

Fiction To Fit

Edmund Waller was in a right pickle, from which only a ready wit could save him. He had welcomed Charles II back to the throne of England with verses entitled "To The King Upon His Majesty's Happy Return," only to find the King less than happy with his efforts. Why, Charles wanted to know, did this poem not measure up to a widely acclaimed panegyric its author had written to the Royal Nemesis, Oliver Cromwell? Waller's rejoinder survives as a classic deflection. "Sir," he said, "we poets never succeed so well in writing truth as in fiction."

Intrigued by this exchange for more than fifty years, I've lately been taking a fresh look at Waller's snappy rejoinder as it exemplifies the intersection of poems and English politics at a time when the balance between King and Parliament had become newly and radically equivocal. My aim is not to explicate texts, but to consider what followed from the way some of Waller's poems were received in their day.

So, who was Edmund Waller? Esteemed in his own time and well into the eighteenth century, he is now hardly known at all. I'll warrant only a handful of those present even know Waller's name, let alone the title of something he wrote. (And I'm sure those worthies will show up after the paper, especially the ones who know more about the man or his work than I do.) Because my paper concerns an episode from his middle age, I'll skip lightly over his early life.

Waller was born in 1606 to a wealthy barrister who died shortly after his birth. After the Royal Grammar School at High Wycombe, passed through Eton to King's College, Cambridge, which he left without a degree to enter Lincoln's Inn. He was elected to Parliament in 1626 and again in 1628 and served without noticeable impact until King Charles dissolved Parliament and ruled without it until 1640, when Waller was again returned for Amersham, near his home at Beaconsfield. Very wealthy—perhaps the richest poet in the canon—he moved in high social circles and married the orphan daughter of a rich mercer in London, who bore him a son and daughter and died in childbirth in 1634. He then courted Lady Dorothy Sidney, eldest daughter of the Second Earl of Leicester, to whom he wrote a cycle of poems under the name of "Sacharissa." She refused him, perhaps because the poems were, as many critics have observed, saccharine. At the same time, he had made himself welcome at Court with several occasional poems and songs.

Elected again to Parliament in 1640, Waller made several speeches that attracted wide attention, some on the King's side, some on the side of Pym's Parliamentary rebels, one of whom was John Hampden, a cousin. In time, he sided with the moderate Royalist faction gathered around Lucius Cary, Second Viscount Falkland, who was also the nominal head of a "Club" of literary and Parliamentary personages that met regularly at his home at Great Tew. The group included Edward Hyde, later the Earl of Clarendon, whom we'll meet again later, and Thomas Hobbes, whom Waller hired to tutor his first son. Finally deciding for King Charles, in spite of qualms about his increasing absolutism, Waller was among the last group to treat

with him at Oxford. Upon his return to London, he then became involved in a plot to stir up resistance to Parliament. Betrayed, he gave himself up, made an abject confession in the House, was imprisoned in the Tower, and finally let off with a fine of ten thousand Pounds and exiled. He fled with his second wife to France, where he lived until he was able to get his brother-in-law, the regicide Adrian Scroop, to negotiate return home from Cromwell, his mother's cousin. (Waller was remarkably well connected.)

He built himself a small house near Beaconsfield and renewed his friendship with Hobbes, whose *Leviathan* greatly impressed him. After Cromwell had appointed him to the Commission on Trade, Waller reciprocated with "A PANEGYRIC TO MY LORD PROTECTOR, OF THE PRESENT GREATNESS, AND JOINT INTEREST, OF HIS HIGHNESS, AND THIS NATION," fifty lines that tick every box in classical rhetoric's requirements for an encomiastic showpiece. Distributed far and wide in broadside, it made Waller famous overnight. It scandalized the founder of our Ur-Club, Doctor Johnson, a Tory to the core. Johnson agrees with the opinion current in his day that it is Waller's best poem, but he finds the whole piece morally repugnant because it succeeds in so veiling the Regicide that it virtually disappears. Which, some might observe, is precisely what makes the poem good propaganda. Old Ironsides died in October of 1668. Of Waller's "UPON THE DEATH OF THE LORD PROTECTOR" Johnson has only good to say. It, too, enjoyed wide popularity.

