“Remembering 1625: George Wither’s *Britain’s Remembrancer* and the Condition of Early Caroline England”

Andrew McRae

University of Exeter

George Wither’s *Britain’s Remembrancer*, one of the longest and most perplexing poems produced in seventeenth-century England, was centered from the moment of its conception on the nation’s new king, Charles I. It was originally written in 1625 as the 3400-line “History of the Pestilence,” delivered to Charles in manuscript form as a New Year’s gift at the outset of the following year. This version took as its twinned points of reference the accession of Charles and the outbreak of plague that struck London in the subsequent months. In its 1628 printed form, which included some revisions to the existing two cantos as well as an additional six cantos and an extended dedicatory verse to Charles, it is over 20,000 lines in length. Wither claims that he composed the final version rapidly, and that publication was delayed by his struggle to find a printer. Internal evidence, however, indicates that he was expanding the poem across the years 1626 and 1627, responding in the process to the key political debates that shaped these early Caroline years, and reassessing in the process his perception of Charles.[[1]](#footnote-1) The keynote is struck in lines added to the first canto in 1628, in which Wither recalls a desire in 1625:

That *Charles* (of whom this Kingdome hopeth so)

Might shew, when he did weare his Diadem,

How worthily we plac’d our hopes on him. (fol. 16r)

The weight placed on “hope” presses upon the reader, who by 1628 is manifestly perceived as Wither’s fellow citizen, rather than the king himself. “*If he be what he seemeth*,” the poem suggests, in another passage added in 1628, Charles may “*save his* Land *from utter overthrow*” (fol. 26v). The conditionality of this statement, endebted as it is to interrogating the actions and discourses of power, creates the ground upon which the expanded poem will be based.

While Wither himself saw *Britain’s Remembrancer* as a landmark in his career, the poem has frustrated modern readers.[[2]](#footnote-2) One school of criticism positions it as the point at which Wither’s promising poetic development evaporated, as a commitment to prophecy and “plain, unadorned expression” suppressed his established “poetic artistry.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Somewhat more sympathetically, Thomas O. Calhoun explains this stylistic shift as a product of “Renaissance anticlassicism,” a movement that rejected formal control in favor of a “loose style.” In this narrative of Wither’s career, *Britain’s Remembrancer* emerges as “the seminal and transitional work,” as the poet sought to bring his writing “closer and closer to the conditions of actual or lived experience.”[[4]](#footnote-4) More recent criticism has politicized these stylistic developments. David Norbrook and Michelle O’Callaghan have demonstrated Wither’s central position within an emergent poetics of political critique in the early Stuart period. While Wither was in 1628 by no means the strident republican figure he would become in the 1640s, his work was increasingly asserting the right of the poet to judge the events of his times.[[5]](#footnote-5) Within this context, the model of prophecy, as James Doelman has argued, lent his work “a greater recklessness.”[[6]](#footnote-6) Yet, despite Doelman’s sense that prophecy was increasingly prevalent in the mid-1620s, and Norbrook’s identification of the late 1620s as a key moment in the emergence of a republican literary tradition, no critic has yet looked closely at *Britain’s Remembrancer* as a product of these early Caroline years.

This essay approaches *Britain’s Remembrancer* as essentially an occasional poem, deeply engaged with the conditions of the initial years of Charles’s reign. While the poem’s length can frustrate easy generalizations, I suggest that it articulates with rare clarity the prevailing “fear and confusion” of these early Caroline years, lending shape in the process to emergent anxieties and debates.[[7]](#footnote-7) The change of title for the 1628 publication itself signals the importance of context, identifying in the process the kinds of questions one might reasonably ask of the text. The title-page declares: *Britain’s Remembrancer Containing A Narration of the PLAGUE lately past; A Declaration of the MISCHIEFS present; And a Prediction of JUDGMENTS to come; (If Repentance prevent not.)*. Crucially, the poem has assumed in the course of its dilation a wider geographical and political dimension, with London’s exposure to the plague underpinning a concentration on the nation as a whole. (Though that nation is purportedly ‘Britain’, Wither’s vision is typically somewhat abstract, and in practice is more strictly confined to England.) The “remembrancer,” meanwhile, is at once the plague, providentially sent as a “bloody *Messenger*” (fol. 141r), but also the poet and his poem. Wither was, he asserts, “prefer[red]” by God, “To be from him, this *Iles* REMEMBRANCER” (fol. 255r).

Situating *Britain’s Remembrancer* as a product of the early Caroline years, I want to pursue the poem’s dialectic of hope. How, specifically, does Wither position his work in relation to debates over Charles and his government? How did the poem’s sprawling, evidently artless account of these years actually help to lend shape at once to the period’s nascent political confrontations and to images of the new monarch? And how might we consider the significance of Wither’s modelling, through the poem, of a new form of political engagement, at a time when questions of speech and representation were at the very heart of political arguments? I argue that the expanded poem may be read as a product of the years in which it was written. Form is thus a response to context; the poem’s evidently shapeless and incoherent bulk documents the citizen-poet’s struggles to comprehend these years. I further suggest that the poem’s concern with relations between the poet and the king develops Wither’s Jacobean critique of political speech in important new ways. *Britain’s Remembrancer* is concerned with representation, and with the ways in which the poet, in describing and interpreting events, models wider forms of political action that challenge some of the Caroline court’s fundamental myths of authority. Finally, the poem registers the fragility of the British polity in these years, opening to its readers not merely the figure of hope, but the shadowy recognition of what loyalist hopes may conceal. This is the spectre of tyranny.

The essay’s first section examines the political culture of the early Caroline years, situating Wither within this context. The second section considers the poem’s initial occasion, the plague, and explores the way in which Wither exploits this event in order to refresh some longstanding concerns about poetic and political speech. And the final section attends to the ways in which Wither engages with the struggles between court and parliament, especially as the early Caroline arguments over supply gave way to the Forced Loan, a novel and controversial attempt to raise taxation without the authorization of parliament. *Britain’s Remembrancer*, as much as any other text of these years, lends definition to these confrontations. The poet stands ultimately as both a commentator upon his times, and an index of the pressures being placed upon the British citizen.

