

Conclusion

Writing enlightenment

IN the early days of 1712 Prince Eugene of Savoy undertook a key diplomatic mission to London to reinforce the commitment of Robert Harley's ministry to the alliance against France in the negotiations over peace at Utrecht.¹ With the Tories in the ascendancy, Eugene's reputation as a stalwart defender of 'our common liberty' across Europe projected him as a defender of Whig principles. Long awaited by the Whig elites of London and Hanover, Eugene's military prowess had endowed him with a powerful public reputation in London. Tory figures like Lord Strafford (probably at the instigation of Robert Harley) had been involved in trying to dissuade him from visiting England, underscoring the mischief the 'mob' might pose. Eugene's reply 'was that he who had done so much for the liberty of Europe need never fear an English church mob, who always was on the side of those that were for liberty and property'.² Despite deliberate attempts to hinder his passage by refusing to provide suitable travel arrangements, Eugene arrived on 16 January, immediately dispatching Baron d'Hohendorf to Harley. It would be difficult to over-emphasise the importance of this moment, not just for national politics, but for the balance of power across Europe, and the perceived survival of Protestant liberty. This diplomatic crisis was a distillation of all the anxieties that confronted men like Toland – the security of the Protestant succession, the defence of true liberties in Church and State, the triumph of reason over superstition, and the war against popish priestcraft – ultimately rested on the shoulders of Eugene and d'Hohendorf.

Entertaining Eugene and his entourage became the focus of social life in London from January to March 1712. One contemporary commented, 'the mobb are so fond of Prince Eugen that his coach can hardly goe about'.³ While Tory politicians did their best to compromise the diplomatic processes and the prince's public repute by blocking meetings and using the press to cast hostile aspersions, London's elite fell over themselves to entertain Eugene. As

Nicholas Tindal put it, 'multitudes of people crowded to see him, and with loud declarations attended him wherever he went'. Although Jacobite plotters endeavoured to rouse a 'rude rabble' to protest against the mission, 'for two whole months, the nobility and gentry of both parties vied with one another, who should entertain him'. Tory nobles like Lord Dartmouth snubbed Eugene. Plans for a lavish civic entertainment by the Mayor and Aldermen were spiked over issues of protocol 'to the great disappointment and mortification of most of the citizens'.⁴ The many public demonstrations of support – bonfires, bells and 'illuminations' – were supplemented with dances, balls and 'drawing rooms' in the houses of the great and the good. Behind all of this public entertainment lay a deadly serious shadow play between Eugene and Harley through the medium of Hohendorf who acted as a covert messenger carrying memoranda back and forth. The public sociability that Eugene undertook – visiting the House of Lords, dining numerous times in public, attending the opera and dances, giving his own 'leveés', and having audiences with the Queen (on her birthday she presented him with 'a sword sett with diamonds') – was an instrument for the propagation of the political programme he supported.⁵ Eugene had a notorious distaste for the rigid Anglicanism of the Tories, dismissing Tory ministers like Harcourt, Poulett, Dartmouth and St John, as 'reputed bigots to the Church ... brought into the administration as a demonstration to the world that the interest of the Church and the safety of the State are preferred before any private ends, and to rescue both out of the claws of anarchical, atheistical, antimonarchical Whigs, as they are generally called'.⁶ It was precisely this quality of man – atheistic and antimonarchical – with whom Eugene associated in private.

Toland had been in contact with Eugene since 1709. The earliest work he had sent the prince and his adjutant d'Hohendorf, was the irreligious account of the *Gospel of Barnabas*, which became the basis for *Nazarenus* (1718), one of his most radical public works. Other manuscripts dealt with subjects like cosmology and physics, the life and thought of Giordano Bruno, and on the reputations of Cicero and Moses. As correspondence between d'Hohendorf and Toland indicates, their relationship was defined by a common interest in heterodoxy and clandestine writings. Hohendorf, again as his correspondence with other radical figures indicates, often acted on behalf of Eugene in the pursuit of 'dangerous books'. On the visit to London both men were reported to have used Christopher Bateman's bookshop, also frequented by intimates of theirs like Anthony Collins. So while Eugene and Hohendorf were embroiled in careful and intense negotiations over the future shape of world diplomacy, they were also trawling London's bookshops and leafing through clandestine literature. Toland's intimacy with these men was remarkable: it is evidence of the dimensions of his intellectual connections and consequent political significance. Added to his connections with Sophia and Hanover, as

Conclusion

well as with leading Whig politicians, it is possible to suggest that Toland in the 1700s (and especially after 1710) had access to the key people who shaped the major developments in national politics. Enlightenment politics in England, at least, were being conducted right at the heart of the Whig establishment.

As this book has established, English political culture was in crisis after 1689 – the challenge that Toland (and his milieu) posed to religious commonplaces were not simply philosophical issues, but fundamentally linked to the power of contemporary civic and ecclesiastical institutions. Toland's cultural significance was determined not simply by the intelligence and acuity of his ideas, but by the fact that they were circulated in concert amongst the political elite and a wider public audience. Toland aimed not just to storm heaven, but to capture the citadels of political authority. In his example we can see how ideas worked in the period. Far from being detached intellectual exercises, the evidence of the composition, circulation and reception of his texts shows that ideas could have serious instrumental purchase in political life. One man and his pen – with the right support in powerful places – really could make a difference.

Toland's affinity with men like Eugene illustrates the role his ideas played in the elite circles of early eighteenth-century European politics. It also indicates how receptive political and intellectual culture in the period was to the cultural intent of such ideas. Toland's example is both a symptom and a cause of the cultural conflict of the period. Fragments of evidence show how Toland's participation in an elite sociability was a means for insinuating his ideas into the minds of the great and good. This was most definitely enlightenment from above rather than from below. This offers a different model of 'Enlightenment' than the one commonly advanced which still emphasises the intellectual influence of philosophic ideas. The more sophisticated account suggested by Robert Darnton argues that the radical culture of the French high enlightenment, was disseminated by the circulation of forbidden ideas 'under the cloak' in clandestine and discrete networks. These 'bestsellers' corroded traditional Christian and royal culture by delegitimising these institutions in discourses that formed public opinion.⁷ The print and scribal culture of England in the period examined here functioned with similar corrosive qualities. The difference was that the sort of anticlerical and heterodox ideas Toland promoted were central to the core debates in both the public and private sphere. Far from being marginal such ideas were both a currency of political debate and an instrument for creating cultural authority. The ideas that became powerful in France after the 1750s, were part of the mainstream of public political debate in England between 1690 and 1720.⁸ Toland used his intellectual capacity and writing to make friends and influence people. We can see this in the shared reading and marginal annotation with Molesworth, the

promises of novels to Sophia, and the use of manuscripts as tokens of love with unidentified noblewomen. In these transactions Toland exploited ideas to establish channels of communication. Although he died in relatively poor circumstances, he moved comfortably in more grand and privileged surroundings. Toland not only made ideas, he communicated and circulated them across political, social and cultural space.

