

# Political Journalism in London, 1695–1720

*Defoe, Swift, Steele  
and their Contemporaries*



ASHLEY MARSHALL

## **Political Journalism in London, 1695–1720**

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Ashley Marshall

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*For Ron Paulson,  
mentor, friend, confidant*



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# Introduction

‘Tis the *Press* that has made ‘um *Mad*, and the *Press* must set ‘um *Right* again’

– Roger L’Estrange, *Observer*, 13 April 1681

‘Burke said there were Three Estates in Parliament; but, in the Reporters’ Gallery yonder,  
there sat a Fourth Estate more important. . . ’

– Thomas Carlyle, *On heroes, hero-worship and the heroic in history* (1841)

The remarkable boom in political journalism and newspapers during Queen Anne’s reign (1702–1714) is well known. Historians of the press and of late Stuart Britain have done excellent work on the ‘why’ of an emergent daily press, and on the causes and nature of the transformation after 1695. They highlight the lapse of the Licensing Act that year as a signal moment in the history of printing and of public politics. As W. A. Speck concludes, ‘The most spectacular effect of the end of censorship was the rise of the newspaper.’<sup>1</sup> Remarkably little scholarship, however, has been devoted to the content and clashing, evolving ideologies of London’s political papers – the focus of the present study.

The growth of political journalism was driven by and contributed to the bitter partisan controversy of the early eighteenth century: party considerations infused every aspect of English society, and the epithet often applied to these years (‘the rage of party’) is richly earned. The rise of a daily press not only ‘greatly facilitated the political education of Londoners,’ but also ‘contributed to an ideological polarisation of public opinion along party lines.’<sup>2</sup> The intensity of the conflict was sustained by Triennial elections: between 1679 and 1716, sixteen general elections occurred, an average of one every two and a half years. Add to these factors the passionate debates about the monarch’s power versus parliamentary rights, about the expensive and seemingly endless War of the Spanish Succession, about the

<sup>1</sup> Speck, ‘Political Propaganda in Augustan England,’ *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series 22 (1972), 17–32, at p. 20. See also Siebert’s *Freedom of the Press in England 1476–1776: The Rise and Decline of Government Controls* (Urbana, 1952), pp. 306–18.

<sup>2</sup> Gary S. De Krey, *A Fractured Society: The Politics of London in the First Age of Party 1688–1715* (Oxford, 1985), p. 215.

succession to the English throne, and a whole host of other disputed topics – and the result is a staggering amount of printed polemic. Another clear consequence of this change is the politicisation of the people and the drastic expansion of public politics. Jürgen Habermas's conclusions in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* are admittedly problematic – but late Stuart and early Hanoverian commentators acknowledged that something important had shifted. The author of *The Commentator* (1720; Defoe?) eloquently describes the early eighteenth century, with the rise of a daily newspaper press, as 'the *Dawn of Politicks* among the Common People.'<sup>3</sup> 'Daily' signifies a wholly new concept of public politics: Richard Steele's description of newspapers as 'the Histories of every Day' underscores the diurnal reinterpretation of past and present events.<sup>4</sup>

The sheer scale of newspaper production in Anne's reign is impressive, and never mind the talent behind some of the papers – Jonathan Swift, Joseph Addison, Defoe, Steele, Arthur Mainwaring, John Oldmixon, to name only the most familiar of the pens. In 1704, roughly 44,000 copies of papers were printed weekly; by 1712, the total was closer to 70,000. In 1709, at least eighteen papers were published weekly or more frequently – 55 issues, *in toto*, per week.<sup>5</sup> Between 1712 and 1716, as many as 45 journals were launched. Small wonder contemporaries voiced concern about the sudden and prodigious proliferation of print matter. Defoe's reflection in *The Review* that there are 'above two Hundred Thousand single Papers publish'd every Week in this Nation' (vol. 7, p. 4) is obviously an exaggeration, but it does signal his sense of the news deluge. In 1703, one author cautioned, 'the Liberty of the Press will be the ruin of the Nation', and though his Tory conviction of the madness of 'appeal[ing] to the Collective Body of the People' is not surprising,<sup>6</sup> the Whigs were not without their own anxieties. The author of *An Essay on the Regulation of the Press* (1704; Defoe?) concludes, 'tis pitty the Press should come into a Party-strife' (12). Liberty of the press had its defenders, but no one could deny that the culture had changed: 'What Heaps of *Nonsense and Forgery!* What Reams of

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Defoe, *Religious and Didactic Writings of Daniel Defoe*, vol. 9: *The Commentator*, ed. P. N. Furbank (London, 2007), no. 2 (p. 24). P. N. Furbank and W. R. Owens list this work as a probable attribution (*A Critical Bibliography of Daniel Defoe* [London, 1998]).

