“The Plot Writ the Association”: Mary, Queen of Scots and Parallel Histories of the Protestant Association during the Exclusion Crisis, 1679-1681

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John Dryden’s translation of Louis Maimbourg’s *History of the League* (1685) is not what it first appears to be. Although ostensibly a history of the French politique victory over radical Protestantism during the French Wars of Religion, Dryden’s *History* offers a thinly disguised commentary on England’s troubles during the Exclusion Crisis (1679-1681). *The History of the League* was Dryden’s only significant work following his appointment as Royal Historiographer in 1683, and his translation speaks directly to the context in which he wrote. The rebellion against the French Crown in the sixteenth century provided Dryden with a parallel from which to castigate the parliamentary opposition (the Whigs), led by Anthony Ashley Cooper, the First Earl of Shaftesbury, as Calvinist radicals bent on the destruction of the church and the monarchy. The Wars of Religion were a sensitive subject for the reigning English monarch Charles II, who had blood in this fight. His grandfather, the French king Henry IV, was felled by a Catholic assassin’s blade in 1610. Using the extreme politics of militant Protestants and murderous Catholics aiming to overthrow the French state, Dryden’s *History* depicts an uneasy peace between the Whigs and the monarchy following the tumultuous Exclusion Crisis. As Dryden’s Dedication makes clear, the principal antagonists are the Whigs, and the Protestant Association—the “associators”—are the true enemies of church and state. Dryden states, “There [never was] a plainer Parallel than of the Troubles of France, and of Great Britain; of their Leagues, Covenants, Associations, and Ours . . . that is to say, 1584, and 1684 have but a Century and a Sea betwixt them, to be the same.”¹ One contemporary critic wrote, “the precedent of the Guises [leaders of the Catholic faction in France] was the most unhappiest parallel…. [They] were a bloody faction indeed, and design’d to overthrow of that monarchy, by the same means and measures your Associators do….”² The associators and the Catholic league are here depicted as moral and political equivalents, as both seek to undermine the foundations of the established church and destroy the monarchy through violent insurrection. These were men “of commonwealth principles” and “of a more obstinate nature than were those Leaguing Catholiques.”³

The Protestant Association in English historical thought played a prominent role in the debate over the succession, which polarized English politics...
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during the Exclusion Crisis. Historians have recently begun to take seriously the role that memory played in the seventeenth century, a period that witnessed a flowering of political and historical theorization by writers like John Locke, Algernon Sidney, and James Tyrell—writers that are traditionally seen as progenitors of modern liberal democratic tradition.4 Yet, with as much interest as these theorists have garnered, historians have paid relatively little attention to historical polemic produced in the era. Sixteenth-century history played a decisive role in shaping public opinion and perceptions of the crisis. Research in this period has only begun to more closely examine historical memory generally, and the “Protestant Association” in particular. Newton Key, for instance, has questioned whether historians ought not rethink the entire Exclusion Crisis as a crisis over the Association.5 Jacqueline Rose has situated the crisis over the succession in a long reformation context. Her work on the royal historian Robert Brady has emphasized some of the linkages between late seventeenth and sixteenth-century historical writing. This research has reconceptualized the intellectual history of the Restoration, where “politics, religion, and history were closely allied.”6

This article explores the uses of Elizabethan history during the Exclusion Crisis and argues that the Protestant Association was a key historical parallel from which to rally popular opinion and inform contemporary politics.7 Just as Dryden drew a parallel between Catholic assassination plots and the Association, parliamentary opposition used this Elizabethan parallel to justify parliamentary sovereignty and resistance to the “popish successor.” By claiming loyalty to the memory of Queen Elizabeth, opposition writers and parliamentarians could claim loyalty to the state. The persistence of the memory of the age of reformation shaped late seventeenth-century political behavior and perceptions of the crisis, and it provided historical remedies to the crisis that confronted contemporaries. The revival of the Protestant Association was a project of the Whigs, many of whom viewed their present through the lens of sixteenth-century history.8 This Association, based on Elizabethan precedent, underscores the anxieties and fears seventeenth-century Members of Parliament and polemicists had over the succession and the popish successor. It also, however, tells us about the possible solutions that contemporaries found in the Elizabethan past. Through an analysis of the Protestant Association, it is possible to examine the motivations and assumptions of the parliamentary classes, which guided political behavior in this period of political crisis.

Parallel Histories in the Exclusion Crisis

John Dryden stated a commonplace when he wrote:

[History] informs the understanding by the memory: It helps us judge of what will happen by showing us the like revolutions of former times. For mankind being the same of all ages, agitated by the same passions, and mov’d to

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action by the same interests, nothing can come to pass, but
the [precedent] of the like nature has already been produced,
so that having the causes before our eyes, we cannot easily
be deceived in the effects, if we have judgment enough but
to draw the parallel.  

Dryden’s historical methodology betrays a universalistic conception of
human history that is characteristic of late seventeenth-century polemic. Rooted
in Renaissance notions of the *magistra vitae* (history as the “teacher of life”),
Dryden’s assumption was that history could promote a deeper understanding of
the present. It is this conception of history and human nature that justifies its
deployment as a polemical weapon against the forces of parliamentary opposition.
If the present is a working out of timeless historical issues, a skilled historian could
solve present problems. As Dryden put it in his translation of *Plutarch’s Lives*,
“History is only the precepts of moral philosophy reduc’d into examples.”  
What I am calling “parallel histories,” in other words, were not simply academic exercises
in historical reconstruction but rather pointed to present circumstances. These
histories played a central role in Exclusion Crisis polemic because historians and
polemists conceived of the past as a prism through which to understand the
present and future. Parallel histories were often elaborate undertakings, making
connections between political and religious events and expounding on their
continued relevance.

