**Making Peace in the English Civil Wars\***

In July 1648, in the midst of a bitter and bloody Second Civil War, the House of Lords received a petition from an obscure London citizen. Despite describing himself as a ‘poor despicable man’, Richard Farrar explained that he had ‘for some moneths past … made Peace, the subject of my Nocturnal study’. ‘After many Debates with myself, (and not a few sheets of paper written in vain)’, he explained, he had now finally ‘conceived a direct and short way for the obtaining of a safe and well-grounded Peace in this Kingdom’. Among other things, this would require instituting an act of oblivion, which king, parliament, and people would each publicly take an oath to uphold, and which would stipulate harsh penalties for those who continued to deploy divisive labels like ‘Roundhead’ and ‘Cavalier’. At the same time, all parties would be urged to introspect, to look within themselves and regulate their passions, so that the common good could once again take precedence over faction and self-interest. As well as bringing these homespun peace proposals to the attention of parliament, Farrar requested that he be allowed to travel to the Isle of Wight and put them to the imprisoned Charles I in person, as a kind of external mediator.[[1]](#footnote-1) This request, unsurprisingly, was not granted. But Farrar’s petition did earn him an invitation to the Lords, where he read out the full details of his plan in person and was thanked ‘for his Pains and Zeal and good Assertions’.[[2]](#footnote-2) The publication of two pamphlets followed soon after, both of which disseminated Farrar’s peace project to a still wider audience.

The last two decades have generated a rich historiography on peacemaking in early modern Europe. Mark Greengrass and Penny Roberts, for instance, have elucidated the political and philosophical contexts of the peace initiatives devised by the Valois monarchy during the French Religious Wars of the late sixteenth century. Meanwhile, scholars like Stuart Carroll have explored more quotidian attempts to resolve the enduring problem of interpersonal violence across the Continent.[[3]](#footnote-3) By contrast, peacemaking has received comparatively little attention from historians of the English Revolution.[[4]](#footnote-4) The focus here, quite understandably, remains tracing the processes by which the nation polarised after 1640 and descended into armed conflict. Peace is mostly discussed in relation to formal treaty negotiations or the factional disputes of high politics. As such, the basic narrative outline of the negotiations conducted at Oxford, Uxbridge, and Newport is familiar, as are the specific constitutional and religious terms over which Charles I and the parliamentarian commissioners tussled each time: control of the militia; the royal veto; episcopacy and the Book of Common Prayer.[[5]](#footnote-5)

However, I want to argue that, crucially, the debate over peace was not confined to these famous exchanges between elite statesmen, nor did it simply concern the specific articles of a prospective treaty. In fact, the problem of settlement represented a central strand of public discourse during the 1640s. The horror of internecine conflict forced English men and women, from prominent peers and MPs to more humble petitioners and pamphleteers like Richard Farrar, to confront the vexed question of what, exactly, it meant to be in a condition of peace: how could such bitter divisions – whether local or national, at Westminster or in the parish – ever be healed, and the cycle of bloodshed broken definitively? What would a stable, lasting settlement actually look like? Moreover, increasingly exasperated by the failure of king and parliament to reach a speedy settlement, private individuals resolved to take matters into their own hands. This article will highlight the activities of several neutralists who set themselves up as mediators around the time of the Treaty of Oxford in early 1643, and show how, especially through print, they sought to promote their schemes for national reconciliation.

At the same time, I want here to chart some of the contours and rhythms of these peace debates, and to show how they were engaged with by partisans, whether royalist or parliamentarian. It is striking that those who favoured continuing the war during 1642-3 were determined, paradoxically, to speak the language of peace. They presented their opposition to treaty negotiations as based not on an aversion to peace *per se* but rather on a superior appreciation of the processes by which it could realistically be achieved. One of the central points of contention here was whether a genuine, *lasting* resolution could ever be secured through compromise and concession, or whether a decisive military triumph for one side would be required to prevent future spasms of violence. The various positions taken on this question drew inspiration from the literature and history of ancient Rome. I hope, then, that this article will contribute something not only to our understanding of political ideas and participation during the English Revolution, but to the historiography of conflict resolution in the early modern period more generally.

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After the stalemate at Edgehill in late October 1642, Charles I had advanced on London and royalist troops under the command of Prince Rupert had destroyed two parliamentarian regiments at Brentford. Although the king was successfully repulsed at Turnham Green in mid-November, hopes of a swift and decisive parliamentarian victory had been shattered, and a popular peace movement soon began to gain momentum in the capital. During December, petitions circulated calling for an immediate end to hostilities, while pro-accommodation mobs caused tumultuous scenes, first at Haberdasher’s Hall, where parliament’s committee for the advance of money was operating, and later during a Common Council meeting at the Guildhall. This popular agitation strengthened the hand of those MPs and peers inclined to negotiate with the king, and parliament was soon persuaded to draw up new peace propositions to send to Oxford.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Parliament’s commissioners set out for the royalist capital on 20 March 1643. With the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that the ensuing Treaty of Oxford was doomed from the start. The war party, led by John Pym in the Commons, had in the months prior to the formal opening of talks successfully insisted on the inclusion of proposals to which Charles I would never agree: the complete abolition of episcopacy, most obviously, but also control of the militia by men approved by parliament. The king privately told a correspondent that ‘no lesse power than his who made the worlde of nothing can draw peace out of thease articles’ and by mid-April the commissioners had been recalled to Westminster.[[7]](#footnote-7) Nonetheless, the opening of treaty negotiations had raised both the hopes of those desperate to see an immediate settlement and the fears of royalist and parliamentarian hardliners determined to push for outright victory. As a result, the months between November 1642 and April 1643, when the talks at Oxford collapsed, witnessed a vociferous debate in print over the respective merits of continuing the war and negotiating a treaty. This was, of course, just one manifestation of a broader process, whereby during the 1640s political culture came to encompass an unprecedented degree of public participation and the nation’s presses saw an outpouring of cheap, topical publications.[[8]](#footnote-8)

