



## The Meaning of "Revolution" in the English Revolution (1648-1660)

Ilan Rachum

*Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 56, No. 2. (Apr., 1995), pp. 195-215.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0022-5037%28199504%2956%3A2%3C195%3ATMO%22IT%3E2.0.CO%3B2-J>

*Journal of the History of Ideas* is currently published by University of Pennsylvania Press.

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/upenn.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

---

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

# The Meaning of “Revolution” in the English Revolution (1648-1660)

*Ilan Rachum*

---

Admittedly, the heading of this paper consists of an anachronistic play on words. The “English Revolution” is a term gradually devised by modern historians: first by the French François Guizot in his *Histoire de la révolution d’Angleterre* (1826), then by Samuel Rawson Gardiner, who in 1889 coined the phrase “Puritan Revolution” to distinguish it from the Glorious Revolution of 1688, and finally by twentieth-century historians, who meant to express by this term the wide ranging changes—political, economic, social, religious, and ideological—that took place in England from 1640 to 1660.<sup>1</sup> Contemporaries employed other terms for the events, terms which reflected their concern for principles of legitimate government. Thus the “(Great) Rebellion,” proclaimed by supporters of the royal cause, was balanced by the “Interregnum” and by the matter-of-fact “Civil War.” During the 1640s we find men employing a variety of words and verbal constructions to characterize their political situation. The times are called “turbulent” and conditions are dubbed “civil distractions.” As early as 1642 one member of Parliament declared that “we are at the very brink of combustion and confusion.” In 1644 James Howell, that virtuoso of words, lamented the destruction brought about by the civil war with the following lush imagery: “And when I consider further the distractions, the tossings, the turmoilings, and the tumblings of other regions round about me, as well as my own, I conclude also, that kingdoms and states, and cities, and all bodies politick, are subject to convulsions, to calentures, and consumptions, as well as the frail bodies of men, and must have an evacuation for their corrupt humours....”<sup>2</sup>

The author wishes to thank David Harris Sacks for his many suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, M. G. Finlayson, *Historians, Puritanism and the English Revolution* (Toronto, 1983), 20-21, and R. C. Letham, “English Revolutionary Thought, 1640-1660,” *History*, 30 (1945), 38-39.

<sup>2</sup> *Harleian Miscellany* (London, 1808-11), V, 217, 446.

Howell's terminology of 1644 and that of contemporaries were as yet devoid of the word "revolution." One would have to wait two centuries to have this word applied to the years 1640 to 1660 by modern historians, and yet one should not fail to perceive that it made its first decisive strides into English political discourse during a twelve-year period beginning in 1648. Then some persons began to employ the word (mostly in the plural form) in reference to political events in England. While they stopped short of forging from it a viable historical label, they at least managed to include it in an array of other words denoting political instability.

In the past three decades a number of studies have focused on the penetration of the term "revolution" to seventeenth-century English political discourse.<sup>3</sup> Vernon F. Snow identified leading examples employing the new term, though he hesitated to decide whether by 1688 "revolution" had established a political meaning completely dissociated from its previous astronomical sense of circular motion of the stars. Melvin Lasky pointed out the variety of sources that contributed, in the first half of the seventeenth century, to fashion "revolution" as a metaphor for change. He credited especially James Howell and Marchamont Nedham with accomplishing the twist toward a political meaning, but he felt that "revolution" still remained associated with "the principle of circularity, not of linear progress," which explains that "the events of 1648-49 failed to be given the definitive name of revolution in their own epoch because they were not a return to a previous regime."<sup>4</sup> It is exactly this point, the transition to a modern sense of one-directional political change, on which Christopher Hill centered. Hill employed passages already used by Snow and Lasky and, adding many more examples, concluded that a decisive shift in the meaning of "revolution" had occurred well before 1688.

The purpose of this paper is to pursue the change of the meaning of "revolution" from a different angle. Rather than just aiming at finding when or how "revolution" came to signify unidirectional, forcible political change, this paper will focus on the politics of its usage and especially on the way the development of the new meaning of the term took shape as a rhetorical device in debate.

In fact the sense of the word as change had been there from the very start. As early as the fourteenth century Chaucer employed the word for the circular motion of the stars, speaking of "hevenish revolucioun" but at the same time coined the phrase "Thurgh change and revolucioun" in his translation of the *Roman de la Rose*. This meaning of the word echoes early in the seventeenth century in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, where, in the graveyard scene, the Danish

<sup>3</sup> Snow, "The Concept of Revolution in Seventeenth-century England," *The Historical Journal*, V, 2 (1962), 167-74; Lasky, "The Birth of a Metaphor; on the Origins of Utopia and Revolution," *Encounter* (Feb., 1970), 35-45 and (Mar., 1970), 30-42, and later in his *Utopia and Revolution* (Chicago, 1976); Hill, "The Word 'Revolution,'" in his *A Nation of Change and Novelty* (London, 1990), 82-101.

<sup>4</sup> Lasky, *Encounter* (Mar., 1970), 34.

prince, seeing a grave-digger throwing up a human skull, exclaims: "Here's fine revolution, if we had the trick to see't" (Act V, scene i, 88). Yet the use of the word in the sense of change remained rare and extraneous to political discourse. We do not find Shakespeare's contemporaries, either Francis Bacon or Walter Raleigh, employing "revolution" when dealing with the subject of political change. In the mid-1620s, however, Thomas Browne pointed towards the meaning which the word would assume, when he wrote; "because the glory of one State depends upon the ruine of another, there is a revolution and vicissitude in their greatness."<sup>5</sup>

The change in meaning of the word took place before 1688, and in fact before 1660. Indeed, given the large number of examples that we have, the discrepancy in interpretation among scholars is in itself an indication of the hidden source of difficulty. Even after 1660 the word "revolution" in the sense of a change of government by violent means, is employed by some, while it is avoided or actually rejected by others. Moreover, those who avoid the word are perhaps the majority and will remain so until 1688. We have to go back to 1648 to understand the nature of the problem.

Hill has shown how the crisis of the 1640s influenced a shift in the use and meaning of "revolution." He found instances in sermons preached before Parliament from 1644 to 1648 in which the word came together with "change," and also noticed similar phrases in astrological literature of those years.<sup>6</sup> But clearly a decisive turn can be claimed to have really taken place when the new meaning of the term had been introduced to political writing. In fact the semantic tendencies in England were reinforced by influences from abroad. During the English civil war the Spanish Empire was beset by a series of revolts in Catalonia (1640), Portugal (1640), Sicily (1647), and Naples (1647). Four books by Italian authors were written shortly thereafter and each book title incorporated the term "rivoluzioni" as a label for the events of these revolts.<sup>7</sup> Of the four, Luca Assarino's work on Catalonia, first published in Genoa in 1644, and Alessandro Giraffi's on Naples quickly completed and printed in Venice within the year of the outbreak, were particularly successful. By 1648 both had been reprinted three more times: Assarino in Bologna (1645), Genoa (1647) and Bologna (1648); Giraffi in Geneva, Ferrara, and La Gaeta (all in 1648).