As D.R. Woolf has argued, “early modern readers were not passive
receptacles of history but rather active directors of a dialogue involving both the
text at hand and the many other authors to which it could be related.” Polemists
and their audiences were each mediating between the past and the present. Since
the expiration of the Licensing Act in 1679, newspapers, pamphlets, and polemic
flooded the literary marketplace and informed the public— stoking fears of the
popish successor in the process. With literacy hovering at nearly one third of the
male English population and the proliferation of coffeehouses that provided a
public forum to exchange news and opinion, the press played a key role in shaping
the debate over the succession. In 1682, Roger L’Estrange, the arch Tory
polemist, press censor, and quasi-historian expressed these sentiments when he
stated, “Can anything be more prudential than for government which is sick of
the same disease under Charles II to make use of the same remedies that cured
the state under queen Elizabeth?” Elkanah Settle, a Whig and historical
polemist who wrote about revival of the Protestant Association based on the
Elizabethan precedent stated, “The [Popish] Plot writ the Association.” These
articulations of narrative, plot, and history underscore their importance in
providing the mental framework through which contemporaries understood their
present context.

Social scientists and memory theorists have likewise supported the idea
that memory is central to understandings of contemporary events. There has been
a recent explosion of “memory studies” as well as intense interest in early modern
scholarship focusing on historical memory. As William Bulman argues in the
context of seventeenth-century historical writing, “The ruminations of past politics
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[was] a form of political advice.” Christopher Hill notes, “A favorite method of political denigration within acceptable limits was to praise Queen Elizabeth—often excessively—in order by implication to criticize her successors.” To the Whigs, Elizabeth was most definitely a hero, “a non-Papist saint, or a goddess, a figure for a unanimous national identification with the true church.” The interstices of historical memory and the law have been particularly fruitful in the context of early polemic. History, after all, was a fundamental part of England’s common law tradition and, thus, provided the framework for how lawyers and parliamentarians conceived of English liberty. Fentress and Wickham have argued that legal history is a form of historical memory. As they explain, “writing not only freezes memory, but freezes memory in textual forms which evolve in ways quite unlike those of oral memory. The form and syntax of a legal document, whether from the twelfth century or the twentieth, reflect the syntax of other written documents. They are typically embedded in a complex of other texts.”

The intertextuality of histories of Mary and Elizabeth during the Exclusion Crisis and the legal history of the Protestant Association bear out this formulation by connecting England’s legal and political history to its contemporary one.

Elizabeth I, Mary, Queen of Scots, and the Protestant Association

The “Association” was a key feature of Exclusion Crisis polemic. Its “revival” was largely because Elizabeth’s struggles against her Catholic cousin, Mary, Queen of Scots, were seen as parallel to the succession crisis of Charles’ brother James, Duke of York—future James II (1685-1688). Just as parliamentarians and polemicists debated and produced histories and critical analyses of Elizabeth’s Treasons Act, the revival of the Association was a central aspect of the opposition’s justification for political resistance. Eliz Cap 1, the statute “for provision to be made for the Suertie of the Queens Majesties Royal Person,” codified the Oath of Association into law following an attempt on the Queen’s life. Elizabeth I and Mary provided a similar narrative of Catholic conspiracy prevalent in England since the revelation of the Popish Plot in the summer of 1678. Many considered Mary “the apparent popish successor,” a presumably legitimate but totally unsuitable successor to the throne of England. The succession of James, Duke of York and Mary, Queen of Scots were parallel in the English Protestant imagination because both were Catholic, and thus seen as threats to the church and state. The Duke of York and Mary were perceived to also be focal points of almost every Catholic conspiracy while they were alive. To contemporaries, the similarities could not have been more obvious.

Thus, polemicists and parliamentarians looked back to the sixteenth century for remedies for their political situation. John Trenchard, an exclusionist, speaking before the House of Commons during the Exclusion Crisis, declared “Mary, Queen of Scots, was first excluded by Queen Elizabeth and then passed the act of Association. Nothing can secure you more than that course.” Trenchard’s sentiment was also prevalent in the popular press. The radical Whig
Robert Ferguson was of a similar mind. To Ferguson, the parallel could not have been any more applicable to the present. As he put it, “An Association for the preservation of the king and Protestant religion if it be duly drawn, [can] contain nothing in it contrary to the rights and prerogatives of this majesty...Parliament and the liberties and property of the people. For our ancestors in Queen Elizabeth’s time...were in danger from Papists...they thereupon entered into an Association for the preservation of her majesties life.” Secretary Coventry spoke in favor of Elizabethan statutes in relation to the crisis: “The statutes of Queen Elizabeth...are of great moment. That of Q. Eliz [be] adapted to the present emergency only.” Both parliamentarians and polemics exploited the memory of the struggle between Mary, Queen of Scots and Elizabeth to justify the exclusion of and resistance to the Duke of York.