Insight into Toland's awareness of the value of this sociability to the diffusion of ideas, can be read in his description of the 'humours and politicks' of Epsom (1711).⁹ Written in emulation of the classical eulogies to country retirement by Pliny, Toland described the routines and habits of his life both in London and in 'retirement' in the Surrey countryside. In these descriptions it is possible to imaginatively experience the different cultural spaces in which Toland's 'enlightenment' ideas were voiced. Public life in Epsom was diverse – the main tavern and coffee-house attracted all sorts of people 'by the conversation of those, who walk there, you wou'd fancy your self to be this minute on the Exchange, and the next minute at St. James; one while in an East-India factory or a West-India Plantation, and another while with the army in Flanders or on board the Fleet in the ocean'.¹⁰ No profession, trade or calling was absent, providing ample opportunity either for 'instruction or ... diversion'. Bowling greens, raffle shops, gaming tables supplemented the taverns, inns and coffee-houses as places of conversation and resort. Indeed the coffee-houses were the space for the display of 'social virtue' – they 'are equal'd by few, and exceeded by none, tho' I wish they may be imitated by all'.¹¹ Party distinctions, borne with honour in London, were set aside in Epsom. Even differences in religious identity did 'not ruffle men's tempers by irreligious wrangling'. Priests and politicians, who 'industriously propagate discord and humanity', were cursed. In 'plain terms', he wrote, 'we are not so fond of any set of notions, as to think 'em more important than the peace of society'. Whether attending 'sumptuous banquets' or 'a genteel collation', the theme of life in Epsom was a blending of the exotic and luxurious from metropolitan London, with the 'most relishing dainty' of local produce. Toland was not then coy about the material benefits of mixing with the ruling gentry. Aristocratic houses, public walks and private entertainments were natural haunts, where he got his business done. Although solitary at times – walking in the long groves at Woodcote conversing with himself, or at Box Hill 'that temple of nature' – or in more sociable company 'angling for trouts at Leatherhead, watching 'contending villagers' play cricket, following the hounds or racing horses, Toland participated in a variety of companionable forms of elite life, whether in London or Surrey. Ideas were the staple of his contributions to these encounters.

Although sociable, Toland also liked a quiet life. He had a preference for 'retirement' rather than solitude, and 'so would have it in my power to be

Conclusion

alone or in company at pleasure'.¹² The proximity of Epsom to London meant he could do both, be back at the centre of power within two or three hours, or keep in touch by means of the frequently visiting stage coaches and daily post. Toland described a social life driven by his own perception of the demands of conversation or retirement. His own desires were modest – 'let me have Books and Bread enough without dependence, a bottle of Hermitage and a plate of Olives for a select friend'. This 'luxurious tranquillity' was to be preferred to the anxieties and corruptions of those that sought out inglorious titles and preferment. Meeting the nine muses in 'every lawn and every grove, in every shady bower and solitary glade', he was as likely to encounter Minerva as Diana. The picture of Toland, ever ready with 'a pocket book and a pencil' to record any ideas that may have occurred to him during all the various entertainments, is testimony to his pursuit of the life of the mind. In hyperbolic terms he composed a celebration of the natural charms of his country retreat, 'far more pleasant than the well known Courts of Princes'. Tired with sport or study 'and sleeping on the grass under a spreading chestnut beech. I enjoy not a more solid and secure repose, than the proudest monarch in his gilded Palace'. These retirements had intellectual purpose: as he described, on his wanderings he always had 'a book in my hand or in my head' with a design of 'returning more entertaining to private conversation, or more serviceable to publick society'.¹³ The duality of intention – entertainment and instructive service – is an apt summary of how Toland's intimacy with the powerful allowed the circulation of his ideas. Ideas were the currency of sociability and entertainment, but also for brokering radical belief amongst a powerful community.

Evidence of the connection between ideas, elite sociability and entertainment can be seen in the example of perhaps his most enigmatic work – *Pantheisticon*, printed and circulated in 1720. The work has generated enormous interest amongst historians of clandestine philosophy but its significance is to be found as much in its role in creating a pan-European community of readers, as in its intellectual components. Written in Latin, it consists of three parts – a dissertation on the infinite nature of the universe, a liturgy used by a society of 'pantheists', and a discussion of the 'two-fold' philosophy of the pantheists incorporating a short work on 'de viri optimi & ornatissimi'. The intellectual sources and significance of these dissertations are complex and still controversial. The account of natural philosophy that starts the work is difficult and perplexing – the overwhelming intellectual influences have been attributed to Lucretius, Giordano Bruno, Spinoza and Newton. An extension of the discussion raised in *Letters to Serena*, the ideas are materialist and heterodox in their account of the relationship between matter and motion, the nature of time and intellect. But discussions of astronomy, anatomy, the nature of

latitude and longitude, as well as the climate and cell biology are also evident. It is clear that the arguments are derived from eclectic sources – Lucretius, Hippocrates, Copernicus are just a few of the works cited. The readership for this sort of material would have to be erudite and well-informed.

