Check for updates

for a more complex understanding of the role of religion in eighteenth-century England, but also a model for how to think about it in the wider English world.

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WILLIAM J. BULMAN. *The Rise of Majority Rule in Early Modern Britain and Its Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. Pp. 279. $99.99 (cloth).
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William Bulman notes that it was over 120 years ago that the esteemed British legal historian, F.W. Maitland, commented that "one of the great books that remain to be written is 'The History of the Majority'" (4). Bulman has now rectified this omission in a lively and persuasive account. Key to understanding the place of majoritarian rule in our modern politics, Bulman argues, are the decisions taken in 1642–3 when the House of Commons abandoned consensus politics in favor of a sharp increase in voting by formal division, thus ushering in "radical innovation" (3), and a process of political conflict that would continue after the 1660 Restoration and before the advent of party politics. Bulman's narrative stretches chronologically from what he views as the consensus politics of the sixteenth century and the seventeenth century up to 1641 and geographically from England to the colonial assemblies of the early American colonies. To understand this practice of politics, Bulman adopts a quantitative approach through a database of 150,000 decisions from the Commons Journal between the reigns of Elizabeth I and II buttressed by tens of thousands of outcomes from colonial legislatures. In doing so, Bulman asks us to focus more on institutional practice and what can be learned from this shift towards majoritarian politics.

While the second chapter surveys what Bulman terms "consensual" politics before 1642, the core of the book is the detailed analysis of patterns of voting divisions in England up to 1800 found in chapters three to six. Bulman identifies the factional divisions over the trial of the Earl of Strafford as key to the breakdown of consensual politics and the rise of "emergent, majoritarian patterns of decision-making" (81). In Bulman's analysis of the tumultuous early years of divisions in the Commons, factional minoritarian protests and external pressures drove the House into more frequent divisions and questions over whether freedom of speech was even possible in a chamber subject to public scrutiny and popular pressure.

In chapter four, "Consensus Destroyed," Bulman provides telling evidence of voting manipulation as MPs took note of the prevailing opinions on the floor of the Commons to decide whether the question should be called or delayed, especially regarding debates on the episcopacy. Bulman then turns to the weaponizing of the Grand Remonstrance and the flagrant exploitation of public opinion that surrounded attempts to have it printed and circulated. Using Sir Simonds D'Ewes reading of the House in late 1642, Bulman sees "factional tyranny" (119) and deliberate finagling of the agenda in the Commons and a drift away from debate in the House to control by the Committee of Safety. Reinforcing Mark Kishlansky's emergence of adversarial politics, Bulman makes a strong case for the radicalization of institutional politics and practices and the importance of majoritarian decisions in intra-parliamentarian conflicts (120).

In subsequent chapters Bulman extends his analysis to the point where he sees the institutionalization of majoritarian rule and the emergence of "embryonic party politics" (253) in the post-Restoration period. This steadily but surely replaced the desirable but ultimately unsustainable search for consensus and the fiction that the Commons as a whole represented a

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single nation. Bulman traces this path through Civil War decision-making, the "Chronic Instability" of the Commonwealth and Protectorate, and into the return of constitutional stability after 1660. The importance of this line of enquiry is clear as while pre-Civil War monarchial and political norms returned to England, consensus politics did not and in fact majoritarian behavior became the convention. In his analysis, Bulman finds that, between 1663 and 1677, the Commons divided 23.6 percent of the time a question was put to the House, in a fashion strikingly similar to modern statistics on divisions in majoritarian rule today (187).

The final evidential chapter, "Little Parliaments in the Atlantic Colonies, 1613–1789," extends Bulman's analysis into Ireland and various Caribbean and North American assemblies. Here Bulman finds that majoritarian decision-making quickly became the rule, probably because no form of consensual approach ever took hold. As Bulman saliently concludes, "the ferociously partisan politics of the antebellum United States, like the precociously partisan politics of the British House of Commons, were made possible by the institution of majority voting" (245).

The Rise of Majority Rule is a superb piece of work, an intellectual triumph, that firmly places the practice of politics and institutions back where they belong, at the forefront of historical debate. Much of the work, though, is unashamedly a quantitative analysis and all the better for it, but further qualitative scrutiny of major decisions would either buttress or nuance the overall argument. I remain a little unconvinced at the degree to which consensual politics dominated to the level that Bulman suggests before 1642, and whether this "consensual" politics was actually about preserving the *honor* of the House or simply avoiding the appearance of factional conflicts. Despite these quibbles, Bulman has crafted a book that will become compulsory reading for everyone interested in the field and how legislature politics operates, then and now.

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DREW DANIEL. *Joy of the Worm: Suicide and Pleasure in Early Modern English Literature*. Thinking Literature Series. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022. Pp. 279. (paper).
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One does not expect to enjoy a book about suicide. However, just as Drew Daniel's title, *Joy of the Worm: Suicide and Pleasure in Early Modern English Literature*, paradoxically yokes suicide to pleasure, his writing likewise reflects the power that eschewing certain somber conventionalities of language, tone, and even decorum may command when talking about self-killing. This is not to suggest Daniel's book is anything less than serious. On the contrary, Daniel's sustained meditation on ethics and interpersonal responsibility renders us keenly aware of a human behind the elastic prose who has thought deeply, imaginatively, and compassionately about the complexities of this subject.

In constructing an "archive of parasuicidal feeling" (59), this work draws on and stands out from earlier studies (dealing chiefly with Shakespeare) on the subject by Roland Wymer, Eric Langley, and Marlena Tronicke. Daniel's extended reading of *Antony and Cleopatra,* the source of the book's title, as well as *Hamlet* and *Timon of Athens,* establishes Shakespeare's subversion of suicide in its various forms. However, Daniel also centers anomalous moments of levity or even "joy-within-death" through attentive readings of early modern literary scenes of self-killing (meditated or attempted) in the works of John Lyly, Sir Philip Sidney, John Milton, and Joseph Addison. Shorter focalizing chapters on John Donne's *Biathanatos* and Richard Burton's *Religio Medici* complicate Michael MacDonald and Alexander Murray's

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