What made the conspiracies of Mary, Queen of Scots so immediately relevant were their similarities to the late seventeenth-century context. The anti-papery narrative of Mary was used to justify the exclusion of the Duke of York. Pamphlets were published throughout this period highlighting the similarities to great effect. Elizabethan popish plots figured prominently in the late seventeenth-century imagination. Throughout her reign, Elizabeth was subject to assassination plots on all sides of the religious and ideological spectrum. But in the context of the Exclusion Crisis, polemics focused laser-like on Mary’s conspiracy to assassinate Elizabeth and take the throne herself. Mary’s plot and the Popish Plot had eerily similar elements: the assassination of the ruling monarch followed by foreign invasion, and, ultimately, England’s reunion with Rome. The plan involved the two most powerful Catholic superpowers at the time: Spain and France. One contemporary drew a direct line from Mary’s execution in 1585 to the horrors of the Civil War, then to the Association. Northleigh wrote, “[Whigs] have represented, how violent the Parliament was against the succession of the Queen of Scots, with a cruel and emphatical malice, cry out—Nay, and against her life too. We know, my lord, the Parliament help’d the grand-mother to the block, and you saw another made the father stoop to it. But would you have your associated Baalites sacrifice the blood of the son too?” Polemics like Northleigh saw the crisis caused by the Association through the lens of sixteenth-century history.

To counter the Catholic threats to Elizabeth’s life, Elizabeth’s councilors devised an Association in 1584, which was the result of the unprecedented popular fears and hysteria caused by popery and the assassination plot. The purpose of the “Instrument of Association” was to unite the nation against the Catholic threat posed by Mary, Queen of Scots. When individuals signed the Association, they pledged to offer not simply their “lands and estates,” but their “lives” as well. There was a higher calling to it, to protect the Protestant nation, broadly conceived, against a popish successor. In an age in which politics and political participation were closed to the vast majority of freeholders, the Oath of Association was democratic by sixteenth-century standards. MPs took the Oath of Association in Parliament, binding the oath-taker to pursue “the aiders, abettors to the utmost extermination of them.” The subscribers of the Elizabethan Association pledged that should a popish successor—namely Mary, Queen of Scots, who herself had been implicated in the Throckmorton plot—come to the...
thron, the associators should “view that person as unworthy of all government in any Christian realm of civil society.”34 The earl of Leicester and Lord Burghley, two of Elizabeth’s closest Privy Councilors, wrote the Instrument of Association with Mary in mind, essentially to “exclude” her from the throne and thereby protect the Protestant nation.

The Association in Elizabeth’s reign was something of a public relations event by Elizabeth’s councilors, as individuals up and down the social ladder signed it.35 Thousands signed it, and, by all accounts, it was popular among elites and non-elites alike.36 The seeming popularity of the Association was an aspect of sixteenth-century history not lost on late seventeenth-century polemicists and parliamentarians. So popular was the Association that it was made law even as signatures of the Oath were being collected in late November 1584. Apparently, Elizabeth’s councilors used the assassination attempt on the Queen’s life as a “catalyzing and catastrophic event” to push their agenda of executing Mary and uniting the nation around the perceived Catholic threat. The resultant legislation was created and passed by both houses of Parliament on March 3rd: a Bill for the Queen’s Safety, which was based on the Oath of Association. Commonly referred to by late seventeenth-century parliamentarians and polemicists as 27. Eliz Cap 1, An Act for Provision to be made for the Surety of the Queen’s most Royal Person, the bill was made law by both houses of Parliament.37 The history of the signing of the Oath of Association and the subsequent statute that enshrined the Association as law was critical because it provided a precedent from which to act.

The Protestant Association in Parliament

From the spring of 1679 until the arrest of Anthony Ashley Copper, the First Earl of Shaftesbury in 1682, the Association played a prominent role in Exclusion Crisis debate within the House of Commons. As the first Exclusion Parliament met in April 1679, parliamentarians debated the best way to preserve the monarchy in the face of Catholic insurrection. In the early days of the crisis, the Association was conceived as a possible remedy to protect the monarchy from the forces of international Catholicism—not outright resist the king’s brother. Sir Robert Markham advocated the revival of the Protestant Association as a way to bind the nation together in the face of a Catholic insurrection. Lord William Cavendish, an opposition leader in the Commons since the impeachment of Danby in 1678, articulated the opposition’s position best: “I am of the opinion, we had better try something else; and although I know not what other act can be made to serve instead of that, but will either prove too weak, or too strong: . . . And therefore I humbly move you, That a Bill may be brought in the Association of all his majesties Protestant Subjects.”38 As the crisis wore on, appeals to the Elizabethan past became increasingly about not simply protecting the monarchy but actively resisting the popish successor. Speaking before the Commons, Colonel Birch stated, “The declaration of the succession by Parliament is no new thing. . . . [I]t proved well in Queen Elizabeth’s time. . . . [T]he Queen’s time is parallel to ours,
as to the fears of a popish successor.” Elizabethan history was central to justifications for political resistance. Following the dissolution of the first Exclusion Parliament in July 1679 the rhetoric of exclusion and consequently Elizabethan history increased to an almost fever pitch. What is now known as the “Exclusion Parliament” was summoned in July 1679 but was prorogued until October of the next year. During this time, the Whig political machine ramped up public demonstrations and polemicists printed scurrilous and propagandistic tracts in favor of the exclusion of the duke. When Parliament was convened in 1680 public opinion about the Association had shifted away from protecting the king’s person to outright resistance.