The second substantial part of the work is much more reader friendly being a ‘*formulae celebranda sodalitatit socraticae*’. This included a three-part celebration of pantheistical principles of morality, philosophy and liberty. Conducted as a series of responses between a President and his companions, friends and brothers of the society, the description mirrors the symposia of antiquity rather than any more obviously Masonic ritual. Celebrating ‘the coming together and conversation of friends’, much of the ceremonial language derives explicitly from the works of Cicero, underscoring the notions ‘that we might live pleasantly, and die peaceably ... free from all fears, neither elated by joy, nor depressed by sadness, we might always retain an unshaken constancy’.¹⁴ If parts one and two developed a stoic approach to questions of religion, and applauded the classical defence of moral philosophy (‘to lead a happy life virtue alone is sufficient, and is itself an ample reward’), the final section advanced a republican defence of the converging benefits of political and intellectual liberty enshrined in the rule of ‘right reason’.¹⁵ Toland proudly acknowledged ‘we are willing to be brought up, and govern’d by this law, not by the lying, and superstitious fictions of men’.¹⁶ Firmly premised both on the ideas and explicit extracts from Cicero’s key works (especially *de republica*, *de legibus*, *de natura deorum* and *de divinatione*) the central point of the work was to ‘study the safety of the republick and the common good of mankind’.¹⁷ Importantly the book asserted the necessary connection between reason and politics; cultivating reason meant both understanding the place of humanity in the wider context of the universe but also providing a platform for true liberty: true knowledge of nature would liberate the mind from the dark shadows of superstition and consequently dissolve the grounds of political tyranny. The society was a defender not only of the ‘liberty of thought, but also of action, detesting at the same time, all licentiousness, and are sworn enemies of all Tyrants, whether despotic monarchs, or domineering nobles, or factious Mob-leaders’.¹⁸

This was then, a serious and profound book. It was also entertaining. Citing the aphorism that ‘mirth is the characteristic of a freeman, sadness that of the slave’, *Pantheisticon* took delight in stressing the elegant, pure and simple pleasure indulged in at their meetings. Explicitly modelled on the Greek *symposia* or the *suffitia* of the Spartans, the pantheistical ‘banquets’ were designed to ‘bring together friends and relish the sweets of conversation’ under the common government of reason. As ‘the bottle is in common to all, so is the discourse’: the society ‘bigotted to no one’s opinion, nor lead aside by Education or custom, nor subservient to the Religion and Laws of their

Conclusion

country; they freely and impartially, in the silence of all prejudices, and with the greatest sedateness of Mind, discuss and bring to a scrutiny all things, as well sacred (as the saying is) as profane'.¹⁹ 'Serious amusement' seems to have been the purpose of the work.²⁰ Exploring the origins and circulation of the text will indicate how the text may have been read in the sort of circles around Eugene and in Epsom described above.

Although printed in 1720 at 'Cosmopoli' the origins of the work may lie directly in the contacts between Toland and the Eugene circle in 1711–12. As has already been noted, Toland was in correspondence with these men from 1709, probably having access to both d'Hohendorf's and Eugene's library collections in Vienna from this date. He certainly inscribed a dedication to Eugene in a copy of his own *Adeisidaemon* in 1709.²¹ By 1710 he was supplying both men with clandestine works. Towards the end of 1712 he dedicated his elegantly printed prospectus for a modern edition of Cicero's works to both men, perhaps trying to reinforce in public his association with their pro-Hanoverian political agenda. During their diplomatic mission in London the only evidence of contact with Toland is the singular letter between him and Hohendorf, dated 7 March 1712. The main part of the letter is a learned discussion of sources related to Toland's ongoing history of scriptural apocrypha. Appended to the letter is reference to a 'formula, sive liturgica philosophica' that was not yet transcribed but would probably be sent in the next post.²² At this stage the work may have simply been the section that would form part two of the printed volume. Like many of his other works, Toland constantly refined and updated his writing, expanding the contents over the next eight years.

If the origins of the work lie in this rather obscure scribal exchange, the printed versions are also enigmatic. Published in two different (but lexically similar) versions possibly by different printing houses (certainly on paper with different water-marks) one copy had elegant rubric and ornamentation, while the other (whilst containing some decoration) was a plainer copy.²³ The more ornate copy contained a number of sophisticated emblem-ornaments that reflected some of the themes of the text. It seems likely that the engraver Francis Hoffman was responsible for the decorations in at least one of these versions, which suggests the work was produced in England rather than the Netherlands. Certainly one of the emblems was used in an edition of Lucretius' *de rerum natura* published by Jacob Tonson in 1713 and edited by Michael Maittaire.²⁴ Toland's involvement in the work, which was printed, but not published in the conventional sense, was shadowy. Continental journalists were convinced they had identified his hand in the work, but it seems likely that rather than distributing the work publicly, that Toland sent copies to specific individuals, sometimes with additional scribal comments. Certainly after the print versions were distributed there was a thriving afterlife of scribal editions of the work both in Latin and in French. One manuscript indicated a

provenance for the work, suggesting that there had only been fifty copies produced at a price of 50 guineas. Written originally for 'une société choisie des plus beaux Esprits et des plus grands Seigneurs de la Cour de Londres', a copy had been given to the Duc d'Orlean regent of France, by the English ambassador, John Dalrymple. This scribal copy was made immediately in the course of one night for distribution.²⁵ Here we have a fragment of evidence for both the audience and forms of circulation of this sort of work. Toland's preferred audience was elite rather than public.

Toland's archive shows that copies were sent to some of his more adventurous friends in England. One letter, written by Toland from Anthony Collin's estate at Baddow Hall in October 1720 to Barnham Goode in London replied to inquiries made by Mr Ingram about passages in *Pantheisticon*. In this letter a glimpse of the geographical and social network made by the circulation of the work is apparent. Toland revealed that he had deliberately left a hint of his authorship in the name used in the preface of the work. 'Janus Junius Eoganesius', was derived from a combination of his original Christian name and the Latin name for where he was born: as he explained it 'serves as good a cover as any I cou'd feign or invent'. Toland begged the two men to 'keep this foolery to your self ... since I hope it will be a long time, before it can be of use to any other'.²⁶ He noted that while he was willing to have his 'doctrines scann'd during my life' for either instruction or diversion, he was not keen to have 'critical descants on my name'. Content to let his friends in on the secret, Toland was concerned to keep both the text, and his authorship, out of a wider public view.

Convincing the powerful of the value of his ideas was a central part of his politics: getting them to read his books was imperative. Making the books entertaining, palming them off in salons and sending them as gifts to princes, ambassadors and regents was the starting point for his political strategy. Such books were intended to have an effect on national policy through convincing the influential figures of the time, rather than having a more historically nebulous 'influence' on public opinion.