As yet there is no proof of the influence of these books by direct contemporary reference. Nevertheless, Snow felt confident enough to write that the first English author who employed "revolutions" in the title of his

<sup>5</sup> *The Works of Sir Thomas Browne*, ed. C. Saylor (3 vols.; Edinburgh, 1912), I, 28.

<sup>6</sup> Hill, 88-89.

<sup>7</sup> Luca Assarino, *Delle rivoluzioni di Catalogna* (Genoa, 1644); Giovanni Battista Birago Avogadro, *Historia delle rivoluzioni del regno di Portogallo* (Geneva, 1646); Alessandro Giraffi, *Le rivoluzioni di Napoli* (Venice, 1647); Placido Reina, *Delle rivoluzioni della città di Palermo* (Verona, 1649). Birago's work was actually a pirated edition of his *Historia del regno di Portogallo* (Venice, 1644), to which the Geneva printer added "rivoluzioni."

work incorporated it from Giraffi. Lasky did not deal with this issue; and Hill, while implying an influence of the Italian works, seemed to by-pass the question, maintaining that by then the sense of “revolutions” as popular revolts was common.<sup>8</sup> Actually, this was not so. The works which appeared in Italy in the 1640s with “rivoluzioni” in their titles really renewed, in a rather sensational manner, a long neglected political meaning of the word, first evidenced in the histories of the Villani brothers in the fourteenth century and encouraged other Italian authors, as Majolino Bisaccioni, Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato, and Girolamo Brusoni, to employ it.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, their unusual titles aroused interest outside Italy. In France, for example, we find Valentin Conrart, first perpetual secretary of the Académie Française, writing on 31 July 1648 to André Félibien in Rome, urging him to send over Giraffi’s original Venice edition, while telling him that he is already in possession of the Geneva edition of the work. He employed the word once, when he acknowledged receiving the sought-after edition.<sup>10</sup> In England, Giraffi’s work appeared in translation in 1650, although there is reason to believe that the translator, James Howell, was in possession of the book as early as 1648.

Also relevant here is the manner in which Assarino and Giraffi used the term “rivoluzioni.” Assarino, an author of novels of sorts until then, wrote in the introduction to his *Delle rivoluzioni di Catalogna* that this was his first work in history. He hardly used the term in the text of his book and left the impression that his real aim was to daze his readers with the word. In an unusual note inserted on a separate page following his first chapter, he apologized for his tendency to use words as “fate,” “destiny,” and the like. Although it is difficult to say how precisely he had decided on the term for the title of his book, “revolutions” might have been incorporated by him because of his admitted preference for words suggesting the fatalistic nature of human existence; after all, this word, being associated with the movement of the planets, resounded with astrological inevitability. Giraffi too made a sparing use of the new term in the text of his work, but he employed it both in the plural and singular and gave it a dimension of time. Thus, the ten days in Naples in July 1647 that saw Masaniello’s rise to power and death are referred to as “tempo di detta rivoluzione.” Therefore, these two books, while exploiting the word to impress the reading public with an unusual term, began the employment of “revolution” as an alternative to “revolt” and

<sup>8</sup> Snow, 170; Lasky, *Encounter* (Mar., 1970), 31; Hill, 87.

<sup>9</sup> See especially M. Bisaccioni, *Historia delle guerre civili di questi ultimi tempi* (Venice, 1652); G. Gualdo Priorato, *Historia delle rivoluzioni di Francia sotto il regno di Luigi XIV e regenza d’Anna D’Austria* (Venice, 1655); G. Brusoni, *Varie osservazioni sopra le Relazioni Univarsali di Giovanni Botero nelle quali si toccano le rivoluzioni di stato delle più principali monarchie dell’universo succeduti a nostri tempi* (Venice, 1659).

<sup>10</sup> R. Kerviler and E. de Barthelemy, *Valentin Conrart, premier secretaire perpetuel de l’Académie Française, sa vie et sa correspondance* (Paris, 1881), 475, 496.

"rebellion" at a time when more places in Europe, England included, were undergoing political crises and debating their outcome.

In 1648 a short treatise on "the birth, increase and decay of monarchies," written by an unknown gentleman identified only as P. D., was printed in London. In this work the revolts in the Spanish Empire are branded "popular commotions" and that of Naples is described in some detail. England's system of "composed Monarchical Government" is found by the author to be the best that was ever invented, despite "our civil distractions." Though the work is an inquiry into the theme of transformation of government, the term "revolution" is employed only once: "it is impossible for the greatest Princes, or Statemen to prevent the change and revolutions of Common-weales and Monarchies, by their wisdom, policy, valour, and the power of their men of warre, if the day of their ruine, appointed by the secret counsell of God, be come." Significantly, "revolutions" here mean god-decreed political changes, which no human interference is able to halt.<sup>11</sup>

A same or similar meaning is conveyed by the term in the title of the tract that Anthony Ascham published in 1648, *A Discourse Wherein is Examined What is Particularly Lawfull During the Confusions and Revolutions of Government*. A Cambridge King's College fellow who had taken the side of Parliament in the civil war, Ascham wrote to persuade Englishmen to transfer allegiance to the new government. He regarded the coming of a new political power into being an act of providence, and in this sense a "revolution."<sup>12</sup> No other word then employed to convey the notion of alteration of government suggested inevitability, fate, and an inexorable movement in a predestined direction. Ascham thus sought out "revolution" as a word that, unlike "rebellion" and others, would not evoke an idea of illegitimacy and would balance "confusion" and other similar words with a slight nuance of a sense of a fait accompli. Familiarity with the Italian works on the revolts of either Catalonia or Naples must have given him the idea to introduce the term to the title of his treatise. Indeed, in 1649, when the book was republished in an expanded version, the title was changed to *Of the Confusions and Revolutions of Governments*, a change that was matched in the design of the new title-page, where the new sensational term was displayed in an even more conspicuous manner.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> P. D., *Severall politique and militarie observations upon the civill and militarie governments* (London, 1648), 46, 50, 64, 69-70.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. P. Zagorin, *A History of Political Thought in the English Revolution* (London, 1954), 66; I. Colman, *Private Men and Public Causes: Philosophy and Politics in the English Civil War* (London, 1962), 205.

<sup>13</sup> Ascham's 1648 edition was printed by H. Moseley, and the expanded 1649 edition by W. Wilson. In 1689 the work was reprinted again, though without Ascham's name, and the title changed, to suit the circumstances, to *A seasonable discourse, wherein is examined what is lawful during the confusions and revolutions of government; especially in the case of a king deserting his kingdom*.