I

Wither’s sense that Charles remained difficult to assess in the early years of his reign was by no means unique. Historians confirm that Charles’s subjects took several years to form meaningful impressions of their new king after his 1625 accession. For Thomas N. Corns, “control of the most formal aspects of the royal image remained insecure probably until 1630,” with court poetry in the intervening years failing to settle on distinct themes and characteristics.[[8]](#footnote-8) Indeed the most distinctive response, by contrast with the outpouring of works that had greeted his father in 1603, was silence.[[9]](#footnote-9) *Britain’s Remembrancer*, not least on account of its extraordinary bulk, must stand as the most ambitious effort to confront this situation. In order to appreciate the task Wither assumed, it will be worth dwelling upon the context of the years in which he was writing, situating his efforts in relation to the wider challenges British citizens were facing in comprehending their new king and his government.

The succession of 1625, the first of an adult male heir in direct family line since Henry VIII assumed the throne two months short of his eighteenth birthday in 1509, was deceptively straightforward. Charles himself immediately sought to stress continuity, encouraging his citizens to look back as much as forward as he invested heavily in James’s funeral service and unusually assumed the role of chief mourner.[[10]](#footnote-10) But events conspired against this easy narrative. While the capital was seized by the plague, the wider nation faced questions about the nature and consequences of the succession. Rumors that James had been murdered unsettled Charles and placed further attention on George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, who survived the succession as the most powerful statesman in the realm.[[11]](#footnote-11) Urgent questions about Charles’s attitude towards the continental wars also pressed upon him.[[12]](#footnote-12) On his miraculous return from the Spanish Match negotiations in 1623 as an unmarried Protestant hero, Charles had argued in parliament for war against Spain.[[13]](#footnote-13) This policy set him at odds with his father’s pacifism and raised the hopes of the nation’s more militant Protestants, marking a course for military action in the latter years of the 1620s. Moreover, Charles was by early 1625 in the midst of negotiations to marry the French princess Henrietta Maria. Indeed he left London shortly after James’s funeral in order to meet Henrietta Maria at Dover, and his next public appearance in the capital was with his bride. While the welcome was warm, citizens who had so recently celebrated, with historic fervor, the collapse of plans to marry one Catholic princess could hardly have been expected to rouse genuine enthusiasm for Charles’s marriage to another. Epithalamia were ambivalent, shadowed by the fear that Charles would be “seduced into idolatry.”[[14]](#footnote-14) As Wither would archly reflect, “some” commentators of the time were heard to suggest that, “till in one *Religion* they agree, / They stand resolv’d, that they will *Neuters* be” (fol. 198r).

These circumstances, doubtless combined with Charles’s own inclinations, contrived to leach the succession of expected forms of public acclamation. The coronation itself was notably low-key, due in large part to Henrietta Maria’s intransigence on the point of Catholic representation in the service. Plans for a formal state entry into the capital, meanwhile, were postponed initially on account of the plague, which forced the king and his parliament from the city, but were not revived thereafter. King James had enjoyed a famously lavish royal entry in 1604, and in *A Paterne for a Kings Inauguration* (1620) he publically urged his son to follow this model.[[15]](#footnote-15) Charles initially encouraged civic governors to prepare for the expected event, and there is evidence of preparations being made both before and after the interruption of the plague. Thomas Middleton was commissioned to write the text for the pageant, while “five most superb arches,” in the words of the Venetian ambassador, were erected in the streets. But the conditions of Charles’s reign shifted over the months of plague. Military defeat in Cadiz at the end of 1625, coupled with the financial pressures that dominated the early years of this King’s reign, appear to have convinced him not to proceed. The arches were eventually dismantled, their purpose unfulfilled, “amid the murmurs of the people and the disgust of those who spent the money.”[[16]](#footnote-16) Though he agonized in private that he had as a result “lost the love of [his] subjects,” this key opportunity to mark his inauguration was allowed by Charles to pass.[[17]](#footnote-17)

In the absence of clear direction from above, commentators on affairs of state moved to reassess preexistent images of the prince. The legacy of the Spanish Match negotiations hung somewhat oppressively over Charles, creating expectations that would rapidly prove to be unsustainable. Wither himself notes that it seemed “as but yesterday” that Charles was welcomed so warmly on his return from Spain, and laments that this spirit had so rapidly dissipated. The king, he writes cryptically, “hath not received that content / From us, which he expected, and we meant” (fol. 225r). Furthermore, representations of Charles were overwhelmed in these years by public debate over the image of Buckingham. Having risen to prominence as a Jacobean favorite, Buckingham had gained even more from his involvement in the collapse of the Spanish Match negotiations than Charles, and invested his popularity, in the 1624 parliament, in the push towards war. James’s death, at a moment when there were clear differences between his own policies and those of his son and favorite, thrust Buckingham more firmly than ever to the forefront of political discussion. He, unlike Charles, was “obsessed with his public image” at this time.[[18]](#footnote-18) In due course, the failure of the early Caroline military ventures, albeit engineered in part to portray Buckingham as a Protestant hero, quickly undermined his efforts, fuelling attempts to censure him in parliament, and vitriolic attacks on him in news and libels.[[19]](#footnote-19) Though Wither avoids naming him in *Britain’s Remembrancer*, determined as he was to demonstrate that his poem was not a libel, some of his assaults on Charles’s courtiers inevitably recall popular images of the Duke. For Charles, the lively contestation over the image of Buckingham, leading up to and beyond his assassination in August 1628, indelibly marked early appreciations of his own rule.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Tensions between the king and his early parliaments raised fresh questions about how Charles’s subjects should perceive him. The House of Commons sparked the initial confrontation in 1625, when it resisted the customary practice of granting of a new monarch the subsidy of tonnage and poundage, a valuable form of customs revenue, for life. Instead it made the grant only for a single year. While this decision was evidently motivated more by a concern to redress perceived power imbalances between subject and monarch, rather than by personalized antagonism towards Charles, his response served only to escalate the tensions. Charles not only continued to collect tonnage and poundage regardless, but also explored new ways of raising revenue for the Crown. This was not merely a matter of money; it was equally a question of political process. The phrase emerging from Buckingham’s circle at court, “new counsels,” cut to the heart of the principle that parliament’s function was to counsel the monarch, positing instead a more constrained form of political dialogue, and in due course also a form of supply that would not require parliamentary approval.[[21]](#footnote-21) The Forced Loan, as it became known, thereby risked positioning Charles as a king prepared to override traditional forms of political engagement that were valued highly by many parliamentarians and commentators. The situation was further enflamed when a number of preachers connected to Buckingham and the court presented outspoken justifications of royal absolutism, based on theories of divine right. Labelled “Arminians” by their opponents, the preachers were concerned not only to elevate the king but to stigmatize his opponents as dangerous: in the words of Isaac Bargrave, “men whose purity consists in parity, whose conscience in disobedience.”[[22]](#footnote-22) Although Charles grudgingly distanced himself from the extremity of their arguments, and did not intervene when the Commons ordered the imprisonment of Roger Maynwaring, he was popularly associated nonetheless with these preachers” exercises in division. One concerned citizen, Thomas Scott of Canterbury, was doubtless not alone in looking for conspiracies, identifying the views of “Papists, Arminians, Maynwarians, and other Dukists” behind the actions of “the incroaching Prince.”[[23]](#footnote-23)