<sup>4</sup> Steele, *The Englishman: A Political Journal*, ed. Rae Blanchard (Oxford, 1955), p. 392.

<sup>5</sup> These numbers show up, with slight variations, in a number of sources. See for example Andrew Pettegree, *The Invention of the News: How the World Came to Know about Itself* (New Haven, 2014), p. 245.

<sup>6</sup> *A Dialogue Between A Member of Parliament. . . and a Country Farmer* (London, 1703), p. 5.



*Declarations, Manifesto's, Hymns, Ballads*, and other merry Conceits! And what Loads of Weekly Journals!’<sup>7</sup> The daily deluge of printed material was a novel phenomenon, and with it came new questions about authority and authenticity.

Our own world of ‘post-truth’ political discourse is extreme – the degree to which fact and hard data fail to matter in partisan debate – but there was in these years an intimate relationship between news and falsification. Journalists wrote to confuse and deceive as well as to enlighten, and on both sides of the party divide propagandists spin elaborate conspiracy theories that evidently rang true to a significant part of their readership. Mark Knights contends that, ‘It was integral to the polemical combat to claim that a rival was distorting the truth, telling lies, misrepresenting things to the public’; this is the “fictional impulse” inherent in partisanship.<sup>8</sup> The competing political visions and rival truth claims to be found in the journalism of this period ‘exacerbated a state of epistemological uncertainty, in which readers, voters, writers and representatives were disoriented by their inability to take things at face value’. Literary scholars have appreciated that this uncertainty represents ‘a causal factor in the emergence of the novel’, but Knights was the first to relate it ‘to the political culture around it or sufficiently related to the routine process of politics.’<sup>9</sup> St. John’s 1709 observation that ‘no man looks on things as they really are, but sees them through that glass which party holds up to him’<sup>10</sup> will seem painfully relevant to consumers of the modern political press. Partisanship creates and perhaps requires double vision.

Many features of this thriving culture of journalistic production have been studied. Knights’s work on early modern conspiracy theories and on the problem of misrepresentation is exemplary. Scholars have studied the physical development of the newspapers;<sup>11</sup> circulation, especially in Lon-

<sup>7</sup> *The Commentator*, no. 3 (p. 25).

<sup>8</sup> Mark Knights, ‘History and Literature in the Age of Defoe and Swift’, *History Compass* 3 (2005), p. 11. See also his *Representation and Misrepresentation in Later Stuart Britain: Partisanship and Political Culture* (Oxford, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> Knights, ‘History and Literature’, 12.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Knights, ‘History and Literature’, 8; Knights cites *Camden Miscellany*, 26 [‘Letters of Henry St. John’, ed. H. T. Dickinson], Cam. Soc., 4th ser., vol. 14 (Cambridge, 1975), p. 147.

<sup>11</sup> In his study of *The English Newspaper: Some Account of the Physical Development of Journals Printed in London between 1622 and the Present Day* (Cambridge, 1932), Stanley Morison details format changes, variations in style and heading, font choices, and the use of decoration.

don;<sup>12</sup> the impact of the Stamp Act of 1712;<sup>13</sup> the sources of the foreign news reported in papers;<sup>14</sup> and Robert Harley's skillful use of journals to disseminate propaganda and counter-propaganda at the end of Anne's reign.<sup>15</sup> The provincial press has received some attention.<sup>16</sup> Jeremy Black has shown that the opposition press 'harmed British foreign policy by presenting a feature of a divided and disloyal nation.'<sup>17</sup> The role of the periodical in shaping attitudes toward femininity and masculinity has been carefully studied.<sup>18</sup> Literary critics have contributed thoughtful analyses of Addison and Steele's *Tatler* and *Spectator* – the two papers that have dwarfed all others in accounts of journalism in this period. Critics have, to a lesser extent, commented upon Steele's *Guardian*, Swift's *Examiner*, and Defoe's *Review*, but the emphasis has been on the 'literary' rather than on the 'political', and few accounts of the English newspaper seem interested in the 'news' dimension.