In the text of his work Ascham employed “revolution” both in the singular and plural forms, though sparingly and almost always together with “confusion(s).” He did not use the term, however, when discussing changes from one regime to another and indeed tried to convince his readers that from a point of view of subordinates it should make little difference to them which form of government existed: monarchy, aristocracy, or democracy. Any type of government had the right to enact laws, collect taxes, judge of life and death, and make war and peace. Therefore, once the impact of the newness of a changed government wore off, there should not have been reasons to reject its rule. The essential point about revolutions, to paraphrase Ascham’s argument, was not the political change that they brought but the fact that they took place and were the work of the inscrutable wisdom of heaven. Those who doubted whether they might submit to a commonwealth government should recall worse times, when Englishmen had to switch their allegiance again and again to a new ruler in breach of their oath to the one deposed, such as during the Wars of the Roses. “There I see true confusions and revolutions in Government,” he declared in the preface. In the opening chapter he again took up the subject, reminded the reader of the atrocities of Richard III, and concluded: “Yet notwithstanding, particular men (according to the calamity of those times) were by oath and allegiance forc’t to submit to this Injustice; which after another bloody Warre had its change, and after 24 years confusions and revolutions ended peaceably in the person of Henry the Seventh.”<sup>14</sup>

As it happened, in the interval between the first printing of Ascham’s book and the appearance of the second, expanded edition, far-reaching political events took place in England. On 17 August 1648 Cromwell defeated the Scots at Preston, practically bringing to an end the second civil war. In November the so-called Treaty of Newport between Charles I and Parliament collapsed, as the king was seized by the army. Next came Pride’s Purge (6 December 1648), which, through the expulsion of most members, left Parliament under army control, thus making possible the decision of the remaining members (Rump Parliament) to try the king. This led to the actual trial, the execution (30 January 1649), and the change of regime from monarchy to republic, known as the Commonwealth. In the face of these events, one might wonder whether they marked Ascham’s usage of “revolution” in the second edition or whether his launching of the term was reflected in contemporary discussions of the events.

Admittedly, one encounters in these critical months instances in which the term is given an obvious political meaning or is even exploited rhetorically for a political purpose. Matthew Barker said in a sermon delivered 25 October 1648: “The Lord knows what revolutions and changes we may see before the next monthly fast.” Earlier that month a declaration written in

<sup>14</sup> Ascham, *A discourse* (1648), 2-3, 22-23, 38; *Of the confusions and revolutions* (1649), 34-38, 70-73, 131-33.

Edinburgh as a response to those who sided with the king, opened thus: "As the only wise God is pleased to exercise his people, and carry on his work in these kingdoms with many strange revolutions of providence."<sup>15</sup> But these examples (perhaps a few more are yet to be uncovered) establish only a remote link with Ascham. The impression is that more than just a few months was needed for the innovation to have its impact, and so it may be that Ascham's own decision to bring "revolution" to the center of the title of his book in its second edition is indeed the best evidence that ties the new term with the events.

This interpretation adds confirmation from another angle. Ascham's ideas aroused controversy. He was attacked by the royalist Oxford theologian Robert Sanderson, who charged him with "encouraging of daring and ambitious Spirits to attempt continuall Innovations, with this Confidence, that if they can by anie waies (how unjust so ever) possess themselves of the Supreme Power, they ought to be submitted unto." Yet another pamphlet came from the pen of Henry Hammond, the former chaplain of the defunct Charles I. Both Sanderson and Hammond declined to use the word "revolution"; and Ascham, in his replies, similarly abstained from the term, though he substantially radicalized his opinions, maintaining in his answer to Hammond that a ruler might not be allowed to continue in office once he downgraded the "people's wellbeing" and favors his own.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, a reference to Ascham seems to be in a tract by Matthew Wren, son of the Bishop of Ely, who wrote of the world being "full of both books and pamphlets," designed "to treat of the most general causes of those strange revolutions we have seen."<sup>17</sup>

Ascham was assassinated in Madrid the day after he arrived there in June 1650 as resident envoy of the commonwealth. Among his six assailants, all refugee English royalists, one was in the retinue of Sir Edward Hyde (later Earl of Clarendon), then present in Madrid as ambassador of the defeated government. Hyde, the future lord chancellor of Charles II and author of the famous history of the civil war, saw fit to leave Spain. At their trial the assassins justified their act by claiming that Ascham had "particularly fomented the death of the King, and the change of government," and that he

<sup>15</sup> See Barker cited in Hill, 88, and "Declaration of the Commission of the General Assembly," 9 October 1648, in John Thurloe, *State Papers* (7 vols.; London, 1742), I, 105.

<sup>16</sup> [R. Sanderson], *A resolution of conscience in answer to a letter sent with Mr. Ascham's book, treating how far it may be lawful to submit to an usurped power* (1649), 5-6; H. Hammond, *A vindication of Dr. Hammond's addresse from the exceptions of Eutactus Philodemius* (London, 1649); A. Ascham, *A reply to a paper of Dr. Sanderson's, containing a censure of Mr. A. A. his book of the confusions and revolutions of government* (London, 1650); [A. Ascham], *An answer to the vindication of Doctor Hammond against the exceptions of Eutactus Philodemius* (London, 1650), 5-6.

<sup>17</sup> Wren's tract was published only later, in J. Gutch's *Collectanea Curiosa* (Oxford, 1781), I, 228-53. Its title, "Of the Origins and Progress of the Revolution in England," could have been added by the editor. See Snow, 170; Hill, 92.



had come to Spain “to seduce and deceive by a book of his, which was found among his papers.”<sup>18</sup> Actually, Ascham had anticipated the charge. At the end of the 1649 preface to his book he added a note reminding the reader that the first edition had been published long before the king’s trial and execution. It therefore never intended to “point at that which it could not then by any means see.” Still, the impression is that *Of the Confusions and Revolutions of Governments* made Ascham both famous and notorious. We should not doubt that part of the notoriety proceeded from the unusual and unorthodox term that he had introduced into the title.

Other political thinkers must have been aware of Ascham’s terminological innovation almost from the start. Clarendon, for example, who met Thomas Hobbes in Paris on his way back from Spain, might have given him details on the affair. In any case, later on Hobbes wrote in his autobiography that he returned in 1652 to England after Clarendon had turned exiled prince Charles against him, and because he remembered the fates of Ascham and Dorislaus (another commonwealth emissary, murdered by royalists in Holland). John Milton knew Ascham well, since as secretary to the new government he wrote his letter of credentials to the court of Spain. If these three authorities, belonging to either side of the political spectrum, took a negative attitude towards “revolution” as a political term, it was certainly not because they had been unaware of the innovation right from the start.<sup>19</sup> Yet another political author who responded to Ascham was Robert Filmer. He found Ascham a theorist of importance, enough to mention him twice, together with Grotius, Selden, and Hobbes, in an essay of 1652. The heading of the essay, “Observations Upon Aristotle’s Politiques Touching Forms of Government Together with Directions for Obedience to Governours in Dangerous and Doubtful Times,” is in itself an echo of the central issue raised in Ascham’s tract. Filmer’s conclusion is diametrically opposed to Ascham’s. Equally significant, he completely refrains from employing “revolution.” Rather he prefers “transgressions of government,” or “alteration and change.” In an essay of 1648 Filmer, too, had spoken of “these distracted times.”<sup>20</sup>

Marchamont Nedham, the man who in a manner of speaking succeeded Ascham as an apologist of the commonwealth government, also might be said to have followed Ascham’s example in the use of “revolution.” After having spent some years at Oxford, Nedham became, in 1643, an editor of an anti-royalist news-sheet. His writings displayed a wide breadth of knowl-

<sup>18</sup> “The Process and Pleading in the Court of Spain, Upon the Death of Anthony Ascham” (London, 1651) in *Harleian Miscellany*, VI, 236-47; Cf. also R. B. Merriman, *Six Contemporaneous Revolutions* (Oxford, 1938), 108-10.