Previously, in July of 1658, Charles had made overtures to General George Monck, a one-time Royalist general then in command of Parliament's forces in Scotland. As the Commonwealth continued to fall apart, Monck, famously inscrutable, eventually plumped for Charles, and marched his forces to London. In February of 1660 Monck took charge of Parliament, which, stacked in Charles's favor with members who had been excluded in Pride's Purge, then dissolved itself on March 16th and called for the election of a "Free" or "Convention" Parliament to bring about the Restoration.

Charles, meanwhile, had moved from the Spanish Netherlands to The Hague, where he was waiting with Edward Hyde, who had been serving him for some months as Lord Chancellor designate. On April 4th, Monck accepted from Charles the Declaration of Breda, worked out jointly with Charles and Hyde. This promised a general pardon for all but the Regicides; provided for the disbandment of the New Model Army and its reconstitution under the Crown: guaranteed religious tolerance; and allowed owners to retain property legally purchased during the Interregnum.

Concurrently, another longtime political and military supporter of the Commonwealth had decided that the failure of Richard Cromwell made inevitable the restoration of Charles. This was Edward Montagu, cousin and patron of Samuel Pepys. MP for Dover in the Convention Parliament and a Councilor of State as well as General-at-Sea, Montagu was chosen by Monck to be Admiral of the fleet to bring Charles back to England. On March 23d, Pepys joined Montagu aboard the *Swiftsure*, at anchor downstream from the Tower, to serve as his secretary. On April 2d, Montagu moved his flag to the *Naseby* (to be renamed the *Royal Charles*) and the fleet prepared to set off to meet the Royal party at Scheveningen, near The Hague. Of particular note for my purposes is Pepys's account of Montagu's investiture on 26 May as a Knight of the Garter, a rare honor for a commoner. Charles had earlier done

the same for Monck, and both were to receive in greater recognition in July, when Monck would be made Duke of Albemarle and Montagu Earl of Sandwich (and no, it was the 4th Earl who would give his name to the two-slice comestible). These favors, which echo the adage to keep one's friends close and one's enemies (or former enemies) closer no doubt reflect the counsel of Hyde, whose biggest challenges were still ahead of him.

Consider. While the Civil War had not ended the struggle for power between the King and his legislature, it had radically altered it. Earlier English monarchs had been deposed, some even killed, in dynastic struggles; but in 1649, a Parliament energized by a rebellious House of Commons had deposed and killed Charles I and more than once during the interregnum had ruled with neither a king nor a dictator to constrain it. While not yet an existential threat to Charles, Parliament now had the potential to become one. Any effort on Charles's part to return to his father's model of absolute rule could run into crippling resistance. With Charles more dependent on Parliament for funds than any of his predecessors, Hyde would have first to coax the Convention Parliament to satisfy the terms agreed at Breda and then work to assure that succeeding Parliaments would uphold ministries friendly to the King.

He would also have to school the young King and his brother, James, Duke of York in statecraft supple enough to preserve their equivocal position. (You might say he was their Dick Cheney.) That job had just been made harder by James's reckless involvement with Hyde's older daughter, Anne, whom he had seduced with a promise of marriage, impregnated, and then secretly married, the last against the wishes of both Hyde and Henrietta Maria, the Queen Mother. Being an in-law of the Royal Family could not conceivably make Hyde's job easier. It was just one more item Hyde would have to juggle when the *Royal Charles* landed.

The ship did land, and when Charles II arrived in London on May 29, 1660—coincidentally his thirtieth birthday—Waller was prepared. "To the King, Upon His Majesty's Happy Return," printed in folio, was already in circulation, and it would not be long before the poet would be received at Court. I don't know if he was invited or just showed up, as at a *levee*, but it's certain he would not have been there without the permission of Edward Hyde, soon to be the Earl of Clarendon. In any case, he was in the door, only to find Charles not happy with a poem that says nothing more than that England is relieved to have its rightful monarch back and pleased that he no longer suffers the pain of exile.

It is easy enough to see why Charles might bridle at Waller's cheek in presuming to honor him so modestly when he has lavished epic praise on Cromwell. But his own classical education should have enabled him to see that annoyance does not justify a suspension of critical judgment and that, as Dr. Johnson says:

The "Congratulation" is indeed not inferior to the "Panegyrick" either by decay of genius or for want of diligence, but because Cromwell had done much and Charles had done little. Cromwell wanted nothing to raise him to heroick excellence but virtue, and virtue his poet thought himself at liberty to supply. Charles had yet only the merit of struggling without success, and suffering without despair.