The debate on the Act of Association reached a climax in December 1680. The second Exclusion bill had been defeated in the House of Lords by a vote of 63 to 30, which was devastating to Whigs in the House of Commons. With this defeat, Whigs began to look for other “expedients” to bar the Duke of York. According to Henry Capel, a prominent Whig Member of Parliament (MP) and prosecutor of the Popish Plot, “the debate was occasioned by the Negative our bill received in the Lords.” By 15 December, the Commons were openly discussing not simply the Exclusion Bill, but the banishment of all Catholics from England and Scotland—a perceived attack on James, Duke of York, who had been sent away by the king during the crisis. The Commons met in a Grand Committee to discuss the state of the nation. It was at this point that William Cavendish proposed the Association: “To consider of a form of Association to adhere to a Protestant heir declared by Parliament and all that come not into it to be incapable to bear any office.” One Parliamentarian argued that the Commons “must take some speedy remedy, or else all is undone.” Winnington went on to say, “I find in Queen Elizabeth’s time, that it was apprehended a popish successor would undo her reign…the people of England entered into an Association. I would have it by this bill of Association that any man may take arms against a popish successor and felony to resist.” Francis Gwynn, a royalist and friend of the King, wrote to James Butler, Duke of Ormonde, a close confidant of Charles II and Royalist in the Civil War, that the House specifically modeled their Association “like that in Queen Elizabeth’s time.” On 15 December, Lord Cavendish was the first to declare the Association as an expedient to resist the Catholic Successor: “My opinion is,” Cavendish explained, “to consider of a form of Association to adhere to a Protestant heir declared by Parliament and all the come not into it to be incapable to bear any office.” It was in this context that the Whig Ralph Montague sat before the House of Commons and moved that the Protestant Association be read before the Commons. Thomas Meres, another opposition Whig who had just been elected to Parliament, admitted that he had never heard of the bill of Association but added that “a law in Queen Elizabeth’s time, I should be glad to see it.” Colonel Birch articulated, too, that the Association was not the best remedy for the ills that confronted the nation. He wanted to debate the nature of the Association, “so we may not defend our selves with fig leaves.”

During the crisis over the succession of the Duke of York, the memory of the Elizabethan period played a crucial role in giving the Parliamentary opposition a rhetoric of loyalty in which they could cast themselves as good loyal
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Protestants while arguing against the succession of a Catholic heir. Parliamentarians made claims based on the somewhat far-fetched parallel, casting Charles II as Elizabeth I and his brother James, Duke of York as Mary, Queen of Scots. “The case is now with the King as it was betwixt Queen Elizabeth and Mary, Queen of Scots,” Vaughan declared. In late 1680, parliamentarians debated the Exclusion Bill for the second time in over a year. They began to question the expediency of exclusion as a viable means to protect the church and state. Daniel Finch and Francis Winnington, who had served in Parliament since the Restoration of Charles II in 1660, began to discuss other ways to protect the Protestant nation. Finch and Winnington are somewhat of an unlikely pair. Finch was a royalist and dutifully served under Charles II and was an opponent of exclusion. Winnington, on the other hand, vehemently prosecuted the Popish Plot and was marked “Worthy” by the first earl of Shaftesbury for his commitment to exclusion and defense of Protestantism.

The debates in Parliament in 1680 illustrate just how much the opposition had changed. As we have seen in the first Exclusion Parliament, opposition members were evoking the Association was a way to preserve the king’s person; it was now being evoked to justify not simply uniting the realm against a popish successor but outright resistance to the regime. Winnington looked back to Mary, Queen of Scot’s reign and argued that it was impossible for a Catholic to govern a Protestant nation. To him the “Bill of Exclusion will not do alone.” To Finch, the problem of Catholic succession was both historical, in the form of Catholic conspiracy since the Reformation, but also personal, in the form of the monarch’s councilors. Pointing to the difference in council of Mary, Queen of Scots and Elizabeth, he argued that the differences in ministries was partly to blame for the state of the nation: “The great reason of the good and bad government of Queen Mary and Elizabeth was from good and bad hands the ministry was in.”

Basing his argument on the public interest and the perpetuation of Protestant government, he asserted the inability of a government run by papists. He argued, “Queen Elizabeth had good ministers and they governed well; queen Mary had wicked and they governed wickedly. If the influence of councilors by Act of Parliament, and that nothing shall be valid but by their advice; that is a remedy.”

The rhetoric surrounding the Protestant Association changed as anxieties over the succession mounted. James, Duke of York was now viewed as a traitor on par with Mary, Queen of Scots during Elizabeth’s reign. This reflects the increasing polarization over the crisis. Parliamentarians saw the issues that confronted the nation and saw that the only way to protect it was to ground the right of resistance firmly in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. As parliamentarians investigated the history of the reigns of Elizabeth and Mary, they came to see the importance of good council as a bulwark against arbitrary government. In this debate, parliamentarians moved beyond the simple rhetoric of “evil councilors” and recommended policy decisions based on a sophisticated understanding of the inner workings of Tudor government. Parliamentarians were making significant claims for parliamentary privilege based on Tudor history. As they evoked Elizabethan councilors, they argued against the monarch’s right to govern the realm without councilor or parliamentary advice. Based on the Elizabethan
precedent, Daniel Finch came to the conclusion that Parliament was essential in the legislative process and that legal acts could not be valid without parliamentary consultation.