<sup>19</sup> Clarendon, E. Hyde, Earl of, *A brief view and survey of the dangerous and pernicious errors to church and state in Mr. Hobbes’s book entitled Leviathan* (Oxford, 1676), 7-8; Coltman, 208-10, 223.

<sup>20</sup> *Patriarcha and other political works of Sir Robert Filmer*, ed. P. Laslett (Oxford, 1949), 188, 279.

edge, and he tackled political issues in a clear style, which is easily communicable to a present day reader. On the merit of his essays Nedham should have been remembered as one of the early champions of modern democracy, but a thorough assessment of his entire career reveals him as no more than a brilliant literary drudge. In 1647 he became a royal propagandist, serving as editor of the weekly *Mercurius Pragmaticus* until 1649. After the execution of Charles I he again changed sides, becoming the commonwealth's chief hired writer and from 1650 until March 1660 editor of the semi-official *Mercurius Politicus*. He would change sides once more after the restoration.<sup>21</sup>

Prior to 1650 "revolutions" are absent from Nedham's vocabulary. In a pro-royalist poem which he wrote in 1648 he speaks of "accidents of state ... the like no age e'er knew."<sup>22</sup> But in his first pro-commonwealth essay the term already has a role to play, which was to convince of the "necessity of a submission to the present government," exactly as Ascham's aim had been. Similarly, he begins by declaring that "governments have their Revolutions and fatall periods." He compares changes in the form of government to "those rapid Hurricanoes of fatall necessity" and claims that "it is the weight of Sinne, which causeth those fatall Circumvolutions in the vast frame of the World." God leaves men to pursue their lusts but takes retribution by eventually destroying the mightiest governments. The term returns as he contends that "the Power of the Sword is, and ever hath been, the Foundation of all Titles to Government." This, too, is proven by the history of states and empires "in their Rise and Revolutions." Significantly, he does not employ the term in later parts of the essay, in which the advantages of "a Free-State, above a Kingly Government" are discussed.<sup>23</sup>

Nedham introduced the term to his writings in the *Mercurius Politicus* and elsewhere. In a preface, written late in 1652, to a work of John Selden that he had translated from the Latin, he claimed that "the Soveraigntie of the Seas flowing about this Island" has in all times been held by the British Empire, "both before the old Roman Invasion and since, under every Revolution, down to the present Age."<sup>24</sup> Here "revolution" seems to mean any

<sup>21</sup> G. P. Gooch, *English democratic ideas in the seventeenth century*, (Cambridge, 1927<sup>2</sup>), 159-62; Zagorin, 121-27.

<sup>22</sup> M. Nedham, "A Short History of the English Rebellion" (1648); the poem was reprinted in 1661, when Nedham, for obvious reasons, strove to give testimony of his royalist past. See *Harleian Miscellany*, VII, 185-208. "Revolution" does not appear in Nedham's *The case of the kingdom stated* (London, 1647), which is a short and rather objective analysis of the interests of the main political parties; neither in Nedham's short pro-royalist play, *The second part of crafty Cromwell, or Oliver his glory as king* (London, 1648).

<sup>23</sup> M. Nedham, *The case of the commonwealth of England stated* (London, 1650), 1-2, 6, 80-94.

<sup>24</sup> J. Selden, *Of the dominion or ownership of the sea, two books* (London, 1652); Hill, 90.

change of government effected through the use of force, such as the Anglo-Saxon invasions of the fifth century, the Norman conquest of 1066, and the victory of Henry VII at Bosworth Field in 1485. All the same, his short essay of 1654 marks a certain shift in meaning. This essay sought to defend Cromwell's setting-up of the Protectorate in December 1653. Nedham here went out of all bounds to argue the supposed elective and democratic nature of the new constitution. He began by claiming that it is the making of divine providence; "so it affords abundant cause of praise and thanksgiving, that those great Changes and Revolutions which have been in the midst of us, have not engaged us in blood among our selves, nor exposed us for a prey and spoil to the Common Enemy ... which the Lord himself hath owned by many glorious Deliverances in the behalf of our Nation." Afterwards, he equated "the many great changes of Affairs and revolutions of Government" with "the Occasions of our Change into a Free-State or Commonwealth."<sup>25</sup> Here again the process of political change, which brought about a different kind of government, was conceived as heavenly inspired.

By this time Nedham was only one of many who experimented with the term. In the early 1650s the new meaning of the word began to permeate the language of politics. Hill has given some dozen examples for those years, in which a variety of writers employ "revolution" in diverse senses. The word stands for change in cosmic, global, or continental European dimensions, as change in national political circumstances, as change in the most personal, intimate sense, and as a word expressing the idea of a certain change to come.<sup>26</sup> Still, it is one thing to fall upon a passage phrased in polished, sophisticated language such as William Sancroft's (many years later archbishop of Canterbury), "that Alterations and Revolutions in Kingdoms are the rods with which God scourges miscarrying Princes...,"<sup>27</sup> and yet another to observe how the new term penetrates daily political conversation or how it is employed in response to political events as they take shape.

The setting up of the Protectorate affords such an opportunity. The editor of *Great Britain's Post* reported to his readers on the events, including the remonstrance of members of Parliament following their sudden dissolution of 12 December 1653:

On the midst of this great *change* and *Revolution*, give me leave (I beseech you) *once more* to usher in, and act the Tragicomedy of this unexpected *Catastrophe*. O admirable constitutions! from whose rare Architecture, proceeds so excellent a *Basis*, essentially neces-

<sup>25</sup> M. Nedham, *A true state of the case of the commonwealth of England, Scotland and Ireland* (London, 1654), 2, 4.

<sup>26</sup> Hill, 89-92.

<sup>27</sup> [W. Sancroft], *Modern policies taken from Machiavel, Borgia and other choice authors* (London, 1653<sup>4</sup>); the first edition of this tract is July 1652. See his "Principle VI."

sary to the very Being of these Nations; unto whose protecting Sanctions, we owe the Beauty, and Order of our present Enjoyments. I shall not be copious in my first Center; but descend to the Effects of this *Revolution* to wit."