The pace of these developments, coupled with Charles’s resistance of inaugurating ceremony, helps to explain the notably muted response of writers to the Caroline succession. While Bargrave asserted that praising the king could never be flattery, early Stuart poets were not so easily pacified, accustomed as they were to conventions in which praise was bound to counsel.[[24]](#footnote-24) Panegyric, that is, could teach in the process of praising.[[25]](#footnote-25) Yet critics have noted an unfocused conventionality and a prevailing resort to political continuity in the surprisingly small body of poetry written to mark the succession, as though poets were struggling to comprehend, and in turn to characterize their new king.[[26]](#footnote-26) In popular culture, meanwhile, images of Charles as Protestant hero were quickly abandoned. The pamphleteer Thomas Scott, who had done so much to promote this perception in the wake of the Spanish Match negotiations, died in 1626. Middleton, whose *Game at Chesse* famously adapted Scott’s version of recent diplomatic history to the stage, might well have perpetuated its glorification of militant English Protestantism in his commissioned text for the royal entry; however, we have no record of his efforts, and he too died shortly afterwards, in 1627.

Much of the most urgent and incisive political commentary of these years assumed instead unauthorized forms. Recent scholarship on the political culture of the early Stuart decades has demonstrated the various ways in which commentators and observers sought to make sense of political actions and motivations. Some of this activity was informed by engagement with classical and continental political theory, sometimes grouped together within the category “reason of state.”[[27]](#footnote-27) There was also an active culture of commentary in pamphlets – whether designed for print or manuscript circulation – as well as newsletters and diaries.[[28]](#footnote-28) For example, one notorious pamphlet in manuscript circulation in the early Caroline years, which may well have influenced Wither, purported to reveal plans to increase the power and revenue of the king, establishing him as an “absolute tyrant.”[[29]](#footnote-29) This febrile environment also stimulated the production and circulation of unprecedented numbers of verse libels, attacking political figures and offering to reveal hidden interpretations of events.[[30]](#footnote-30) While libellers never directly attacked the king, Buckingham remained a favorite target, and his early Caroline military ventures provided fresh material for libellous attacks.[[31]](#footnote-31) The impact of these associated practices on political life was profound. As Noah Millstone has argued: “Learning to see the world through politic eyes, like a “statist”, or “statesman”, became a major theme of discourse in early Stuart England”.[[32]](#footnote-32)

While it would be easy to associate Wither with a culture of libel, given his commitment to forthright political speech and his assertion that his satiric writing has “levell’d” some of his opponents (fol. 242v), his authorial position was in fact much more complicated. By the end of James’s reign, Wither was a prominent and successful poet, who had received a degree of patronage from the court – most notably, it seems, from Princess Elizabeth – and had seen his poems sell in large numbers. Moreover, although Wither had written political satire under James, and had endured a period of imprisonment in 1614 for a perceived slur on a statesman (probably Henry Howard, Earl of Northampton), he remained committed to the idea of loyal critique.[[33]](#footnote-33) He positioned himself less within a culture of unauthorized libel, and more in a tradition of public satire, endebted above all to the models provided by Edmund Spenser.[[34]](#footnote-34) By 1625 he was also beholden to the king, on account of James granting him a controversial patent to have his *Hymnes and Songes of the Church* bound together with all metrical psalm-books.[[35]](#footnote-35) Although the grant proved almost impossible to enforce, and brought Wither many years of antagonism from London’s printers, it marked him briefly as a poet in receipt of royal patronage. Therefore, for all his poem’slack of felicity – suggesting from the outset that the 1625 plague was a punishment for the nation’s sins – there is no reason to suspect that Wither was in any way disingenuous when presenting “The History of the Pestilence” to his new king. Wither was looking for ways of deploying his status as a public poet, and was concerned from the moment of succession with the citizen’s forms of speech in the face of authority. This, in part, is what makes the poem’s expansion so tellingly strained.

The political significance of these early Caroline years remains a matter of debate among historians. While the revisionist movement set aside a binary model of government and opposition, some of the best recent scholarship has forged new ways of understanding ideological conflict and political division in this era. One of the most valuable characteristics of this work is its attention to language, as the medium through which political actors and commentators ascribed meaning and order to their circumstances.[[36]](#footnote-36) It is in this context, I propose, that we might most profitably approach *Britain’s Remembrancer*. For all of its undeniable bagginess, and its author’s pretensions to artlessness, it demands recognition as a skilful piece of work, deeply rooted in the debates of the years in which it was written. If it does not achieve clarity, that is entirely in accord with the confusion of this time. Wither, as I want now to consider more closely, turns the resources of satire upon the uncertain conditions of early Caroline culture, and produces the period’s most rigorous and engaging political poem.

II

The coincidence of plague and succession presented obvious challenges for a poet. When a similar set of circumstances had occurred in 1603, Thomas Dekker produced *The Wonderful Yeare*, a text which embeds passages of Elizabethan elegy and Jacobean panegyric within a pamphlet overwhelmingly concerned with the impact of the plague on London. The disjunction between the text’s dual functions is underscored by the predominant use of prose for descriptions of the plague and verse for treatment of the succession. Wither, by comparison, boldly fuses the two narratives. An extended dialogue between Justice and Clemency in Canto 1, that ends with God siding with Justice and sending the plague, is essentially a debate about the state of the nation at the moment of succession. What emerges, above all, from this bold conjunction of narratives and modes, is the figure of the author, presented to the reader as a man with the insight and authority to assess his world.

The tension between Wither’s reliance upon the king – at once for the occasion of his work and for his assumed licence to speak – and his self-assertion as a godly witness shapes the entire work. The poem’s early description of the moment of succession is framed by this dynamic, drawing attention to the speaker as much as his subject. Wither recalls where he was when the king died:

Ev’n then, by *Thames* faire Banks, I did reside,

Where her sweet waters washeth ev’ry *Tide*

The spacious verge of that well peopled *Towne*,

Which with most princely Pallaces doth crowne

Her goodly *streame*, and at her *Ports* and *Keyes*,

Take in the wealth of Kingdomes and of Seas. (fol. 16r-v)

The lines locate palaces and poet alike within the city, the momentous change of the Caroline succession offset in the process by the mundane yet economically vital ebbs and flows of the tidal river. Monarchs as well as commoners, Wither suggests, assume legitimate positions in the nation.