According to many Whigs during the crisis, the court was the cause of strife and conspiracy that troubled the nation—not the Parliament. Francis Winnington spoke before Parliament of the difference between Mary and Elizabeth’s ministries. “We know, in the case of Mary, Queen of Scots, pretensions, what resolutions were taken; we made a brave Protestant Association—In that Act there is an Exclusion.”\textsuperscript{53} Daniel Finch stated before Parliament, “the great reason of the good and bad government of Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth was from good and bad hands their ministry was in. If the influence of councilors have power to distinguish Princes good and bad by councilors, make those Privy-Councilors by act of Parliament, and that nothing shall be valid but by their advice; that is remedy.”\textsuperscript{54} Whig polemicists viewed the court with increasing skepticism and as the chief source of issues confronting the English nation, and they appealed to the experience of sixteenth-century history to make their case. Most significantly, Whig parliamentarians were expressing potentially radical ideas of exclusion and regicide through their appeal to history. The Whig newspaper publisher Richard Janeway expressed this sentiment in his \textit{Impartial Protestant Mercury}: “to associate is no more then to devote himself for the safety of his king and country.” Roger L’Estrange skewered this sentiment in the \textit{Observer}, because to him the Association was simply part of a Protestant plot to execute the king.\textsuperscript{55} Parliamentarians began to question the expediency of exclusion as a viable means to protect the church and state. Daniel Finch and Francis Winnington, who had served in Parliament since the Restoration of Charles II in 1660, began to discuss other ways to protect the Protestant nation. Basing his argument on the public interest and the perpetuation of the Protestant monarchy, Winnington asserted the inability of a government run by papists. As the crisis over the Association wore on, parliamentarians became increasingly focused not only on the monarch but also the crown’s ability to effectively deal with the crisis. By implying that a Catholic could not govern England and that the ministry was itself corrupt, parliamentarians like Winnington suggested that the only avenue for legitimate redress of their grievances was through violent means.

Unsurprisingly, it was Francis Winnington that gave perhaps the most sustained and damming speech on the state of the nation. He advocated the Association for remedying the crisis that besieged the nation. His speech is significant because it shows a sustained analysis of the crisis strictly in terms of sixteenth-century history. Winnington saw the issues that confronted them as distinctly constitutional and, therefore, needing constitutional remedies. First, he accused the court of acting manifestly against “tradition” and “custom,” two concepts that carried extraordinary weight in seventeenth-century political discourse. To Winnington, “If a man acts according to the \textit{magna carta}, he lies in Prison, pays great fees, and is sent home with reflection into his country.”\textsuperscript{56} Winnington’s speech can be seen as a doomsday warning that if the Duke of York succeeded to the English throne, the laws of England would be abolished. Winnington saw no other alternative but to follow the precedents that were
established during Queen Elizabeth’s reign to destroy popery and eliminate a corrupt court. Before the Commons, he evoked the right of Queen Elizabeth and the Protestant Association to protect the Protestant religion. “What shall we do to be saved,” he asked. He answered that “in Queen Elizabeth’s time, that it was apprehended a Popish Successor would undo her in her reign: … the people of England entered into an Association, ‘That, if the Queen should fall, or the Papists should make any attempt upon her, they would avenge it even until death.’” Here it is significant that Winnington views the people as the restorer and champion of English liberties. Apparently, his speech was convincing, as it was at this point in the debate that the House immediately resolved to have a reading of the bill of Association before the House of Commons. He went on to say, “I would agree to an Association.”

The Protestant Association brought to the fore not simply questions about the nature of resistance but an overt critique of Charles II’s court. To contemporaries, Elizabeth’s government provided a potent alternative to the corruptions that were seen inherent in Charles II’s government.

Within Parliament, MPs repeatedly evoked the memory of Queen Elizabeth’s advisors as the paragons of nobility and selflessness. This was, in part, because Elizabeth’s advisors wanted to protect the realm against the Catholic threat. Throughout the debate on the Protestant Association, parliamentarians evoked the nobility of Elizabeth’s parliaments and her councilors as the protectors of the Protestant nation. “There were good ministers of state in those days and the Parliament so well countenanced the Association as to make it law.” The exclusionist Parliamentarian William Jones spoke against the applicability of Elizabeth’s Association. According to him, “a pattern of Association from that of the 27th of the Queen, that will not do.” Charles II’s Privy Councilors were not of the same mettle as they were in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. “But since they are not of the same disposition now as they were then, I fear it. I wish they were.”

As William Jones’ comments on the Association illustrate, not all parliamentarians saw in the sixteenth-century proper parallels from which to guide them in their contemporary crisis. The times had indeed changed. The perception of the court as hopelessly corrupt, lacking the necessary virtue to maintain the Protestant nation, undercut the applicability of the Association to the contemporary crisis. As the Association was debated in the Commons, parliamentarians began to debate the Association not as much in terms of protecting the king but rather actively resisting a popish monarchy. In many respects, Association discourse allowed parliamentarians to voice radical claims for deposition while simultaneously appealing to the sacrosanct memory of Elizabeth and the English monarchy. This was an aspect of politics that even the king himself recognized. Gilbert Burnet remarked in his History of His Own Time that Charles II looked upon the Protestant Association as “deposing himself.”

This latter aspect of the Association was amplified in the popular press. Polemicists made public appeals to the Exclusion Crisis of Mary, Queen of Scots and Elizabeth as a way to either argue for or against the legality of the Association. Admittedly, it is difficult to assess the degree to which the public debate over the sixteenth-century Exclusion Crisis in the press influenced Parliament or alternatively how parliamentary debate influenced the public debate. Nevertheless,
through an examination of the printed pamphlet literature, it can be discerned that the anxieties expressed in Parliament were mirrored in the public at large.

