CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Thanks first to radio and television and then the cell phone and the Internet, we live in an age preoccupied with an explosion in the reach and density of the media and their penetration into our daily, and particularly our political, lives. Other ages too experienced a multiplicity of means through which people learned about politics. This book seeks to present a panorama of the genres through which early modern English men and women learned about politically significant ideas, events and institutions. It is about the channels through which the political culture of the time and place was acquired. Only enough of the substance of the messages sent and received is presented to allow us to gain an understanding of the agendas and target audiences of the plethora of media.

Not without reason, intellectual historians pay a great deal of attention to what people thought and what people knew at various times and places. They have, however, paid far less attention to how people came to know what they knew, the written and nonwritten channels through which knowledge was acquired. There are, to be sure, many studies of literary genres, but each of those studies typically focuses on a single one. Real people, however, do not learn from any single genre. They know what they know through a melange of sources, and not only by reading and having heard about distant matters but also through seeing and participating directly in the world around them. The English public received political ideas and values through a wide array of channels ranging from erudite treatise to scurrilous ballad. How did the English people know what they knew about the political life of their country? What means did they have of communicating their beliefs and experiences? To what extent was government

successful in disseminating its ideas and monitoring and controlling public discourse? Did the kinds and quantity of political expression change when governmental control lapsed or proved ineffective? By addressing these questions this book seeks to offer a fuller view of English political culture than previously has been presented.

The treatment here differs from that of earlier studies in a number of ways. Unlike much of the work on political thought of this period, this study does not focus on the work of well-known innovative thinkers such as Hobbes, Harrington and Locke. Literary and other scholars have produced detailed studies exploring a single figure such, as a Milton or Dryden, or a single genre, often covering only a brief period of time. Examples of the latter that come to mind are those on Elizabethan or Restoration drama, sermons of the Jacobean era and civil war–era news media. Some scholars have focused on separate cultures or subcultures within the larger political sphere. There have been numerous studies of court culture, which is to be distinguished from the larger culture particularly by its aesthetic forms. Royal entertainments, courtly behavior and language and court masques figure large in this approach. This subculture was less likely than others to turn to print. Personal sociability and manuscript circulation were typical of its communicative structure. Thus far there has been greater attention to the pre–civil war court than to court life of the Restoration era, perhaps because of its greater informality, and the fact that it was less cut off from the world of polite society and commerce than its predecessor. The civic culture of towns is another subculture, the study of which gives special emphasis to the rituals of civic governments. There have also been studies of coffee house culture, an institution to which Jürgen Habermas gave particular attention in connection with the concept of a public sphere.[1] Here we look at the whole spectrum of available venues and genres in which political ideas were expressed and through which the English people received and contributed to their general political culture from the reign of Elizabeth to just prior to the transformation of 1688.

Genres and Channels for Political Expression and Experience

My approach to genres and modes of political expression may require some explanation. Focusing on particular types of expression and experience such as drama, sermons or poetry allows us to look at avenues of ex-

pression familiar to contemporaries and to audience expectations as to subject matter, rhetorical conventions and tone. Although the genres or forms of expression discussed here were stable enough to be identified as such by contemporaries, I do not wish to use genre in a formal and technical sense because formal genre requirements were often ignored or modified, and some topics and subject matters were conveyed in a variety or mixture of formats. The focus on genre, somewhat loosely conceived, is useful, however, because it was widely recognized that different kinds of speech and writing were governed by different rhetorical conventions and appropriate styles.

Genres or forms of expression thus provide a helpful window for examining political life. But they must not be treated as impermeable or entirely stable, and both the enduring and the unstable are worthy of attention. News, for example, might be conveyed in proclamations, pamphlets, broadside ballads, printed newsbooks, manuscript newsletters, trial accounts or gossip among friends and acquaintances. News writers adopted the norm of accuracy and impartiality, but, as contemporaries recognized, much of the news media they encountered were partisan efforts purveying rumor or misinformation. Several of the most important genres were vehicles for government communication.

