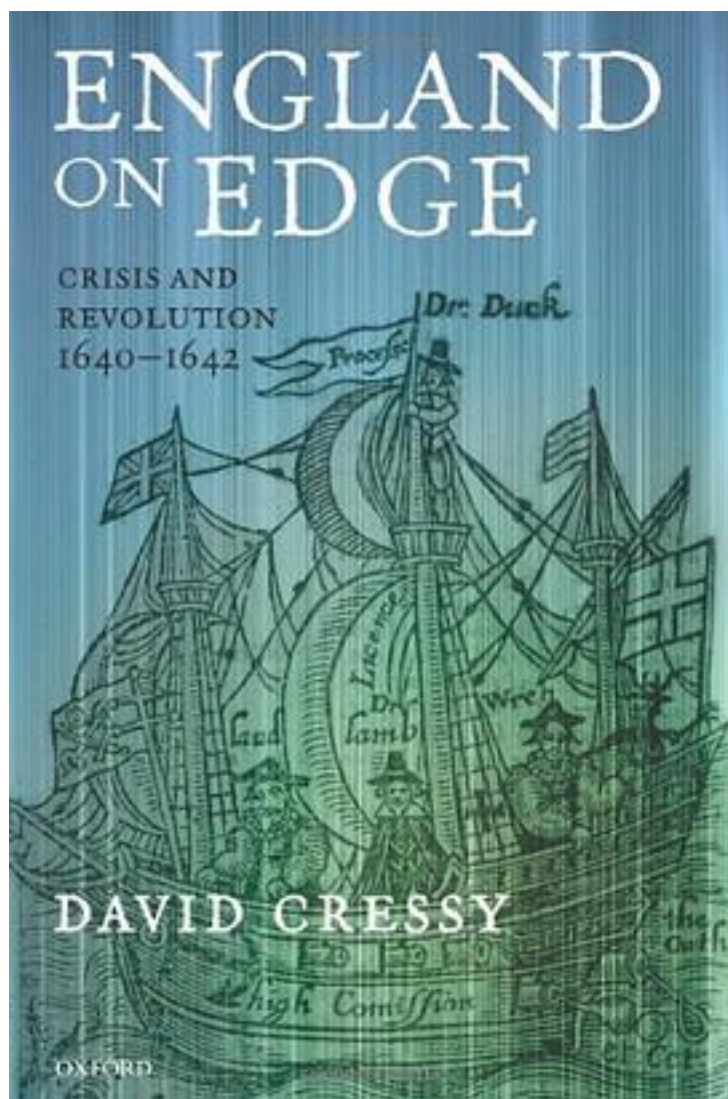


England on Edge



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England on Edge deals with the collapse of the government of Charles I, the disintegration of the Church of England, and the accompanying cultural panic that led to civil war. Focused on the years 1640 to 1642, it examines stresses and fractures in social, political, and religious culture, and the emergence of an unrestrained popular press. Hundreds of people not normally seen in historical surveys make appearances here, in a drama much larger than the struggle of king and parliament. Historians commonly assert that royalists and parliamentarians parted company over issues of principle, constitutional scruples, and religious belief, but a more complex picture emerges from the environment of anxiety, mistrust, and fear. Rather than seeing England's revolutionary transformation as a product of the civil war, as has been common among historians, David Cressy finds the world turned upside down in the two years preceding the outbreak of hostilities. The humbling of Charles I, the erosion of the royal prerogative, and the rise of an executive parliament were central features of the revolutionary drama of 1640-1642. The collapse of the Laudian ascendancy, the splintering of the established church, the rise of radical sectarianism, and the emergence of an Anglican resistance all took place in these two years before the beginnings of bloodshed. The world of public discourse became rapidly energized and expanded, in counterpoint with an exuberantly unfettered press and a deeply traumatized state. These linked processes, and the disruptive contradictions within them, made this a time of shaking and of prayer. England's elite encountered multiple transgressions, some more imagined than real, involving lay encroachments on the domain of the clergy, lowly intrusions into matters of state, the city clashing with the court, the street with institutions of government, and women undermining the territories of men. The simultaneity, concatenation, and cumulative, compounding effect of these disturbances added to their ferocious intensity, and helped to bring down England's ancien regime. This was the revolution before the Revolution, the revolution that led to civil war.

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