Wither’s preoccupation with the question of his own authority informs the poem’s central drama. For, to the extent that this is a narrative of the plague, it pays surprisingly little attention to the sufferings of others. Instead the question that sustains much of the early parts is whether Wither himself should flee London to avoid the plague, and in due course thousands of lines are devoted to his motives for staying. In Canto 3, Wither represents Faith and Reason expounding the debate before the poet’s conscience. For Reason, the desire to stay is the foolhardy act of one who secretly thinks himself made of “better stuffe … / Then other men” (fol. 81v). But Faith posits a deeper purpose, placing Wither’s poetic career in a providential narrative:

Why, at thy very birth, did he infuse

Thy Soule with naturall helpes to forme thy Muse,

Which is a Faculty not lent to many,

Nor by meere Art attained to, of any?

To thee, why gave he Knowledge, such a way

As others lose by it? And why I pray

Did he bestow upon thee so much Fame

For those few childish lines that thou didst frame

In thy minority? Why did he then

(Then scarce a man) enroule thy Name with men?

And make thee to be prais’d and priz’d before

Those men whose Yeares, and Sciences are more? (fol. 99v)

In an age awash with references to poetic muses, the description of Wither’s is perhaps unique, positing the muse as a product of a divinely ordained soul, a poetic correlative of Calvinist election. Fame, meanwhile, is a recurrent theme. Wither is repeatedly insistent upon his status among the reading public of his time, claiming this as a prerequisite to his subsequent value as a prophet.

As much as Wither is concerned with God’s judgment upon the nation, therefore, he repeatedly pauses in order to reflect upon the trajectory of his own career. Turning to God, he exclaims:

how great a blessing, then, didst thou

Confer upon me? And what Grace allow!

Oh! what am I, and what my parentage?

That Thou of all the Children of this Age

Didst chuse out me, so highly to prefer,

As of thy *Acts*, to be a *Register?* (fol. 100v)

For all Wither’s pretence to artlessness, the word “Acts” is carefully chosen, given its biblical and Foxeian resonances. The social placement of the author is also pointed. Though Wither was in fact born and raised into the gentry, as his career progressed he tended to rewrite his biography, presenting supposedly lowly origins and popular fame as twinned sources of authority in the face of the court and its values.[[37]](#footnote-37) “It seem’d more comfort, and more honour far,” he writes, reflecting upon his calling, “Then if a Monarkes *Favorite* I were” (fol. 100v).

Given this careful positioning of the author within his nation, Wither’s own encounter with the plague is represented as a microcosm of the wider pestilence. Through a curiously circular logic, God notices “some inward pride of heart” in the poet on account of his chosen status, and sends “as my *Remembrancer*, / His dreadfull, and his bloody *Messenger* / To take his lodging, where my lodgings were” (fol. 141r). Wither appears to have recovered relatively rapidly, and dwells very little on the details of his illness. The recovery, however, is predictably determined by God:

His *Mercy* seal’d my *pardon*; and I shook

The *Pestilence* (which hold upon me tooke)

From off my shoulder, without sense of harme,

As *Paul* did shake the Viper from his arme. (fol. 148v)

The allusion to St. Paul’s inconsequential encounter with a venomous snake underscores Wither’s claim to authority (Acts 28.3-5). He is at once an everyman figure, visited with the plague just like his country men and women, and a man blessed with extraordinary insight, his status sealed by his providential recovery. That very week, he notes in the succeeding lines, “God began to slack / His *Bow*, and call his bloody *Angell* backe,” easing the suffering not just of the author but the wider nation (fol. 148v).

Wither’s account of the plague is thus concerned not in any straightforward way with the social body of the city, but always also with the relation between the citizen and his nation. Wither is the voice of authority who stays behind to witness, when others choose to flee. In the city, becalmed and benighted, he experiences an ecstatic sense of belonging as he encounters the spectral, unfinished pageants designed for the state entry that would never take place:

But here I walkt in safety to behold

What changes, for instruction, see I could.

And, as I wandred on, my eye did meet,

Those halfe-built *Pageants* which, athwart the street,

Did those triumphant Arches counterfeit,

Which heretofore in ancient *Rome* were set,

When their victorious *Generalls* had thither

The spoile of mighty kingdomes brought together.

The loyall Citizens (although they lost

The glory of their well-intended cost)

Erected those great Structures to renowne

The new receiving of the Sov’raigne Crowne

By hopefull CHARLES (whose royall exaltation,

Make thou oh! God, propitious to this Nation.) (fol. 109v)

Isolated yet “in safety,” the poet sees through the mere architectural forms, destined never to serve their intended function, in order to reflect upon the relation between the citizens and their monarch. “Counterfeit” is pointed, weighing the tangible victories of Roman generals, the original recipients of triumphs, against the untested authority of England’s “hopefull” king. Thereafter the strain of scepticism in the lines is borne by the parenthetical asides. The citizens have not just lost money but “glory,” the opportunity to mark their part in a reciprocal relationship with the sovereign. The closing prayer, with breathlessly halting punctuation, dwells on the doubleness of “hopefull.” “Propitious,” a word steeped in discourses of providentialism, underscores the point that reigns may either be auspicious or inauspicious, and relations between a king and his subjects harmonious or fraught.