**Out of Doors Polemic and the Exclusion Crisis**

The debates over the applicability of the Association in popular polemic closely mirrored the contemporary debate on the Association in Parliament. This was largely because of the proliferation of printed materials that accompanied private debate within Parliament. Publishers throughout the late 1670s and 1680s printed transcripts of the debates for a public audience. This was something new in the seventeenth century. Polemicists, for instance, published transcripts of Parliamentary proceedings, casting their own partisan interpretation on the events. One printer published the entire text of Elizabeth’s Association and added on the frontispiece, “her life and the Protestant religion by hellish popish plots were attempted. Together with the Act of Parliament then for confirmation and several observations thereupon.” This printer thus tied the two crises together. Like Parliament, the popular press depicted the Elizabethan Association in terms of applicability to the present. It was in this context that Elizabeth and sixteenth-century history began to play a significant role in shaping perceptions of the crisis. Of course, political division in the popular press was the result of assumptions about the monarchy and the proper role of Parliament as a legislative body. Each political side had a radically different perception of events than the other. Whigs fervently appealed to the Protestant Association as a proper and legal avenue to protect the nation and resist the popish successor. Tories used the opposition’s parallel history of Mary, Queen of Scots and James, Duke of York as a way to criticize them and portray them as fanatics and regicides. Whigs in the Tory critique appealed to the history of the Reformation merely as pretense to their more wicked design to usher in religious toleration and therefore destroy the Church of England. Roger L'Estrange thought that the Popish Plot gave the occasion of the Protestant Association: “Is there a popish plot? Tis but the bricoling of a true Protestant Association, that upon the false bound shall play upon the government.” Another writer voiced a similar opinion: “Popery never made such advances from the first of Queen Elizabeth, to the beginning of that Rebellion, as she did from the Rebellion to the end of the Usurpation: nor had she been near so considerable as now, was it not for the strength, she gain'd then.” There were thus varying interpretations of the sixteenth-century past, and those differences of interpretation provided the fault lines that divided political opinion between loyalists and opposition. The analogue of Elizabeth and Mary is thus illustrative of the greater fissures in English politics.

Just at historians and polemicists drew attention to the parallels between Mary and Elizabeth, they also reprinted political theory of the period, perhaps most notably George Buchanan’s *De Jure Regni Apud Scotos, or A Dialogue the Due Privileadge of Government in the Kingdom of Scotland*. This tract was written and first published in 1579, during Mary’s exile in England, but first translated and again
republished in 1680 and 1689, respectively, amidst the crisis over the succession and the flowering of polemic related to Tudor history. Buchanan advocated popular resistance against a tyrant, ideas that fit well with arguments associated with exclusion and the Protestant Association. Buchanan’s ideas were particularly suited to the debate on the Association. First, Buchanan wrote his *Dialogue* during the crisis in Scotland over Mary, Queen of Scots in the 1560s when it appeared to many Scot Presbyterians that Mary would not only wage civil war but also impose Roman Catholicism in Scotland, horrors that Whigs believed the Duke of York would commit were he to ascend to the throne. The second and more important aspect of Buchanan’s writing centered on political resistance and the legitimacy of not simply a “godly magistrate” but the obligation of any individual member of society to depose and kill a tyrant. Buchanan defines a tyrant as one that dissolves society and wages war against its people. Were this to happen according to Buchanan, “it is lawful not only for the whole people to kill that enemy, but for everyone of them.”

Buchanan articulated a popular theory of resistance that would have spoken to many fears generated by the crisis over the succession. According to the logic of the crisis, it makes perfect sense that Buchanan’s writing would be translated and published in England in 1680. (*De Jure Regni Apud Scotos, or A Dialogue the Due Privilege of Government in the Kingdom of Scotland* was condemned in 1584 and published in Oxford in 1680, almost one hundred years later). Buchanan’s ideas of popular resistance meshed well with the revival of the Protestant Association. That it was revived in the context of the Exclusion Crisis and the Glorious Revolution illustrates the histories of Mary, Queen of Scots, and Elizabeth had practical relevance to historians and theorists of popular political resistance.

As the timing of Buchanan’s works suggests, the narrative of Popish conspiracies of the sixteenth century fit well with the Whig principles of resistance and popular sovereignty. However, to the Tories, these ideas were antithetical to a stable body politic and reverence for a divinely ordained monarchy. Tory polemists lampooned Whig writers for their insistence on the Protestant Association as a legitimate expedient to exclude the Duke of York. Roger L’Estrange’s *Observator* became a sounding board for Tory retorts to Whig legal arguments over the succession. In L’Estrange’s view, arguments that Whigs made to exclude the Duke of York were the same arguments that were made by religious radicals during the Civil War. In 1682, the Whig interlocutor in his *Observator* asked, “What did you think of the old excluders in Queen Elizabeth’s reign that pressed the necessity of putting the Queen of Scots to death for the very danger of her religion?” “Tory’s” reply reveals the attitudes of royalists at the time: “It was a Presbyterian argument and a Presbyterian practice and only the same bloodhounds now in the ear of Queen Elizabeth herein England that had forced her before from her government in Scotland.” To writers like L’Estrange, appeals to the reign of Elizabeth were merely cover for more radical and violent designs of the Whigs. In this sense, L’Estrange turns the tables on his Whig adversaries. By labeling them as Presbyterians, L’Estrange paints them as the cause of political instability and source of religious chaos.
Roger L’Estrange devoted an issue of the *Observator* to Richard Janeway’s *History of the Association*. He refuted it on the basis that the Whigs appeal to the Elizabethan precedent is nothing more than “a ready way to create…impressions” of loyalty when “the [real] business is to move a faction.” This edition of the *Observator* is important because it argues against the Whig claim of loyalty through the memory of Elizabeth and the Association. L’Estrange derides the notion that the Association’s intent is “to devote ones self to the safety of the king and country.” Through the memory of Elizabeth and the Association, the Whigs “have…found out the ready way to create impressions” of loyalty. The People are “incompetent judges,” L’Estrange declares, and unable to discern “the true reason of the point in consideration.” In order to clarify the issues, L’Estrange draws from sixteenth-century history, issues that “shall serve for all.” As he puts it, “In Queen Elizabeth’s days, the privy councilors were all for the Queens interest and none for the successor. Now most of the privy-councilors are for the successors and none for the kings. Then the ministers unanimously agreed to keep out popery; now there are many for bringing it in.”