Toland's role in the distribution of ideas amongst this European elite shows a very different model of cultural diffusion than is commonly proposed. This was no covert, marginal, radical figure, but an individual comfortable with social and political hierarchy who aimed to use his position to achieve reform, rather than to overthrow order. One of the central themes of recent accounts of parliamentary politics in the first three decades of the eighteenth century has been the importance of the social context of political management. The routines of political action were achieved by negotiating access to the Court and the Queen in the 1700s, or by being part of the networks of dining rooms, private houses and inns and coffee-houses, that co-ordinated parliamentary business in both the Houses of Commons and Lords. A

Conclusion

descending hierarchy of meetings from county houses, to London town houses, to dining-clubs and regular coffee-house societies were venues where policy was formulated co-ordinated and disseminated. By communicating with figures near the apex of this social network, Toland was able to insinuate his ideas at an effective point in the chain of command.²⁷

Toland was not just a *philosophe* devoted to enlightening the rich and powerful, but also a public author of considerable reputation and skill. While committed to persuading the powerful and elite, making the public rational and free, was also a central part of his project from the earliest moment in his career in the 1690s. This was the point of his involvement in politics. Indeed one of the intentions of this work has been to underscore the practical and public dimension of his polemic. Unlike some accounts of ‘Enlightenment’ ideas that have emphasised the philosophical and intellectual achievements of authors (detached from their milieu or context), this study has established how entrenched Toland’s project was in the everyday conflicts of political life. Writing in the late 1690s, Toland asserted that ‘To employ one’s thoughts on what he pleases, and to speak as freely as he thinks, is the greatest advantage of living in a free government’.²⁸ Although he never completed his full-blown history of republican traditions (*Brutus, or the history of Liberty and Tyranny*²⁹) from the 1690s to the 1720s he was committed to the promotion of an authentic and politically engaged republicanism. Whether writing on behalf of Shaftesbury, Harley, Molesworth or the Electress of Hanover, Toland was unswerving in this commitment to liberty and free government. Although he built his ideas from the conceptual architecture of ancient and early modern discourses, Toland was not simply a conduit for the rehearsal of an earlier tradition of thought. His role was that of adaptation, adjustment and engagement. By detaching the political theory of the writings of Milton and Harrington from the question of the nature of monarchy, Toland made the texts functional for the central ideological conflicts of the 1700s. Free government was defined less by the relationship between monarchy and parliament, than by the quality of civic and religious freedom. For Toland, the unprejudiced, non-dependent, rational exercise of human intellect in the cause of the common good was possible in a regime governed by the limited and regulated monarchy of the post-1689 polity. Here was a form of republican thinking that had practical purposes, and was unanchored from the straightforward issue of ‘monarchical’ government.

Following in the republican footsteps of Milton’s *Areopagitica*, Toland underlined his commitment to the liberty of public reason in *A letter to a member of Parliament* (1698). Written in the context of debates about the lapse of the Licensing Act and the parliamentary discussion of a ‘blasphemy’ act, the tract identified the *esse* of humanity in its rational agency. The language of

Lockean 'reasonableness' was entangled with a republican vocabulary of tyranny and slavery. It was man's duty to use reason to judge of the truth and falsehood of beliefs and propositions; it was also the communal duty of each individual 'to inform each other in those propositions they apprehend to be true'. Men had, then, 'the same right to communicate their thoughts, as to think themselves'. While priestcraft dominated contemporary Rome, the city of antiquity had celebrated such freedom: there 'to think on what one had a mind to, and to speak one's thought as freely as to think them, was looked on as one of the chief blessings of a free government'. For Toland, the issue of the liberty of the press was a question of 'whether we ought to be free, or slaves in our understandings'. The role of the clergy (of all confessions) had been to impose upon the consciences and reason of the people. Protestant churchmen had been as deviant as Catholics: the question of the legitimacy of belief was not determined by standards of truth, but by sincerity of commitment to rational enquiry. Restraint of the liberty of thought and expression was not simply a religious crime but had dangerous civil consequences. Ignorance destroyed 'the English nation and enslave[d] the Nation'. The baneful influence of sacerdotal slavery corroded civil society for 'when men are once enslaved in their understandings (which of all things ought to be most free) it's scarce possible to preserve any other liberty'. Priestcraft and slavery went hand in hand, so 'there never was a nation which lost their religious rights that could long maintain their civil ones'. The endorsement of arbitrary and absolute notions of divine right monarchy from the pulpits throughout the Restoration had tarnished true notions of government. Securing the liberty of the press would 'in all probability, secure all other liberty'.³⁰ The press was to be a rational engine for the manufacture of public opinion.

The adjustments made over the course of Toland's life in his practical commitment to the printing press as an agent of intellectual reform can also be seen in his scribal *A project of a journal* composed about 1704. Intended to be published weekly, to advance the 'beauty, harmony, and reasonableness of Virtue', Toland saw the role of such a paper as supplementing the ambitions of the magistrate and legislators in cultivating a civil society. To be 'published to the world' on Wednesdays (the day most suitable 'because most people are in town') the paper was to be instructive and entertaining. The content of the paper was to follow this principle of public utility, but chiefly 'the moral virtues, remarkable passages of History, philosophical disquisitions, and the detection of popular errors'. Although Toland intended to extract materials from a variety of 'antient and modern, foreign and domestick books' he was insistent that no one should 'imagine that this will be a work above his sphere or capacity'. The work was calculated for 'the good of all' and especially the 'ladies'. Detailing the typographical layout, the continuous pagination and the indexing system, Toland was anxious to make the work accessible and useful

Conclusion

for a variety of readers 'because they have no trouble in reading the Book by parts, which would deter them in one volume'. The journal was to be above faction and party but to serve the 'Publick and the Government' by rendering the people 'wise and vertuous'. The projected journal was to accomplish the philosophical ambitions of Cicero: it was to be a guide to life, a reformation of understanding and manners just like the *acta diurna* of ancient Rome.³¹ Toland had ambitions then both 'within and without doors'. It is no surprise then that the true Whig journals of the later 1710s and early 1720s produced exactly this sort of discourse – republican and anticlerical – for a broad public audience.