It is this point that Waller addresses when he says, “Sir, we poets never succeed so well in writing truth as in fiction.”

The wit of his answer lies in what his contemporaries saw as a quibble. When speaking of truth, one can be concerned either with mere fact or with enlightenment. When speaking of fictions, one can be concerned either with conditions contrary to fact or with creations intended to enhance the factual as a guide to enlightenment. For Waller’s contemporaries, the definitive resolution of this quibble was in Sir Philip Sidney’s *Apology for Poetry*, published posthumously in 1598. After pointing out the derivation of the English “poet” from the Greek verb meaning to make or create Sidney says that in making poetry we

give right honor to the heavenly Maker of that maker, who having made man to his own likeness, set him beyond and over all the works of that second nature: which in nothing he shows so much as in poetry, when with the force of a divine breath he bringeth things forth far surpassing her doings . . . since our erected wit maketh us to know what perfection is, and yet our defective will keepeth us from reaching unto it.

Working from the Latin verb meaning to make or create, Sidney then says it makes sense to call a poet’s products fictions. These fictions excel the dry precepts of moral philosophers by imbuing them with emotions that move us to action; and they excel the accounts of historians, who are “captived to the truth of a foolish world” by giving us idealized actions to praise and emulate (or to demonize and disdain). Poetic fictions, then, are not the lies Plato said they were. In the Christianized version of Aristotle we get from Sidney, they show us the way to virtuous action and moral truths.

A throwaway rider in another part of Sidney’s treatise closes the deal, as it were.

Now for the poet, he nothing affirmeth, and therefore never lieth. For, as I take it, to lie is to affirm that to be true which is false; so as the other artists, and especially the historian, affirming many things, can, in the cloudy knowledge of mankind, hardly escape from many lies. But the poet, as I said before, never affirmeth . . .

In other words, poets never speak more truly than in their fictions.

Sidney’s view is clearly what Doctor Johnson had in mind when he praised the “Panegyrick” for its elevation of Cromwell’s heroic qualities but damned it for its omissions; it spoke the truth, but not the whole truth. It also underlies the double meanings in Waller’s comeback. Charles might want Waller to be saying that the poem to Cromwell was a fiction in the sense of a lie, and that the shorter, plainer poem addressed to him is true. But in the light of Sidney’s *Defense*, that won’t fly, and Charles should know it. Waller is implying something less obviously flattering,

maybe even a little reproachful. If, at least with respect to his undeniable heroic qualities, the poem to Cromwell has succeeded, it is because people have accepted the poet's creation—a fiction—as the portrait of a truly great man. If Charles wants an equivalent fiction rather than a simple welcome, he needs to give someone deeds worthy of the imaginative effort needed to showcase them. If Charles were returning from a heroic expedition as Cromwell was, he would merit a comparable poem. And Charles might also consider that the welcome he did receive comes with an epigraph from Horace that labels it as a verse epistle, a form accepted in the period as suitable for the sincere expression of good wishes.

So, how to treat this poet with the twice-turned coat who doesn't fear a verbal joust with his King and who was obviously angling to renew his welcome into the Royal Family?

Thanks to the interference by Monck and others, the Convention Parliament was friendly, but there was no guarantee that its successors would be. Thanks to those pesky poems on Cromwell, Waller was now as well known as any poet in England, potentially either a benefit or a risk. Keep him close to blow the Royalist trumpet and benefit from its enhanced volume? If he did no more than keep the committed in line, that would be worth something. Persuading a few fence sitters or outright opponents would be a bonus.

Kick him to the curb? That would smack of ingratitude or a want of aristocratic taste, equally unseemly. Worse, it might provoke a damaging counterblast from that same newly amplified horn. Doctor Johnson is scandalized that Charles and Clarendon did not follow the second course. He says they could not “value his testimony or receive his praises as effusions of reverence; they could consider them but as the labour of invention and the tribute of dependence.” He cannot accept that pressed as they are, the Court party might be less put off by Waller's wavering commitments than keen to profit from a poet able to broadcast their achievements. In the end, they chose to hope for some help and avoid any potential hindrance by keeping Waller inside their tent, pissing out. He was made welcome at Court and would remain so for the rest of his life, able to think himself entitled to some standing as the Royal Family's designated publicist.