Here follows a description of the Parliament's resigning of power into Cromwell's hands, his appointment of a council of army officers, and their drawing up a constitutional document, whereby Cromwell was to share power as Lord Protector with a twenty-one-member council of state.<sup>28</sup>

The term "revolution" is employed twice in the quoted passage, first in association with "tragicomedy" and "catastrophe," then in relation to its immediate effects as summarized by the writer. In the first instance "revolution" is as if made to be the outcome of a narrative development of a drama. But the writer's choice of calling this drama a tragicomedy and not a tragedy, is apparently a deliberate attempt at ambiguity. Rather than making his "revolution" an unmistakable catastrophe, which is the reversal of fortune at the end of a tragedy, he hints at its farcical nature as the comic end that undoes tragedy in a tragicomedy. Evidently, we have here a person who is displeased with the setting up of the Protectorate but is careful not to spell out his opposition. This interpretation fits with his words on the "admirable constitutions," which again are cast in a certain ambiguity and perhaps said in irony. In any case, his second use of "revolution" is comparatively straightforward and plain. This time it is not only given in the singular form and has a clear one-directional sense, but it is used in connection with the change in the form of government, and not with the transfer of political power.

One month after the writing of the quotation discussed above a new editor of *The Politique Informer* found it necessary to tell his readers that "the Gentleman that formerly writ this Pamphlet" had been imprisoned and replaced for his daring to vent his opinions on recent events. He therefore had for his predecessor and for others a piece of advice: "but give me leave to tell him, the Revolutions and Changes which this Commonwealth hath sustained, ought not to be questioned by every Subject; for private men, who know little of, or converse little with state transactions and affairs, are not competent Judges, when the observation of the letter of the Law is of a dangerous and threatening import to the publique safety."<sup>29</sup>

On the background of this use of "revolution" in the popular press, it is not unexpected to find Cromwell himself employing the word. This comes in his speech of 4 July 1653 to the newly nominated Barebone Parliament. Comparing the years of the civil war to "those strange windings and turnings of providence," he exulted in their outcome "in this revolution of affairs,

<sup>28</sup> *Great Brittain's Post*, 14-21 December 1653.

<sup>29</sup> *The politique Informer*, 23-30 January 1654.

and issues of those successes God was pleased to give this nation.” He then enumerated the important changes that had taken place. They consisted of “bringing the state of this government to the name, at least, of a common-wealth ... the King removed, and brought to justice, and many great ones with him, the House of Peers laid aside; the House of Commons itself, the representative of the people of England, winnowed, sifted and brought to a handful, as you may very well remember.”<sup>30</sup>

The term does not occur in Cromwell’s next two speeches, both given during September 1654. But his fourth, delivered 22 January 1655, to his first Protectorate Parliament, which he was about to dissolve, is singularly full with illustrations:

And I say this, not only to this assembly, but to the World, that that man liveth not, that can come to me, and charge me that I have in these great Revolutions made necessities. I challenge even all that fear God. And as God has said, “My glory I will not give unto another,” Let men take heed, and be twice advised, how they call his Revolutions, the things of God, and his working of things from one Period to another, how I say, they call them necessities of men’s creation, for by so doing, they do vilify and lessen works of God,... And God knows what he will do with men when they shall call His Revolutions humane Designs, and so detract from his Glory, when they have not been fore-cast, but sudden Providences in things.

Cromwell revealed the source which had inspired him to use the term when he mentioned in his speech “a Book, entituled, *A True State of the Case of the Common-wealth*, published in January 1653[4].” That was Nedham’s essay which had defended the setting up of the Protectorate. In any case, Cromwell alone drew the apocalyptic tone. In his handling of the term, “revolutions” completely transcended politics. Yet on further consideration it appears that we might face here an early version of a “revolution” being enshrined by its own author, who thus feigns to dissociate himself from the charges that he craves power. Another utterance of the Protector, toward the end of the speech, suggests that this is the case, as he fulminates: “they that shall attribute to this or that person the contrivances and production of those mighty things God hath wrought in the midst of us, and that they have not been the revolutions of Christ himself, upon whose Shoulders the Government is laid, they speak against God, and they fall under his hand without a Mediator.”<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> *The Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, ed. T Carlyle (3 vols.; London, 1904), II, 274-75.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 419, 426, 428. This speech of Cromwell’s was given a wide distribution, having been printed both in London and Edinburgh. See *His Highness speech to the Parliament in the painted Chamber at their dissolution*, upon Monday the 22d of January 1654 [1655], 14, 19, 20, 21.

As for the contribution of James Howell to the usage of "revolution," Lasky believed that his are the central texts to be considered and that they coined the modern ideological idiom. Snow and Hill at least implied the priority of Howell, when they accepted his date of the letter in his *Epistolae Ho-Eliane*, in which he combined the meaning of revolution as a circular movement with its new meaning of insurrection and popular revolt.<sup>32</sup> In this letter, purportedly sent to the Earl of Dorset, Howell said: "and now my Lord, to take all nations in a lump, I think God Almighty hath a quarrel lately with all Man-kind, and given the reines to the ill Spirit to compass the whole earth, for within these twelve years there have the strangest revolutions, and horridest things happen'd not only in Europe but all the world over, that have befallen man-kind, I dare boldly say, since Adam fell, in so short a revolution of time."<sup>33</sup>

Howell marked this letter "20 January 1646[7]." But the date is clearly incorrect, given the fact that he referred to the revolt in Naples, which broke out only in July 1647. Indeed, considering that towards the end of the letter he mentioned that peace had been concluded between Holland and Spain, the date of composition can not be before sometime in 1648. By then Howell was probably in possession of Giraffi's *Le rivoluzioni di Napoli*, the book he translated and printed in 1650 as *An Exact Historie of the Late Revolutions in Naples*. Neither in the preface to this translation, nor in *The Second Part of Massaniello* (1652), which is his own composition, does Howell make proficient use of the new term. But his range of expression is different in *Parthenopoeia* (1654), a history of the Kingdom of Naples, partly written by him and partly translated. Here, in his "Epistle to the Reader," Howell begins by introducing Naples as a "Political Instrument so often out of tune, having had forty popular *Revolutions* in less then four hundred years, yet none that brought a *Ruine* with it." He then goes on to give a succinct description of "this last Revolution in the year 1647," which besides its striking use of the term in a modern sense, brings alive the personality and meteoric career of Masaniello and the legendary, romantic qualities of the events.

In contrast with Ascham, Nedham, and Cromwell, Howell tends to a more secular meaning of "revolution." His understanding of the term is clearly affected by his profound knowledge of Italian. Moreover, as he was the author of dictionaries, including one of simultaneous English-French-Italian-Spanish, it stands to reason that he was familiar with the political

<sup>32</sup> Lasky, *Encounter* (Mar., 1970), 31-32; Snow, 169; Hill, 87.

