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The Tragedy of Regicide in Interregnum and Restoration Histories of the English Civil Wars

Claire Gheeraert-Graffeulle

- 1 As countless political pamphlets, verse elegies and sermons¹, many contemporary histories of the English civil wars represent the execution of Charles I as the “last part of his tragedy”², as a “catastrophe”³, that is to say, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, “the change or revolution which produces the conclusion or final event of a dramatic piece,” “the dénouement”⁴. John Cook, who led the prosecution of the king, said it was “the highest Treason that was ever wrought on the Theater of England”⁵. Still the incorporation of dramatic imagery and structure into histories of the regicide is paradoxical as long as history and drama are genres that are usually regarded as being alien to each other. Historical writing is indeed based on narration (*diegesis*) while tragedy should be, as Aristotle recommends in his *Poetics*, “in the form of action, not of narrative”⁶. Those borrowings may be first explained by the theatricality of the regicide, often stressed by authors who held themselves to be spectators of history. This is the case of historian John Rushworth who claimed to “have been upon the stage continually, an Eye and Ear-witness of the greatest Transactions”⁷. The theatrical references are even denser in relations of the king’s execution on the “scaffold,” a term which designates both the place of execution and “the platform or stage on which a theatrical performance or exhibition takes place” (OED). The royalist historian Peter Heylin (1599-1662) significantly refers to the “*Scaffold* on which [the king] was to act the last part of his *Tragedy* in the sight of his people”⁸. Here, as in many other historical writings, Charles I is an “actor,” forced to hear the sentences of the judges, while the protagonists of his trial are made to speak in direct speech as if they were characters in a play. Another possible reason why historians transposed the regicide into a tragedy is that this genre allowed them to make sense of such an unheard-of event. But their interpretations of tragedy, like their understanding of history⁹, diverged. The royalists tended to see the downfall of Charles I as the “last Act of this afflicted King’s life”¹⁰, as the dénouement of “a lamentable

tragedy”¹¹, a horrid act, a sacrilege. On the other hand, those who supported the king’s execution, preferred to view it as the dénouement of a revenge tragedy. The Parliamentary writer Edward Peyton refers to the “divine catastrophe” of the regicide as the work of God, “who, when he determined to bring this family to destruction, accomplisheth it not only by poor and weak means, but by his mightiest thunderbolts of vengeance”¹².

- 2 Such a generic proximity between history and drama demands further investigation. I shall first look at the way historians – whether on the king’s or on the Parliament’s side – appropriated the ingredients of tragedy in order to structure their narratives of the regicide and characterize their protagonists. Then, I shall examine the ambivalent use of theatrical emotion in royalist histories. To be sure, stirring up the passions of their readers was an effective way of persuading them of the justness of the royalist cause, but at the same time this use of pathos stood in contradiction with their insistent claims of historical impartiality¹³. It would be unfair, however, to consider such a theatrical presentation of history merely as an instrument of political propaganda; on the contrary, historical narratives could serve a truly tragic vision of history, conferring complexity on an act often related in a Manichean way in the 1650s and at the Restoration.

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- 3 During his trial Charles I is recurrently characterized as an actor playing the role of martyr to perfection¹⁴ – so much so that some critics have drawn a parallel between the role he played during his trial and his participation to court masques in the 1630s¹⁵. This role of martyr was not a retrospective fabrication; it was constructed by the king himself, even before the publication of *Eikon Basilike*¹⁶. The main ingredient in the king’s characterization is the analogy with Christ’s passion, authorized by the king’s own words and conduct at his trial¹⁷. It appears for instance in William Dugdale’s *Short View of the Late Troubles in England*, a history based on a record of events kept by the author at Oxford during the war¹⁸. Dugdale’s relation of Charles I’s Christ-like passion is typical of most royalist accounts. His description of the scaffold as an instrument of torture brings out the king’s heroism in front of his judges’ unnatural cruelty. The execution is called a “murther” and the regicides behave like vicious assassins. Sacrifice here is not gratuitous¹⁹; it is to be interpreted as a promise of heavenly victory and echoes the king’s speech, longing for an “incorruptible crown”²⁰:

And such a Sacrifice they really made him, upon the Tuesday following (which was the Thirtieth of January) having (the more to affront and deject him, had it been possible) built a Scaffold for His Murther, before the Great Gate at White-Hall, whereunto they fixed several Staples of Iron, and prepared Cords, to tie him down to the Block, had he made any resistance to that Cruel, and Bloody stroke²¹.

- 4 The idea of sacrifice – an ingredient of classical tragedy – is also taken up by John Milton, but in a different sense; when he speaks of a “most gratefull and well-pleasing Sacrifice”²², the poet implies that tyrannicide manifests divine wrath upon an erring monarchy. This is a radical position which most former supporters of Parliament could not accept. Clement Walker’s description is thus closer to Dugdale’s *Short View* than to Milton’s *Eikonoklastes*. Like the royalist authors, this Parliamentary historian speaks of sacrifice²³ and insists on the analogy between Charles and Christ:

one barbarous Souldier (it is confidently reported) spat in the Kings Face as he bauled for Justice : The King only saying, My Saviour suffered more for my sake,

wiped it off with His Handkerchief, yet the Court took no notice of this Affront, so farre was His Majesty already fore-judged and condemned to Sufferings²⁴.