Some genres were used for political purposes throughout the period; others were adapted to political use for a short time and under particular political circumstances. Many had recognizable expectations as to format, length, subject matters; others were more loosely defined. I have treated historiography as a genre, but there were many types of historical writings ranging from chronicles and annals to perfect history and memoirs. Historical writing might appear in lavishly illustrated, expensive folios designed for the prosperous and also in brief inexpensive formats for popular consumption. Historical and legal discourse were often intertwined. Historical material might be blended with news or chorography, a form focused on the description of the present state of some particular political entity. It might be conveyed in prose or verse forms, in narrative or drama, presented as merely factual or mixed with fiction. Treatment of England's national past, the Roman past and scriptural history lent themselves to discussion of a wide range of often contemporary political issues. The events recorded in Scripture were undoubtedly the most familiar. Some venues were more likely than others to make use of Scripture, others the English or Roman past.

Although the chapter headings I employ suggest sharp distinctions

among genres, there are instances in which the material in one chapter might well have been considered in another. Ballads often conveyed news of people and events and may be considered either as a species of poetry or as a news form. Satirical libels were often in verse. Some forms reached quite distinct audiences, depending on cost or whether they were personally viewed or read. Reading itself might be done privately with the opportunity for reflection and analysis or aloud to an audience, some of whom might be illiterate. While empirical political description was a genre devoted to matters of fact, the form could also be turned to fictional uses, as in Sir Thomas More's *Utopia.* For this reason several chapters emphasize the overlap among genres.

The term "genre" is, therefore, used rather loosely to indicate a recognizable form of expression typically following a set of known rhetorical features. Despite occasional disregard for genre norms, most types of expression adhered to their own rhetorical conventions. The rhetoric of the sermon was quite different from that of the ballad, the news media or the libel. There were relatively fixed and differing conventions for such genres as the epic, elegy and pastoral. Some genres, such as assize sermons, lent themselves particularly well to conservative themes; others were more likely to emphasize conflict than harmony. There were also norms for different kinds of drama, some dramatic forms lending themselves more easily to political comment than others. Not all drama conformed to the strict norms announced by drama theorists. The popular historical drama, to which we give considerable attention, did not fit into the conventional classifications.

The sermon is an easily recognizable, relatively stable genre, typically beginning with a biblical text and then providing an explanation of its meaning and implications for the audience. While most sermons focused on doctrine and practical piety, there were also sermons that dealt with political topics particularly when they were given in certain venues or delivered on particular occasions. We concentrate on sermon types most likely to communicate political messages. Something similar can be said of the trial. While most trials were not political in character, the well publicized trials of particular individuals, for treason or seditious libel, became the focus of political excitement and comment. We can therefore reasonably identify, if not precisely define, a category of political trials.

If some forms of expression were fairly stable, others underwent considerable change. The "character" began as a literary form with little political content and then morphed into a decidedly political genre used to attack religious and political opponents. The use of the political printed play pro-

logue during the Restoration era provides an example of an ephemeral genre. Petitions were a traditional form for presenting grievances but changed considerably over time. Not only did new types of petitioners appear, but petitions presented by large crowds in public spaces began to appear menacing to those to whom the petitions were addressed. Always a device for requesting change, the petition sometimes became a means of applying substantial political pressure backed by the threat of force. There were also new forms of expression, such as the serial newsbook, which came into existence during the revolutionary period, and may have evolved from the coranto or manuscript newsletter. One possible evolution runs from the familiar letter, written by a known person to another known person and then transformed into a newsletter written by a known person to an unknown audience and finally to the newspaper, written by an unknown person to an unknown audience, all the while retaining features of its origin.[2]

Despite permeability, overlap and changeability, the forms of expression and activity to be discussed were sufficiently fixed to be recognizable, although sufficiently flexible to be adapted to new uses. Examining the available modes and channels of political expression provides a convenient way to approach the question of how political ideas and information were expressed and disseminated. Collectively they provide a useful way of viewing political culture between the accession of Elizabeth and the Glorious Revolution.

Scholarly Traditions

The emphasis on genres necessarily entails combining the approaches of intellectual, literary and political history as well as the history of printing and the book. Scholars from several disciplines come to the subject of English political thought with a variety of perspectives. The multidisciplinary "history of ideas" approach, which traced the development of particular ideas over lengthy periods of time, was not attentive to the context in which ideas developed and has not lately been much pursued. Influenced to a greater or lesser degree by Marxist approaches, some scholars have treated political ideas and assumptions as reflections of economic structures and class interest.