The relative lack of engagement with content has meant that surprisingly little has been done to identify the basic ideologies and shifting outlooks of even the most important periodicals. William Bragg Ewald's *The Newsmen of Queen Anne* (1956), a now dated introduction to its subject, includes a 'Descriptive List of Periodicals', but the descriptions convey little about the

<sup>12</sup> The seminal pieces are Sutherland, 'The Circulation of Newspapers and Literary Periodicals, 1700–1730', *The Library* 4th series 15 (1934), 110–24; Henry Snyder, 'The Circulation of Newspapers in the Reign of Queen Anne', *The Library* 5th series 23 (1968), 206–35; and Snyder, 'A Further Note on the Circulation of Newspapers in the Reign of Queen Anne', *The Library* 5th series 31 (1976), 387–89. See also J. M. Price, 'A Note on the Circulation of the London Press, 1704–1714', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 31 (1958), 215–24.

<sup>13</sup> J. A. Downie, 'The Growth of Government Tolerance of the Press', in Robin Myers and Michael Harris (eds.), *The Development of the English Book Trade, 1700–1899* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 36–65, esp. pp. 52–56; J. A. Downie, *Robert Harley and the Press: Propaganda and Public Opinion in the Age of Swift and Defoe* (Cambridge, 1979), Ch. 7.

<sup>14</sup> Black, 'The British Press and Europe in the Early Eighteenth Century', in Michael Harris and Alan Lee (eds.), *The Press in English Society from the Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries* (Rutherford, NJ, 1986), pp. 64–79.

<sup>15</sup> Downie, *Robert Harley*.

<sup>16</sup> G. A. Cranfield, *The Development of the Provincial Newspaper 1700–1760* (Oxford, 1962); C. Y. Ferdinand, *Benjamin Collins and the Provincial Newspaper Trade in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1997). For Ireland, see Robert Munter, *The History of the Irish Newspaper, 1685–1760* (Cambridge, 1967), Ch. 6.

<sup>17</sup> Black, 'The British Press and Europe', p. 77.

<sup>18</sup> Kathryn Shevelov, *Women and Print Culture: The Construction of Femininity in the Early Periodical* (London, 1989); Shawn Lisa Maurer, *Proposing Men: Dialectics of Gender and Class in the Eighteenth-Century English Periodical* (Stanford, 1998).

focuses or commitments of the papers. When journals other than the most celebrated are named, they tend to be labelled Whig or Tory – or government and opposition – but these categories rarely get us very far. Neither Whig nor Tory papers were consistent in their identities or objectives, and all were forced to adapt to evolving political circumstances.

The first section of the book is devoted to a cartographic survey of newspapers and periodicals. The point is partly to contextualise the major periodical writers of this period – Defoe, Swift, Steele, and to a lesser extent Addison – and partly to show the different ways in which newspapers signalled ideological commitment. Chapter 1 covers the period from 1695 to 1714; Chapter 2 explores the very different milieu of early Hanoverian London. One object of these surveys is to characterise some of the ideological positions of and topical battles we find in the papers; another is to highlight the ways in which particular journals were in (usually antagonistic) conversation with one another. Few scholars, for example, tend to consider Steele's high-minded, ethically instructive *Tatler* in relation to the overtly political, aggressively Tory *Examiner*, but their authors were responding to one another, directly and indirectly. The centrality of *The Examiner* to Steele's journalism has never been fully appreciated.