But there was more to come. Concerning the poems to Cromwell, Johnson says, “Waller had little to expect; he had received nothing but his pardon from Cromwell, and was not likely to ask anything from those who would succeed him.” Now we know that Waller did indeed receive something from Cromwell—his appointment to the Commission of Trade, which he was allowed to keep under Charles. But Waller had lost a position which was of far greater value to him and which was in the Crown's power to restore. Thereby hangs a tale.

On March 25th, 1660, as Montagu and Pepys were waiting aboard *Swiftsure* to sail to Holland, there arrived the writ and mandates for election to the “free” Parliament of seats traditionally controlled by the government in the Cinque Ports, an ancient confederation of south-coast towns that earned benefits from the Crown for services connected with the building and manning of ships and with the defense of the coast. The original five towns were Hastings, New Romney, Hythe, Dover, and Sandwich, to which were eventually added Rye and Winchelsea. From the late 14th Century, these seven towns had also each been entitled to two members of the

House, one answerable to the town, the other to the government. Local magnates chose the towns' mandated candidates, the Lord Warden or his Lieutenant Governor those of the government. In the time-honored tradition of pocket boroughs, the mandated candidate nearly always won, and would continue to do so until the Reform Law of 1832. By 1600, the importance of the Cinque Ports had declined so far that their principal value to the Crown lay in their votes in the house, more often than not for ship money. Look no farther for why Charles I wanted James as Lord Warden; or for why Parliament tossed James out in 1642 as the Civil War was heating up; or for why Charles II would want his brother to resume the title, and that not for ship money alone, considering the new value of every vote in the realm.

Assuming that the King would appoint James, and because the time was short, the Council of State entrusted the canvass of the Cinque Ports for the "free" Parliament to Montagu. Pepys wrote a letter to summon John Raven, clerk at Dover Castle to take back the mandates filled out in consultation with the Royal party. Even so, as shown by the 1983 history of the House of Commons, when Mr. Raven made his rounds, he was told nearly everywhere that the seats had already been promised. Montagu took the seat at Dover; but James was frustrated when Hastings, which he sought for his intended Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Francis Vincent, was allotted to the brother of the local officer in charge of elections. Luckily, this setback did no harm, as the Convention Parliament ended up heavily Royalist and was able to codify the goals set out in the Declaration of Breda.

Consequently, Charles felt free at the year's end to dissolve the Convention Parliament and risk the election of a new one; and James, now officially Lord Warden, apparently did his homework. He got Vincent into the seat at Dover vacated when Montagu ascended to the Peerage. Hastings he offered to, of all people, Edmund Waller, who took all sixty-seven of the votes counted.

This appointment looks to me like the second half of an elegant, if small-scale, political twofer, giving the Court an established poet to promote it to those who elect the House of Commons and a member to aid it in that House. In addition to any part Waller might have in moving legislation, he would also be free to push the Court's agenda informally with his fellow members and keep a finger on the pulse of the House.

I can see making Waller welcome at Court as a favor to a long-time friend of the family, as it were. But a seat in the House just for old times' sake? How likely is it that Clarendon would have agreed to such a gift without the promise of a payoff?

A more significant motive is suggested by another lapse in Dr. Johnson's account that parallels his failure to see the Machiavellian allure of a flack who can make good things look better and make bad things disappear. He simply mentions in passing that in the first Parliament 1661, Waller "sat for Hastings," unaware that his return to the House was a gift from Charles, who knew its value to the recipient. I can see Charles being ready to assure Waller's fealty, as he had that of Monck and Montagu, with a public show of Royal favor. On top of that, I can see why Clarendon would acquiesce. He had served in the House with Waller and says in his "character" of Waller that

“... [Waller] appeared in those assemblies with great advantage; having a graceful way of speaking . . . he seemed often to speak upon the sudden . . . which gave a great luster to all he said; which yet was rather of delight than weight.” (A taste for showboating in the House is apparently not a new phenomenon. Who knew?)