There have been several traditions of literary scholarship, some more, some less useful to my endeavor. Older historical approaches, such as those of E. M. W. Tillyard and Basil Willey, were eclipsed by "new critics" who

rejected their historicizing bent. These in turn have been largely displaced by "new historicists" and others who, under the influence of Foucault, have returned to investigations of epistemic regimes or have conceptualized literary activities as either subversive or contained by dominant political-intellectual structures. This approach sometimes shows a kinship with the notion of paradigms and paradigm shifts developed by Thomas Kuhn in the context of a particular discipline, by applying that notion to an entire culture rather than to one branch of intellectual life. Some new historicists, however, have preferred to focus on an event or even an anecdote and thus have not looked to categorizing movements or to charting long-term change. Literary historians also have been active in examining the political aspects of particular periods such as the Jacobean era or the Restoration or have focused on the works of individual dramatists such as Shakespeare or Middleton or poets such as Milton and Dryden, demonstrating that literary figures often participated in political discussion. When literary scholars moved in the direction of viewing literature as embedded in and a part of political discourse their work overlapped with scholars working in other disciplines. It is currently difficult to distinguish the work of many literary scholars from that of the cultural or intellectual historian or the contextually oriented political theorist.

Of the numerous historians who have focused on political life, most have dealt primarily with political thought and political institutions. Many have investigated the tensions between concepts of limited and unlimited monarchy, or controversies over the ancient constitution. Some have produced institutional studies of Parliament, the courts, local administration, patronage or the military. Others have illuminated the importance of gender, social structures or religion. Current work on intellectual history and the dissemination of ideas is being reshaped by studies of literacy, manuscript circulation and the history of the book, as well as reading practices, marginal annotation and the practice of commonplacing. This work, again shared by historians and literary scholars, is complemented by studies of the use of governmental authority to supervise and control intellectual and cultural communication. The common interests and overlapping investigations of literary scholars and intellectual and cultural historians has greatly enhanced the possibilities for work dealing with political and other sorts of communication, whether in print, manuscript or oral form.

For many decades political theorists, a group sometimes closer to philosophers, sometimes to historians and literary scholars, focused on the work of canonical figures, such as Richard Hooker, Thomas Hobbes and John

Locke. For several decades now this approach has been overshadowed by an emphasis on the context in which such individuals wrote of general concerns about early modern republicanism or Machiavellianism. Contextual approaches, pioneered by J. G. A. Pocock and Quentin Skinner, have emphasized the languages of political discourse. Whether the principal interest is in forms of discourse or in the writer's embeddedness in current political controversy, the scholarly work of the community of political theorists has come to overlap with that of the historian and literary scholar, all of whom collectively pursue interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary investigations of early modern English political life and thought.

This study takes a more comprehensive view of the channels of early modern English political culture than has been achieved previously while making use of the insights of these scholarly traditions. Ideas themselves, modes of discourse, audiences and changes in these elements are obviously central to political culture. It is impossible to gain an understanding of political culture, however, without also paying some attention to the pressing political issues of the day, the conflicts they engendered and the institutions in which they were experienced and expressed. Culture involves both ideas and institutions. Culture, however, must be learned. It can be understood fully only if the means of transmitting all these elements of political culture to the citizenry are understood fully. The media may not be the message, but they contribute mightily to how, where, when and to what extent recipients receive the messages and how they process them.

In order to gain a composite sense of how English men and women absorbed and participated in the changing political culture of their time, the chapters that follow bring together work in various disciplinary traditions. Some draw heavily on relevant previous scholarship. Others, particularly those dealing with the least formal and most ephemeral modes of communication, have little such scholarship to draw upon.

Several issues also must be mentioned before describing the chapters that follow. The first is the choice of focusing on the period from the accession of Elizabeth in 1558 to the Revolution of 1688. The second involves chronology. It is also necessary to say something further about the widely used concept of "political culture" and to indicate how this study intersects with the debates that currently engage scholars dealing with early modern English political culture. Finally it is necessary to provide a brief outline of some of the basic assumptions of the era, assumptions so fully accepted that contemporary theorists and commentators rarely felt the need to speak or write of them.