<sup>33</sup> J. Howell, *Epistolae Ho-Eliane; familiar letters domestic and forren* (London, 1650<sup>2</sup>), III, 2. The first edition of the *Epistolae* appeared in 1645; the second edition was enlarged "with divers supplements, and the dates annexed which were wanting in the first, with an addition of a third volume of new letters." Howell had discussed the revolts of Catalonia and Portugal against Spain already in a letter in the 1645 edition, but he did not use there the word "revolution."

definition given to “*rivoluzione*” in the famous dictionary of the Florentine Accademia della Crusca (first edition, 1612; second edition, 1623).<sup>34</sup> In any case, when he published in 1655 a short treatise on the proper government of England, his grasp of the term again was made clear. This booklet, in the form of a dialogue between two Englishmen, one of whom had been traveling abroad, reflected Howell’s personal views. A monarchist by conviction, he had become nevertheless an admirer of Cromwell as a ruler and a man of strong character, and dedicated the treatise to him. Addressing his hero with lavish praise, he suggested that Cromwell act as “Charles Martell in the mighty Revolution in France, when he introduced the second race of Kings.”

Throughout this work, Howell berated the Long Parliament, justified its dissolution, and indeed claimed that parliaments were not an essential part of the English political tradition. He employed the term “*revolution*” both in the singular and the plural. The returning traveller refers to “this mighty revolution,” by which he means “a kinde of transposition of all things in point of government, that England may be said to be but the Anagram of what she was.” Elsewhere, the traveller is asked: “what doe they say abroad of these late revolutions in England?” And the answer is: “they say that the English are a sturdy, terrible and stout people, that the power and wealth of this Island was never discovered so much before both by Land and Sea, that the true stroke of governing this Nation was never hit upon till now.”<sup>35</sup>

In these instances Howell is consistent in his view of the English “*revolution(s)*.” Although his phrasing in the first quotation is somewhat ambiguous, in the final reckoning he endorses here “*revolution*” in its new, linear meaning. This indeed is a problematic interpretation, given his well known conservative political outlook; but it seems that what Howell really wants to say is that England is new not because of different governing institutions but because of effective political leadership. He never hides his belief that monarchy is almost always the best type of government, for England as well, but then in his mind Cromwell is ruling England in nearly monarchical fashion and better than the kings who preceded him. The new ruler, therefore, his manner and quality of government, is the basis for the newness of the revolution.

Shortly after the Restoration, Howell, newly appointed as Charles II’s royal historiographer, was accused by Sir Roger L’Estrange of having been a supporter of the commonwealth and of having encouraged Cromwell to crown himself. Of course, L’Estrange made use of passages from the above mentioned dedication in Howell’s *Sober Inspections*.<sup>36</sup> But long before that

<sup>34</sup> See J. Howell, *Lexicon tetraglotton, an English-French-Italian-Spanish dictionary* (London, 1660). Here “*revolution*” is given the equivalents of “*revolution, rappel*” in French, “*rivocazione*” in Italian and “*revocacion, rebuelta*” in Spanish.

<sup>35</sup> J. Howell, *Some sober inspections made into the carriage and consults of the Late-long Parlement* (London, 1655), 4, 9.

<sup>36</sup> R. L’Estrange, *A modest plea both for the Caveat and the author of it, with some notes upon Mr. James Howell and his Sober Inspections* (London, 1661).

attack the booklet merited an answer from a different direction. This was Nedham's *The Excellencie of a Free-state* (1656). Alarmed by Howell's advice to Cromwell "to lay aside Parliaments," and also by what he termed Howell's plea for an "absolute monarchy," Nedham composed his most elaborate defense of democracy, marshalling examples from both ancient and modern history to argue the merits of a government by the people. In his words, "nothing will satisfie for all the Blood and Treasure that had been spilt and spent, make England a glorious Commnwealth, and stop the mouths of all gainsayers, but a due and orderly succession of the Supreme Authority in the hands of the Peoples Representatives."

In the permeation of the term "revolution" within the political language of the Protectorate, it is surprising to find that the two major practitioners of the term, Nedham and Howell, were at odds. Equally surprising, however, is to discover that in Nedham's treatise "revolution" had a changed meaning. He employed the word several times but mostly in the sense of rotation of government in a democracy, not in the sense of capture of power and change in the form of a regime. The periodic rotation of men charged with political office is also what he meant by "revolution" in the following quotation:

And since a revolution of Government in the Peoples hands, has ever been the only means to make Governours accountable, and prevent the inconveniences of Tyranny, Distractions, Misery; therefore for this and those other reasons fore-going, we may conclude, That a Free-State, or Government by the People, settled in due and orderly succession of their supreme Assemblies, is far more excellent every way, than any other form whatsoever.<sup>37</sup>

There may be an explanation for that. Nedham's early use of "revolution" had been inspired by Ascham, who had meant by the word something akin to heavenly ordained crises in polities. Yet during his years of serving the commonwealth as a hired pen Nedham became close to John Milton. He identified with Milton's republicanism and was possibly also influenced by his style and choice of terms. Milton rejected Ascham's innovation. We find the word in his poetry, though not in a political sense and never in his pamphlets in defense of the commonwealth. In *The History of Britain* (1671) "revolution" appears in the opening passage and the last sentence; but its meanings there are related to time and to a disaster repeating itself. On the basis of this evidence Lasky concluded that with respect to "revolution" Milton's vocabulary was at best transitional, but is it not more likely that this rather tardy employment of the word in his prose was an attempt once more to register his disavowal of its new political meaning?<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> M. Nedham, *The excellencie of a free-state* (London, 1656), 37, 77, 79-80, 135.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Lasky, *Encounter* (Mar., 1970), 34-35; *The complete works of John Milton* (New Haven, 1971), V, 1, 403.



A somewhat similar implicit manner of rejection of the political meaning of “revolution” is found in Hobbes. In 1650 his *De corpore politico: or the elements of law, moral and politick; with discourses upon several heads, as of the law of nature, oaths and covenants, severall kind of government, with the changes and revolutions of them* was printed in London. We know from the “To the Reader” of this book that Hobbes, then in France, was not connected with this publishing venture. The employment here of “changes and revolutions” must therefore be an initiative of the printer, who had received the manuscript from a friend of the author and responded thus to the budding terminological trend in England. In the text of this work, which includes a full chapter on rebellion, Hobbes employed this last word and “sedition,” or constructions such as “to dissolve into civil war,” “aptitude to dissolution,” “distraction”—never “revolution.” Still, in 1652 Hobbes’s French friend, Samuel Sorbier, brought out in France a translation in which the title ended, as in the English edition, with “les diverses sortes de gouvernemens; leur changemens et leur révolutions.”