Wither’s experience of the plague, in a city the poem represents as eerily devoid of life, underpins his assumption of authority to speak. The poem is purposefully digressive and immediate: “A hundred *Musings*, which I meane to say,” he asserts, “Before I can expresse them, slip away” (fol. 138v). This approach is professedly “lowly,” in both social and poetic terms, yet in Wither’s view adheres to a “*Method*” which will be lost on those who define literary quality in terms of classical models (fols. 136v-137r). As O’Callaghan has demonstrated, the development of Wither’s “loose” style can be traced through the 1620s, bound to the author’s belief in the politics of poetry. He was thus “unconstrained by the ‘*strict rules as* Arts-men *use*’,” and deployed this style “to open out established genres to new ideological influences.”[[38]](#footnote-38) Crucially, his lines are “free” (fol. 139v), an adjective that for Wither epitomizes his sense of the politics of poetic style. Comparing himself to more conventional poets, with their dedication to established models and precedents, he writes:

Sometime, as well as they I play the *Bee*:

But, like the *Silkeworme*, it best pleaseth me

To spin out mine owne Bowells, and prepare them

For those, who thinke it not a shame to weare them. (fol. 137v)

The key point here is that, while the prophet may typically speak as a conduit for the word of God, Wither wants more than this. His prophecy is altogether more a product of an individual subjectivity, profoundly located in the circumstances of his time. When he says that “*God still … calls vulgar men / To speake his will to* Princes, *now and then*,” the nature of the calling thus leaves a critical degree of agency in the hand of the poet (fol. 9v). As he reflects at the beginning of the dedicatory poem to Charles that he added in 1628: “*What freedome* Nature *gives to ev’y soule, / To speake just things, to* Kings, *without controule*” (fol. 1r).

This approach constitutes, for Wither, a new approach to political poetry. Throughout the poem he distinguishes his work at once from panegyric on the one hand, and libels on the other hand. Each of these kinds of poems, he argues, is undermined by a necessary subservience to patrons. Indeed, while many libels of these years belie his assertions, proclaiming a similar degree of independence, for Wither the libeller is only “*impudently bold, / When he hath* Times*, or* Patrons *to uphold / His biting* Straines” (fol. 285v). Wither writes instead as “*a private man*,” informed by the individual “*Conscience*”: a site of religious and political authority that was emerging as at once vital and volatile in the seventeenth century (fol. 284v).[[39]](#footnote-39) From this basis he is also able to reformulate the functions of satire. Notably, Wither reflects upon the interestedness of much satire, including his own; “*thy tart reproofes have beene*,” his conscience determines at one point, “*The fruits, not of thy Vertue, but of Spleene*” (fol. 143r). Wither’s reformed poetics, by comparison, align prophetic vision with a satirist’s commitment to strip bare the deceptions of power:

Rapt by a sp’rituall *Vision*, I have seene

The thin and crasie wall, that stands betweene

Our sight, and their concealed practices,

Who have the place of *Elders* in these dayes:

And spying there a hole, I digg’d into

Their secresies; to see what works they doe.

Where (not without God’s warrant and his ayd)

Most foule abominations I survaid. (fol. 222v)

The “thin and crasie wall” stands as an apt metaphor for the intangible distance separating the machinations of power and the observing subject. “Crasie,” in this context, most obviously means “full of cracks or flaws”; however, a secondary meaning of “damaged, impaired, unsound” is perhaps equally relevant.[[40]](#footnote-40) The poet is necessarily intrusive – “spying” and “digg[ing]” – yet his vision can never be perfect because of the way in which power is cloaked, in its structures and discourses, with layers of mystification. His own work therefore emerges as itself a product of the “thin and crasie wall,” a vision characterized by fragmented excess and paranoia-ridden exercises in exposure.

The question of his authority to speak remains fundamental to Wither throughout the poem. The “sp’rituall *Vision*” to which he lays claim not only places him in relation with God, but equally moderates his relationship with God’s agent on earth, the British king. In his preface to Charles, added for the poem’s publication in 1628, Wither acknowledges the risk, for anyone claiming to speak prophetically, of being made “*a laughing-stock*,” dismissed as an egotist “*puft with selfe conceit*” (fol. 6r-v). He reflects further upon Charles’s power to determine the fate of poet and poem alike, and upon the fragility of his relationship with his king. Some people, he writes, “*perish*” under the “*dislike*” of kings, whom they are nonetheless “*bound to cherish*” (fol. 6v). The fraught oscillation here between submission and assertion is entirely characteristic of this poem. In its sheer bulk, as Wither repeatedly ponders the nature of his enterprise, it offers one of the era’s most engaging essays in political subjectivity. And it is from this basis, however inconsistent or shaky it may seem, that he launches his more specific critique of contemporary politics.

III

In the cantos added to *Britain’s Remembrancer* for its 1628 publication, Wither covers a great range of subjects. Alongside the extended reflections upon himself, as citizen and poet, he considers corruption in London, the nation’s religious and moral shortcomings, as well as specific problems at court and in parliament. As a document of political thought, the poem contains nothing especially radical; it maintains a commitment to the principle that subjects may petition or counsel monarchs, and never posits any demonstrably new or alternative forms of political engagement. Its achievements derive rather from the poet’s qualities of observation, modulated through the “crasie wall” that can render his findings at once factually unreliable yet satirically perceptive. The poem gradually unfolds a subtle analysis of the causes and consequences of political corruption, speculating in the process upon the origins of tyranny. It offers, through its close and topical engagement with the conditions of Charles’s early years on the throne, some of the period’s most incisive reflections upon his emerging forms of rule.

Considerations of Wither’s own role in the state led naturally in the poem to more abstract assessments of political responsibility. In the context of any plague outbreak, the question of who should stay and who should flee was always vexed; popular pamphleteers such as Dekker and John Taylor, for instance, assailed those who left the plague-stricken city as “runaways,” abandoning their responsibilities to their fellow citizens.[[41]](#footnote-41) Wither, having expounded at length upon his own purpose in the city, was more considered in his judgements. Though pausing sardonically on the flight of gentlemen who could previously not be “compell[ed] / Upon their owne Inheritance to dwell,” he nonetheless argues that those who have responsibilities stretching beyond the city, including the king himself, may reasonably be considered “free / To live where safety best appeares to be” (fols. 67r, 71v). But for those bearing responsibility specifically for the city, the decision is clearer. Wither notes with guarded approbation the actions of the Lord Mayor, who:

startled, and some say was gone:

But, when his Charge he truly thought upon,

It settled him. (fol. 66v)

The verb “settled” is crucial, articulating the Lord Mayor’s appropriate commitment to a community. The decisions of other city fathers, by comparison, Wither leaves to “their owne consciences” (fol. 66v).

