

## Chapter 9

# *The True-Born Englishman* as pro-army polemic

THE pro-army campaign led by Somers and Defoe, discussed in the last chapter, ended in failure. While the 'royal proposal of a small standing army actually triumphed', the outcome of parliament's campaign to disband William's forces was nothing short of an overwhelming defeat for the king.<sup>1</sup> William had to suffer the indignity of having his request for a significant standing force repeatedly brushed aside by MPs, who, for the most part, were utterly 'unaware of the realities and costs of international war'.<sup>2</sup> By the end of the controversy, in 1699, William was left with an army of only 7,000 soldiers, a force which was large enough for internal repression but far too small to undertake any kind of meaningful military action against France. In addition, parliament, indulging in its growing xenophobia, had decided to demonstrate its political power by insisting on an army of native-born Englishmen. This final insult forced William to send his precious Blue Guards back to the Republic and, unsurprisingly, one of the king's periodic depressions ensued.<sup>3</sup>

Defoe's initial reaction to the success of the anti-army campaign came in the ballad *An Encomium upon Parliament* (1699, discussed in Chapter 3), a sarcastic attack on William's fourth parliament, which sat from December 1698 to May 1699. The ballad largely echoed sentiments Defoe had already expressed in his pro-army pamphlets: the ineffectiveness of the militia, the country's ingratitude towards William and his troops, and the excessive limitations which

1 See Schwoerer, *The Antiarmy Ideology*, pp. 137–190.

2 Childs, *British Army of William III*, p. 186.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 370.

Defoe believed had been placed on the king's sovereignty. Despite the fact that the controversy had ended in a virtual defeat, Defoe, as Maximillian Novak has pointed out, 'never let it die'.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, it does not come as a surprise to find that the issues raised during the controversy resurfaced in Defoe's first popular success, *The True-Born Englishman*. Indeed, the poem, as will be shown, constituted Defoe's final, eclectic attack on those who opposed the granting of a standing army.

### The poem and anti-army xenophobia

IT is worthwhile to highlight the timing of the composition of *The True-Born Englishman*. Frank Ellis has shown that parts of *The True-Born Englishman* must have been written as early as the middle of 1699, which places the conception of the work well within the period of the standing army controversy and the issues which surrounded it.<sup>5</sup> Defoe himself may later have identified John Tutchin's *The Foreigners* (1700) as the immediate impulse behind *The True-Born Englishman*,<sup>6</sup> but this should not distract from the fact that the contents of Defoe's poem were shaped by the controversy. Tutchin's poem was, in fact, the public expression of the xenophobic feelings which had been latent among those MPs who had gleefully voted for the disbandment of William's Dutch troops and periodically attacked William's Dutch advisers. A speech in the House of Commons against a bill for the naturalisation of foreigners, which concluded with the motion 'that the *Serjeant* be commanded to open the Doors, and let us first Kick the Bill out of the HOUSE, and then Foreigners out of the KINGDOM', was only one representative example of the kind of attitude which had informed the anti-army campaign.<sup>7</sup> Drawing some inspiration from Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*,<sup>8</sup> Tutchin's poem articulated these senti-

4 Novak, *Master of Fictions*, p. 141.

5 Ellis, *POAS*, Vol. 6, p. 762.

6 Defoe, *An Appeal to Honour and Justice*, p. 6. It should be noted that there are no references to *The Foreigners* in Defoe's 'Explanatory Preface' added to the ninth edition of *The True-Born Englishman* or in the poem itself.

7 *A Speech in the House of Commons, against the Naturalising of Foreigners* (1693), in *POAS*, Vol. 6, p. 224.

8 With *The Tribe of Levi* (1691), Tutchin had already produced an imitation of Dryden's famous verse satire, although, as Alan Roper has argued, *The Foreigners* retains so little of the principal biblical allegory of *Absalom and Achitophel* that it should not be considered an imitation. See

ments, identifying foreigners, here represented by the Dutch, as parasites who were denying the natives their rightful places:

Like Beasts of Prey they ravage all the Land,  
Acquire Preferments, and usurp Command:  
The Foreign Inmates the Housekeepers spoil,  
And drain the Moisture of our fruitful Soil.  
(ll. 57–60)<sup>9</sup>

Echoing the anti-army opposition, Tutchin's message was straightforward: the English race ought to be kept pure and 'the alien [William's Dutch entourage] must be expelled, particularly from the lucrative jobs that their Dutch master had given them'.<sup>10</sup> In addition to emphasising the mercenary character of the Dutch, Tutchin rehearsed the usual disparagements levelled at the king and his fellow countrymen; their way of speaking English was ridiculed and William was accused of indulging in homosexual affairs with his Dutch advisers.

Importantly, however, beside its xenophobic content, *The Foreigners* contained a reference which established a firm link between the poem and the standing army controversy. Somewhat hidden among the barrage of derogatory remarks on foreigners, Tutchin made a comment which was clearly motivated by the controversy:

Unthinking *Israel!* Ah henceforth beware  
How you entrust this faithless Wanderer!  
He who another Kingdom can divide,  
May set your Constitution soon aside,  
And o'er your Liberties in Triumph ride.  
(ll. 184–188)

Like *The True-Born Englishman*, *The Foreigners* had been published less than a year after the conclusion of the standing army controversy. The warning included in the above lines was a staple charge of the anti-army campaign, and shows that the controversy was still fresh in Tutchin's mind. William had variously been accused of using British resources to pursue the interests of his native country of Holland rather those of Britain. In addition, the prolonged

Alan Roper, 'Absalom's Issue: Parallel Poems in the Restoration', *Studies in Philology*, 99:3 (2002), p. 286.

<sup>9</sup> John Tutchin, *The Foreigners*, in *POAS*, Vol. 6, pp. 224–246. All subsequent line references to the poem are to this edition.

<sup>10</sup> Sutherland, *A Critical Study*, p. 67.