

WOODFORD, Benjamin — *Perceptions of a Monarchy without a King: Reactions to Oliver Cromwell's Power*. Kingston & Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013. Pp. 240.

Woodford's book derives from his doctoral thesis and bears many of the hallmarks of that genre. It insistently lays claim to a niche in the subject area it seeks to fill, its structure is notably programmatic, and the tone of the writing is very earnest. The chief chronological focus is the short period which began on March 31, 1657, when the first version of the Humble Petition and Advice with its proposed new constitution and offer of the crown was laid before Oliver Cromwell. Its closure came a few weeks later on May 27 when a revised version of the Humble Petition was accepted but without the kingly title; "Lord Protector" was judged to be a more appropriate and prudent fit than "King Oliver". Woodford explores issues relating to the title, substance and trappings of kingship in this phase of the English republic, the reactions to the growth of Cromwell's power both inside and outside government, and the ways in which kingship became a topic of lively debate in the print culture of the day. Printed pamphlets from the 1650s constitute the major source.

Logically, the author begins with Cromwell's own views – far from fixed – on the subject of kingship and the factors which ultimately swayed him from accepting the undoubtedly tempting offer of the crown. In an article which appeared in 2012, Woodford previously visited the vexed question of the accuracy of the record of Cromwell's speeches on the subject and the merits and demerits of different modern published editions. The first chapter of his book goes over the same ground, underlining the contrast between Cromwell's guarded utterances to Parliament and his greater openness in discussions with the Kingship Committee. Woodford also has important things to say about the timing of the contemporary publication of Cromwell's kingship speeches and indeed the reluctance to release more than summaries in some cases. Opening up the debate to all on the same terms (and so offer double-edged swords), after all, was not likely to happen.

But Cromwell's own views and final decision on kingship – self-evidently central though they were – do not provide the principal focus of Woodford's survey. Seven other chapters significantly extend the range first by examining the carefully limited place of the kingship debate in printed propaganda of the 1650s and then by reviewing an assortment of pamphlet writers, poets, Royalists, sectarians, as well as the lengthy political allegory/instruction manual offered by James Harrington in his *Oceana*. Predictably, Marchamont Nedham, Milton, and Marvell get the generous allocation of space their respective contributions merit. But since so many other modern scholars, historians and literary critics alike, have traversed this part of the field before him, readers of Woodford's book are likely to look elsewhere for his most original contributions to Cromwell studies. In particular, they will be sure to welcome his discussion of lesser-known writers such as John Hall of Richmond, Michael Hawke, James Howell, John Lineall, and John Spittlehouse and his judicious assessment of how precisely they fitted in to the ongoing dialogues on Cromwellian kingship. The Welshman Arise Evans also finds a place in Woodford's discussion, though he fails to mention Christopher Hill's pioneering essay (in *Change and Continuity in Seventeenth-Century England* [London, 1976]) on this frank and fearless commentator. Chapter 7 draws attention to the partial overlap between sectarian judgements on kingship – as being cancelled by God's intervention – and Cromwell's own. Elsewhere, the chapter structure of *Perceptions of Monarchy* does not always provide a neat fit for the contents. Nedham straddles two chapters, firstly as a newspaper editor (of the semi-official *Mercurius Politicus*) and then as a writer of tracts. Milton's famous sonnet "To the Lord General Cromwell" of May 1652 gets drawn into a chapter on prose-writing.

Cromwell, of course, as well as being controversial in his own lifetime, has exercised an unending posthumous fascination. There is a bulky historiography. Blair Worden's *Literature and Politics in Cromwellian England: John Milton, Andrew Marvell, Marchamont Nedham* (Oxford, 2007) covers much of the same ground featured in Woodford's book. In different ways, Laura Lunger Knoppers' *Constructing Cromwell: Ceremony, Portrait and Print 1645-1661* (Cambridge, 2000) and Kevin Sharpe's *Image Wars: Promoting Kings and Commonwealths in England, 1603-1660* (New Haven, 2010) partially overlap. Joad Raymond and Jason Peacey, among others, have explored the print culture of the Revolutionary period which provides the context for Woodford's investigation of the Cromwellian kingship debates. This author's niche in the field might not be quite so assured as is claimed in the introduction.

This book certainly has its own merits, however, and it would be unfair not to recognise them. Sometimes, however, Woodford provides too little comment or explanation. Surely, more needs to be said, for example, about the Council of State's frequent use of the London printer Henry Hills in view of his other activities not only in printing Leveller tracts and Baptist pamphlets but also at least two editions of *Eikon Basilike*, the central text of the Royalist cause (p. 42)? Rather more on Peter Heylyn's shifting ground would also have been helpful (pp. 116-117). Woodford is less than convincing in his general assertions about the reading public, the political nation, and "the people of England". Claiming that "the entire nation" became involved in these kingship debates is, after all, ultimately unprovable. The author's proof-reading, unfortunately, has been very careless and, as a result, the book is littered with typographical errors which ought to have been spotted. (Hugh Trevor-Roeper and Valerie Peal, for instance, appear in the bibliography). But the consistent misspelling of James Nayler's surname (even in the index) is obviously a different matter. And, at times, the author's prose style is rather awkward. On this side of the Atlantic at any rate, the regular use of "likely" instead of "probably" makes the reader wince and also draws attention to the frequency of the author's surmisings.

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