The middle part of the book is devoted to closer analysis of some of the major journalistic ventures of this period. Chapter 3 focuses on the issues of continuity and change in Defoe's highly influential *The Review* (1704–1713); it challenges the persistent characterisations of that paper as a ministerial outlet, arguing instead that the relationship between Mr. Review and the successive ministries under which it appeared is more unstable and ambivalent than scholars tend to assume. Chapter 4 concerns *The Examiner*, arguably the most important Tory paper of the last four years of Anne's reign. What little attention *The Examiner* has enjoyed has gone to Swift's contributions in 1710–1711; I analyse the whole life of that paper, challenging the consensus about how Swift came to be involved and why he resigned his position. The fifth chapter covers Steele's journalistic career, and seeks particularly to disentangle the politics of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* from the agendas in his later Stuart and Hanoverian periodicals. Steele was a remarkably versatile journalist, and his succession of papers – many of which lasted only a matter of months – represent a multifaceted critique of Tory ideology and its spokesmen. Steele is as committed as any contemporary to exploring issues of political and journalistic authority; he fosters public discourse even among the 'low', and he relentlessly seeks to undermine the authority claimed by Tory propagandists.

The final chapter is devoted to the ways in which rhetorical choices reflect journalists' ideological commitments. Chapter 6 studies how

periodical writers imagined and addressed ‘the public,’ and the nature of their judgments of ‘street politicks’. The point is neither to support nor to refute Habermasian notions of the ‘public sphere’; the historical reality of political participation by citizens is not my concern. I am more interested in rhetorical constructions of the public. Swift, Defoe, Addison, Steele and others deliberately write about subjects and citizens in particular ways: Tory papers often use third-person and the language of subjection, tending toward homily; Whig writers address their readers (commonly ‘citizens’ rather than ‘subjects’) more directly. Most conclusions about early eighteenth-century periodicals treat them as a monolithic corpus without attending to distinguishing characteristics – including the nature of their personae (if any) and how they engaged with their envisioned audiences. Chapter 6 highlights important distinctions in terms of the manner in which journalists talk about and imagine popular politics, while also exploring the relationship between rhetorical strategies and journalistic ethos. There I also consider the marked change that occurs in the way Whigs and Tories relate to ‘the people’ after the Hanoverian succession, and, finally, the ways periodical writers respond to each other and read each other publicly, whether by means of animadversion, stylistic critique, or character assassination. When journalists read each other for the benefit of readers, they are trying to shape reception – and to change how readers read is to change how they participate in public politics. This chapter might be considered a complement to Rebecca Bullard and Rachel Carnell’s wide-ranging and illuminating collection, *The Secret History in Literature, 1660–1820*, concerned with issues of the blurred boundaries between fact and opinion, with the problems of misrepresentation, with the limits of readerly discernment, and – most relevant for my purposes – the question of how political ‘secret history’ trained its readers in new forms of textual engagement.<sup>19</sup>



What we find reflected in early eighteenth-century journalism is a major transition: the emergence of an intensely, consistently politicised public. The surge in newspaper production both reveals and fosters an unprecedented degree of public participation in the political process. Tim Harris and other historians are surely right to warn against overemphasising the role of the press in politicising the people, and downplaying the importance of other socio-cultural processes. That said, my premise is that we need a

<sup>19</sup> Rebecca Bullard, Introduction to Bullard and Rachel Carnell (eds.), *The Secret History in Literature, 1660–1820* (Cambridge, 2017), p. 10.

clearer sense of how journalists conditioned (or tried to condition) their readers to engage in the political events of the moment.<sup>20</sup> The daily production and consumption of news helped politicise the people. Whig writers such as Steele and Defoe quarrel fiercely with Tories like Swift and Leslie, but they fight over more than the issues. Whether a writer addresses ‘fellow citizens’ or docile subjects signals an important premise about the role of journalism: was it meant to help cultivate a rational populace, or merely to convey the official message to be consumed by obedient subjects? At least in Anne’s reign, Tory journalists often register discomfort with the notion that mere citizens could reflect upon the government’s doings; they contest not only the ideology of their rivals but also the rhetorical relationships found in Whig papers. The culture of political journalism in these years is dynamic, and some of that energy comes from the fact that the job of journalism is itself being debated. Mr. Examiner sees his function as representing the state to the subjects, whereas Steele – sometimes quite aggressively – dings into readers their duty to be critically engaged. The notion of public politics substantially expands in the early eighteenth century, and the emergent paradigm of state accountability does not go uncontested. The daily press certainly politicised readers (or auditors) of the news; it also offered a site for debates about such politicisation.