In a wider political context, this principle of responsibility includes not merely a patriarchal duty of care, but equally a commitment to representation. At court, prevailing political theory held that practices of counsel and petitioning maintained the appropriate representation of a king’s subjects. Wither appears genuinely committed to these models, while anxiously aware of debased practices that were threatening the viability of the system. He notes, for instance, that proper exchange between king and subject may well be distorted at court; in one of several passages in the poem perhaps intended as a barb directed at Buckingham, he suggests that “Some *Sycophant*, or cunning hypocrite” may undermine the dialogue between king and subject (fol. 228v). The corruptions here are those of discourse: sycophancy and hypocrisy subvert transparent exchange. The “shamelesse *Bills*” of suitors at court, he argues elsewhere, are even more damaging than “A Scurrilous *Rime* or *Phamphlet*” (fol. 187r). While these complaints are relatively conventional, supporting Norbrook’s argument that Wither’s methods are “imagistic rather than legal,” other passages are more topically astute. [[42]](#footnote-42) On the controversial subject of appointments to offices of state, for instance, he asserts that:

nobler far he seemeth in mine eyes,

Who, by a due election, doth arise

To be but *Heardman* in some Country Borrough,

Then all the *Lordlings* who have passed thorough

The greatest *Offices*, by giving pay;

Or by some other unapproved way. (fol. 189v)

Moreover, as it turns from the distribution of offices at court to elections for the House of Commons the poem is particularly detailed in its description of corruptions of process, whether through a facile concentration on candidates who present “the greatest showes,” or the marginalization of some electors by “force” or “constraint” (fol. 230r). And even within the Houses of Parliament, processes of representation can be distorted. Wither, like a number of his contemporaries, expresses concern about the practice of members of either house passing proxy votes, an issue that became associated in 1626 with hostility to Buckingham.[[43]](#footnote-43) In lines that recall his perception of his own mission as a poet, he judges that “it doth unfit appeare, / To give my voice, untill the cause I heare” (fol. 233v).

Working within this governing conception of political process, *Britain’s Remembrancer* also glances more topically at the struggles of 1626 and 1627. The wrangling over supply and the Forced Loan, figured as a mystifying instance of “*Dissention*” or “*Discord*,” prompts Wither to assess the various arguments: for loyalty and submission on the one hand, and for “*Freedome*” and “*Custome*” on the other hand (fols. 225r, 235v). Reflecting on arguments raised in the Commons, he judges:

Let them, therefore, their ancient rights maintain,

By all just meanes: and let them yeeld againe,

The royall dues. (fols. 234v-235r)

In practical terms, of course, nothing is achieved by such prevarication, resting as it does on the contested categorization of “just meanes.” The poem is equally evasive on the collapse of parliament (probably the session of 1626) over this issue:

neither dare men say

(Although they could) on whom the blame to lay.

Some, doe accuse the *Parliament*; some blame

Another Faction; and, I doubtfull am,

Some rashly taxe the *King*: but, to provide

A *Judge*, by whom such parties may be tride,

Who knowes (I pray?) or what is he that can

Such points as these, without reproving, scan? (fol. 225v)

Yet there is intent here: not only in the parenthesized hints that there is, after all, a truth that might be revealed, but more fundamentally in the subsequent representation of “a rupture” in the nation, setting the king variously against the “*Country*” or “*People*” (fols. 225v-226r). Wither declares his loyalty to both sides, and resorts desperately to the traditional model of the body politic in order to make a point about the dangers of disharmony. But the poem’s appreciation of division, and of its profound legal and ideological bases, resists such comfortable solutions.

Wither is moved more powerfully towards political engagement when he addresses the arguments of Arminian preachers. He writes:

One part of these will for preferment strive,

By lifting up the *King’s* prerogative

Above it selfe. They will perswade him to

Much more then *Law* or *Conscience* bids him do,

And say, God warrants it. (fol 263r)

It was still possible, at the moment that Wither was writing, to operate on the presumption that the Arminians were not necessarily speaking on behalf of the king. Nonetheless Wither’s position is unusually assertive. Kings are constrained by “Law,” and any person suggesting otherwise is guilty of ascribing to “*Monarchs*, rights that proper are / To none but *Christ*” (fol. 263r). Though Wither never refers specifically to the Forced Loan, and may not entirely have grasped its significance, the lines also betray a deep unease about the apparent threat to “Law” posed by a misuse of “prerogative.” In the parliament of 1628, albeit probably several months after Wither had finished writing, the outspoken Sir Dudley Digges pursued the same line of argument, directly opposing the Forced Loan. “So now there is a doubt,” he proclaimed, “whether the law be above the King, or the King above the law.”[[44]](#footnote-44)

One question that occupied successive Caroline parliaments, and that also shadows Wither’s most outspoken passages of political critique, is the extent to which Charles himself might be held responsible for the Forced Loan. The overwhelming majority of public statements adhered to the convention of directing criticism at counsellors rather than the king himself.[[45]](#footnote-45) Even within the terms of this discourse, however, the boundaries separating the monarch from his counsellors was troublingly porous. Outside the realms of public discussion, meanwhile, concerned citizens were drawing their own conclusions; Thomas Scott of Canterbury, for instance, consistently identified Charles as the “principal culprit in the levy of unjustified taxes.”[[46]](#footnote-46) For Wither, the poem’s early emphasis on “hope” for Charles gradually gives way to a more troubling possibility: “[S]ure,” he writes at one point, “I may excuse / The *King*” (fol. 197v). But what if that conviction is not so sure after all? What, in the terms of the lines added to the first Canto in 1628, if he is not “*what he seemeth*” (fol. 26v)? The answer, which presses itself into the poem’s final cantos, is embedded in a theory of tyranny. Tyrants, the poem suggests, deprive subjects of their “ancient *freedomes*,” and take away, “by degrees,” their “patrimonies” (fol. 259v). The sense that tyranny may work “by degrees,” rather like the piecemeal demands of a tax, is critical here; the language of a subject’s “ancient” rights, meanwhile, keyed as it is to appeals in parliament to the common law and ancient constitution, is decidedly topical. A tyrant, this discussion concludes, will portray “all heathnish tyrannies, / As just *Prerogatives*” (fol. 260r). In the poem’s closing passages he looks rather more abstractly to the future, identifying signs of God’s displeasure that may follow, even now that the plague has passed. The last of these:

Is when the hand of God Almighty, brings

The people, into bondage, to their Kings.

I say, when their owne *King* shall take delight,

Those whom he should protect, to rob, and smite. (fol. 276v)

Tyranny, according to this prophecy, is uncomfortably close. The suggestion of malice, as this king “take[s] delight” in his incursions upon his subjects’ liberties, is new to the poem, and accommodated only barely by the prophetical model. Charles is not yet this king, but nor is he necessarily “*what he seemeth*.”