- 5 Walker is undeniably less prolix than most royalists on the king's passion: he overlooks the king's last three days and his execution²⁵. Still, his use of the word "Apotheosis"²⁶ to designate the monarch's death points to a form of deification and heavenly victory. Walker's narrative, which was published at the Restoration but written ten years earlier (Walker died in 1651), evokes many pro-Stuart histories of the 1650s, such as, for instance, Richard Perrinchief's *The Life and Death of King Charles*²⁷. In the preface to the anonymous 1676 edition, dedicated to Charles II, the royalist bookseller Richard Royston insists on the king's heroic sufferings, inviting the reader to read the late king's biography as an anticipation of the Restoration to come, hoping "that the world might see how far Truth and Justice and a better Cause is able to hold out, under the most prosperous Triumphs of violence and oppression"²⁸. In many relations, especially those published after 1658, Charles I dies but lives again in his son, being as it were "mystically reincarnated as Charles II"²⁹, an assurance which was asserted by the king himself at the moment of his death when he allegedly said to his daughter Elizabeth that he "doubted not the Lord would settle his Throne upon his Son, and that we should be all happier, that (sic) we could have expected if he had lived"³⁰. In Sanderson's history quoted here, just as in the histories written by Walker, Dugdale, Lloyd, Sanderson – and the examples could be multiplied – the catastrophe of the king's death is systematically depicted as a momentary defeat which is subsumed in a pattern of events that go from crisis to restoration, a pattern typical of tragicomedy, a genre which dominated the dramatic production at the time³¹. Tragedy, it seems, was too dark for royalist historians who put all their hopes in the return of a Stuart king on England's throne.
- 6 In these pro-Stuart histories based on a tragicomic pattern, Charles is portrayed as a saint and, as such, he cannot be fallible. From this angle, he does not fall within Aristotle's definition of the tragic hero as "a man who is not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty"³². In those accounts written in the wake of his execution or at the Restoration, there is no trace of "error or frailty," so that the Aristotelian category proves inadequate³³. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to discard this description of the tragic hero, as several portrayals of Charles correspond to this definition: "the royal Actor," to quote Marvell's 'Horatian Ode,' bears the stamp of ambiguity and remains an enigma for many scholars³⁴. Similarly, Edward Hyde's *History*, although it is clearly royalist, offers a complex characterization of Charles I. The monarch is not one-sidedly described as a saint; on the contrary, the king's former Chancellor of the Exchequer holds him responsible for the disasters of the civil war and points out some errors and misjudgments which could have been avoided. For example, he attributes Charles's inappropriate dissolution of Parliament to a flaw in his character: "And here I cannot but let myself loose to say, that no man can shew me a source from whence these waters of bitterness we now taste have more probably flowed, than from this unseasonable, unskillful, and precipitate dissolution of Parliaments"³⁵. The king, Hyde says, was "perplexed and irresolute"³⁶ and his "fatal misfortune [...] proceeded from the excellency of his nature, and his tenderness of blood, that he deferred so long his resolution of using his arms"³⁷. This critical vision of the sovereign reaches a climax in Clarendon's portrait of Charles after his execution where he denies that Charles was the "best of kings"³⁸:

To conclude: he was the worthiest gentleman, the best friend, the best husband, the best father, and the best Christian, that the age in which he lived had produced.

And if he was not the best King, if he was without some parts and qualities which have made some kings great and happy, no other prince was ever unhappy who was possessed of half his virtues and endowments, and so much without any kind of vice

³⁹.

- 7 Likewise, Hyde complexifies the pattern of crisis and restoration. He did not content himself with the providential scheme chosen by most of his fellow-royalists, whose teleological view of the civil wars is well summed up by Heylin: “they [the Presbyterians] had carried on this Tragedy to the very last Act from the first bringing in of the Scots to the beginning of the war, and from the beginning of the war till they had brought him prisoner into *Holmby-House*”⁴⁰. The earl of Clarendon did not reject this concatenation of events, but his vision of history was more complex. Like most historians who wrote in support of the king, he saw a connection between the executions of Strafford, Laud and the king. He recognized that “the immediate finger and wrath of God must be acknowledged in these perplexities and distractions”⁴¹ and deemed all these “fatal” events paved the way to the “tragic conclusion” of the civil wars⁴². Yet, he did not account for the realm’s tragedy only in providential terms. His perplexity in front of the erratic events of the 1640s is manifest in his comparison of the confused actions of his contemporaries with the disordered movement of atoms – “like so many atoms contributing jointly to this mass of confusion now before us”⁴³. This atomist and non-deterministic vision of history is not homogeneous in his *History of the Rebellion*, but it is confirmed in several places where he states that history could have taken a different course: “It may easily be said that [...] if his majesty had, instead of passing that Act come to the House and dissolved the Parliament, or if he had withdrawn himself from that seditious city and put himself in the head of his own army, much of the mischief which had since happened would have been prevented”⁴⁴. It is no wonder then that Clarendon should have distanced himself from those who blindly trusted heaven and the stars; after a very brief account of the regicide, he emphasizes instead contingency and personal causation:

There were so many miraculous circumstances contributed to his ruin, that men might well think that heaven and earth conspired it, and that the stars designed it. Though he was, from the first declension of his power, so much betrayed by his own servants, that there were very few who remained faithful to him, yet that treachery proceeded not from any treasonable purpose to do him any harm, but from particular and personal animosities against other men⁴⁵.

- 8 Such scepticism as regards the historical process confers a tragic dimension on Hyde’s history, offering the image of a frail king, reminiscent of Shakespeare’s Richard II. This outlook is also in keeping with later historiography, especially the late twentieth-century revisionist approach, which stresses the unpredictability of the regicide in a similar way⁴⁶

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- 9 The exploitation of tragedy as a dramatic genre does not only relate to plot and characterization: royalist historians who witnessed the event also turned the regicide – a political event – into a highly theatrical occasion – interestingly Clarendon called it “that woeful spectacle”⁴⁷. The reason why they resorted to dramatic techniques may lie in their desire to arouse pity and fear, like writers of tragedy. They did not mean to purge and soothe excessive passions among the readers though, but were rather concerned to win

over their approval.⁴⁸ At first sight such politicization of events may seem at odds with the historians' longing for impartiality, but, in actual fact, it does not contradict their duty of instructing future generations, and most especially rulers and magistrates⁴⁹: civil wars and regicide were evils to be avoided at all costs, which theatrical devices could contribute to show in an extremely effective way. To be persuasive, writers of history opted for a twofold strategy that consisted in horrifying their readers as well as stirring their compassion, using pathos in order to arouse their affections, "those things wherewith Men being mov'd, make a different judgment of things"⁵⁰.