The pamphlet literature produced around the time of the Treaty of Oxford has not gone entirely unnoticed. Both David Wootton and, more recently, David Como have shown expertly how the drive against accommodation pushed some parliamentarian war-party activists to assume increasingly radical ideological positions, with Wootton tracing the origins of Leveller ideas to the publications produced in these months.[[9]](#footnote-9) Focusing on ideological escalation and polarisation obviously makes a great deal of sense, not least because the transition from rebellion to revolution and regicide is still so keenly contested by historians. However, it can also obscure the extent to which other pamphleteers were simultaneously agonising over how the conflict could be quickly resolved.

The intractability of this problem was readily apparent to all commentators. ‘What we shall do to procure Peace’, bemoaned one exasperated pamphleteer in March 1643, ‘is a question more acceptable in the resolution, then in the proposal thereof, and is sooner propounded then resolved’.[[10]](#footnote-10) Other writers compared the pursuit of peace to entering a ‘Labyrinth’, in which ‘true and false paths’ presented themselves to a weary nation and needed to be carefully distinguished.[[11]](#footnote-11) It was hard – though not impossible – to find anybody dissenting from the normative value of peace. ‘I scarce ever met with any that will not speak for Unity and Peace’, observed Richard Baxter in *The reformed pastor*, ‘or at least, that will expresly speak against it’.[[12]](#footnote-12) But this only made continuing disagreement over how to achieve reconciliation all the more disconcerting, and many writers despaired of finding ‘a way to end our troubles’.[[13]](#footnote-13) ‘Peace’ was another word – like ‘religion’, ‘liberty’, and ‘property’ – that contemporaries feared was being distorted and manipulated for partisan advantage.[[14]](#footnote-14) A consensus on the route back to order and unity thus proved consistently elusive, and while the different roadmaps drawn up often exhibited considerable ingenuity, they could also generate bitter controversy.

It should be stressed again that it was notsimply politicians at Westminster or Oxford who were reflecting on the necessary conditions for peace. As the example of Richard Farrar with which we began illustrates, what is striking about the 1640s as a whole is the extent to which *non­*-elite individuals began to see themselves as, and indeed to become, integral to the search for settlement. While some were content merely to plead for peace in the abstract, other pamphleteers and petitioners were prepared to put forward detailed proposals. Many deemed it a Christian or civic duty to cast into the public realm or put before those in power any ideas that might hasten the end of the conflict. In a short pamphlet composed on the island of Bermuda and ‘sent over to further the Reconciliation of his Native Country’ in 1646, the mathematician Richard Norwood argued that ‘if it please the Lord to discover to any man a likely way of reconcilement by just and good means, he may not … conceal it, lest he incur that heavy sentence pronounced against the unprofitable servant, that hid his masters talent in the ground’.[[15]](#footnote-15) The author of the 1643 pamphlet *A high way to peace* hoped his small contribution would inspire others to come forward and share their own. ‘It should be some mens studie to give satisfaction’, he declared, ‘and a small beginning, though from a low and weake head, may be seconded to a better purpose’.[[16]](#footnote-16)

However, these prefatory justifications in themselves reflect a degree of authorial unease at the prospect of dictating specific policies to those in power and thereby appearing to trespass on the *arcana imperii*. Farrar was not alone in worrying that he would appear under a ‘Cloud of Prejudice [for] presuming to offer so high an Expedient as Peace’.[[17]](#footnote-17) The moderate Calvinist cleric Thomas Warmestry had been more apologetic still when, in his 1642 *Ramus oliviae*, he came to consider how ‘a happy complyance and re-union’ between king and parliament might be obtained:

In this I shall endeavour not to spend too much time, I know who they are that have the mannaging of this matter; and it may be easily imagined how little need they have of my councell. Yet let me crave pardon for a word or two, and obtaine your pardon, if my zeale to peace set me a little beyond the bounds of modesty and wisdom.[[18]](#footnote-18)

As late as 1659, an author styling himself the ‘Christian reconciler’ felt the need to assure readers that had it been ‘against the Turk or Pope that we were at War and defiance, I should hold my peace’; but since ‘it is one Countryman against another, one English man against another’, he was compelled to publish his view on the way to end these ‘woful calamities’.[[19]](#footnote-19)