Having observed as well that Waller was uncommonly vain, Clarendon would surely have guessed the appeal to him of the applause the House accorded then as now to sallies of wit from the backbenches. What better way to assure his continued loyalty than this gift to his neediness?

Waller at least seems to have thought himself required to supply fictions useful to the court and obliged when in 1663-64 Charles created an opening on the public relations front by arranging the enlargement of St. James's Park under the direction of a noted French gardener. In “On St. James's Park, as Lately Improved by His Majesty,” Waller first treats the new park as a display befitting a monarch. He then envisions it as a grand version of the classical *hortus conclusus*, or enclosed garden, where Charles can repair to consider matters of state before going to the neighboring Westminster Hall to see his larger plans carried out by Parliament. The poem ends with a conceit that embodies the “joint-interest” strategy Waller had used in the poems to Cromwell. By bringing about the transformation of a modest, restricted palace garden into a sumptuous park open to all, Charles has created the expectation of subsequent, grander achievements in line with the royal role he was born to play, an expectation that he alone can satisfy. More than mere “tribute of dependence” (*Pace*, Dr. Johnson), the poem supplements praise with exhortation and admonishes Charles to get cracking on what his legacy entails. This allows the poet some critical distance from his subject, at once enhancing his credibility and preserving a measure of self-respect.

The Second Dutch War would afford Waller his greatest opportunity to trumpet the House of Stuart. Drummed up by James, Duke of York as Lord High Admiral and Lord Arlington, Charles's new favorite and a sworn enemy of Clarendon, this conflict got under way with a formal declaration of war by Charles in January of 1665. In June of that year, the English were decisive victors in the Battle of Lowestoft: for the loss of a single ship and no more than five hundred men, the English cost the Dutch seventeen ships, over two thousand dead, and over two thousand captured.

Following the example of his wife, who had commissioned Peter Lely to paint a series of portraits of her friends, James commissioned a series to commemorate his junior officers. The first series came to be called “The Windsor Beauties,” the second “The Flagmen of Lowestoft.” That commission would draw from Waller his most notorious poem: INSTRUCTIONS TO A PAINTER FOR THE DRAWING OF THE POSTURE AND PROGRESS OF HIS MAJESTY'S FORCES AT SEA, UNDER THE COMMAND OF HIS HIGHNESS-ROYAL; TOGETHER WITH THE BATTLE AND VICTORY OBTAINED OVER THE DUTCH, JUNE 3, 1665, first published as a broadside late in 1665 and reissued, with this longer title, early in 1666.

The poem imagines a fictive poet upbraiding a painter for showing his subjects on shore and at rest when he might have done them greater justice by showing them in action. The opening lines tell the painter how to set the scene:

First draw the sea, that portion which between
The greater world and this of ours is seen;
Here place the British, there the Holland fleet
Vast floating armies! Both prepared to meet.
Draw the whole world expecting who should reign,
After this combat, o'er the conquer'd main.

The "Poet" then urges his painter to "Make the sea shine with gallantry, and all/ The English youth flock to their Admiral," James, Duke of York, who evokes this further injunction:

Let thy bold pencil hope and courage spread
Through the whole navy, by that hero led;
Make all appear, where such a Prince is by,
Resolved to conquer, or resolved to die.

From line 78, the "Poet" ceases to instruct the painter and merely tells the story. The dramatic high point of the narrative involves an attack by the Dutch flagship on James's flagship, the *Royal Charles*, during which three of the Duke's young courtiers are decapitated by a chain shot. The "Poet" then describes how James, earlier moved by honor, now fights for revenge and urges the boarding of the much larger enemy vessel, only to have it blow to bits before the *Royal Charles* can close. For the rest of the day, James is said to have been on a rampage throughout the fleet chasing all before him, while the second day finds him, inexplicably separated from the main fleet, menacing the Dutch coast and spreading terror as he goes. Then, at line 287, the "Poet" returns to original mode:

Painter, excuse me, if I have a while
Forgot thy art, and used another style;
For though you draw arm'd heroes as they sit,
The task in battle does the muses fit.