- 10 In the first place, to demonstrate the horror of the execution, many histories offered well-thought-out scenographies. In Sanderson's *Compleat History* – a controversial history which attempted to manage the memory of the martyred king⁵¹ – everything was arranged in advance, as is clear from this description, written in the present tense, as if it were a long stage direction. The trial is presented as a play "with the multitude of people spectators":

The judges met in the Painted Chamber, attending the President Bradshaw in his Scarlet Robe, the Sword born before him by Colonel Humphrey, the Mace by Serjeant Denby the younger, and twenty men for his Guard with Partizans. Himself sits down in a Crimson Velvet Chair of State, fixed in the midst of the Court with a Desk before him, and thereon a Cushion of Crimson Velvet [...].

The King looks sternly upon the Court, and up to the Galleries, and then sits down, not showing the least regard to the Court, but presently rises up and looks downwards on the guards and on the multitude of people spectators⁵².

- 11 The theatrical transposition is all the more ironic as most regicides were hostile to drama, a royalist pastime, which they associated with the depravity of the court⁵³. There is, therefore, a sort of mischievous delight in Perrinchief's staging the king's trial as a conspiracy in which all the protagonists were imparted a precise role to play: "the *Conspirators* meet in private in a Committee, to appoint everyone their part in this Tragedy, what Gestures they were to affect, what Words they were to use, as also for the manner, place and time of the *Murther*"⁵⁴. More generally, the king's trial is represented as a scene in a revenge tragedy – a form of gruesome Senecan drama which was popular in the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras. For Roger Manley, it was a "Black Tragedy", "a Tragedy of Horror and Blood" [⁵⁵], while for David Lloyd all this was "ignominious and gastly [sic] Theatre"⁵⁶. Similar devices are amplified in Gauden's *Blood Court, or The Fatall Tribunall*, a piece of polemical history which is interestingly subtitled "The Bloody Tragedy of all Tragedies, against King, Lords, and Commons; the several Scenes, presenting their most horrid Villanies, and the most barbarous and Tyrannical Massacre that was ever heard of"⁵⁷.

- 12 But the theatrical metaphor does not only convey the horror of the event; it also contributes to denounce the hypocrisy of the king's judges and their perversion of justice. Dugdale wrote that the regicides "erected a Bloody Theater at the upper end of *Westminster-Hall*, which they call'd *The High Court of Iustice*"⁵⁸. Perrinchief spoke of "a tribunal "dress'd up [...] with all the shapes of terror"⁵⁹, while Lloyd referred to the "*High Court of (pretended) justice*" and to the scaffold as a "ridiculous scene"⁶⁰, underlining the "villainy of the Actors in this tragedy"⁶¹. Perrinchief accuses the king's judges of playing the roles of Machiavels and calls Hugh Peter a "Pulpit- Buffoon," "an unhallowed buffoon"⁶². For him the regicides and supporters are "inhumane Butchers," who have "devested themselves of all humanity"⁶³. On the other hand, he celebrates "the Excellent Monarch," who he is gifted "with a generous Miene, shewing no sign of discomposure," ready to

“combate [sic] for Glory the Monsters of Mankind”, and scorning the “fictitious judges”, also called the “Parricides”⁶⁴. In Fabian Phillips’s polemical biography of Charles I, the king’s executioners are even compared with Medea : “The blood of old *England* is let out by greater witch-craft and cousenage then that of *Medea*, when she set *Pelias* daughters to let out his old blood, that young might come in the place of it”⁶⁵. In any case, such hyperbolic comparisons establish that the execution of the king is not an act of justice but “a Horrid act”⁶⁶, an “assassination,” a “murder”⁶⁷, and even “a parricide”⁶⁸.

- 13 Royalist histories do not only draw on the register of horror; they also seek to move the readers and raise their compassion, by reporting the circumstances of the king’s death as well as his very last words. One knows the importance of dying utterances in early modern England and remembers John of Gaunt’s warning as he stood on the threshold of death in Shakespeare’s *Richard II*: “O, but they say the tongues of dying men / Enforce attention like deep harmony./ Where words are scarce, they are seldom spent in vain/ For they breathe truth that breathe their words in pain” (2.1.5-9)⁶⁹. It is no coincidence that most histories – even the most synthetic⁷⁰ – should report the king’s last words in direct speech as if they were sacred and to be remembered by everyone. It is not surprising either that many historians should go into detail to narrate how the king “laboured for the Mercy of God and to fit Himself for His last victory over Death”⁷¹, in a way reminiscent of the *ars moriendi* tradition. But telling the last moments of a king is no easy task, as William Dugdale points out, explaining how the style of the historian has to be adequate to the solemnity of the moment:

This business of the Treaty being therefore thus over, I come now to the last Act of this afflicted King’s life. A Scene (indeed) of much sorrow, and which cannot well be represented without great lamentation and the deepest expressions of sadness, wherein I shall be as brief as well may be⁷².

- 14 The most moving parts of these narratives are undoubtedly the passages in which the “rigid barrier between monarch and man” is broken down, when the king is presented as a simple man, “the broken-hearted father, husband and patriot”⁷³. This is an aspect on which many histories focus in order to arouse compassion, an affection also “known also as mercy, pity and sympathy”⁷⁴, which was analysed both in books of rhetoric and in treatises on the passions⁷⁵. Hence, for example, the moving tableau of the king surrounded by two of his children we find in most of the royalist histories of the time. In Lloyd’s version of the scene, the king speaks to the Duke of Gloucester and to Princess Elizabeth whom he both addresses as “sweet-heart[s]” and to whom he explains, with a lot of pathos, that their elder brother, Charles, the Prince of Wales, should succeed him: “Then said the King to her, Sweet-heart, you’ll forget this: No (said she) I shall never forget it whilst I live; and pouring forth abundance of tears, promised Him to write down the particulars”⁷⁶. In Manley’s version of the same episode, the king himself weeps, “dismiss[ing] them in a Deluge of Tears”⁷⁷. For readers, these scenes are persuasive invitations to mourn personally and collectively for the death of the king⁷⁸ – or to quote John Staines’s enlightening analysis: “in weeping for the royal martyr, the reading public restores the bonds of compassion that unite the monarchic state and thus prepares the ground for royal restoration”⁷⁹.
- 15 This importance of compassion eventually stands out in the representations of the crowd: ⁸⁰ the reactions of the spectators who attended the execution constitute a model for the readers who should be filled with terror and pity just like spectators watching a tragedy. Lloyd says the spectators were filled with “amazement and horror”⁸¹. Perrinchief adds

