... 1660-1690*). It is possible that the John who matriculated with Edward in 1631 was indeed Edward's brother, but that he died before the younger John was born in 1635. To complicate matters further, it is important to distinguish these three John Cokes from the man of the same name who matriculated from Trinity as sizar at Easter 1631, and was eventually appointed to a fellowship in 1637. This man is the likeliest author of a Latin poem included in the Cambridge miscellany presented to the King on his recovery from illness in 1633, *Anthologia in Regis Exanthemata*, to which several later contributors to *Justa Eduardo King*, as well as Edward King himself, contributed; he is at least a candidate for authorship of the Latin poem in *Justa* signed 'Coke', which Le Comte (220), attributes instead to Francis Coke or Cooke of Christ's.

<sup>76</sup> Coke, *A Detection of the Court and State of England*, 2. 52-9.

<sup>77</sup> Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, 1. 21-2.

readership.<sup>78</sup> Butler is now recognised as the author of *The Censure of the Rota on Mr Miltons Book*, a scathing and contemptuous response to the publication of the first edition of *The Readie and Easie Way*.<sup>79</sup> Interestingly, given his friendship with Cleveland, Butler here singles out Milton's seemingly dismissive attack on his "late Court-poet" for particular satirical attention. He mocks both Milton and Waller with a reference to the latter's encomium on John Evelyn's translation of Lucretius, describing Waller as a "modern Protector-poet" for his anti-monarchical invocation of the notion that storks can only be born in a republic;<sup>80</sup> for good measure, he repeats the echo in describing Aristophanes as "one of [the ancient Greeks'] Common-wealth poets", citing lines spoken by Chremylus in *Plutus* to suggest that only "temple robbers, politicians [*rhetoires*], informers [and] rascals" have prospered in the current political dispensation.<sup>81</sup> These echoes of Milton's phrasing, thrown back upon their author, might indicate that Butler knew exactly who Milton was attacking; he is mocking Milton's apparent dismissiveness by appropriating and repeating his only apparently artless phrasing – partially, I would suggest, in defence of his late friend.

The fact that Milton's thrust against Cleveland concerns the latter's assertion of the invulnerability of monarchy to iconoclastic intrusion might also have inspired Butler's singular defence of Charles I's use for his scaffold devotions of a prayer by Philip Sidney spoken by Pamela in the *New Arcadia*, which Milton had held up for ridicule in *Eikonoklastes*. Against Milton's triumphant revelation of its origins, which he had suggested fatally compromised Charles's claims to Christian piety and sanctity, Butler countered with

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<sup>78</sup> de Quehen, "Butler, Samuel", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

<sup>79</sup> The case for the attribution of this work to Butler was most persuasively made by Nicholas von Maltzahn, in "Samuel Butler's Milton", 482-95.

<sup>80</sup> Butler, *The Censure of the Rota*, 8. Waller's commendatory poem prefacing Evelyn's translation begins "LUCRETIUS with a Stork-like fate / Born and translated in a State / Comes to proclaim in English Verse / No Monarch Rules the Universe"; Evelyn, *An Essay on the First Book of T. Lucretius Carus De Rerum Natura*, 3.

<sup>81</sup> Aristophanes, *Frogs. Assemblywomen. Wealth*, 426.

the accusation that in calling it a heathen prayer Milton had shown only his own credulousness – while within the narrative of the *Arcadia* Pamela might well have been a pagan princess, the prayer’s real author was of course the unimpeachably Christian Sidney. Far from being a heathen, Pamela was in reality “born and bred of Christian parents in *England*”.<sup>82</sup> Milton, the would-be disenchanter, had made the fool’s error of mistaking the fictive for the real. In doing so, the iconoclast had shown himself to be, in essence, no better than an idolater. It is a criticism of Milton’s understanding of monarchy which is entirely consonant with Cleveland’s contempt for the “brats of this expounding age” in “The King’s Disguise”.

Through the popularity of his writings and the political currency of his friends and supporters, we can see how Cleveland and his articulation of the singular nature of monarchical power might still loom large enough for Milton to warrant an attack even after his death. If this is the case, though, there is one final twist which would show that Milton was not just a casual reader of Cleveland, but one who was more well-informed or attentive than his rhetorically dismissive reference to his “late Court-poet” would otherwise suggest. The key consideration here is that the line in “The King’s Disguise” to which Milton plausibly refers exists in two distinct states across the early print editions. In its initial publication as a separate in 1647, and then in the first three editions that year of *The Character of a London Diurnal with Several Select Poems* (labelled D1-3 by Morris and Withington) the line reads “Keyes for this Coffe you can never get”, entirely lacking any reference to the king as a cipher. However, the three 1647 editions D4-6 introduce a number of substantive emendations and variants, which clearly demonstrate an attempt to improve the text with

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<sup>82</sup> Butler, *Censure*, 10.