The development of an appreciation that hope in Charles may be misplaced, which can be traced both through the cantos added in 1628 and the revisions to existing cantos, puts almost unbearable strains upon Wither’s professions of loyalty. Indeed one of the most instructive aspects to a reading of *Britain’s Remembrancer* is precisely this struggle, which in itself reveals so much about the situation of concerned citizens in the early years of Charles’s reign. In theory, Wither’s position is clear:

This therefore is my *Rule*; that *Government*

(What e’re it be) in which to me God lent

My birth and breeding; that, until my end,

I will obey, and to my pow’r defend.

Yea, though it tyrannize, I will denay

No more obedience, then by Law I may:

Ev’n by those *Lawes* and *Customes* which do stand

In force, and unrepealed in that Land. (fol. 268r)

Even here, though, the quibble on withholding a degree of obedience allowed “by Law” resonates with wider debates of the early Caroline years. A reader might reasonably align this suggestion with Wither’s claim, at the beginning of Canto 7, that his “*Muse*” is “*lawfully* emboldned” (fol. 202v; my italics). Appeals to the law were simply impossible to disentangle from the fraught political discourse of this time. Moreover, the poem’s commitment to a “loose style,” which invites the reader to assess the trajectory of the author’s “hope” for Charles, documents the insistent emergence of doubt. “What if,” Wither writes, “his people have expected more / (From hopes, by them conceived heretofore) / Then yet succeeds?” (fol. 227r). He continues:

Thy generall voice, but newly, did confesse

In him much vertue, and much hopefulnesse;

And, he so late assum’d his *Diadem*,

That there hath scarce beene time enough for him

Those evils to performe, that may inferre

A generall mischiefe. Neither, do I heare

Of ought, as yet, which thou to him canst lay,

But that he doth to thee thy will denay.

Or with a gentle stoutnesse claime, and strive,

For what he thinks his just *Prerogative*. (fol. 228r)

The “generall voice” that professed “much hopefulnesse” was of course also Wither’s voice in 1625. Despite the poet’s steadfast refusal to disown his professions of loyalty, the realities of division, and even the possibility of the king being responsible for “evils,” presses hard upon the poem. For all its statements to the contrary, *Britain’s Remembrancer* is in part a record of political disillusionment.

In the light of the foregoing analysis, it might be possible to rethink how we categorize *Britain’s Remembrancer*. As various other critics have observed, it unquestionably functions as prophecy. It also draws upon the resources of satire, albeit without being situated formally within a satiric tradition.[[47]](#footnote-47) And it is enabled by a culture of news and comment, of the kind that produced pamphlets such as Thomas Scott’s *Vox Populi*, and manuscript poems such as the topical 500-line “Fortune’s Wheel.”[[48]](#footnote-48) But above all, I would conclude, it stands as an occasional poem, spanning a period of roughly three years that sorely tested the author’s powers of observation and judgment. Scholars of Caroline culture tend to identify two turning-points which helped to clarify images of the new king: firstly 1628, when Buckingham was assassinated; and secondly 1630, when the arrival of a male heir provided writers and painters with cause to concentrate upon the image of Charles as a father-figure.[[49]](#footnote-49) *Britain’s Remembrancer*, in this context, may help us to appreciate not merely what happened in the course of the preceding years, but the reputational damage Charles incurred from the very beginning of his reign.

The poem strains at the boundaries of a providential model of political causation, and as a result clarifies a new direction for the poet. As it sprawls outward from its description of the plague, conventionally enough positioned as a judgment upon the nation’s sins, the fractured and uncertain political discourse of the early Caroline years leaches its way into the verse. It is a poem well aware of lines of “rupture” in the state, and alert to the ways in which division is a product of language. It is also well aware of the uneasy position of the king, raised perhaps unrealistically high by the hopes of his subjects, and mired so early in battles over the limits of his authority. For Wither himself, who had spent much of the preceding reign struggling to define a kind of poetry in which a citizen poet may present his monarch with counsel founded upon assumptions of loyalty, the experience of the poem and the period pulled him in distinctly new directions. While *Britain’s Remembrancer* is not a statement of rebellion, and still less an articulation of republicanism, previous critics have been correct to identify it as marking a pivotal moment in Wither’s career. It is a poem in which the author works his way towards fresh perceptions of authority and poetry alike. It is a poem, also, in which the image of Charles is first burnished, then allowed through the passage of time to tarnish.