that they showed “Reverence or Pity to Him as He passed. (*For no honest Spirit could be so forgetful of humane frailty, as not to be troubled at such sight; to see a Great and Just King, the rightful Lord of three flourishing Kingdoms, now forced from His Throne and led captive through the streets*)”⁸². He is not only interested in the pity and compassion of the crowd on the 30th January, but also in the effect produced by the act of regicide on the stage of England at large: “Women, he said, with Child for grief cast forth the untimely birth of their Womb,” “Others, both Men and Women, fell into Convulsions and swoounding Fits [...]. Some unmindful of themselves, as though they could not, or would not, live when their beloved Prince was slaughtered, (it is reported) suddenly fell down dead”⁸³. The historian argues that grief was universal, that everyone “in the whole kingdom” lamented the king’s death, even children, some anti-Episcopalian enemies of Charles and the Judges who “could not forbear to mingle some Tears with His Blood when it was split [sic]”⁸⁴. Such an emotional description amplified the trauma produced by the regicide, to the point of inscribing the king’s sufferings onto the bodies of his living subjects. Besides, by arousing sympathy among readers, those accounts minimized the opposition to the king, implying that the king’s death was only decided by a small minority of people, not even “a hundredth of part of them” if we believe Lady Fairfax’s words reported by Clarendon⁸⁵. According to later historians and critics this is actually what happened: instead of legitimizing the Commonwealth, the public ceremony of the king’s decapitation aroused so strong an emotional response in the population that the image of the suffering king eventually eclipsed Charles I’s misgovernment and tyranny⁸⁶. Forgetting their commitment to impartiality, Royalists exploited to the full the emotional potential of the king’s theatrical execution, turning him into an innocent victim on whom the whole kingdom should pour their tears.

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- 16 It is not surprising that such histories, which stirred the readers’ affections for the sake of propaganda, were not viewed as truthful history by Republican authors who refused this demagogic and ideological use of compassion. Throughout *Eikonoklastes*, Milton accuses the royalists of appealing to people’s base passions rather than to their conscience, “stirring up the people to bring him that honour, that affection, and by consequence, that revenge to his dead Corps”⁸⁷. But royalist voices also warned people against the confusion between polemic and history. Edward Hyde’s son, Laurence Hyde, first Earl of Rochester (1642-1711), in his preface to the first edition of *The History of the Great Rebellion* (1702), underlines “the usefulness of making this work public in an age when so many memoirs, narratives, and pieces of history come out, [...] to blacken, revile and ridicule the sacred majesty of an anointed head in distress”⁸⁸. Rochester’s remark is far from being irrelevant as most Interregnum and Restoration histories are biased and tend to express a Manichean vision of history that does not leave room for the uncertainty inherent in tragedy, as underlined by Sidney:

Tragedy, that openeth the greatest wounds, and sheweth forth the Vicers, that are couered with Tissue: that maketh Kinges feare to be Tyrants, and Tyrants manifest their tiranicall humors: that with sturring the affects of admiration and commiseration, teacheth, the vncertainety of this world; and vpon howe weake foundations guilden roofes are builded.⁸⁹

- 17 Such sense of uncertainty is certainly more often conveyed in poetry than in history – Marvell’s “tragic scaffold” in his ‘Horatian Ode,’ for instance, perfectly encapsulates the

ambiguity of the king's destiny⁹⁰. There are, however, a number of historical relations that illustrate Sidney's description. The Presbyterian Richard Baxter, who originally defended Parliament's cause, seems to quote from Sidney's text when he wrote that the spectacle of the king's execution showed "the Severity of God, the Mutability and Uncertainty of Worldly Things, and the Fruits of a sinful Nation's Provocations"⁹¹. The same "tragic vision"⁹² permeates John Rushworth's historical narrative, which is not entirely subordinated to propaganda either: it displays instead the complexity of the king's predicament and what the act of regicide entailed for the nation at large, through a patchwork of documents and speeches, "digested in order of time"⁹³. Rushworth – who supported Parliament – stages the trial as a play, each character speaking in direct speech. He does not insert any personal comment, but what makes the scene poignant is the attention he pays to apparently insignificant details, such as the monarch's movements, or his desire to be heard that was inexorably frustrated.

King. I may speak after Sentence, by your favour Sir, I may speak after Sentence, ever. By your favour, hold: The Sentence, Sir—I say Sir, I do—I am not suffered to speak, expect what Justice other People will have.

His Majesty being taken away by the Guard, as he passed down the Stairs, the Soldiers scoffed at him, casting the smoke of their Tobacco (a thing very distastful unto him) and throwing their Pipes in his way⁹⁴.

- 18 Similarly, the king's farewell scene is recounted in plain sentences. The effect produced by this terseness is a stronger intimacy between the monarch and the reader-spectator:

This day the King was removed to St. James's, where his Children from Syon House came to visit him, but stayed not long: he took the Princess in his Arms and kissed her, gave her his Blessing, and 2 Seals that he had, wherein were two Diamonds; she wept bitterly. The Prince Elector Duke of Richmond, and others, made suit to see him, which he refused. This night he lay at St. James's⁹⁵.

