



Political Magic: British Fictions of Savagery and Sovereignty, 1650-1750

Christopher F. Loar

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Political Magic examines early modern British fictions of exploration and colonialism, arguing that narratives of intercultural contact reimagine ideas of sovereignty and popular power. These fictions reveal aspects of political thought in this period that official discourse typically shunted aside, particularly the political status of the commoner, whose "liberty" was often proclaimed even as it was undermined both in theory and in practice. Like the Hobbesian sovereign, the colonist appears to the colonized as a giver of rules who remains unruly.

At the heart of many texts are moments of savage wonder, provoked by European displays of technological prowess. In particular, the trope of the first gunshot articulates an origin of consent and political legitimacy in colonial showmanship. Yet as manifestations of force held in abeyance, these technologies also signal the ultimate reliance of sovereigns on extreme violence as the less-than-mystical foundation of their authority.

By examining works by Cavendish, Defoe, Behn, Swift, and Haywood in conjunction with contemporary political writing and travelogues, *Political Magic* locates a subterranean discourse of sovereignty in the century after Hobbes, finding surprising affinities between the government of "savages" and of Britons.

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