In fact, the frequency with which individuals outside the usual spheres of political decision-making were now publicising their schemes and projects for peace was noticed by contemporaries. John Saltmarsh in 1643 declared it ‘a notion more Platonicall than reall for a private man to thinke he can arbitrate Imperiall differences’, and dismissed those who were ‘industrious in projectings after Pacifications’.[[20]](#footnote-20) Saltmarsh thought it inconceivable that any of the prospective mediators now entering into print possessed the requisite knowledge about such a fast-moving political situation to be able to broker a compromise that would suit both sides.[[21]](#footnote-21) But crucially he also conceded that these peace pamphlets were popular, since ‘accommodation [is] such a subject as will gaine both Readers and parties’.[[22]](#footnote-22)

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What kinds of conciliatory schemes, then, did these different peace pamphleteers propose? Some, it must be said, bordered on the impractical, farfetched, or even downright delusional. One curious pamphlet from early 1644, for example, argued that the only way to decide the conflict was for the two sides to cast lots. Since ‘humane Counsels are puzled, humane reason non plust, and all humane endeavours prove fruitlesse’, the anonymous author suggested, lot-casting offered a means of breaking the deadlock by forcing God to show a preference for one side or the other.[[23]](#footnote-23) But while its central proposal clearly stood little chance of being acted on, the pamphlet as a whole does testify to a diminishing faith in the peacemaking capacities of the nation’s statesmen. ‘How many Petitions, Propositions, Messages, Answers, Declarations, Remonstrances, and Protestations’, it asked, ‘have passed, to beget a right understanding betweene the King and his Parliament? Yet all have rather … increased than any way extinguished the flame of this contention’.

Much more widespread was the conviction that only spiritual regeneration could engender political reconciliation. So entrenched and dominant had the Jeremiadic mode become in early Stuart preaching that England’s descent into civil war could easily be construed as the long-promised punishment reserved by God for His favoured, ungrateful, sinful nation.[[24]](#footnote-24) Moreover, for all that peace was accepted as desirable, it was also widely conceded in the seventeenth century that it brought with it certain dangers: the idea that England had enjoyed a ‘surfeit of peace and plenty’ in the decades prior to the Civil Wars was a commonplace on all sides, and drew on long-standing ideas about the so-called ‘peace-war cycle’.[[25]](#footnote-25) When one writer explained in 1642 that‘our long peace hath bred prosperity, prosperity hath brought forth plenty, plenty pride, pride discord, which hath destroyed our peace’, he was rehearsing a trope that was well established in classical and Renaissance literature.[[26]](#footnote-26) The author of *The plaine English-man* agreed that just as ‘the sweetest Wine turneth to the sharpest Vinegar, so that Kingdome that hath enjoyed Peace for a long time, will bee soonest wasted with warre’.[[27]](#footnote-27) Peace fostered a moral and spiritual complacency, making men so ‘pampered’ that ‘with Jeshurun [they] kick against God’.[[28]](#footnote-28) Civil war was the inevitable punishment meted out by the Almighty. In this context, it is unsurprising that so many writers – both clerical and lay – saw the solution to the nation’s woes as sincere collective repentance. ‘If we would have all things to go well with us’, implored Thomas Jordan in the immediate aftermath of Edgehill, ‘let us make in the first place our atonement and peace with God’.[[29]](#footnote-29) This approach would require popular participation: every member of the commonwealth, ‘from the greatest to the least’, must ‘duly conside[r] what influence his particular hath unto the publick State; and whether his own sinnes help not forward the common wo’.[[30]](#footnote-30)

However, other pamphleteers displayed both a much deeper awareness of political realities and an acute sensitivity to the psychological complexities of conflict resolution. Here, I want to focus on one writer in particular, and the pamphlet they produced to coincide with the Treaty of Oxford.Thomas Povey was born in 1614, the son of Justinian Povey, Auditor of the Queen’s Revenues under James I. Having entered Lincoln’s Inn in 1633, Thomas would be elected MP for Liskeard, Cornwall, in March 1647 but was excluded as part of Pride’s Purge at the end of the following year. During the 1650s, he would therefore concentrate on the activities for which he is now best known – as a merchant and imperial schemer.[[31]](#footnote-31) He helped to fit out the Western Design fleet in 1654 and from 1655 sat on the Protectorate councils for trade and plantations. A huge collection of Povey’s papers survive in the British Library, documenting his myriad proposals for governing and supplying the Atlantic colonies.[[32]](#footnote-32)

*The moderator, expecting sudden peace or certain ruin*, the pamphlet Povey published in February 1643, can therefore be seen as an early staging post in a long career spent devising projects, solving political problems, and offering advice to those in power. Povey was only too conscious of the dangers of adopting a neutralist stance and advocating accommodation, even at this early stage of the civil war, and this helps to explain his decision (along with many other peace authors) to enter print anonymously. His caution was soon shown to be well founded: despite its tact and even-handedness, *The moderator* was repeatedly attacked in print, with at least three parliamentarian pamphlets devoting themselves solely to demolishing Povey’s arguments and depicting him as a crypto-royalist. The title of the last of these, *Neutrality is malignancy* (1648), neatly encapsulates the growing impossibility of occupying a middle ground as the nation became ever more polarised.