- 19 We find even more brevity in Clarendon's *History*: although he narrates in detail the proceedings that led to the "woeful spectacle" of the trial⁹⁶ – he does not say much about the last moments of the king's life; he only sums them up, saying that enough has been said on "that lamentable tragedy," unambiguously rejecting pathos as the main ingredient of the king's tragedy :

The several unheard of insolences which this excellent prince was forced to submit to at the other times he was brought before that odious judicatory, his majestic behaviour under so much insolence, and resolute insisting upon his own dignity, and defending it by manifest authorities in the law as well as by the clearest deductions from reason, the pronouncing that horrible sentence upon the most innocent person in the world, the execution, of that sentence by the most execrable murder that ever was committed since that of our blessed Saviour, and the circumstances thereof [...]; the saint-like behaviour of that blessed martyr, and his Christian courage and patience at his death, are all particulars so well-known, and have been so much enlarged upon in a treatise peculiarly applied to that purpose, that the farther mentioning it would but afflict and grieve the reader and make the relation itself odious; and therefore no more shall be said here of that lamentable tragedy, so much to the dishonour of the nation and the religion professed by it⁹⁷.

- 20 Such *brevity* is regarded as a flaw by the editor of Clarendon's work, Edward Hyde's son, Laurence Hyde, earl of Rochester. In the dedication to Queen Anne prefixed to the third volume of the first edition (1704), he wishes the relation of the regicide in his father's *History* had been more copious. Interestingly, he attributes this excessive brevity to the author's abhorrence for this event. One should here note the apologetic tone of the

passage but also the generic remark concerning Hyde's decision "to contract the whole tragedy:"

One thing indeed were very much to be wished, that he had given the world a more distinct and particular narrative of that pious King's last most magnanimous sufferings in his imprisonments, trial, and death. But it seems the remembrance of all those deplorable passages was so grievous, and insupportable to the writer's mind, that he abhorred the dwelling long upon them, and chose rather to contract the whole tragedy within too narrow a compass. But this is a loss that can only now be lamented, not repaired⁹⁸.

- 21 One could actually reverse Rochester's judgment and argue that the "whole tragedy" he mentions owes its worth and meaning to its "contraction," that is to say, its concision. Hyde's choice not to imitate mainstream royalist historians is not gratuitous – the horror of the act is more blatant in a terse evocation rather than in a verbose and lachrymose description. In that sense, the author's reticence may be construed as an index of the tragic quality of his narration. David Hume's understanding of Clarendon's relation of the regicide is similar to Rochester's. Commenting upon the same passage in his essay "Of Tragedy," he deplores the fact that Clarendon did not exploit all the emotional potential of the king's tragedy. Like him, he interprets this excessive brevity as a symptom of "pain" and "grief." Clarendon, Hume says, was too close to the events to give a sympathetic account of it:

Lord Clarendon, when he approaches towards the catastrophe of the royal party, supposes that his narration must then become infinitely disagreeable, and he hurries over the king's death without giving us one circumstance of it. He considers it as too horrid a scene to be contemplated with any satisfaction, or even without the utmost pain and aversion. He himself, as well as the readers of that age, were too deeply concerned in the events and felt a pain from subjects which an historian and a reader of another age would regard as the most pathetic and most interesting, and, by consequence, the most agreeable⁹⁹.

- 22 There are, I believe, two ways of understanding Rochester and Hume's criticisms. First, as far as aesthetic is concerned, both Hyde and Hume were writing in an emerging culture of sensibility, in which sympathy and emotion were essential. As men of the eighteenth century, they did not realize that brevity and abruptness of style could just as well signal the horror of an indescribable event. Their culture of sensibility may have prevented them from perceiving the unique tragic quality of Clarendon's reticent relation of the king's execution. The other way of understanding their severe judgement is to connect it to political divergence. Indeed, both Rochester and Hume supported the Tories, and they may not have appreciated Clarendon's critical portrait of the king throughout the four volumes of his *History of the Rebellion*. Although Clarendon had been one of the king's main councillors in the 1640s, he had always been critical of his character and reign.

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- 23 The dramatic genre of tragedy, whatever its use, proves an essential template in Interregnum and Restoration histories, which, in this respect, do not differ from pamphlets, verse elegies and sermons that were published in the wake of the regicide. What has seldom been pointed out, though, is that the genre of tragedy profoundly affected English historiography. So far history had been predominantly written as a national epic and generally took the form of the chronicle; when history became ideologically divided and could no longer limit itself to celebrate the great deeds of

heroes, the paradigm of tragedy offered news ways of writing but also of making sense of events that were not heroic. Besides, it was a genre that that was not the monopoly of one party and that provided the possibility of expressing diverging scenarios, something that was not conceivable in pre-civil war historiography. Indeed, Interregnum and Restoration histories make use of the notion of “tragedy” in ways that vary according to their political agenda. Regicide authors seem to be mostly interested in characterizing the death of Charles Stuart as a necessary sacrifice in a revenge tragedy, while moderate historians such as Rushworth, Baxter, and Walker – who supported Parliament in the 1640s – succeeded in conveying the ambiguity of the event in its tragic dimension. As for the supporters of the king, they were among the most prone to resort to the possibilities of tragedy, but it must be acknowledged that their understanding of the notion was approximate. They depicted the king as a saint, a representation usually to be found in hagiographical drama, not in classical tragedy, where the hero is fallible and divided. Similarly, they aimed at stirring the affections of their readers, but they did not intend to generate catharsis: pity and fear were rather politically exploited in order to win over the readers to the cause of monarchy. Finally pro-Stuart histories deviate from the expected structure of tragedy: dramatizing the death of the king as a paradoxical victory that announces the restoration of monarchy, they are generally based on the pattern of tragicomedy, a genre that was emblematic of the Interregnum and Restoration. Among royalist histories, Edward Hyde’s *History of the Great Rebellion* stands as a notable exception as his dark and disillusioned narrative is complex, non-deterministic, and refuses to indulge in pathos, preferring analysis and reflexion.