Evidence from Toland's own publishing career suggests that he was well aware of the dangers of censorship and persecution. It is important to note however that Toland's commitment to freedom of the press was, like his commitment to republican liberty in general, a regulated conception rather than one of pure licence. This can be most simply demonstrated in his memorial 'Proposal for regulating ye news-papers' composed about 1717 (probably for Robert Molesworth). In one sense the proposal is indicative of the changed political circumstances that were in operation after 1714. In the early 1700s Toland was intimately engaged in opposition polemic against Tories, renegade Whigs and corrupt churchmen; after 1714 Toland was writing from a less defensive position given his intimacy with the Whig regime. 'It becomes every day more and more necessary, to put the public newspapers under some better regulation' to protect the King's reputation and person and the revenues of the government. Toland acknowledged the seeming contradiction of calling for regulation since he could 'truly say yt no man in the world is more zealous than myself' for the liberty of the press, but 'I would not have the Liberty of writeing turn'd into licentiousness, no more than any other liberty'.³²

The circulation of seditious insinuations under the title of news needed supervision. The fact that 'papists, non-jurors or other disaffected persons' were in general the authors of such works made the need for regulation even more pressing; such works 'being industriously calculated for the taste of the mob, contribute more perhaps than all other artifices to poison the minds of the people against his majesty, to vilify his ministers & disturb the public peace, to the scandal of all good government'. Toland's draft act defined the parameters of regulation, taxation and penalties with precision. In his concluding remarks, Toland returned to the issue of the sacred liberty of the press: his measure was not intended as an encroachment but merely a regulation that would stop the nation 'running to an anarchy'. The point to make here is an important one for understanding the nature of Toland's republicanism. Liberty was not licence, the promotion of republican conceptions of government was radical, not because it advanced a 'modern' or democratic account of political society, but because it challenged the commonplaces of divine right

discourses. For Toland, subscription to principles of a virtuous regulation of the press was as acceptable as advancing the legitimacy of a limited monarchy: these convictions were not compromises of an earlier authentic republican discourse but the application of core principles to the pragmatics of political context. As he noted in a later work, 'we are servants of the law, that we may be free'.³³

For Toland the task of citizens was to free themselves from the corruption of passion, ambition and envy by the pursuit of reason.³⁴ Human beings were fundamentally sociable creatures who formed themselves into communities for mutual support. Promoting the cause of 'true and never deceiving reason' was a fundamental political duty.³⁵ Toland's commitment to the publication and propagation of a republican tradition, suggests that far from becoming a marginal and ineffective political discourse after 1689, it was still a vibrant and potentially effective political option. This political ideology brought him into a political intimacy with leading figures like Harley, Shaftesbury and Molesworth, but also took him as far as the court at Hanover. Fundamental to Toland's reinvention of republican politics was an emphasis upon the religious underpinnings of the tradition. A theory of religious liberty was elemental. This republicanism concerned itself almost exclusively with the relationship between the freedom of subjects and the powers of the Church. One of the political conditions necessary for the establishment of civil liberty was liberty of thought. By consequence the relationship between the Church and State, and between Church and laity were as significant as that between subject and monarch because of the republican emphasis upon the relationship between reason and citizenship. Liberty was not simply a political category but had a religious and rational context too. 'Liberty' was not only the unconstrained exercise of a bundle of civil rights, but for Toland and his circle included both *libertas philosophandi*, as well as the more narrow conception of the liberty of religious expression and worship. This dimension of republican thinking has not been explored with any serious intent by current historiography, which may account for the general impression that eighteenth-century republicanism was both insipid and derivative.

Republican ambitions were vital for Toland. He was also convinced that such aspirations were more than idle dreams. The immediate and pressing point to underscore was the connection between the attack on tyranny and the corrupting function of the Church. Fundamental to Toland's perception of the problem with contemporary politics was not simply a default case against the institution of monarchy, but a hostility to tyrannous government inspired by the passionate self-interest, not just of princes, but of priests too. Importantly, this meant that Toland (and others in his circle) was able to detach regicidal aspirations from his political agenda. Unlike the battle of the free and rational

Conclusion

Englishman against the Stuarts before 1689, the battle he saw himself engaged in was not so much against an actively deviant monarchy, but against the incipient potential for corruption of the current system of governance by 'wicked Levites'. All princes were latent tyrants, but this dormant form was habitually only cultivated by the corrupt 'pulpit stuff' of clergymen.³⁶ The war against tyranny then was fought on the front-line of theological discourses.

The dominance of *de jure divino* discourses, which legitimated both monarchical and ecclesiastical institutions, meant that, almost by default, the starting point for thinking and writing about political power was theological and ecclesiological rather than civic or jurisprudential. 'The power of Kings' was first and foremost a sacred discourse: in terms of corroding the affective power of this discourse, the starting point was divine.³⁷ Republican writers then, were engaged as much in a theological debate as a civil controversy. After 1689 ecclesiological issues were most manifest in the central issue of toleration. Despite men like Locke attempting to make a firm distinction between political theory and claims of conscience, for most in the political elite (in particular those involved in parliamentary politics and successive national administrations) the inter-related questions of the security of the established Protestant church and its rights of jurisdiction (and coercion) over the laity were fundamental. It was impossible to critique the nature of the monarchy without drawing implications for the status and authority of the Church, or the rights and duties of subjects or citizens. As we have seen, it was no accident that contemporaries vilified Toland both as a commonwealthman and a heresiarch. Like Spinoza, Toland saw republicanism as fundamentally an ecclesiological discourse.

The evidence of Toland's emphasis upon the liberty of reason and the defence of the regulated rule of the Hanoverian monarchy poses some difficulties for the claim that republicanism in the strict sense was only characterised by hostility to the institution of monarchy. His example shows it was both possible and practical to develop a theory of liberty which was compatible with regulated forms of monarchical government. Moreover it also establishes that it was practicable to fashion this political theory out of the canonical writings of Harrington, Milton and Sidney. Certainly no one in the late 1690s was more familiar with these authentic republican writings than Toland. After 1689, most politicians abandoned a regicidal agenda. Resistance against the tyranny of the Stuarts was most effectively undertaken after 1700, by a defence of the legitimate claims of the Hanoverian monarchy. 'Tyranny' rather than simply monarchical government became the focus of criticism. The most pernicious agent of tyranny in post-revolutionary England was the Church. Erastian defences of regal supremacy became (ironically) a fundamental weapon in the war against priestcraft. This was why, for example, Thomas Hobbes's writings, despite their perceived absolutist tendencies, persisted in being so popular

amongst freethinking circles. Liberty could only be built on public reason rather than superstitious prejudice. Following Hobbes and Spinoza, Toland argued that the vulgar were incapable of rational conduct because they had been led astray by the corrupting influence of the Church. Since priestcraft made people ignorant, the attack upon it became a key part of a practical political agenda. A consequence of this was that Parliament and nobility, as bearers of reason and virtue, were the best agencies of republican reform.