Nonetheless, Povey was convinced that it was ‘every mans duty to lend his best assistance to the common safety’.[[33]](#footnote-33)He was reluctant to interrogate ‘how justifiable, how necessary, and on which side this War was defensive or offensive’: retrospective apportioning of blame was both divisive and pointless.[[34]](#footnote-34) His priority, instead, was brokering a swift settlement. It was vital that this happen while the two armies were still ‘so well poysed, so fit for a composure; seeing now their equall Powers may make them afraid of each other’.[[35]](#footnote-35) But *The moderator* did not suggest particular compromises or articles: instead, the pamphlet was fundamentally concerned with *processes* of peacemaking, and in particular with showing why a lasting peace could only be achieved through accommodation and negotiation. Povey was not trying to set out what a treaty should look like. Rather, he was making the case that there shouldbe a compromise treaty and that, by contrast, victory for either side would be disastrous for the long-term welfare of the kingdom. ‘Let us seek Peace earnestly,’ he urged ‘but let it not, as yet, be by this Argument; *Bellum faciamus, ut Pacem habeamus* [we make war, so that we may have peace]’.[[36]](#footnote-36) Povey was here responding to an argument frequently made by Roman writers and, as we will see, taken up by partisans during the Civil Wars: that the way to peace was through military conquest and the subjugation of enemies.

*The moderator* then proceeded to spell out the many dangers that a military solution would bring with it. For example, ‘the Religion which all moderate men … desire’ consisted of a middle-way between the extreme positions insisted on by the most committed royalists and parliamentarians. To reach this virtuous mean, ‘reasonable yeelding on both sides’ would be essential.[[37]](#footnote-37) Should either side successfully subdue the other, however, the victors would feel compelled to mollify their most militant supporters – ‘those Rigid Antagonists’ – who had brought them success on the battlefield, and an intemperate religious settlement would be imposed on the nation.[[38]](#footnote-38) Political arrangements would likewise pander to these extremists: the nation, Povey observed, would be forced to endure either an ‘extravagant popular Power’ or ‘the exorbitancies of Monarchy’.[[39]](#footnote-39)

Most importantly, if the conflict was ended by a victory for king or parliament, it would engender so much bitterness and hatred in the vanquished that any peace would inevitably prove short lived. It is here worth quoting Povey at length:

What age shall ever see those Fewds eaten out, which these Civill Broyles will beget? For we shall find, that as Jealousie was the mother of them, so Malice, Hatred, and Revenge, will be the issue. And when shall a State so distempered, look for a quiet, or a safe composure? For War, like a strong disease, leaves many dregs and reliques behind it, which (though the maine Forces be disbanded, and it be no more an Army, a Fever) will punish the uncleansed body with severall fits and distempers.[[40]](#footnote-40)

At the same time, the experience of a protracted war would breed a generation of pugnacious men who quickly ‘grow sick of peace, and are like Tinder, ready to be inflamed into sedition, or high attempts, by everie spark which Ambition, or any other exorbitant desire lets fall’. The state would find itself initiating costly wars with foreign powers just to be rid of these ‘fierie spirits’ and would still be vulnerable to ‘their lawlesse manners’ when they returned.[[41]](#footnote-41)

A pamphlet addressed to the House of Commons and published six months before Povey’s had made the precisely same point – that outright military victory was a recipe for enduring political instability. ‘Should we be conquerers’, it asked, ‘would not the King have it ever wrote in his heart, how stained should we be with the blood of our Fathers, Kindred, Friends, and Countrymen? Would not after-ages extreamely blame us?’ There were psychological advantages to peace-by-negotiation, since neither side could feel as though the settlement had been imposed upon them unwillingly. After all, the pamphlet continued,‘may not Kings in future times hate the Lawes now made, calling them forced?’[[42]](#footnote-42)

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Before moving on to consider the contribution made by militants to these pamphlet debates about peace, is worth drawing attention to the less publicattempts at mediation that were being made in these months. Sir ThomasRoe had been a distinguished diplomat during the early Stuart decades, serving as ambassador to both the Mughal and Ottoman Empires. He had then undertaken a series of missions in Europe, successfully brokering the peace between Sweden and Poland in 1629 that freed up Gustavus Adolphus to enter the Thirty Years War as part of a grand Protestant alliance. Elected as an MP for Oxford in the Long Parliament, Roe stopped attending the Commons in April 1641 – first because of diplomatic duties on the Continent but afterwards because of a genuine desire to remain neutral. Again, this was much easier said than done.[[43]](#footnote-43) ‘No neutrality is admitted’, Roe lamented in the autumn of 1642, since ‘both parts resolve that those who are not for them are against them … the voluntary contributions daily increase, and all who will not are as corn between two millstones’.[[44]](#footnote-44) Rather than simply keeping his head down, however, Roe sought to use all the experience and contacts he had accumulated during his long diplomatic career to heal the divisions between Charles I and parliament. While other prospective peacemakers entered into print, Roe worked behind the scenes, corresponding with moderates in both camps like Lord Falkland and the earl of Northumberland, who he hoped would be able to move ‘those who are in power to assist and to prepare the waye’ for peace.[[45]](#footnote-45)