NOTES

1. See Nancy Klein Maguire, “The Theatrical Mask/ Masque of Politics: The Case of Charles I,” *The Journal of British Studies*, 28.1, 1989, p. 1-22. “Both royalists and non-Royalists enlisted the terminology, structures, and expectations of the theatrical tradition to politicize (and work through) the act of regicide – theatrical in itself – by transposing the events of 1649 into the more familiar concepts of drama” (p. 6). See also Paula Kewes, “History and its Uses: Introduction,” *The Uses of History in Early Modern England*, special issue of *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 68.1 and 2, 2005, p. 6. On the representations of regicide in Cavalier poetry, see Line Cottagnies, *L’éclipse du regard. La poésie anglaise du baroque au classicisme (1625-1660)*, Genève, Droz, 1997, especially ch. 5, “Crise du regard et guerre civile,” p. 222-266.
2. Peter Heylin, *A Short View of the Life and Reign of King Charles*, London, 1658, p. 151.
3. See Edward Peyton, *The Divine Catastrophe of the Kingly Family of the House of Stuarts, or, a short History of the Rise, Reign, and Ruine, thereof*, London, 1652.
4. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edition, 1989. See Thomas Blount, *Glossographia: or A dictionary, interpreting all such hard vvords, whether Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, French, Teutonic, Beelgick, British or Saxon; as are now used in our refined English tongue*, London, 1656: “Catastrophe, a subversion, the end, or last part of a Comedy or any other thing: a sudden alteration, the conclusion or shutting up a matter, or the inclination unto the end, as *Vitae humanae catastrophe, the end of mans life.*”

5. Clement Walker, *The Compleat History of Independency*, London, 1661, part II, p. 96.
6. Aristotle, *Poetics*, translated by S. H. Butcher, Book VI <<http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/1/9/7/1974/1974.txt>> (accessed 28 December 2011).
7. John Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, London 1682, sig. Bv. See Joad Raymond, "John Rushworth (c.1612-1690)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004.
8. P. Heylin, *op. cit.*, p. 151. On this tragic use of the scaffold, see George R. Hibbard, "The Early Seventeenth Century and the Tragic view of life," *Renaissance and Modern Studies*, 5.1, 1961, p. 11-12.
9. From the 1640s the historical consensus that had roughly prevailed in England so far was broken. See Paula Kewes, art. cit., p. 20 and Daniel R. Woolf, "Narrative Historical Writing in Restoration England: A Preliminary Survey, in *The Restoration Mind*, W. Gerald Marshall (ed.), Newark, University of Delaware Press, 1997, p. 210: "The Civil War would change much of this. The collapse of stable government, the virtual disappearance, for a time, of effective censorship, and the emergence of competing religious and political ideologies swept forever away the univocal narrative historical writing of the earlier period." On the trial of the king see C. V. Wedgwood, *The Trial of Charles I*, London, Folio Society, p. 137.
10. William Dugdale, *A Short View of the Late Troubles in England*, London, 1681, p. 361.
11. Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, *The History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England [1702-1704]*, 6 vols., W. Dunn Macray (ed.), Oxford, Clarendon Press, [1888], 1969, vol. 4, p. 488.
12. E. Peyton, *op. cit.*, p. 71-72. Peyton's providential history was edited by Sir Walter Scott. See "Sir Edward Peyton's *Divine Catastrophe of the House of Stuarts*," in his *Secret History of the Court of James I*, Edinburgh, 1811, p. 309-466. On Edward Peyton, see "Edward Peyton (1587/8-1652?)," *OED*, *op. cit.*
13. For the Ciceronian definition of history repeated in most histories of the civil wars, see for instance P. Heylin, *Examen Historicum : Or A Discovery and Examination of the Mistakes, Falsities, and Defects in some Modern Histories*, London, 1659, sig. A2: "It is affirmed of History by the famous Orator, that it is *Testis temporum*, the Witness and Record of time, by which the actions of it are transmitted from one age to another. And therefore it concerns all those who apply themselves to the writing of Histories, to take special care that all things be laid down exactly, faithfully, and without deviation from the truth in the least particular."
14. Sean Kelsey, "Staging the Trial of Charles I," in Jason Peacey, *The Regicides and the Execution of Charles I*, Basingstoke, 2001, p. 71. On the king's martyr, see Andrew Lacey, *The Cult of Charles the Martyr*, Woodbridge, Boydell Press, 2003.
15. *Ibid.*
16. Kevin Sharpe, "So hard a text? Images of Charles I, 1612-1700," *The Historical Journal*, 43.2, 2000, p. 392 ff; G. R. Hibbard, art. cit., p. 25.
17. Helen W. Randall, "The Rise and Fall of a Martyrology: Sermons on Charles I," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 10.2, 1947, p. 138 : "both the real character of Charles and most of the tangible circumstances of his life have given way to a stylized representation of an already legendary figure who owes his lineaments more to sacred than to contemporary history."
18. On William Dugdale (1605-1686), see Royce MacGillivray, *Restoration Historians and the English Civil War*, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1974. For other royalist accounts of the same episode, see David Lloyd, *Memoires of the Lives, Actions, and Sufferings of those Noble, Reverend and Excellent Personages [...] with the Life and Martyrdom of King Charles I*, London, 1668, p. 211, and Roger Manley, *The History of the Rebellions in England, Scotland, and Ireland*, London, 1691, p. 201.
19. This notion of sacrifice is a leitmotif in pro-Stuart literature. The royalist historian and army officer, Roger Manley (d. 1687), also speaks of sacrifice: "the King, the designed Sacrifice to their hellish ambition," "a Lamb to the slaughter" (*op. cit.*, part I, book 4, p. 189-190).