Other polemicists echoed L’Estrange’s attack on the Whig interpretation of sixteenth-century history. Phillip Ayers, an otherwise moderate poet and polemicist, linked the Protestant Association to religious fanaticism. In this analysis, the Popish Plot and the Association were connected only through conspirators wishing to overthrow the monarchy: “some wicked persons . . . resolve to . . . overthrow . . . the government…and so make the discovery of the popish plot to be a means to make it prove effectual…which hath been made too manifest of late by the discovery of the late fanatic plot and association.” Northleigh expressed a similar sentiment. He claimed that all of the discussion of “Queen Elizabeth’s time” was a ruse to divert attention from the real aims of the opposition. In his view, the branding of the oath as an Association was precisely to make it more acceptable. “Association,” he wrote, “will be easily swallowed, when league may stick a little in the throat.”

**Conclusion**

The arrest of the earl of Shaftesbury on 2 July 1681, and his eventual exile to the Netherlands following his acquittal for treason on 24 November 1681, saw an astounding amount of coverage in the popular press. His arrest was made even more sensational when a copy of the Oath of Association was found in his office, purportedly evidence that he was planning an overthrow of the government. With this revelation began a spectacular news event in the popular press, which vilified the Whigs as fomenters of rebellion and the Association as part of a plot to stoke rebellion. The anonymous tract *Remarques Upon The New Project Of Association*, published following Shaftesbury’s arrest, provided a line-by-line comparison between the Elizabethan and late seventeenth-century Oath of Association with the intent to illustrate the subversive design of the Whigs. Where the Elizabethan Association was made for the purpose to “defend the Queen
against any pretendant whatsoever,” Shaftesbury’s Association is a “confederacy against the King’s brother” and a “Final and Irreparable Extirpation” of law and order. “Whoever lays both ends together of this late association, will find that it begins in the Name of God…and ends in the Devil’s name with the total extinction of the King and Government.” Despite the opposition’s appeals to the reign of Elizabeth and the Act of Association, after 1681 the crown had regained the initiative and turned the narrative against the Whigs. Instead of acting to protect the Protestant nation, Tory parliamentarians and polemicists cast Whigs as real threats to the church and state.

The debate on the Association reveals that it was viewed as a possible solution to what seemed as the intractable issue of exclusion. Because parliamentarians viewed their context in terms of Elizabethan history, they saw sixteenth-century solutions to the pressing issues that confronted them. The parallels they observed in their own time and Elizabeth’s time in turn guided political behavior. The memory of the sixteenth century played a central role in shaping the debate over the succession, parliamentary sovereignty, and the right of resistance. Although 27. Eliz Cap 1 and the Oath of Association were ultimately used against the Whigs, during the Revolution of 1688/89, the Oath of Association was once again revived under William of Orange to solidify his control over northern England when he landed at Torbay. “In very many counties the nobility and the genric rise and associat. . . . but I hold it was in them perfect rebellion.” John Bramston, who wrote these words, lived through the Civil Wars and Exclusion Crisis, and witnessed the signing of the “Exeter Association” on 17 November 1688, a prelude to the Revolution of 1688/89. Bramston was thus within living memory of the most traumatic and disruptive events of the second half of the seventeenth century. His Autobiography recounts the signing of the Association in detail, one of William’s initial acts as Dutch commander and future English king. As William of Orange made his way from Torbay to London, he stopped in Exeter for over a week. In that time, flocks of disaffected English came to William’s banner: “many rabble of people came to him in great numbers,” Gilbert Burnet remarked. So great was enthusiasm for William that he asked Burnet, the future Bishop of Salisbury, to have an “Association signed by all that came to us.” “We were as a rope of sand,” William remarked, [and] “had them under no other tie.” The Association pledged to “protect England’s ancient liberties” and the Protestant religion from “the bloody designs of desperate and cursed papists” and to “stick firm to this cause” in protecting the Prince of Orange. William’s invasion was, of course, successful. When the Convention met in late December, one of its first acts was to have the Exeter Association brought in so it could be signed “by all the members present” with only minor changes in the wording. The Association made at Exeter and Westminster in the winter of 1688 justified resistance to the Duke of York but also legitimized the Parliamentary proceedings that would eventually create the first constitutional monarchy in English history.