What drove Roe’s neutralism?On one level, the answer is simple: he explained to Falkland his justifiable fears that ‘if you make not peace, the king, and kingdome will be undone irrepayreably’.[[46]](#footnote-46)Nonetheless, it is also worth pondering the relationship between Roe’s Protestant internationalism, and in particular his consistent support for the Palatine cause, and his mediatory activities in England during the early 1640s. Indeed, it is revealing that many peace-party MPs and peers – Benjamin Rudyerd, Denzil Holles, the earls of Holland and Pembroke – had been among the most steadfast advocates of the Elector Palatine prior to 1640. It is therefore tempting to wonder whether these men were especially inclined to view events in Englandthrough the prism of European politics and the fortunes of Protestantism more generally. In March 1643, Roe wrote to Sir William Curtius, another diplomat who had worked tirelessly to promote the Palatine cause on the Continent, expressing his hopes that the ongoing Treaty of Oxford would be successful, so that ‘we may be more considerable both to friends, and enemyes’.[[47]](#footnote-47) In another letter two months later, Roe warned Sir Dudley Carleton, then resident in the Netherlands, that a protracted civil war in England would have disastrous implications for fellow Protestants in Europe. He advised the Dutch to consider how vulnerable they would be to a Franco-Spanish alliance, should ‘England be reduced to that condition, that it be not able to assist them’.[[48]](#footnote-48)

Furthermore, one of Roe’s recurring proposals for effecting reconciliation was to solicit intervention and mediation from Europe. He repeatedly wrote to Elizabeth of Bohemia during 1642-3, requesting that she come to England ‘as an angell, and mediative of peace’, before moving on to place his hopes in representatives from the Dutch Republic.[[49]](#footnote-49) The candidate would need to be somebody sufficiently respected and impartialto be able to ‘speake and propose to both, that w[hi]ch no subiect may to his king, nor no member dare to the Parlament’. Roe was aware of his own inadequacies in this regard, acknowledging that were he to attempt to do the ‘mediators service’ directly, ‘I shall be able to doe no more, than to be condemned, if not laughed at, on both parts’.[[50]](#footnote-50)

At the heart of Roe’s insistence on external mediation was an appreciation of the deep-seated mistrust that had come to characterise relations between king and parliament. ‘The disease is knowne to be only diffidence on both opposite parts’, he told Northumberland on 3 May 1643.[[51]](#footnote-51) ‘Whatsoever shall proceed from eyther part of the interested, and so much enraged, willbe understood, and received with Stomach, and iealousie’.[[52]](#footnote-52) This was a problem with which many peace writers were forced to contend throughout the 1640s. How could either party ever reach the negotiating table when both suspected the other of devious plots and nefarious designs? And even if a set of acceptable peace terms werehammered out, could both sides be confident that their erstwhile adversary would keep to them? Would they not simply take the first chance to exact revenge, once they were again in a position to do so? One parliamentarian epitomised this problem when he complained in 1643 that the Machiavellian counsellors surrounding the king had made it ‘one part of the perfection of a Statist, to be too wise for engagements’.[[53]](#footnote-53) On the other hand, as Roe explained to Denzil Holles in May 1644, the advantage of a well-chosen mediator was their potential to ‘speake a language and propose those tempers to both, w[hi]ch will not become, or not be endured from either exasperated party’.[[54]](#footnote-54)

This problematic trust deficit – which Roe termed ‘diffidence’ – also shaped his opinions about how peace negotiations should actually be conducted. Roe’s disappointment at the failure of the Treaty of Oxford was compounded by his sense that it had been approached in the wrong way from the outset and thus destined to fail. King and parliament had put the cart before the horse by discussing articles without first resolving their mutual fears and anxieties. As a result, Roe claimed, ‘all discussion of articles [had been] swallowed up in that bottomless pitt’ of ‘distrust’.[[55]](#footnote-55) Since ‘this distrust is the great impediment’, Roe told Falkland in May, ‘yo[u]r treaty must begin there’: both sides must ‘sett downe, and state, what it is they mutually distrust and … consult upon such remedy, and assurance as may be applyable to the diffidence’.[[56]](#footnote-56) An example of one such ‘diffidence’ was ‘how his Ma[jes]ty may safely come to London: or how the Parlament may securely remove to him’.[[57]](#footnote-57) Issues like these, Roe believed, needed resolving *before* questions of church government or forts and the militia could be considered.

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How, then, did royalist and parliamentarian activists respond to this popular clamour for accommodation? Both sides were acutely conscious of the propaganda value of appearing peaceable and the corresponding bad press that would accompany blatant intransigence. In a speech to the House of Commons on 17 February 1643, the peace-party MP Benjamin Rudyerd declared that ‘the Disposition of the Kingdome, for the greatest part, stands bent towards a Peace: so that wheresoever the Refusall, or Delay of the way to it shall be fixt, the Disadvantage will fall on that side’.[[58]](#footnote-58) Despite not sharing Rudyerd’s enthusiasm for a treaty**,** his fellow MP John Pym agreed that the English people ‘will joyne with us, with more alacrity, when they see we have desired Peace … and cannot have it’.[[59]](#footnote-59)