20. D. Lloyd, *op. cit.*, p. 216: "I go from a Corruptible to an Incorruptible Crown; where no disturbance can be, no disturbance in the world."
21. W. Dugdale, *op. cit.*, p. 373.
22. John Milton, *Eikonoklastes in The Works of John Milton*, vol. 3, London, Pickering, 1851, vol. 3, p. 526.
23. C. Walker, *op. cit.*, part II, p. 104.
24. C. Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 92.
25. C. Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 104.
26. C. Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 111.
27. It was originally included in the *Βασιλικά: the Workes of King Charles the Martyr* edited by William Fullman in 1662.
28. *The Royal Martyr: Or, The Life and Death of King Charles I*, London, 1676, sig. [A3v].
29. N. H. Keeble, *Restoration: England in the 1660s*, Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2002, p. 38-40: "Charles I was almost as forceful a presence in the early Restoration years as his son." See also Thomas N. Corns (ed.), *The Royal Image: Representations of Charles I*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 16.
30. William Sanderson, *A Compleat History of the Life and Raigne of King Charles from his Cradle to his Grave*, London, 1658, p. 1134-1135.
31. Susan Wiseman, *Drama and Politics in the English Civil War*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 190-215 and N. Klein Maguire, *English Tragicomedy, 1660-1671*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999. "When the theatres reopened, the Renaissance genres reappeared, and [...] Tragedy, the greatest of Renaissance genres, had vanished" (p.1).
32. Aristotle, *Poetics*, chapter 13, *op. cit.* <<http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/1/9/7/1974/1974.txt>> (accessed 28 December 2011).
33. See Gilles Bertheau, "Representing Charles I's Death in some Mazarinades : The Limits of the Aristotelian Tragic Model," *Études Épistémè*, 20, 2011, especially §14 where the author shows that in the Mazarinades "there is no trace of an error or a frailty attributed to Charles I ; he is never accounted responsible for what has happened to him. His death cannot be thought of in terms of retribution. He is, on the contrary, presented as a sheer victim."
34. See Gilles Sambras, "Marvell et l'éloge ambigu du roi martyr," *Études Épistémè*, 20, 2011.
35. E. Hyde, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 5.
36. E. Hyde, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 217.
37. E. Hyde, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 153. According to Blair Worden, those psychological causes are significant; he mentions the king's political mistakes, his deficient political judgment, his complex personality and the fact that "no-one could trust him." See *The English Civil Wars 1640-1660*, London, Phoenix, p. 6-7.
38. See also E. Hyde, *op. cit.*, vol. 4, p. 490: "His kingly virtues had some mixture and alloy that hindered them from shining in full lustre, and from producing those fruits they should have been attended with."
39. E. Hyde, *op. cit.*, vol. 4, p. 490.
40. P. Heylin, *op. cit.*, p. 158-159.
41. E. Hyde, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 2. Voir Martine Watson Brownley, *Clarendon and the Rhetoric of Historical Form*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985, p. 19-20, p. 69-70 and especially p. 169-171. See David Norbrook, "The English Revolution and English Historiography," *The Cambridge Companion to Writing of the English Revolution*, N. H. Keeble (ed.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 242.
42. E. Hyde, *op. cit.*, vol. 4, p. 346.
43. E. Hyde, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 4.
44. E. Hyde, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 339.
45. E. Hyde, *op. cit.*, vol. 4, p. 491.

46. See J. Kelsey in J. Peacey (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 71-73.
47. E. Hyde, *op. cit.*, vol. 4, p. 487.
48. See John Staines, "Compassion in the Public Sphere of Milton and Charles," in Gail Kern Paster *et al* (eds.), *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004, p. 101: "the most intense public scene in the seventeenth century of the stirring up of compassion was the execution of Charles I. The spectacle of Charles being killed in the name of the people could move the crowd either to cheers or tears. The feeling of grief, of compassion for the dead king, soon became the greatest argument in favour of monarchy."
49. See, for instance, the dedication prefixed to the second volume (1st edn) of E. Hyde's *History*; Queen Anne is said to have no "better guide for the good administration of government, than history in general" (xli).
50. Aristotle, *Aristotle's Rhetoric, Or the True Grounds and Principles of Oratory*, London, 1686, I, 2, p. 8-9.
51. See D. R. Woolf, "Sir William Sanderson" (1586-1576), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.
52. W. Sanderson, *op. cit.*, p. 1123-1124.
53. See Jonas Barish, *The Anti-theatrical Prejudice*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1981. All regicides were not Puritans and were not necessary hostile to the theatre. See S. Wiseman, "Royalist Versus Republican Ethics and Aesthetics," *op. cit.*, p. 62-80.
54. [R. Perrinchief], *The Life and Death of King Charles*, London, 1676, p. 199.
55. R. Manley, *op. cit.*, p. 93, 94.
56. D. Lloyd, *op. cit.*, p. 204.
57. John Gauden, *The Bloody Court, or the Fatal Tribunal*, London, 1660.
58. W. Dugdale, *op. cit.*, p. 370.
59. R. Perrinchief, *op. cit.*, p. 191.
60. D. Lloyd, *op. cit.*, p. 205.7
61. As for Lloyd, another royalist historian, he speaks of the "villany of the Actors in this tragedy" (215).
62. R. Perrinchief, *op. cit.*, p. 190-196. See D. Lloyd, *op. cit.*, p. 195 "one Pulpit Buffoon Peters."
63. *Ibid.*, p. 195 and 193.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 192 and 193.
65. Fabian Philipps, *The royal martyr. Or, King Charles the First no man of blood but a martyr for his people Being a brief account of his actions from the beginnings of the late unhappy warrs, untill he was basely butchered to the odium of religion, and scorn of all nations, before his pallace at White-Hall, Jan. 30. 1648*, London, 1660.
66. D. Lloyd, *op. cit.*, p. 196.
67. E. Hyde, *op. cit.*, vol. 4, p. 479.
68. See R. Perrinchief, *op. cit.* p. 193. See also Clarendon's dedication prefixed to the third volume of the first 1st edition published in 1704, in E. Hyde, *op. cit.*, vol. 4, p. 492: "This unparalleled murder and parricide."
69. Richard Wunderli and Gerald Broce, "The Final Moment before Death in Early Modern England," *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 20.2, 1989, p. 259-275. See Donald T. Siebert, "The Aesthetic Execution of Charles I: Clarendon to Hume," *Executions and the British Experience from the 17th to the 20th Century: A Collection of Essays*, William B. Thesing (ed.), Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1979, p. 8: "How a person died was important; it was expected that good people would die well, and that the good and great would die greatly. And what conditions offer more challenges, and hence opportunities, for greatness than suffering and execution? Even the ephemeral, the supposedly "inartistic" writing of the time revelled in descriptions of these events, in particular focusing on the behaviour, in particular focusing on the behaviour and last words of the condemned."