Why 1558–1688

Focus on any period of time, any particular set of dates, is always somewhat arbitrary. Not only are there always strands of thought, practices and institutions that may have a continuing existence both before and after the time period selected for study, but there are often alternative dates that may be plausibly offered. One might have begun with 1485, the beginning of Tudor rule, or 1509, the accession of Henry VIII or have chosen 1707, the end of Stuart rule as a closing point. However, I believe that the years from 1558, the beginning of the reign of Elizabeth, to 1688, the year of the Glorious Revolution, share a group of characteristics that make them a reasonable and coherent period of time on which to focus. The pre-Elizabethan era was dominated by the separation from Rome and the attendant dismantling of the monastic orders, elimination of pilgrimages and controversies over the Oath of Supremacy. While there is continuity to be found in Parliament and legal institutions, this early period was an especially unstable one that experienced numerous rebellions. And while print was becoming an available means of political expression, it had not yet become a commonly used media.

The salient characteristics of the 1558–1688 period are different. On the religious front, England experienced hopes of religious unity and the fact of internal religious division. It experienced the creation of a Protestant church coterminous with the commonwealth as a whole, with the sovereign as head of the church. Shortly after the succession of Elizabeth it became clear that the legislatively established Church of England would be Protestant. Domestically the focus was on defense or criticism of the doctrine, practice and form of ecclesiastical government. The shape of the church was contested by several Protestant groups seeking to shape it closer to their ideal form. The problem of how to handle Protestant dissent was continuous throughout the period. The question of religious dissent segued easily into more general issues relating to obedience and disobedience to authority and even the right of rebellion.

The period was also characterized by the development of intense anti–Roman Catholic sentiment, and especially the fear of a Roman Catholic succession resulting in England's return to Roman Catholicism. Domestically, fear and antagonism were focused on how to deal with those who could not or would not attend the established church. Much of the antagonism toward Spain in the first part of the period and toward France in

the latter part was associated with the aggressive Catholicism of England's most formidable enemies. Antagonism toward popery and the papacy were givens throughout the entire period.

In the years between 1558 and 1688 many political issues were framed around question of law, courts and judges. This was a period in which both Crown and Parliament gained institutional strength. It was characterized by disagreement about the nature and powers of the monarchy and Parliament. The relationship between royal prerogative and law was frequently a source of friction. Conflicts emerged intermittently, most often when Parliament was in session. For most of the period rulers were reluctant to call parliaments and often dismissed them precipitately. Parliaments were often frustrated, with grievances unheard or unresolved. The pre–civil war period was one in which parliamentary self-confidence increased at the same time there was great fear for its continued existence as representative institutions elsewhere declined or disappeared. The issue became less important after 1688, when the Parliament met regularly, needed by the Crown to provide financial support for England's engagement in Continental warfare. While the issue of the royal prerogative powers did not disappear after 1688, it was never again so central to political and constitutional debate.

Although the legal system exhibited considerable continuity with the period before Elizabeth's reign and that after 1688, aspects of that system became particularly politicized between 1558 and 1688. The role of the prerogative courts was challenged, and they were eventually destroyed. The judiciary between 1558 and 1688 became a center of political interest and dispute. After 1688, as legislation made the judiciary more independent of Crown control, judges were no longer a major political issue.

The period selected has a coherence shaped by extreme anti-Catholic sentiment, intense intra-Protestant divisions, debate about the relationship between law and prerogative and even the existence and character of Parliament, and a politicized judiciary.

Chronology

Although the book is organized around the forms of political expression, some chapters and parts of chapters are treated chronologically rather than synchronically because particular political conditions and events were important to how a given channel of communication developed. The chapter on news and the communication of political information about contempo-

rary occurrences necessarily must give some attention to those occurrences. The changing formats in which news was communicated were modified by the changing environments of government censorship and control. The "character" is treated chronologically in order to show its evolution from a purely literary genre to a highly politicized form of political writing. It has also been necessary to draw attention to how celebrations such as Gunpowder Day and Queen Elizabeth's accession day changed from occasions for stressing Protestant unity into more divisive ones. Grievances were aired and petitions circulated most often when Parliament was meeting or about to meet. Periods with the least governmental control of printing that witnessed greater publication opportunities will be given special attention, not only because there is more data to examine but also because these were also the periods of greatest political activity.