Neither party was therefore willing to be held responsible for the failure to reach a settlement. A pamphlet published by the royalist cleric and propagandist Peter Heylyn shortly after the breakdown of the Treaty of Oxford was typical in declaring on its title-page that ‘the overtures, which have been made for peace and accommodation have proceeded from [the king] onely And … the unsuccessefulnesse of the late treaty is notto be imputed to His Majesty, but to [parliament]’.[[60]](#footnote-60) Both sides likewise bristled at being the sole addressees of peace petitions, since this implied that it was they who were the chief obstacle to a resolution. Parliament responded to one such petition by telling the signatories that ‘it behooved [them] to addresse themselves … to the King, if no want of affection to peace were apparent in the Parliament, as certainly none was’.[[61]](#footnote-61) The paradox here was that a posture of peacefulness was being projected in order to mobilise popular support and resources for continued war. As a result, partisans were frequently accused of employing the rhetorical technique of *paradiastole* and giving peace a new meaning entirely. A group of London pro-accommodation petitioners complained in January 1643 that their opponents had ‘studied Sophistry, to prove Peace to be no Peace’.[[62]](#footnote-62) ‘That man which hates peace’, conceded one parliamentarian writer, could still ‘make advantage of the name’.[[63]](#footnote-63)

However, to explain the deployment of pacific rhetoric by militants as mere ‘sophistry’ and illusion underestimates the depth and sophistication of peace thought in the 1640s. There was space for genuine disagreement between writers on the exact relationship between war and peace: the idea, for instance, that peace could only be gained by waging, or at least being prepared to wage, war was well known from classical writers. The concept of *Pax Romana*, after all, had been premised on the conquest and subjugation of enemies abroad, to ensure peace within Rome’s borders. This was fundamentally an *unequal* peace, imposed by the Romans on other peoples at the point of a sword and maintained through military occupation.[[64]](#footnote-64) Hence, the famous words of Cagacus, a Caledonian chieftain, as reported by Tacitus: ‘they create a desert and call it peace’.[[65]](#footnote-65) Roman coins often depict the goddesses Pax and Victoria as inextricably linked, and those minted under Trajan show Pax setting her foot on the necks of the defeated.[[66]](#footnote-66) Roger Manning has argued that there is an important contrast here with ancient Greece, ‘where the theory was that *both* parties to [a] treaty had identical rights and there was some room for negotiation’.[[67]](#footnote-67) It is clear that Roman history and philosophy were influential in shaping the peace debates of 1642-3. In a publication from November 1642, for example, Richard Ward, a parliamentarian apologist, paraphrased the famous adage of the Roman military theorist Vegetius: ‘men prepare war, when they desire peace’.[[68]](#footnote-68) On the other hand, the following month in the House of Commons, Benjamin Rudyerd quoted Cicero on the evils of civil war: ‘All things are miserable in a Civill war, but nothing more miserable than a Victory it selfe’.[[69]](#footnote-69)

*Plaine English*, an anonymous pamphlet published in January 1643 and possibly penned by the Presbyterian minister Edward Bowles, epitomises the ways in which parliamentarian activists presented and defined peace. Bowles declared himself desperate for ‘an honest and honorable peace’ but immediately distinguished this from the ‘peace upon unsafe and unworthy termes’ that the royalists were proposing. It was a genuine resolution that parliament was fighting for, argued Bowles, and their very willingness to continue the bloodshed, paradoxically, proved their commitment to this goal: ‘I love peace so well, that I can endure warre to accomplish it … I am sure I love a better peace then they that can abide the thought of nothing else’. Crucially, there was a distinction to be drawn, for Bowles, between an actual peace and a mere truce. The former could never be secured if true religion were sacrificed and superstitious idolaters tolerated, since this would only bring further providential punishment upon the nation from an enraged deity. Bowles could thus conclude that peace was entirely dependent on the absolute triumph of parliament’s religious programme – the extirpation of ‘Popery and superstition’, the establishment ‘of a pious painfull Ministry’ – and this necessitated fighting the war until the king’s party could be forced to acquiesce in godly reformation. ‘This warre is the fruit of peace’, he declared, and ‘Peace may be the fruit of this warre’.[[70]](#footnote-70) A petition from Derbyshire presented to the House of Commons in March 1642 had made a similar point. ‘God’s blessing’ towards England was dependent on the nation continuing to fulfil its Protestant destiny by destroying the papist threat within its borders. Only if Catholics were ‘fully disarmed and confined, Church papists discovered, and the evill Councels of the popish and malignant party disappointed’, would God allow every man to sit ‘under his own Vine and Figtree, and enjoy a happy peace to us and our posterity to the worlds end’.[[71]](#footnote-71)

The broader point here, and one that partisans on both sides could make use of in opposing treaty negotiations, was that peace was ultimately the Lord’s gift to give and could be had only on His terms. There could be ‘no peace till God be at peace’, argued one of Thomas Povey’s interlocutors in March 1643, and this would not be ‘till we have … removed that which makes Him our Enemy’.[[72]](#footnote-72) The same author was careful to distinguish between ‘a Peace *accommodated* by Man’ and ‘a Peace given by God’.[[73]](#footnote-73) More famously,in late 1648 Oliver Cromwell would warn Colonel Robert Hammond, then having doubts over the army’s forcible curtailing of the Newport Treaty, that ‘peace is only good when we receive it out of the Father’s hand, it is dangerous to snatch it, most dangerous to go against the will of God to attain it’.[[74]](#footnote-74)