This paper situated the Protestant Association within the context of the Exclusion Crisis and illustrated how the memory of Mary and Elizabeth were part of contemporary discourse that served as a parallel history from which to interpret
and criticize the present. The memory of the Association reverberated beyond the Exclusion Crisis into the Revolution of 1688/89 and the Assassination Plot of 1696. Historians often view the late seventeenth century as witnessing the triumph of Lockean notions of popular sovereignty and the right of rebellion, the foundations of modern democratic ideology. This paper has sought to illustrate that sixteenth-century historical discourse was at the center of debate and influenced these defining ideas. The Exclusion Crisis witnessed, in some sense for the first time, mass popular participation in politics. Not since the English Civil War was the body politic engaged in such intense political questions. Unlike the Civil War, however, the Whigs were able to organize opposition to the crown based on the rhetoric of the Association. The parallel histories of Elizabeth and Mary, Queen of Scots structured political debate because both eras spoke to the same issues. In the *History of My Own Time*, Burnet reflected on the significance of the Elizabethan period during the Exclusion Crisis. In his view, those that supported the Elizabethan historical parallel “argued that government was appointed for those who were to be governed and not for the governors themselves and therefore everything related to it were to be measured by the people’s safety and the public interest.”

While Burnet’s *History* was written well after the crisis of the early 1680s, his recollection of the Elizabethan era reflects its importance not simply to the exclusion of the Duke of York, but the fundamental issues in the development of the first constitutional monarchy.

Notes

1. Louis Maimbourg, *The History of the League Written in French by Monsieur Maimbourg; Translated into English by His Majesty’s Command by Mr. Dryden* (London, 1684), To the King.
8. Pamphlets reflecting sixteenth-century history were a regular aspect of the popular press. See, for instance, Anon., *A Pattern or President for Princes to Rule by and for Subjects to Obey By Together With the Rare Exemplar of Subjects tender and Singular Care for the Life of their Sovereign* (London, 1680); Anon., *The Honor and Courage of our English Parliament in the Reign of Elizabeth of Ever Blessed Memory, In defending of Her and the Protestant Religion* (London, 1680); Anon., *A True and Exact Account of the Wars with Spain in the Reign of Elizabeth, (of Famous Memory) Being the Particulars of what Happened between the English and Spanish Fleets from the Years, 1585-1602* (London, 1682). This was also an age in which biographies of Elizabeth were published. See, for instance, Samuel Clarke, *The History of the Glorious Life, Reign, and Death of the Illustrious Queen Elizabeth* (London, 1682).

9. John Dryden and Plutarch, *Plutarch’s Lives Translated from the Greek by several hands; to which is Prefixt The life of Plutarch.* (London, 1683), 81.


24. Northleigh wrote that “the story of the Queen of Scots, which [the Whigs] make so plain a parallel, is in my judgment, as little to the purpose” (*A Gentle Reflection*, 13). The debate over the relevance of Mary, Queen of Scots in the popular press is discussed below.


27. Ferguson, *No Protestant Plot Part III*, 133.


29. Roger L'Estrange, for instance, mercilessly mocked the Whig claim that Elizabeth and her councilors held Whig values. See Roger L'Estrange, *A Brief History of the Times... In a Preface to the Third Volume of Observators* (London, 1687), 26. For Whig appeals to Elizabeth in Parliament see below.


35. In 1584, for instance Henry, Earl of Huntingdon wrote to Secretary Walsingham that such “a great number of inferior quality have signed, sealed, and sworn to the instrument of Association...that the number of seals...was too cumbersome to [be] sent by post.” *Calendar of State Papers Domestic of the Reigns of Elizabeth and James I*, Addenda, 1580-1625 (HMSO, 1872), 133.


44. Francis Gwynn to the Duke of Ormonde, HMC, *Ormonde*, 5:488. As the Lords debated the bill it was noted that the Act of Association was framed specifically to “resemble the form of Queen Elizabeth’s time.” (HMC, *Ormonde* 5: 506).


47. Grey, *Debates*, 8:162.


60. Gilbert Burnet, History of My Own Time, From the Restoration of King Charles the Second to the Treaty of Peace at Utrecht, in the Reign of Queen Anne. A New Edition with Historical and Biographical Notes (London: Chatto and Windus, 1875), 252.


62. Polemicists printed transcripts of Parliamentary proceedings. In doing so they also highlighted partisan aspects of the debate. In one transcript, the frontispiece offers the “History of the Association containing all the debates in the Late House of Commons at Westminster.” In this pamphlet, the author adds “a postscript with reflections on the last Association and the parallel between the solemn league and covenant.” See: Anon., History of the Association Containing all the Debates in the Late House of Commons at Westminster Concerning an Association for the Preservation of the King’s Person and the Security of the Protestant Religion (London, 1682); Anon., Historical Collection, or, A Brief Account of the Most Remarkable Transactions of the Two Last Parliaments (London: 1682).


64. Roger L’Estrange, Considerations upon a Printed Sheet entitled the Speech of the Late Lord Russell to the Sheriffs (London: 1683), “To The Reader.”


66. George Buchanan, De Juris Regni Apud Scotos, or A Dialogue the Due Privilege of Government in the Kingdom of Scotland (1680), 127.


68. Goldie, Exorcism of the Plot, 69.


70. John Northleigh, The Parallel or The New Specious Association an Old Rebellious Covenant, Closing the Disparity between a True Patriot and a Factious Association (London, 1682), 7.


72. See for instance, Shaftesbury’s Farewell: or The New Association (1683), 2; Anon., Remarks Upon the New Project of Association, In a Letter to a Friend (London, 1682); Anon., The Knot Untied: Or the Association Disbanded (London, 1682); Anon., The Newcastle Associators; or the Trimmers Loyalty. Being a True Relation How Several Sanctified Bretheren Were Apprehended, and Found Signing the Association (London, 1684).


78. Burnet, Bishop Burnet’s History of His Own Time: From the Restoration of King Charles the Second, 304.
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