Some venues exhibited considerable continuity; others changed substantially over time. The Exchange and Paul's Walk in London and meetings of quarter sessions and assizes remained locales for the exchange and communication of political information, news and debate throughout most of the period. Coffee houses became important focal points for political discussion after the Restoration. Some chapters feature periodization within the larger period 1558–1688 because to do otherwise would convey false and overly static characterizations. I thus differentiate the pre–civil war and Restoration theater environments but treat the historical drama of both periods topically rather than chronologically because this approach makes it possible to see how different historical personages or events were used by different political groups.

Those channels and types of expression that were least affected by the politics of the moment are not treated chronologically. Empirical political description receives a largely synchronic treatment, as does the less broken experience of serving on juries and as justices of the peace. The degree to which each chapter is treated chronologically depends on the degree to which the various forms of expression were created or altered over time by changing political circumstances.

Political Culture

This study makes use of the term "political culture," a somewhat elusive concept that has been used differently in different scholarly communities. The term was introduced in the 1950s by political scientists engaged in com-

parative politics who employed survey data in a variety of national settings. Later political scientists extended the concept, applied it to numerous locales, criticizing the methods initially employed and querying its utility as a causal explanation. It was used so expansively that political scientist Sidney Verba suggests that the term "political culture" had become "a residual category casually used to explain anything that cannot be explained by more precise and concrete factors."[3]

Another influential approach to political culture has been that of Clifford Geertz's symbolic anthropology. He and his followers have emphasized the role of forms and symbols in constructing public and political meaning. His technique, "thick description" of verbal and nonverbal materials, is utilized to get behind rationales for action in given cultures. This approach, which has influenced the writing of historians, literary scholars and art historians, emphasizes interpretation and "meaning" of cultural systems.[4]

Historians adopted the term but ignored the political scientist's concern with methodological questions or causality. By 1988 "political culture" had become a topic for discussion by the American Historical Association. Historians of the United States associated political culture with political rituals, political education and symbolic politics, though the term was also used in connection with political tradition and patterns of political behavior. It has most frequently been associated with symbolic behavior of various kinds. Political culture was likely to be contrasted to those aspects of political life relating to elections, political parties, policy formation and the actions of legislative, executive and judicial bodies.[5] The term has also been applied to a wide number of political entities, European and non-European, as well as to a variety of subcultures, by both historians and political scientists. A quick look at any library catalog reveals dozens of volumes that deal with past or present political cultures of France, Japan, China, Eastern European, Iran, etc.[6]

Historians of England have also adopted the concept of political culture, most often to discuss something distinct from politics. Some have focused on ritual and celebration, others on a particular form such as the masque or the drama or a particular institution such as the coffee house.[7] The concept has been used to focus on royal propaganda efforts in a particular region of England,[8] as well as to place individual writers in a larger political context.[9] There have been important studies that investigate the close connection between literary and political culture.[10] There are studies that focus on elite political culture, such as the culture of the court, and others where the emphasis is on popular thought and action, and still others that suggested a

distinction between political culture and cultural politics.[11] Michael Hicks has employed the concept to deal with the entire fifteenth century and covers a very wide range of topics while largely ignoring ritual, ceremony and literary culture, topics that other scholars treat as central features of political culture.[12]

Many collections of essays with a wide range of topics have adopted the term "political culture" to signal that the collection deals with things political. Used in this way it serves as an umbrella under which a wide range of topics relating somehow to the political can be grouped together.[13] In a relatively early effort to discuss political culture, Dale Hoak attempted to differentiate it from politics but insisted that the two must be drawn together for a full understanding of early Tudor political life.[14] Focus on "political languages" has made it possible for some of the efforts of political theorists to be assimilated into or at least associated with the notion of political culture. Perhaps the best-known effort of this type is Pocock's *Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law* which attempts to show how the language of the ancient constitution and the common law shaped the political thinking of an era.

Although the term "political culture" is widely employed by scholars of early modern England without topical or methodological consistency, it has nevertheless proved to be a useful concept. In this book the term is used to include political assumptions that were so widely held as not to merit discussion, the many written and spoken forms in which political matters were discussed, disseminated and debated, and the forms of political participation available to members of the English polity. Each of the forms of expression dealt with in subsequent chapters is, therefore, treated as one component among many that together constitute political culture. My study focuses predominantly on forms of written and oral expression and on the experience of participating in or observing institutions and practices. Political culture as used here also involves political education and the means by which individuals, especially literate individuals, absorbed that political education. This study, for the most part, concentrates on material that was available to fairly broad audiences. It, therefore, relies primarily on printed sources rather than privately held information or government or other documents available to only a small number of people but extends to hearing as well as reading sermons, participating in borough and parish government and serving on grand and petty juries.