John Saltmarsh’s *Peace but no pacification*, meanwhile, was published in the aftermath of a string of parliamentarian defeats during the summer of 1643, which had re-energised London’s popular peace movement. Saltmarsh was both a religious and a political radical, particularly by the standards of 1643. Accused of antinomianism and denial of the sacraments, he had in August of that year come close to being imprisoned by the House of Commons after the discovery of a manuscript in which he considered ‘how the King and his Children might be destroyed’.[[75]](#footnote-75) The anti-accommodation pamphlet Saltmarsh published in October, however, made the less provocative case that negotiating with Charles I was fundamentally unsafe because the king could never be trusted to keep to any agreement.

As we have already with Sir Thomas Roe, the issue of mutual mistrust was a vexed one for those who advocated accommodation in the 1640s. In a pamphlet published just a few weeks before Saltmarsh’s own, his fellow parliamentarian Henry Parker had suggested by way of solution an ‘oath of pacification’. The king would swear, publicly and on the sacraments, never in future to alter the ‘Religion established’, ‘invad[e] the Liberty and Property of the Subject’, or ‘violate the least Priviledges of Parliament’.[[76]](#footnote-76) For Saltmarsh, however, this proposal would not have its desired effect, since oaths depended for their efficacy on the swearer’s fear of divine retribution – they must believe that ‘violation [brings] with it (like a boding Comet) the sparklings of an heavenly indignation’. This fear, he argued, would simply not apply to princes surrounded with flattering councillors, who would ‘make them beleeve that their politicall deitie can secure them’ and ‘heale their distempers with many a blandishment and evasion’. Saltmarsh conceded that if God *were* to intervene the very moment an oath was violated, that wouldoffer parliamentarians some protection. But, alas, providential punishment ‘is not an immediate judgment which treades alwayes on the heeles of a transgression’ and ‘what shall a State doe then in this space and intervall to judgement?’[[77]](#footnote-77)

Many parliamentarian clergymen claimed that it was specifically the popery rife at Charles I’s court that rendered royalists incapable of upholding any treaty. In doing so, they applied to a civil war context arguments that – as both Peter Lake and Alexandra Gajda have shown – militant Protestant advocates of war against Spain had wielded during the late Elizabethan and early Stuart decades.[[78]](#footnote-78) ‘An happy union between Protestants and Papists [is] altogether impossible’, declared the Presbyterian Francis Cheynell in a work of May 1643: ‘We cannot forget how many leagues the Papists broke [between] 1572 [and] 1588’.[[79]](#footnote-79) He commended the ‘sweet lines’ of Aristophanes, ‘where he advises all men to beware how they enter into a league of Peace with men that are unpeaceable’.[[80]](#footnote-80) Catholics, agreed John Ley, ‘ply [the people] with artificiall fomentations of different fancies and opinions, to raise an hearty disaffection betwixt them’.[[81]](#footnote-81) Christopher Love conjured a still more striking image when, on the first day of the Uxbridge talks in January 1645, he compared a ‘Covenant’ with Catholics to ‘a loose collar around an Apes neck, which they can put on and off at pleasure’.[[82]](#footnote-82) It was the same conviction that lay behind the publication in 1644 of *A pattern of Popish peace*, an English translation of Francois Hotman’s historical account of the French Religious Wars. The example of France, a foreword explained, proved that Catholics would use ‘Treaties, Leagues, Oathes, [and] Marriages’ as ‘nets and snares to deceive Trust’. ‘By what Security can any be assured of any Peace with Papists, when the very Security doth Decei[ve], and Destroy?’ The only secure peace that could be had with such innately duplicitous men was instead one enforced at the point of a sword: negotiated treaties were a non-starter because they depended on mutual trust.[[83]](#footnote-83)

However, Saltmarsh was prepared to go one step further and attack not only the possibility of a treaty with the royalists specifically but the very idea of peace achieved through negotiation. In complete contrast to Thomas Povey, Saltmarsh argued that a ‘pacification’ brokered through a series of mutual concessions and trade-offs would ultimately leave England in an unstable predicament precisely *because* it had involved compromise: the ‘peace’ achieved would be chimeric and impermanent rather than robust and meaningful. It was far preferable that one side – and Saltmarsh obviously hoped this would be parliament – crush their opponent so completely that ‘all possibility of resistance is taken away’. The alternative involved permitting the co-existence within the nation of ‘two natures of proportionall abilities and passions, which would prove like the two men in the Fable, who being weary with beating one another, tooke truce for an houres refreshment, and fell fresh to their blowes againe’.[[84]](#footnote-84) This, for Saltmarsh, was a function of how deeply people were by this point attached to either cause: ‘both sides have been so Argumentatively and rationally informed, and have taken in their owne fundamentalls so deeply, [that] it is not possible nor probable to mediate a reconciliation till you have loosened and unhinged the one’.[[85]](#footnote-85) ‘Our Peace’, Saltmarsh therefore concluded, ‘may be rather secured by a disability of contending’.[[86]](#footnote-86)