Late seventeenth-century republicans shared the view with their earlier sources that loss of liberty reduced both the individual and the state to the condition of slavery. Importantly for Toland, and many of his circle, it was not just the subjection of the body that created slavery, but also that of the mind. Dependence and corruption was not simply a physical condition, but fundamentally a mental state: any institution that hindered such liberty was corrupt. The claims of the Church to 'independent' (sacerdotal) jurisdiction or authority over the laity made an elemental challenge to republican understandings of the consensual origins and function of government. Both Hobbes and Harrington were consequently concerned to derive religious authority from popular sources, or at least civil sources. The constitutional anxieties of earlier republicans about the 'king's negative voice' could easily be matched by the alarm about the clerical claims for the constitutional authority of Convocation in the 1690s. The hostility to the 'flattering clergy and courtiers' was profound in the 1650s: by the 1700s it was the overwhelming focus of republican disquiet. The continuity of such concerns can perhaps best be explored in the repeated importance of the attack upon the *Eikon Basilike* in the 1650s and 1690s: in the earlier period the focus of Milton's attack was against its misuse in civil tyranny, by 1698 Toland treated it as evidence of the conspiracies of priestcraft.³⁸

Toland's polemic was shot through with references to religious tyranny. The influence of self-interested priests, or persecuting and partial ecclesiastical law corroded all forms of liberty. Priesthood, by its claim to interpretative or sacramental authority was a form of tyranny over conscience that became reified into persecuting law. For Toland, the claim to be able to think for someone else was tyrannous. For those republicans living under a secure limited monarchy in the 1700s the immediate cause of dependence and corruption was not monarchy but priesthood. The republican critique of clericalism argued that the Church caused two forms of dependence: by epistemic claims (their ability to understand the 'truth') and by the imposition of sacramental tests, which was a more active form of coercion. Liberty then, for later seventeenth century republicans like Toland, was premised upon an assertion of the relationship between reason and human identity. To be a good human was to have rational autonomy and self-mastery, and to be bound by laws of one's own making, independent of both passion and external coercion. Arguing that 'reason' was an eternal pattern for virtue, by necessity implicated

Conclusion

the republican agenda in a war against a more traditional theological understanding of the relationship between human reason and sin. Sceptical of the human capacity for true knowledge, churchmen in the 1690s dismissed this veneration for reason as 'the vanity of fallen and darkened mankind'. As one critic of Molesworth's *Account* insisted, if mankind was in a condition of slavery this was caused by human sin, rather than tyrannous governments. The 'specious pretence of the all-Atoning Freedom of the subject' was rebutted in favour of the arguments of obligation and 'prudential' restraint. That which the republicans called 'slavish and unintelligible' was true Christianity: obedience and the 'passive state' was not a 'state of slavery' but 'glorious liberty'. Human pride was the prompt for sedition, it 'filled men's hearts with coarse and sordid desire, and makes their heads swell with the wind of Fantastical doctrines about liberty, without a just restriction; till at length the Distemper or malignancy breaks out into a vain outcry against tyranny and slavish opinions'.³⁹

Almost by default, confronted with these theological definitions of the language of liberty, reason, and virtue, Toland felt compelled to engage with tyranny in all its forms: spiritual as well as civil. Unlike other neo-Roman theories of free states that were regarded as subversive because they attached a language of liberty to radical forms of representative government, the republicanism of Toland was elite and hierarchical. Its radicalism was found in the fact that it challenged fundamentally the traditional and dominant accounts of political authority that were built on theological foundations. The 'political' problem of tyranny could only be resolved by attention to religious issues. Toleration was the foundation of free citizenship. Toland's republicanism was not radical in either social or institutional ambition. His writings (drawing from Sidney's work) indicate a preference for the rule of an aristocracy of virtue: he did his best to mingle with such people. The high point of this 'aristocratic' republicanism can be seen in the constitutional proposals enshrined in the Peerage Bill of 1719, where the conceptual assertion 'that it is only possible to be free in a free state' was deployed as a justification for reinforcing the independence of the Lords. As many contemporaries noted, this was not a radical form of representative government.⁴⁰

Working close to the heart of the political machine Toland's ambitions were to overturn the cultural system of superstition by compromising the theological structures that underpinned 'tyranny'. As a good republican, the keywords in his political vocabulary were the trinity of virtue, liberty and reason. Although he was concerned with the nature of political institutions, the thrust of his understanding of republican politics was as a moral discourse: making men free, rational and virtuous. By default the promotion of these ambitions projected him into a full-frontal assault upon the enduring structures of

theological and ecclesiastical authority. If man was to be free, his soul had to be unshackled from the dominance of priestcraft. Politics necessarily involved contesting the social power of the Church and the cultural practices that legitimised that authority. Anticlericalism was as much a political as a religious discourse. Toland's intention was both to explain, and change, the world he lived in. Assessing the practical power of his discourses is a complex matter. Certainly his challenge to the cultural shibboleths of the established orthodoxy – both monarch and priest – was regarded as deeply subversive by contemporaries.

Reconfiguring the content and political viability of republican tradition was a significant achievement. There is no doubt that contemporaries in England, and on the continent, saw Toland as a dangerous, powerful and well-connected figure. There was little ambiguity about his reputation as a freethinker, absolutely hostile to the culture and authority of the established religion. Whether he had a long-lasting impact on the vitality of this Christian culture is still a matter of considerable debate. Certainly his ideas and scholarship had a persistence beyond the time and communities he wrote for. Contemporaries were profoundly anxious about his insidious influence both on public attitudes and political policy. A man who argued that atheists might be good subjects challenged the shibboleths of Christian society. Churchmen worried about two elements in his writing – the attack upon Revelation, and the promotion of republican political theory. These irreligious discourses were connected in denying a *de jure divino* authority for both Church and State.

