

The Reflection of the Exclusion Crisis (1678–1683) in Contemporary Literature

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abstract

This work of literary history analyses the reflection of the Exclusion Crisis (1678–1683) in contemporary literature across genres. It is based on the theory of the rise of the public sphere by Jürgen Habermas and on the theory of Michael McKeon, understanding the ideology of the late Stuarts as a last remnant of aristocratic ideology. The Exclusion Crisis is presented here as a period of unsettling negotiations between the declining Stuart ethos and the Whig ideology of the rising mercantile classes. The interpretation of chosen texts serves to discover creative transformations of the political discourse of the newly emerging political parties of Whigs and Tories, stressing the negotiations between genres, individual authors and political ideologies.

The first chapter offers a brief overview of the socio-historical context, Habermas's theory of the rise of the public sphere and Michael McKeon's conception of aristocratic ideology. It also introduces the Tory political theory defending the Stuart divine right of kings on the basis of Robert Filmer's patriarchal household-state analogy and the Whig defence against absolutist tendencies of the Stuarts through asserting the priority of Law over the Royal Prerogative, as well as the religious issues inherent in these political discussions.

The following four chapters contain detailed analyses and comparisons of the chosen literary texts in relation to the political discursive strategies of the period. Chapter 2 shows how John Dryden's tragedies *Oedipus* and *Troilus and Cressida* and his tragicomedy *The Spanish Fryar* reflect the crisis by staging a disrupted state, promoting the divine right of kings and code of honour as the basis of aristocratic ideology, warning against faction and rebellion, as well as criticizing Charles II through the stock "effeminate" characters. *Absalom and Achitophel* is used as an example of highly topical satire of the Tory reaction period after the Oxford Parliament of 1681, which allows a study of the use of typological example for asserting the authority of a political text.

Chapter 3 addresses the political opposition in the tragedies by Nathaniel Lee, where *Theodosius* is read as a smashing critique of an incompetent monarch and *Caesar Borgia* develops the sexual-political analogy to disqualify Stuarts' tendencies to absolutism and Catholicism. *Lucius Junius Brutus* is then compared to another adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, Thomas Otway's *Caius Marius*, to show how they transform the same tropes and topics for different ends.

Since the sexual-political analogy formed the basis of Restoration political discourse, chapter 4 turns to the use of female characters and introduces three types employed specifically for political writing: 1. the vile woman as a symbol of political transgression in Elkanah Settle's *The Female Prelate*, 2. the innocent victim as a means of arousing pathos in the newly appearing she-tragedies by Thomas Otway (*The Orphan*) and John Banks (*Vertue Betray'd*), 3. The modern Protestant woman in Thomas Shadwell's comedies.

After discussing fictional female characters, chapter 5 turns to an actual female voice of Aphra Behn, whose comedy *The Feign'd Curtizans* and tragicomedy *The Young King* show her first reactions to the crisis and negotiation between her political allegiance and awareness of gender problems inherent in the Stuart patriarchal discourse. *The Roundheads* and *The Second Part of The Rover* represent a direct attack on Whig ideology, embodied in the satirized Puritan upstarts. Instead, the Cavalier libertine ethos is promoted as an epitome of the intrinsic quality of aristocratic honour. The last part of the chapter presents the Duke of Monmouth and the Earl of Shaftesbury as intriguing public figures who not only

inspired Dryden for his most famous satire, but also influenced Behn's pastoral poetry and prompted her first roman à clef.

The conclusion then stresses the intertextual nature of all the studied texts, which were engaged in constant negotiations between the individual authors and political ideologies, but also between genres, discourses, tropes and motifs.

The thesis does not aim at classifying individual texts as either "Tory" or "Whig". In her study of Restoration theatrical culture, Susan J. Owen has persuasively argued that the drama of the Exclusion Crisis is rather a drama of contradiction and the plays rarely provide a clear-cut political message. I find a similar tendency also perceptible in both poetry and fiction writing. Therefore, the main objective of the thesis is to clarify and disclose the ways political events shaped public discourse and how the imagery used in political theory was employed and transformed in literary works.