Saltmarsh’s was one of the most articulate arguments for peace through total military victory advanced by a parliamentarian activist, undermining as it did the whole notion of a resolution reached through compromise and negotiation. For their part, however, Charles I’s supporters could make the case just as forcefully that the way to long-term stability was through the military triumph of their cause. A pamphlet published at Oxford in 1645, the year of the Uxbridge negotiations, encapsulated this argument in its title: *No peace till the king prosper*. The author – possibly the royalist divine John Arnway – began by declaring that ‘he is a block, a stone, not a Man, a Christian, that is not weary of Warre and greedy of Peace’. However, if parliament were to prevail against the king, it would mean the subversion of all known laws of the land and the imposition of military rule. Without the king, ‘the want of the Scepter must be supplied by the Sword, and that which was the Mother of so great a change and Innovation of Church and State, must of necessity be the Nurse to violence and Warre’.[[87]](#footnote-87) Furthermore, according to Arnway, the parliamentarian leadership – the ‘Authors and Actors in these Warres’ – would not ‘ever allow of Peace; but whilest the power is in their hands, for ever abet and maintaine the Warre’. This was because, if a treaty was agreed, they would constantly live in fear of future punishment for their war-time actions. ‘They may think’, Arnway observed, ‘that no Security can warrant their indemnity. If one Parliament, for the present necessity, should pardon all, another (more free) may revoke it’. Hence the rebel leaders kept insisting on peace terms to which Charles I could not possibly agree without violating ‘His Honour and Oath to Almighty God’.[[88]](#footnote-88) Since negotiations were a sham and a treaty with such men impossible, Arnway argued, there remained ‘no way left to Peace, but to raise the King to prosperity; to assist Him with our Meanes and Lives, Valiantly and Vigorously to hasten it’.[[89]](#footnote-89)

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This article has argued that the seismic upheavals that shook the English nation after 1642, combined with the persistent failure of king and parliament to reach a settlement, generated intense popular interest in the theory and practice of peacemaking. In pamphlets, petitions, and private correspondence, the English people reflected on the dilemmas associated with healing and settling and, with greater or lesser degrees of sophistication, devised their own strategies for resolving the conflict. In another example of the growing public participation in politics that characterised these revolutionary decades more generally, private individuals sought to interpose themselves as mediators and to publicise their peacemaking schemes through print.However, it is also worth noting how often these different schemes put the responsibility for peace on each individual member of the Commonwealth, however humble, and not just its rulers: it was up to ordinary men and women to turn from their sinful ways; to restrain their passions and self-interested impulses; or to refrain from divisive language and acting on perceived slights to personal honour. Thus, while Carl von Clauswitz famously claimed that, in the wake of the French Revolution, ‘war again became the business of the people’, this article has tried to suggest that, during the EnglishRevolution, the same might be said of peace.

It has also attempted to give a sense of how, exactly, different commentators – whether neutralists or partisans – differed in their ideas about peace and how it could be restored to the kingdom(s). In particular, we have seen contrasting positions adopted on the very wisdom of pursuing a peace through negotiation: would a compromise treaty avoid the imposition of a radical religious and political settlement on an unwilling populace by extremists, or would it merely produce a temporary truce, unsatisfactory to both sides and therefore unstable? Would outright military victory for either party breed feelings of humiliation and resentment that would inevitably lead to future convulsions? Or would it in fact ensure that authority and obedience could be effectively maintained at the point of a sword? Thinking on these questions in the mid-seventeenth century was shaped by the writings of the classical world, but modern theorists of conflict resolution continue to wrestle with the same issues. In her study of intrastate conflicts since the Second World War, for example, Monica Duffy Toft argues that negotiated settlements have too often failed to produce a ‘quality peace’, and therefore the prudent strategy for the international community to adopt is to let belligerents keep fighting until one side achieves victory.[[90]](#footnote-90)

It is possible that further research will suggest that the very ambiguity and malleability of peace rhetoric can help us to understand the elusiveness of settlement in the 1640s.[[91]](#footnote-91) Even the most militant activists could lay claim to the mantle of peace and reassure themselves, or others, that they were acting to bring it about. A corollary of this is perhaps that the traditional ‘war’ and ‘peace’ party labels are problematic not just for their failure to capture the fluidity of Westminster politics after 1642. For someone like John Saltmarsh, a fiery parliamentarian, to oppose ‘war’ and ‘peace’ in this way was to construct a false dichotomy. The latter could only be meaningfully achieved through the former.

But I hope too that the findings of this paper might help to develop our understanding of neutralists and neutralism during the 1640s. With the abundance of excellent recent literature on processes of mobilisation in these years, it is easy to lose sight of those who tried to mediate and accommodate disagreement, to smother the flames of discord before they became a conflagration. Indeed, those who opted for neutrality are still occasionally caricatured as dis- or self-interested pragmatists, whose horizons extended only as far as the edge of their town or village. By contrast, men like Thomas Povey, Richard Farrar, and Sir Thomas Roe thought deeply not only about the complexities of the national political situation but about the processes through which an enduring reconciliation could be achieved. That these would-be mediators ultimately failed to repair the breach between king and parliament should not, I think, preclude us from taking seriously their attempts.

William White

*University of York*

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