In the same year Hobbes’s greatest work on politics, *Leviathan*, appeared in London, this time with his full cooperation. He added to it a postscript (“A review and conclusion”), which was clearly intended to help make his peace with the Commonwealth and secure his return to England. The line of reasoning he took there was close to that which Ascham had argued, and in the last paragraph he wrote of “revolution of states,” a term entirely missing from his text previously. But even so, he really managed to endow the words with an ambiguous meaning, so that it is difficult to say whether “revolution” here relates to politics or astrology.<sup>39</sup> Finally, in *Behemoth*, published 1679 though written some ten years earlier, in the penultimate paragraph, Hobbes referred to the restoration of 1660 thus: “I have seen in this revolution a circular motion of the sovereign power through two usurpers, from the late king to his son.” Is this use of the term in reference to a concrete historical event a recognition on the part of Hobbes that “revolution” has a political sense or just a reiteration of his view that the proper meaning of the word is circular motion?

Yet another prominent political thinker reacted ambiguously to “revolution”—the author of *Oceana*, James Harrington. All of his works (unless posthumous) were published between 1656 and 1660, when the new meaning of the term was gaining currency. There should not be any doubt that he was aware of the development, but the word is seldom employed in the hundreds of pages of his political prose, apparently no more than three times. Moreover, with one exception he used the term to convey an idea of circularity or

<sup>39</sup> Hobbes’s last sentence of the postscript states, “And although in the revolution of states, there can be no very good constellation for truths of this nature to be born under (as having an angry aspect from the dissolvers of an old government, and seeing but the backs of them that erect a new), yet I cannot think it will be condemned at this time, either by the public judge of doctrine, or by any that disires the continuance of public peace.”

rotation, as he described methods to replace magistrates in a commonwealth by means of reelection at regular intervals.<sup>40</sup> When he was in need of terms signifying a breakdown of government, Harrington employed "disorder," "corruption and dissolution," "change," "alteration," "state of civil war," and of course "ruin of the balance," his own term, expressing his view that those who possess the balance of property in a state must inevitably possess sovereignty. Thus, according to Harrington, when most property is held in the hands of a group inadequately sharing in the government, the result is political disturbance. Bearing these views in mind, we may more fully appreciate his use of "revolution" in the following passage from *The Prerogative of Popular Government* (1658):

Property comes to have being before empire or government two ways, either by natural or violent revolution. Natural revolution happenth from within, or by commerce, as when a government erected upon one balance, that for example of a nobility or a clergy, through the decay of their estates comes to alter unto another balance; which alteration in the root of property leaves all unto confusion, or produceth a new branch or government according to the kind or nature of the root. Violent revolution happenth from without, or by arms, as when upon conquest there follows confiscation.<sup>41</sup>

We have here a unique passage where "revolution" was given a distinct modern meaning, as Harrington's "natural revolution" situated the term within the context of the interplay of the social and economic forces that bear on politics. Yet Harrington never repeated the performance. We do not find the term in his substantial essay of the following year, *The Art of Law-giving* (1659). Here it is absent, in spite of numerous opportunities afforded by the nature of the discussion and his selecting Masaniello, leader of the Neapolitan "rivoluzione" of 1647, as a prototype of "government against the balance" in the form of anarchy. In the final account it appears that, to Harrington as to Milton and Hobbes, the legitimacy of the political meaning of the word was at best doubtful.

Oddly, exactly at the same time Harrington was wavering with regard to the use of "revolution," the term turned even more visible than before. During the twenty months that separated the death of Cromwell and the Restoration, the word began for some reason to crop up almost anywhere. Possibly this had to do with the pervasive sense of political transitoriness that took hold of contemporaries. Still, it should not be overlooked. Hill has given us a cluster of examples from the years 1659 to 1660, which are in themselves

<sup>40</sup> *The Political Works of James Harrington*, ed. J. G. A. Pocock (Cambridge, 1977), 228, 820.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 405-6; cf. the interpretations of this passage in Snow, 171, and Hill, 93.

enough to prove the point; but there are more. Soon after the fall of Richard Cromwell in May 1659, the event was termed in a letter of a highly ranked naval officer “this late greate Revolution and change of the whole Civill Government of these Nations.”<sup>42</sup> In the reports sent from London by the French ambassador, Antoine de Bordeaux, to Cardinal Mazarin one finds the word at least half a dozen times between November 1659 and May 1660. Bordeaux employed “revolutions” in the plural as a general reference to all recent changes in government, while at the same time using it in the singular either to sum up a report on a squabble between military factions and the restored Rump Parliament, or in anticipation of a restoration, which he conceived as “a great revolution in government.”<sup>43</sup> Even Milton was apparently once carried away. In his State Papers there is a 1659 letter to the King of Denmark where he allowed “a Revolution of this government” to slip in.<sup>44</sup> Christopher Harvey, who on 11 March 1660 completed a postscript to a treatise on rebellion, which he had composed sixteen years before and from which the term was absent, remarked: “how great Revolutions have been seen to all the world in the publick affairs of these Nations since that time.”<sup>45</sup> In a new 1659 edition of John Florio’s Italian-English dictionary, we may notice an early lexicographic acknowledgment of the new meaning. It comes in the English-Italian section compiled by Giovanni Torriani: “*A revolution, rivolutione, mutatione.*”<sup>46</sup>

Confirming indications come from astrological literature of these years. The celebrated William Lilly, always committed to the cause of the commonwealth, assured his readers that there is nothing like the astrological method to discover “the fatall Mutations of Kingdoms, the Grand Revolutions of Empires and Dominions,…” For the year 1658 he predicted “various and unusual Changes, Actions, Revolutions in all or most the Nations of Europe.”<sup>47</sup> For 1659 William Andrews opened his predictions by reminding his readers “That the publique mutations, and admirable revolutions of Empires, Countreys, Kingdoms, Cities, and the general accidents of this World” are foreseen by the motions of the planets, comets, eclipses, and the like.<sup>48</sup> For 1660 *The Bloody Almanach* announces the foretelling of “the strange *Catastrophes, Changes, and Revolutions*, that will befall most Princes, States, and

<sup>42</sup> “An account of the fall of the Protector, Richard Cromwell, in a letter from Nehemiah Bourne,” *The Clarke Papers*, ed. C. H. Firth (London, 1899), III, 217.

<sup>43</sup> F. Guizot, *Monck or the Fall of the Republic and the Restoration of the Monarchy in England in 1660*, tr. A. R. Scoble (London, 1851), 131, 148, 195, 208, 222-23, 225; or in the French original, *Monck; chute de la république et rétablissement de la monarchie en Angleterre, en 1660* (Brussels, 1851), 165, 186, 243, 259, 276, 279-80.

<sup>44</sup> Cited by Lasky, *Encounter* (Mar., 1970), 35.

<sup>45</sup> C. Harvey, *Atheniastes, or the right rebel* (London, 1661), 149-50.

<sup>46</sup> G. Torriani, *A dictionary Italian and English formerly compiled by John Florio* (London, 1659).

<sup>47</sup> W. Lilly, *Merlini anglici ephemeris* (London, 1658), 1, 23.

<sup>48</sup> W. Andrews, *De rebus caelestibus* (London, 1659).