The historiographical treatment of Toland has often made a distinction between the theological and political dimensions of his thought and polemic. The intention of this work has been to argue that they were inherently intertwined projects. Toland had (in Spinoza's vocabulary) 'theologico-political' objectives. The political, theological and cultural arguments that Toland articulated, were all part of an entrenched war against priestcraft. Unlike many other accounts of Toland which place him either at the radical margins of political society, or just caught within the carapace of Christianity, this work argues that he operated right at the core of a powerful political elite. This intimacy with the influential created a platform for the development of a series of public discourses aimed at persuading a broader audience. Toland's objectives were transformative in the sense that he wished to change the habitual structures of Christian culture. Although labelled a 'deist', 'freethinker', even 'atheist', none of these words fully captures either his strategy or character. Although he loudly proclaimed the sovereignty of reason, and indeed of the people, he was more than a simple rationalist, and certainly no democrat.

As this work has suggested, the intellectual origins of Toland's project are not easy to pin down. In many of his writings he appropriated, adapted and tuned contemporary (sometimes very pious) works to his own purpose. Plun-

Conclusion

dering orthodox clerical scholarship on patristic and scriptural texts, or the antiquarian researches of Godly men, or even the writings of John Locke, Jean Leclerc and other people he had some friendship with, Toland was able to recycle ideas with facility. His innovation was to compromise cultural authority by exposing the conventional foundations of such knowledge. His function was viral; it set the immune system of orthodox culture against itself. Many contemporaries were convinced that Toland was merely a conduit for an older subversive tradition represented by the materialism of Hobbes or Spinoza, or even Lucretius and the ancients. It is possible to identify elements in his writings lifted from all these people and more – Hobbes, Spinoza, Herbert of Cherbury, Milton, Blount, Bekker, Van Dale, Simon, Livy, Cicero, Lucretius – to name but a few. But influence spotting will not unlock the secret of Toland's identity.

A frequent accusation, echoed by modern historians, was that Toland merely vulgarised the more complex and innovative ideas of the most philosophically original of thinkers: Benedict Spinoza. Nicknamed 'Tractatus Theologico-Politicus' and 'Spinoza in abstract' Toland was closely identified by contemporaries as a man who was, as one critic put it, 'Genuinus Spinozae pullus'.⁴¹ As his writings show, Toland was certainly familiar with Spinoza's writings (both the *Ethics* and the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*), but it would be inaccurate to suggest he was simply derivative of this source. Where Spinoza's work was clandestine, Toland's was public. Where Spinoza was prosecuted and his works proscribed, Toland wrote for Queens and Princes. Where Spinoza had a rigorous and philosophically robust metaphysical system, Toland was eclectic, ludic and erudite.

Toland undoubtedly developed key approaches evident in Spinoza's works. The general influence of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (1670), which was available in English translation after 1689, pervades Toland's methodology and political thought. Toland's application of historical criticism, to both Scripture and patristic sources, was undoubtedly inspired by Spinoza's writing on the ideas of revelation and canon. The connections between virtue, liberty and a materialistic metaphysics evident in *Pantheisticon* (1720) show Toland thinking through the arguments linking republican politics and the rule of reason made by Spinoza in the second half of the *Tractatus*. The influence of Spinoza should not be overstated however. In making these arguments, Toland used more sources than simply Spinoza. Toland's unique skill was his eclecticism, binding together a wide variety of different types of writing – orthodox and impious, scholarly and popular, Christian and Judaic, literary and antiquarian.

While Spinoza's writings do provide a useful device for understanding the distinctive nature of Toland's intellectual and political republicanism, they do not explain it all. Toland's war against prejudice was a war against tyranny in the mind and in society. In the first instance, it was a specifically English

campaign: its most obvious targets were intolerant churchmen. Theological prejudices were not only erroneous notions of revealed doctrine but also false political injunctions. While Spinoza gave a powerful example of how to combine a radical biblical criticism with a full defence of republican political institutions, there were also other sources for a defence of *libertas philosophandi* as the grounding of rational political liberty. Clearing away the undergrowth of false doctrine was an essential prerequisite for establishing the politics of virtue. Cultural criticism was then as essential to the war as political reform. While Jonathan Israel has powerfully reinstated the Dutch Enlightenment as a significant model for the radical assault upon Christian culture, the evidence presented here suggests that English society also had a notable role to play. Importantly the war of ideas in England was a battle for the minds of powerful men as well as the public, it was won by corroding religious certainties as much as by the positive affirmation of political principle. It was fought out, not just in clandestine circles, but in public: in aiming to convince the hearts and minds of the political elite, Toland hoped to capture control of powerful national institutions. In much of this Toland undoubtedly followed Spinoza. However, where Spinoza deployed his rabbinical learning in a single-minded account of the status of *Old Testament* scripture, Toland drew on a much wider range of erudition. Where Spinoza condensed republican political theory into a few chapters of commentary on the contemporary writing of people like Peter de la Court, Toland produced a massive canon of commonwealth writings, carefully made bespoke for contemporary purposes. Where Spinoza wrote in Latin and his posthumous ideas were circulated clandestinely, Toland used a full range of vernacular styles for both public and private polemic.

Toland (and by default the notion of an English Enlightenment) has been dismissed as a second-rate, isolated, marginal and mediocre figure, ultimately a failure because he was a man with no friends or adherents. Just as Toland was second-rate, isolated and derivative, so was the broader contribution of English thought to the cultural process of 'Enlightenment'.⁴² As this book has been at pains to show, nothing could be further from the truth. At his best Toland was completely original. At his most powerful he stood on the threshold of influence right at the centre of British politics. He had friends everywhere – in the Royal court, in the salons, in coffee-houses, universities and private houses all over England and throughout Europe. His case is also good evidence for rethinking the significance of this period of English history. That Toland operated at the heart of national politics, that he produced such works for public and private audiences, surely tells us much about the nature of English public culture in the period. Fundamental issues about the certainty of Revelation, the power and authority of the Church, the status of the monarchy, and the rights of conscience, were all part of the everyday business of public debate.