70. See R. Perrinchief, *op. cit.*, p. 204-205: "He expressed what were His Hopes (fall the Righteous have such) in Death, saying, *I have a good Cause and a Gracious God on my side; I go from a Corruptible to an Incorruptible Crown, where no disturbance can be, no disturbance in the world.*"
71. R. Perrinchief, *op. cit.*, p. 197.
72. W. Dugdale, *op. cit.*, p. 361.
73. Anne Elizabeth Carson, "The Hunted Stag and the Beheaded King," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 45.3, Summer 2005, p. 551.
74. J. Staines, *op. cit.*, p. 92.
75. See for instance Nicolas Coeffeteau, *Table of Human Passions*, tr. E. Grimston, London, 162; Edward Reynolds, *Treatise of the Passions and Faculties of the Soul of Man*, London, 1649; Jean-François Senault, *The Use of the Passions*, tr. Henry Earl of Monmouth, London, 1649; Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Mind*, 1601.
76. D. Lloyd, *op. cit.* p. 215.
77. R. Manley, *op. cit.*, p. 203.
78. See Lois Potter, "The royal martyr in the Restoration: National Grief and National Sin" in T. N. Corns (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 245.
79. J. Staines, *op. cit.*, p. 105.
80. Thomas W. Laqueur, "Crowds, Carnival, and the State in English Executions, 1604-1868," in Lee Beier, David Cannadine, and James Rosenheim (eds.), *The First Modern Society: Essays in Honor of Lawrence Stone*, Cambridge UP, 1989, p. 306.
81. D. Lloyd, *op. cit.*, p. 198.
82. R. Perrinchief, *op. cit.*, p. 195.
83. *Ibid.*, p. 211-212.
84. *Ibid.* We have roughly the same description in D. Lloyd, *op. cit.*, p. 220 and R. Manley, *op. cit.*, p. 204-205.
85. E. Hyde, *op. cit.*, vol. 4, p. 486.
86. See N. K. Maguire, art. cit., p. 18; Robert Wilcher, *The Writing of Royalism, 1628-1660*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, Chapter 11 : Lamenting the King, 1649, especially p. 287; Byron S. Stewart, "The Cult of the Royal Martyr," *Church History*, 38.2, 1969, p. 175-187.
87. John Milton, *Eikonoklastes*, *op. cit.*, p. 332.
88. E. Hyde, *op. cit.*, p. xix.
89. Philip Sidney, *An Apologie for poetrie*, London, 1595.
90. G. R. Hibbard, art. cit, p. 26.
91. Richard Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae, or, Mr Richard Baxter's Narrative of the most Memorable Passages of his Life and Times*, London, 1696, Part I, p. 63.
92. Voir Gisèle Venet, *Temps et vision tragique. Shakespeare et ses contemporains*, Paris, Presses de la Sorbonne-Nouvelle, 1985, 2002 et Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence : The idea of the Tragic*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2003.
93. J. Rushworth, *op. cit.*, sig. bv.
94. J. Rushworth, *Historical Collections, The Fourth and Last Part, Containing the Principal Matters Which Happened from the Beginning of the Year 1645 to the Death of King Charles the First 1648*, London, 1721, p. 1425.
95. *Ibid.*, p. 1428.
96. E. Hyde, *op. cit.*, vol. 4, p. 487.
97. *Ibid.*, p. 488.
98. E. Hyde, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, "Dedication to the Third Volume of the First edition," p. xliv.
99. David Hume "Of Tragedy," in David Hume, *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary* [1742-1754], Essay 22: "Of Tragedy," p. 223-224. See <http://www.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/Etexts/hume.tragedy> accessed 05/12/2011.

ABSTRACTS

This article explores the generic proximity between history and drama in the Interregnum and Restoration histories of the English civil wars. It first looks at the way historians – whether on the king's or on the Parliament's side – appropriated the ingredients of tragedy in order to structure their narratives of the regicide and characterize their protagonists. Then, it examines the ambivalent use of theatrical emotion in royalist histories. To be sure, stirring up the passions of the readers was an effective way of persuading them of the justness of the royalist cause, but at the same time this use of pathos stood in contradiction with historical impartiality. It would be unfair, however, to consider such a theatrical presentation of history merely as an instrument of political propaganda; on the contrary, historical narratives could serve a truly tragic vision of history, conferring complexity on an act often related in a Manichean way in the 1650s and at the Restoration.

Cet article explore la proximité générique entre histoire et théâtre dans les histoires des guerres civiles anglaises, écrites pendant l'Interrègne et à la Restauration. Il s'intéresse d'abord à la façon dont les historiens – qu'ils soutiennent la cause du roi ou celle du parlement – s'approprient les ingrédients de la tragédie pour structurer leur récit du régicide et composer leurs personnages. Ensuite, il porte sur l'utilisation ambivalente de l'émotion dans les histoires royalistes de l'exécution de Charles I^{er}. Certes, l'excitation des passions du lecteur constitue une façon efficace de le faire adhérer à la cause royaliste, mais en même temps ce recours au pathos contredit l'impartialité très souvent revendiquée par les historiens. Il serait injuste, toutefois, de considérer cette présentation théâtrale de l'histoire comme un simple instrument de propagande ; au contraire, certains récits écrits servent une version authentiquement tragique de l'histoire en livrant une version complexe d'un événement souvent relaté de façon manichéenne pendant les années 1650 et à la Restauration.

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