reference to new witnesses presumed to offer better readings. Among the alterations to “The King’s Disguise” made in these editions, “Coffer” is changed to “Cipher”. Modern editors have followed this reading because it is also the variant chosen by Cleveland’s earliest editors, his former students Samuel Drake and John Lake, in their attempt to retrieve his genuine works and authoritative texts from the morass of unwarranted attributions and random variations in which his popularity had left them. It is also the variant found in a unique manuscript collection of Cleveland’s poetry now in the Beinecke Library, which shows signs of privileged access to the circumstances surrounding the composition of one of the poems.<sup>83</sup> Fifty years ago, Helen Duffy and Paul Wilson speculated that this manuscript might have some connection to Samuel Drake, whose personal connection with Cleveland extended beyond Cambridge at least to their common service in the Newark garrison.<sup>84</sup> Their supposition is reinforced by the fact that on the pastedown at its end it contains notes relating to the income derived from some of the prebendaries and succentorship of York Minster – Drake was vicar of Pontefract after 1660, prebendary of Normanton, near Wakefield, in 1670-71, and a preacher throughout the diocese of York after 1662.<sup>85</sup> Comparison of this manuscript with an autograph letter by Drake now in the British Library confirms that it is substantially, at least, in his hand.<sup>86</sup> “The King’s Disguise” was most likely written very shortly after the surrender of the Newark garrison in May 1646. Given his proximity to Cleveland around the time of the poem’s composition, there is every reason to

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<sup>83</sup> Yale, Osborn MS b 93. This manuscript, which was then still in the private collection of James Osborn, is designated “O” by Morris and Withington. Crucially, it identifies the “Mrs K. T.” to whom Cleveland addresses a poem first published in 1647 as “Mrs Katharine Thorold”, a member of another Lincolnshire gentry family with Cambridge and Royalist connections. See Duffy and Wilson, “A Note on John Cleveland’s ‘To Mrs K. T.’”.

<sup>84</sup> Duffy and Wilson, “A Note”, 548.

<sup>85</sup> Duffy and Wilson, “A Note”, 548; *Clergy of the Church of England Database*, Person ID 145598.

<sup>86</sup> BL MS Sloane 3515, ff. 68-9.



suppose that the reading preferred by Drake in his later role as editor of the poems is authoritative.

Only the Beinecke manuscript witness of “The King’s Disguise” was known to Morris and Withington. Yet the report on the Northumberland manuscripts at Alnwick carried out for the Historical Manuscripts Commission in the 19th century transcribed the first few lines of another copy of the poem, written on a single folded sheet of paper and bound in with other unrelated items from the 1640s.<sup>87</sup> Because this copy of the poem was unattributed, and clearly, but unsurprisingly, unknown to the writer of the report, it evaded notice until this century. The Northumberland manuscript is an independent witness, despite its closeness in parts to Drake’s text in the Beinecke manuscript – it includes unique variants, and offers a version of lines 55-6 that exactly matches the archetypal reading postulated by Morris and Withington; it also has a marginal annotation to line 22 that is found nowhere else in the extant texts. And the fact that it may have come into the collection via the papers of the Earl of Northumberland’s household is itself intriguing – I argued some years ago that there was a continuity between the rendering of “clouded majesty” in Cleveland’s poem and the portraits of Charles and his family that the tenth Earl of Northumberland, the jailer and/or guardian of the royal children, commissioned from Peter Lely in 1647.<sup>88</sup> Here, there is something that looks at least a little like corroboration of such a claim. More pertinently, it follows the “cipher” reading preferred by Drake and the corrected – if that is the right word

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<sup>87</sup> *Third Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts*, Appendix, 86; Alnwick DNP MS 16 (450/1), ff. 78-9. There is a surviving record of a third witness in a sale catalogue of books and manuscripts from 1748; this copy was among two poems by Cleveland included in a miscellany begun by Sir Robert Bolles while he was a student at Sidney Sussex, Cambridge, in 1635, and sustained through the 1640s (*Catalogue of English Literary Manuscripts*, Bolles MS, CIJ 66). Robert, the second baronet, was appointed with his father as a Commissioner of Array for Lincolnshire in 1642; a Sir John Bolles, who may well have been Robert’s Royalist father, was in the Newark garrison (“Bolles, Sir Robert, 2nd Bt. (1619-63), of Scampton, Lincs. and London”, in Henning, ed., *History of Parliament ... 1660-1690; Newark on Trent: the Civil War Siegeworks*, 92). The provenance of this manuscript suggests it would be an important textual witness; unfortunately, its fate after 1748 is unknown.

<sup>88</sup> Loxley, *Royalism and Poetry*, 138-47, 155-68.

for the process – later editions of 1647. Here, then, is further evidence that the “cipher” variant is both closest to Cleveland’s original text, and that this is why it was preferred by those keen to put authoritative versions of his poems before a readership. Yet it was not the most widespread variant – in addition to the first three editions of 1647, “coffer” was consistently preferred by all the editions of Cleveland’s *Poems* published in the 1650s. So when Milton seized on that word to make a lunge at resurgent royalism in 1659-60, he was actually demonstrating a keen and very well-informed awareness of royalism’s rhetorical, political and poetic force. This would have been – and in Butler’s case, surely was – visible to his opponents, even as he appeared to feign something like throwaway contempt. The gesture has a doubled force: it demonstrates a wary respect for enemies whom you regard as dangerous rather than negligible, while letting them know that such respect is certainly not something you are going to grant them publicly. It is entirely consistent with the polemical currents of the mid-seventeenth century, as both Milton and his contemporaries would have understood. For us, though, as I hope to have shown here, it is sometimes helpful to spend a while unpacking these moments in order to understand and appreciate the energy or urgency of such sharply felt exchanges.

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