After a few more lines in the same vein, our "Poet" concludes with this instruction:

Then draw the Parliament, the nobles met,
And our great Monarch high above them set;
Like young Augustus let his image be
Triumphing for that victory at sea,
Where Egypt's Queen, and Eastern kings o'erthrown,
Made the possession of the world his own.
Last draw the Commons at his royal feet,

Pouring out treasure to supply his fleet;
 They vow with lives and fortunes to maintain
 Their King's eternal title to the main;
 And with a present to the Duke, approve
 His valour, conduct, and his country's love.

Nothing subtle here. Waller takes for granted that the government will capitalize on this battle won by funding the Navy to win the war.

This poem was to blow up as spectacularly as the Dutch flagship, although mostly for reasons beyond Waller's control. Even as early as the publication of the second version, shadows were beginning to fall over the victory. It soon became known that the *Royal Charles* had lost contact with the main fighting fleet overnight because while James was asleep, a courtier, perhaps on the orders of the Duchess, had ordered the ship to shorten sail. That's the reason James spent the second day of the battle menacing the Dutch coast. The enquiry that got the offending officer cashiered did not take place until October 21st, 1667, with Pepys present to lament first-hand how difficult it would be to make the Navy fully professional.

Worse, 1665 saw a resurgence in London of the Plague. Before it subsided in 1666 this visitation's aggregate death toll became the highest in all the city's Plagues. This necessarily interfered with attempts to make the Navy ready for whatever the Dutch might have up their sleeve, as would the Great Fire in September of 1666.

Worse yet, trade wars may be easy to win today, but they were not in 1665. The free-trading Dutch were eating the lunch of the mercantilist English, whose imports and exports were encumbered by high tariffs and duties. (If Adam Smith doesn't come along, will it be necessary to invent him?) Even the alternative of preying on Dutch merchant ships was faltering: shortly after Lowestoft, Pepys's patron, Sandwich, let the spice fleet from the East Indies slip through his grasp, almost cancelling out the victory in battle.

Worst of all, by early 1667, the English Treasury's cupboard was nearly bare. Clarendon, who had never wanted the war, told Charles he must make peace or allow Parliament much more latitude in its management of the war. Charles's bad-faith negotiations were too messy to go into here; but while they were going on, the Dutch revealed just how much they did have up their sleeve. With a newly formed corps of Marines, on June 13, 1667, they attacked the Medway, a marshland off the mouth of the Thames in Kent, where a large number of ships had been laid up for lack of funds. It was the worst defeat in the history of the British Navy. Many ships were sunk or burned, and the *Royal Charles*, abandoned by its skeleton crew, towed to the Netherlands. Some years ago, my late colleague David Mann, a specialist in the Restoration, showed me its coat of arms in the Rijksmuseum.

All of which is to say that the timing of "Instructions To A Painter" could have been better. The second printing had been out only a few months before both the poem and its subject had been ambushed by reality and rendered essentially moot. And for Waller there was yet worse to come, for his poem engendered a slew of satirical ripostes, the most notable of them by Andrew Marvell. The first, probably by Marvel but published under the name of Sir John Denham, was called "Second

Advice to a Painter.” A “Third Advice” and a “Final Advice,” both also thought to be by Marvel, appeared by the end of 1667. The last of these envisions a weakened state ill protected by a navy shot through with incompetent amateurs, directed by corrupt ministers, and undercut by a dissolute, cynical Court. It was probably this one of which Pepys said, “Here I met with a fourth *Advice to the painter* upon the coming in of the Dutch to the River . . . that made my heart ache to read, it being too sharp and so true.” His heart ached because he knew ships and men had been wasted by commanders not able to handle a shallop, let alone a man of war or a squadron. A proper navy would be led by officers who had ascended a ladder of mastery on merit and overseen by civilians charged to heed the advice of the professionals.

If Pepys had read Waller’s “Instructions,” one would expect him to say so, especially as he records three other encounters with with the man or his works. In 1664 he heard Waller speak during a conference session of Parliament and found his comments apt and witty and would meet him a few months later. Then there was this encounter, wholly in keeping with what we’d expect of Pepys. At the home of Elizabeth Knepp, an actress with whom he was beginning a fraught relationship, he finds himself “reading of Waller’s verses while she finished her dressing—her husband being by, I had no other pastime.” The footnote deadpans that Pepys later bought the Fourth Edition (1682) for his library.