*Commonwealths* throughout Europe."<sup>49</sup> George Wharton, the royalist astrologer, blessed heaven in 1660 after "our late twenty years Confusion..., at this happy, and (by many, almost) unexpected Revolution of Government; viz. of turning from Anarchy, to the most Natural of all Governments, Monarchy."<sup>50</sup> Perhaps the best proof for the visibility of "revolution" on the eve of the restoration is the fact that the double meaning of the word now allowed room for jokes. Thus goes the first proposition in an anonymous short pamphlet of 1659: "Whether it be not convenient that the doctrine of Copernicus, who held that the world turns round, should be established by act of Parliament, which our late changes, alterations, and revolutions, in part have verified."<sup>51</sup>

It should not come as a surprise then that "revolution" plays a role at least in the rhetoric of the debate which preceded the Restoration. The term appears in a letter sent by officers from London to General Monck's forces in Scotland.<sup>52</sup> While it does not occur in Monck's letter of reply, he is supposed to have made effective use of it in a speech to the principal citizens of London at Guildhall in February 1660. Unleashing himself against the old Rump, the general remarked, "You are Witnesses Gentlemen that in this fatal Revolution of our Kingdoms, the most unjust, and most wicked, and most violent Actions, have been authorised by the popular Fury of a silly Multitude."<sup>53</sup>

Charles II, about to take advantage of the opportunity to return, also found it necessary to employ the term. To put it bluntly, the monarchy, putting on a façade of appeasement, broadened its vocabulary, so as to communicate better with its subjects, perhaps even cajole and blandish them. We find the term in four out of five letters and declarations, all issued by the king from Breda on 14 April 1660. In the famous Declaration of Breda, addressed to all of his subjects, the king mentions "the continued distractions of so many years, and so many and great revolutions." In a letter to the members of the House of Commons, he has "mistakes and mis-understandings which have produced and contributed to inconveniences which were not intended; and after so many revolutions." In a letter to the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of London the reference is to "these great revolutions which of late

<sup>49</sup> Given by Lasky, *Encounter* (Feb., 1970), 42.

<sup>50</sup> *The works of the most excellent philosopher and astronomer Sir George Wharton* (London, 1683), 387.

<sup>51</sup> "Democritus Turned Statesman; or Twenty Queries Between Jest and Earnest, Proposed to All True-hearted Englishmen," *Harleian Miscellany*, VII, 82-86.

<sup>52</sup> *A collection of several letters and declarations sent by General Monck* (London, 1660), 15.

<sup>53</sup> Monck's speech is given at length in D. Riordan de Muscry, *Relation des veritables causes, et de conjonctures favorables, qui ont contribue au retablissement du Roy de la Grande Bretagne* (Paris, 1661), 117-33. The French wording is: "Vous estes tesmoins, Messieurs, que dans cette funeste révolution de nos Royaumes, les actions les plus injustes, les plus noires et les plus violentes, ont esté autorisées par la fureur Epidemique d'une multitude insensé."

have happened in that our kingdom to the wonder and amazement of all the world,” by which the king actually has in mind the “publick manifestations of their affection to us in the City of London.” Finally, in the letter to General Monck “revolutions” are claimed to carry a moral lesson: “You have been your selves witnesses of so many revolutions, and have had so much experience, how far any Power and Authority that is only assumed by passion and appetite, and not supported by Justice, is from providing for the happiness and peace of the people.”<sup>54</sup>

The employment of “revolutions” in these documents was deliberate. This is so not only because we have here four carefully phrased pieces of evidence; rather it gains support from the fact that once the king had returned the term disappears from the royal vocabulary. Afterwards there would be an attempt to stress “rebellion,” not the ambiguous “revolution.” Admittedly, a complete eradication was not possible, and thus in the few cases that we encounter the word in the early 1660s it was given a pejorative characterization. For example, in April 1661, the day before Charles II’s coronation, one of the king’s loyal subjects reminded him of the past “many Sad and Destructive Revolutions;” quite a shift from the king’s own “great revolutions” of the previous year.<sup>55</sup>

In the same year James Howell published a collection of short political pamphlets entitled *Twelve Several Treatises of the Late Revolutions in These Three Kingdoms*. “Revolutions” was printed here in large capital letters on the entire width of the title-page. But the tracts were selected mostly from the material Howell had published in the 1640s, that is before he began to use the term.<sup>56</sup> Howell continued to employ the word in the early 1660s, but the right tone in those years was better displayed by his opponent, Roger L’Estrange, who as licenser held an effective censorship on the popular press. In L’Estrange’s *A Memento* (1662), one of the first political essays on the civil war and the commonwealth written after the Restoration, “revolution” is not to be seen. Those subjects of Charles I who had teamed up against him are said by the author to have used “Armed violence to invade the Sovereignty, and to improve a loose and popular Sedition, into a regular Rebellion.”<sup>57</sup>

As argued in this paper, to understand how “revolution” penetrated English political discourse we have to realize that its new meaning aroused

<sup>54</sup> *A collection of His Majesties gracious letters, speeches, messages and declarations since April 4/14 1660* (London, 1660), 9, 11, 23, 26-27.

<sup>55</sup> W. Wylde, *A speech spoken to his most sacred majesty, Charles the Second in his passage from the Tower to Whitehall* (London, 1661).

<sup>56</sup> The last of these twelve treatises, dated by Howell 12 March 1659, is a call to restore the monarchy. Only there we find: “The Ile of Great Britain hath been always a Royall Island ... although she had four or five Revolutions and changes of Masters,” 408-9. See also Howell’s preface to *Florus Hungaricus, or the history of Hungaria and Transylvania* (London, 1664).

<sup>57</sup> R. L’Estrange, *A memento treating of the rise, progress and remedies of seditious, with some historical reflections upon the series of our late troubles* (London, 1682<sup>2</sup>), 17.

opposition. This was not a case of slow diffusion because of lack of exposure. Rather the contrary is true. We have enough evidence to show that shortly after Ascham had published his *Confusions and Revolutions of Governments* everybody who had to know did, but to those who supported or opposed the term it mattered little whether "revolution" would mean a change back to a previous form of government or a forward change to a new form. Royalists objected to the term because it relieved the rebels of responsibility, suggesting, given its associations, that changes of government are heavenly inspired, fatal, and inevitable. Supporters of the commonwealth could accept it, and precisely for the same reasons. This basic division with regard to the innovation became blurred at times because of other concerns, such as critical stylistic attitudes toward anything that lacked the sanctity of classical literature or a refusal to accept an à la mode term imported from Italy.

Still, the word quickly began to permeate the language of the 1650s and at the same time broadened its perimeter of contexts, nuances, and meanings. On the eve of the Restoration it had gained such a level of pervasiveness that the returning monarchy saw it as a term useful to its efforts of ingratiating. However, immediately after the Restoration the monarchy's attitude would reverse and reflect once more the original opposition to the term. Somehow, these premises continued to bear on the status of "revolution" until 1688.

Bar-Ilan University.