1. Wither states that he typeset the entire text himself: a claim that seems barely credible, but which underlines the impact of his long-running disputes with the Stationers’ Company (fol. 14v). It was sold by John Grismond, who had previously risked imprisonment in order to work with Wither on *Withers Motto* (1621). On Wither’s disputes with the Stationers’ Company, see esp. Norman E. Carlson, “Wither and the Stationers,” *Studies in Bibliography*, 16 (1966), 210-15; James Doelman, “George Wither, The Stationers’ Company and the English Psalter,” *Studies in Philology*, 90 (1993), 74-82. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See, for example, Wither’s reflections on *Britain’s Remembrancer* in: *Haleluiah Or, Britains Second Remembrancer* (1641), sigs. A2r-A5v; and *A Memorandum to London* (1665), pp. 1-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Charles S. Hensley, *The Later Career of George Wither* (The Hague and Paris, 1969), pp. 49, 8; cf. Allan Pritchard, “George Wither: The Poet as Prophet,” *Studies in Philology*, 59 (1962), 211-230. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “George Wither: Origins and Consequences of a Loose Poetics,” *Studies in Literature and Language*, 16 (1974), 263, 265. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. On Wither in the 1640s and 1650s, see Norbrook, “Levelling Poetry: George Wither and the English Revolution,” *English Literary Renaissance*, 21 (1991), 217-56; and references throughout Norbrook, *Writing and the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric and Politics, 1627-1660* (Cambridge, 1999). On the earlier political writings, see esp. Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics in te English Renaissance*, revised edn (Oxford, 2002), pp. 173-223; and O’Callaghan, *The “shepheardes nation”: Jacobean Spenserians and early Stuart political culture, 1612-1625* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 147-86. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *King James I and the Religious Culture of England* (Woodbridge, 2000), p. 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Glenn Burgess, *The Politics of the Ancient Constitution: An Introduction to English Political Thought, 1603-1642* (Basingstoke, 1992), p. 194. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. “Duke, Prince and King,” in *The Royal Image: Representations of Charles I* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The volume and nature of responses to successions may be traced through ‘The Stuart Successions Project’ database: http://stuarts.exeter.ac.uk/database/. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Richard Cust, “Charles I: A Case of Mistaken Identity,” *Past and Present*, 189 (2005), 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Alastair Bellany and Thomas Cogswell, *The Murder of King James I* (New Haven and London, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The allegation of murder was made most forcefully in George Eglisham, *The Forerunner of Reuenge Upon the Duke of Buckingham, for the Poysoning of the Most Potent King James* (Frankfort(?), 1626). See Alastair Bellany and Thomas Cogswell, *The Murder of King James I* (forthcoming). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Thomas Cogswell, *The Blessed Revolution: English Politics and the Coming of War, 1621-1624* (Cambridge, 1989). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. J. A. Taylor, “The Literary Presentation of James I and Charles I, With Special Reference to the Period c.1614-1630,” unpublished DPhil dissertation, University of Oxford, 1985, p. 233. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Qtd. in Taylor, “The Literary Presentation of James I and Charles I,” p. 221. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Qtd. in David Bergeron, *English Civic Pageantry, 1558-1642* (Tempe, Arizona, 2003), p. 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Qtd. in Gary Taylor, “Lost Pageant for Charles I: A Brief Account,” in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford, 2007), p. 1900. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Thomas Cogswell, “The People’s Love: The Duke of Buckingham and Popularity,” in *Politics, Religion and Popularity in Early Stuart Britain: Essays in Honour of Conrad Russell*, ed. T. Cogswell et al. (Cambridge, 2002), p. 212. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. On the collapse of Buckingham’s reputation in the years preceding his assassination, see esp. Alastair Bellany and Tom Cogswell, *England’s Assassin: John Felton and the Killing of the Duke of Buckingham* (New Haven, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Richard Cust, *The Forced Loan and English Politics 1626-1628* (Oxford, 1987), p. 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Cust, *Forced Loan*, p. 27; Burgess, *Politics of the Ancient Constitution*, p. 181. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. *A Sermon Preached Before King Charles* (1627), p. 4; qtd. in Cust, *Forced Loan*, p. 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Qtd. in Cesare Cuttica, “Thomas Scott of Canterbury (1566-1635): Patriot, Civic Radical, Puritan,” *History of European Ideas*, 34 (2008), 485. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Bargrave, *Sermon*, p. 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. On the functions of early modern panegyric, see James D. Garrison, *Dryden and the Tradition of Panegyric* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1975). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Corns, “Duke, Prince and King,” p. 18; Kevin Sharpe, *Image Wars: Promoting Kings and Commonwealths in England, 1603-1660* (New Haven, 2010), p. 173. On Stuart succession panegyric, see Andrew McRae, “Welcoming the King: The Politics of Stuart Succession Panegyric,” in *Literature of the Stuart Successions*, ed. Paulina Kewes and Andrew McRae (Oxford, forthcoming 2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. See esp. Peter Burke, “Tacitism, Scepticism, and Reason of State,”, in *The Cambridge History of Political Thought, 1450–1700*, ed. J. H. Burns and Mark Goldie (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 479-98; Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government 1572-1641* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 31-64. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Richard Cust, ‘News and Politics in Early Seventeenth-Century England’, *Past and Present*, 112 (1986), 60-90; Noah Millstone, *Manuscript Circulation and the Invention of Politics in Early Stuart England* (Cambridge, 2016); Joad Raymond, *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge, 2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Noah Millstone, “Evil Counsel: The *Propositions to Bridle the Impertinency of Parliament* and the Critique of Caroline Government in the Late 1620s,” *Journal of British Studies*, 20 (2011), 813-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. See esp. Alastair Bellany, “‘Raylinge Rymes and Vaunting Verse’: Libellous Politics in Early Stuart England, 1603-1628,” in *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England*, ed. Kevin Sharpe and Peter Lake (Basingstoke, 1994), pp. 285-310; Thomas Cogswell, “Underground Political Verse and the Transformation of English Political Culture,” in *Political Culture and Cultural Politics in Early Modern England: Essays Presented to David Underdown*, ed. Susan D. Amussen and Mark A. Kishlansky (Manchester, 1995), pp. 277-300; Andrew McRae, *Literature, Satire and the Early Stuart State* (Cambridge, 2004). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. See “Early Stuart Libels: an Edition of Poetry from Manuscript Sources,” ed. Alasiair Bellany and Andrew McRae, *Early Modern Literary Studies*, Text Series 1 (2005) <http://purl.oclc.org/emls/texts/libels/>, section O. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. “Seeing Like a Statesman in Early Stuart England,” *Past and Present*, 223 (2014), 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Michelle O’Callaghan, “‘Now thou may’st speak freely’: Entering the Public Sphere in 1614,” in *1614: Year of Crisis*, ed. Stephen Clucas and Rosalind Davies (Aldershot, 2002), pp. 63-79. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. See esp. O’Callaghan, *The “shepheardes nation”*; Rachel Hile, *Spenserian Satire: A Tradition of Indirection* (Manchester, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Doelman, “George Wither, The Stationers’ Company and the English Psalter.” [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Cf. Kevin Sharpe, *Remapping Early Modern England: The Culture of Seventeenth-Century Politics* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Michelle O’Callaghan, “George Wither,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004). [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. *The “shepheards nation”*, pp. 24-5; quoting Wither, *Faire-Vertue, the mistress of Phil’Arete* (1622), sig. C2v. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Keith Thomas, “Cases of Conscience in Seventeenth-Century England,” in *Public Duty and Private Conscience in Seventeenth-Century England: Essays Presented to G. E. Aylmer*, ed. John Morrill, Paul Slack and Daniel Woolf (Oxford, 1993), pp. 29-56. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. OED, “crazy,” 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. See esp. Dekker, *A Rod for Run-awayes* (1625); Taylor, *The Fearfull Sommer* (1625). [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. “Levelling Poetry,” 221. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Conrad Russell, *Parliaments and English Politics, 1621-1629* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 285-86. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Qtd. in Burgess, *Politics of the Ancient Constitution*, p. 200. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Cust, *Forced Loan*, pp. 184-85. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Cuttica, “Thomas Scott of Canterbury,” 488. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Cf. Doelman, *King James I*, p. 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. See Scott, *Vox Populi: or newes from Spaine* (London?, 1620), and *The Second Part of Vox Populi: or Gondomar appearing in the likenes of Mathiavell in a Spanish parliament* (1624); for “Fortune’s Wheel,” see “Early Stuart Libels”, K1. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. On the significance of 1628 see Sharpe, *Image Wars*, p. 153; on 1630 see Corns, “Duke, Prince and King,” pp. 20-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)