The approach used here is eclectic and focuses on a number of different genres and forms of expression, some obviously political, others less so.

It is contextual in the broadest sense. Although it is concerned with the available languages of discourse, it also is cognizant of immediate political issues, the institutions generating political discussion and significant political actors when they are pertinent to examination of the genres and venues used for the creation and dissemination of political information and beliefs. It assumes that written forms of political expression can not be severed from other aspects of political life. It, therefore, also investigates opportunities to participate in and to observe political activities such as petitioning, processions, celebrations and executions. This study then, while cognizant of institutional development and formal political philosophy, focuses on the more pervasive modes of expression that were available to English men and women.

The Scholarly Context

The much studied period from the accession of Elizabeth to the Revolution of 1688 has been variously interpreted for several centuries. Although it would be inappropriate to discuss all these interpretations at length, several long-standing scholarly debates and approaches that bear on political expression and political culture more generally must be noted. Among those are the views of revisionist historians who have emphasized high politics over popular politics and political consensus over political divisiveness, rejecting any picture of intense political conflict, especially for the years preceding the civil war.[15] Revisionists challenged both Whig and Marxist interpretations of the civil war. They rejected the Whig view, which emphasized conflict between forward- and backward-looking political groups, and rejoiced at the victory of a Puritan-parliamentary cause seen as looking forward to more progressive later regimes. Revisionist emphasis on consensus and harmony, as many have noted, makes the outbreak of civil war difficult to explain, though some revisionists have focused on the difficult and complex relationships among the three kingdoms of England, Scotland and Ireland in precipitating the conflict. This in turn has led to new studies of the three kingdom problem and a concern with the creation of "Britain." Revisionists also rejected the Marxist approach, which, like that of Whig historians, emphasized internal conflict, but attributed it to the ideologies and interests of a rising bourgeoisie and a declining feudal aristocracy. Revisionist views, especially of the pre–civil war era, are now being contested, with scholars increasingly emphasizing conflict and divisiveness,

albeit without a return to the Whig view of the Puritan-parliamentary cause as harbinger of a better future. A variant of the pre–civil war revisionist debates can be found in scholarly disagreement as to whether the post-Restoration period should be considered one of divisiveness and contention or as a confessional regime that can be grouped with Continental repressive ancient regimes. The relative degrees of consensus and divisiveness must, therefore, be kept in mind as we review the various channels for political expression.

Another related, contested issue involves the question of whether English political and intellectual life should be considered one of heavy censorship, control and repression or as a regime of sufficient laxity for a wide variety of opinion to be expressed. This debate, in turn, involves questions relating to the role of print, an issue much discussed since Elizabeth Eisenstein's pioneering work on the role of printing in intellectual and cultural development.[16] Her investigations have been both extended and criticized, with a substantial number of scholars now examining manuscript publication and oral transmission as well as printed material. A new and growing scholarly field deals with the history of the book and news, conveyed in its many forms. Such studies have drawn attention to the differences between single and serial publication, cheap and expensive forms of printing and their respective audiences. Reading practices too are now being studied in the context of politics,[17] as are cultural artifacts such as paintings and other visual media. Royal rituals and public celebrations are now recognized as significant forms of political expression.[18]

The concept of the public sphere, derived from the work of Jürgen Habermas, has also informed the work of a considerable number of literary scholars and historians who have adopted it as a useful way of characterizing some decades. Habermas viewed the emergence of the public sphere as a function of the bourgeois stage of development and believed that the sphere first emerged in England. He treated the public sphere as something distinct from government or the state. The Habermasian public sphere was characterized by rational public debate, a development he associated with the English coffee house environment. Historians of early modern England have taken up the concept, which obviously bears on the debates relating to consensus and divisiveness, the degree of censorship and other forms of government control and the forms and venues available for public debate.

These interrelated issues will be discussed in greater detail after we have completed our survey of the genres and venues available between the accession of Elizabeth and the Revolution of 1688.