Conclusion

Ultimately, Toland won a few famous victories against theological prejudice, but he lost the war against priestcraft. In England at least, churchmen, although perhaps more polite, retained their social authority into the distant future. That he lost, is not the same as saying he was unimportant. While to claim too much for one man would be to fall into temptations of exaggeration, it is clear Toland acted as a broker and mouthpiece for a radical milieu that was fundamentally opposed to the orthodox confessional structures of political and cultural life. Toland worked furiously to design tracts that would convince many different audiences of the authority of his views – with people like Sophia of Hanover, Eugene of Savoy, Shaftesbury, Harley, Molesworth, Collins and Furlly listening, Toland always had the hope that his ideas would prompt national policy. Projecting the same ideas to the broader public community Toland intended to provide a context for the reception of this policy. Tragically, these ‘enlightened’ ambitions dribbled into the sand with the defeat of the commonwealth party by the more pragmatic Whiggism of Robert Walpole who recognised that the social power of the Established Church was a critical component of political hegemony. Toland did however leave a potent archive that became an important resource exploited by later ‘High’ Enlightenment assailants of irrationalism and superstition. We still live in a modernity shaped by this afterlife.

NOTES

- 1 See P. R. Sweet ‘Prince Eugene of Savoy and Central Europe’ *American Historical Review* 57 (1951) pp. 47–62. The best account of the background to this is E. Gregg *The Protestant succession in international politics, 1710–1716* (1986).
- 2 J. J. Cartwright (ed.) *The Wentworth papers 1705–1739* (1883) pp. 241–242.
- 3 *Ibid.* p. 244.
- 4 See N. Tindal *The continuation of Mr Rapin de Thoyras’s History of England* 2 volumes (1751) ii pp. 237–238; PRO SP 34/17/48.
- 5 *Wentworth papers* p. 247.
- 6 *Portland Mss V* ‘Characters by Prince Eugene’ pp. 156–158 at 157.
- 7 Darnton *The forbidden bestsellers of pre-revolutionary France* (1996), *passim*.
- 8 See J. A. I Champion “‘May the last king be strangled in the bowels of the last priest’: irreligion and the English Enlightenment, 1649–1789’ in T. Morton and N. Smith (eds) *Radicalism in British literary culture, 1650–1830* (Cambridge, 2002) pp. 29–44, 220–226.
- 9 See P. Lurbe ‘Epsom as emblem: John Toland’s *Description of Epsom*’ *Eighteenth Century Ireland* 9 (1994) pp. 129–136. For a broader consideration of the politics of sociability between provinces and city see, S. E. Whyman *Sociability and power in late-Stuart England: the cultural worlds of the Verneys 1660–1720* (Oxford, 1999).
- 10 *Collections* 2 p. 100.
- 11 *Ibid.* p. 105.

- 12 *Ibid.* p. 115.
- 13 *Ibid.* p. 118.
- 14 *Pantheisticon* (1751) pp. 66–67.
- 15 *Ibid.* p. 73.
- 16 *Ibid.* pp. 85–86.
- 17 *Ibid.* p. 100.
- 18 *Ibid.* p. 57.
- 19 *Ibid.* pp. 11–14, 58.
- 20 *Collections* 2 p. 92.
- 21 See Vienna ONB Autogr. 45/83–1.
- 22 BL 4295 fo. 20r.
- 23 See the comparison between the BL copies C 69.E.5 and 4015.a.20. Pierre Lurbe is undertaking a scholarly edition of both the manuscript and printed editions. I am grateful to him for sharing his ongoing research.
- 24 See G. Cherchi *Satira ed enigma dice saggi sul Pantheisticon di John Toland* (Lucca, 1985) p. 34; and *ibid.* ‘Atheism, dissimulation and Atomism in the philosophy of John Toland’ (Unpublished PhD, London, 1994) p. 87.
- 25 Nicastro (ed.) *Pantheisticon* p. 90.
- 26 BL Add Mss 4295 fos. 39–40.
- 27 C. Jones ‘The parliamentary organisation of the Whig Junto in the reign of Queen Anne: the evidence of Lord Ossulston’s Diary’ *Parliamentary History* 10 (1991) pp. 164–182. For a useful case-study see H. Snyder ‘Godolphin and Harley: a study of their partnership in politics’ *Huntingdon Library Quarterly* 30 (1966–67) pp. 241–271.
- 28 J. Toland *The Militia reform’d* (1698) p. 4. This phrase also occurs in *Pantheisticon* (1751) p. 108.
- 29 *Ibid.* p. 63.
- 30 J. Toland *A letter to a member of Parliament* (1698) pp. 3–5, 8, 11–12, 16–17, 21–22, 24, 26–27.
- 31 Toland ‘A project of a journal’ in *Collections* 2 pp. 202, 203, 205–206, 211–212, 213–214.
- 32 See BL Add Ms. 4295 f.49–50; also reproduced in L. Hanson *Government and the press 1697–1763* (Oxford, 1967) pp. 135–138.
- 33 *Pantheisticon* p. 84.
- 34 *Ibid.* pp. 1, 2, 3, 4.
- 35 *Ibid.* pp. 9, 11, 14, 57, 62.
- 36 See J. Toland *A defence of the parliament of 1640* (1698) preface p. 2–3 [unpaginated].
- 37 See P. Monod *The power of kings: monarchy and religion in Europe 1589–1715* (New Haven, 1999).
- 38 See Champion (ed.) *Nazarenus* ‘Introduction’ *passim*.
- 39 T. Rogers *Commonwealthsman unmasqu’d* (1694) pp. ii, 2, 62, 123, 148, 159.

Conclusion

- 40 See C. Brooks 'The debate on the Peerage Bill, 1719' in *Bicameralism: Tweekamerstel vroeger en nu* (eds) H. W. Blom, W. P. Blockmans and H. de Schepper (s-Gravenhage, 1992) pp. 261–277; C. Jones "'Venice preserv'd; or a plot discovered": the political and social context of the Peerage Bill of 1719' in C. Jones (ed.) *A pillar of the constitution* (1989) pp. 79–112.
- 41 Carabelli *Tolandiana* p. 95, Carabelli *Errata* p. 197.
- 42 See J. Israel *Radical Enlightenment* (Oxford, 2001) pp. 609–614, 627.