But I digress. The real aim of the Second, Third, and Final “Instructions to a Painter” is not to savage Waller or his poem *per se*. Rather, they suggest that Waller had hold of the right end of the stick, but that it was twisting in his grip. Instead of mildly upbraiding the painter for doing portraits of the admirals instead of showing them in battle, Waller ought to have excoriated Lely for wasting his time on a project that grew out of a request for portraits by a gaggle of frivolous and highly competitive courtly women; moreover, he ought as well to have lashed the admirals for sitting to the painter instead of getting the fleet back into top condition. The satirist also thinks Waller has erred in imagining that a report of the battle, apt as it may be, will not automatically prompt the King’s ministers and Parliament to supply the funds to support that task (if funds there are); rather, he ought to have shown how feckless the ministers had become, led by the nose as they were by their courtly mistresses into distracting struggles over power and position. They, too, needed to feel the satirist’s scourge.

For this was the point in Charles’s reign when the King’s mistress, Barbara Villiers Palmer, now Lady Castlemaine and later Duchess of Cleveland was also sleeping with Lord Arlington and wanted to replace Clarendon’s ministry with what would be called the “Cabal” ministry, an anagram from the first letters of its’ members surnames: Clifford, Arlington, Buckingham, Ashley, and Lauderdale. These five Privy Councillors, who formed the Council’s Committee on Foreign Affairs, would run both domestic and foreign affairs until 1674, not always in unison, but always in tension with the King and Parliament, both of whom disliked the Cabal’s way of doing much of their work in secret. They succeeded in driving Clarendon from power toward the end of 1667 and dominated until 1674.

As both the recognized Court poet and a Member of Parliament. Waller had a unique opportunity to become a significant political asset to England's King during a testing period, when the seesaw between the Crown and Parliament had yet to achieve the equilibrium that would follow from the Glorious Revolution of 1688-89. After the disastrous reception of "Instructions to a Painter," that opportunity dissipated in parallel with the dissipation of Charles's Court. Savvy enough not to dig himself in deeper, Waller subsequently kept to in-house occasional verse and contented himself with a moderately successful term in the Cavalier Parliament, where he chaired several commissions, managed several conferences between the Houses, and had a reputation for pursuing and upholding the most moderate alternatives available. He did not stand when Charles dissolved the Cavalier Parliament in 1679, although he did accept a seat at Saltash, near Portsmouth, in James's first Parliament in 1685. He scarcely served there at all and died at Beaconsfield in 1687.

He nevertheless did pave the way for other writers with literary pretensions to enter the lists as political publicists at a time when most of the voters in England were men of substance with the taste and aptitude for commentary couched in literary modes familiar to them from their common classical educations. From the 1670s on, with the formation of the Tories and Whigs, this usually took the form of partisan support, more often than not in satire. In the coming age, such writers as Dryden, Swift, and Pope would follow that course, accompanied a little later by such essayists as Addison and Steele and even Doctor Johnson. I suppose Waller could be seen as having had an inverse effect on this: his poem to the painter had been the cause of wit in others. Moreover, the culmination of the Glorious Revolution itself affords vindication of his idea that fictions have their place in politics.

The implosion of James's reign began shortly thereafter. In June of 1688, Queen Mary gave birth to a male heir, raising the specter of a Roman Catholic succession. At the end of June, a group of Protestant lords invited William of Orange to invade England. With William's arrival in November, many Protestant commanders of James's army defected, causing James to lose his nerve. On December 11, he threw the Great Seal of the Realm into the Thames and fled for France. Captured along the way, he was soon released by William, who declined to make him a martyr, and retired to France.

In January of 1689, William convened a Convention Parliament of his own. It first made him co-regent with Mary, elder daughter of James by Anne Hyde, making her Queen by Royal succession and the first of Clarendon's granddaughters to rule in England. A subsequent Bill of Rights listed the charges against James and provided that no Roman Catholic could henceforth inherit the Throne and that no English ruler could marry a Roman Catholic. That bill embedded an important counter-narrative. Because James had thrown the Great Seal in the Thames and left the country, Parliament had not deposed him; he had abdicated, thereby forfeiting the Crown. The success of that rhetorical move magnifies the enormous new power Parliament has gained by pretending in an elegant fiction that they have not used their power at all. Are we to understand that, like the poet who nothing affirmeth, Parliament cannot lie?