Newspapers and periodicals positioned themselves, vis-à-vis authorities and the people, in very different ways. The Whiggism or Toryism of any particular paper is not necessarily crucial to our understanding of the culture, but mapping the range of rhetorical stances and ideologies is essential, and that is one object of this book. Chapters 1 and 2 represent breadth surveys, complemented by more detailed engagement with *The Review*, *The Examiner*, and Steele’s varyingly political periodicals. These papers reflect different ways of imagining the relationship between journalism and politics. Both *The Review* and *The Examiner* have complex affiliations with the governments they serve, and throughout Steele’s journalistic corpus we see him adapting to new circumstances and to his own shifting position within the evolving political milieu. One aim of the present study is to explore some of the ways in which journalists envisioned their political function: do they convey state information to the populace, or do they contribute to a culture of governmental accountability? Are they informing readers or provoking them? Are they educating subjects or trying to win party votes?

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Tim Harris, ‘Understanding popular politics in Restoration Britain’, in Alan Houston and Steve Pincus (eds.), *A Nation Transformed: England after the Restoration* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 125–53.

A discussion of partisan journalism in these years almost inevitably becomes a discussion of authority. The very technology of the daily press led to a (permanent?) crisis in authority, as Knights and others have observed: the proliferation of texts meant a proliferation of competing narratives. The battle for authority was not always made explicit, but it does almost immediately become an inextricable feature of political controversy. The journalists advance disparate notions about political authority, using the medium to make their cases on at least a weekly basis. They argue either for the sanctity of royal (or ministerial) power or for the prerogatives of parliament and the people (and after 1714, the parties awkwardly reverse their positions on this issue). Crucially, they seek to undermine the authority of their opponents, sometimes through issue-based refutation and sometimes by challenging an antagonist's right to speak. Most journalists in the early eighteenth century directly or indirectly defend the legitimacy of their intervention in the public realm. Steele and other contemporaries impugned Mr. Examiner not only for his content but also for his claim to speak for the government. Journalists vied for authority, and they frequently sought to demonstrate that they – and the party for which they spoke – truly represented the nation.

The dynamism of early eighteenth-century partisan periodical culture comes not least from the fact that the nature of public politics had not yet been settled. Journalists either encourage or seek to inhibit the increasing politicisation of the public; they raise questions about whether a particular government is fairly representing its people; they preach obedience and loyalty or active, sceptical citizenship. In a variety of ways, journalists tell people what to think, while also promoting a more constant consciousness of the nature and limits and sources of authority.

Journalism is about power. Partisan periodicals and newspapers comment (to varying degrees) upon the nature and basis and limits of power, and about subjects' rights to demand representation. Historians have done good work on governments' strategic management of the press as a way of preserving and strengthening their authority.<sup>21</sup> A theme of much early eighteenth-century journalism is power: state power, citizens' power, and the power of the media to mediate between them. The existence of a (relatively) unregulated daily press changes the power dynamic between the state and the people. Not only does such daily politicisation create a culture of constant surveillance and an expectation of accountability; it also enfranchises subjects by inculcating political literacy and offering a model of public commentary on matters that had previously been handled with

<sup>21</sup> The best study remains Downie, *Robert Harley*.

less scrutiny. In *The Commentator*, Defoe (?) succinctly captures this new mindset: the free press is 'a *natural Appendix* to a just Government, as it gives every Man a Right to speak to it' (22). The press was not merely a mechanism through which citizens learned of events, but also an active influence upon events, a vehicle that could shape policy by galvanising public opinion in one direction or another. The present study represents, among other things, an attempt to understand the ways in which journalists tried to matter – and sometimes did.





## **PART I**

### Mapping Early Eighteenth-Century Political Journalism



## Chapter 1

# The Culture of Political Journalism, 1695–1714

What follows is an attempt to provide an overview of the development and the kinds of political journalism from the lapsing of the Licensing Act in 1695 through the end of the reign of Queen Anne. This survey is representative rather than exhaustive, an attempt to characterise some of the kinds of journalistic enterprises we find in this period, and to contextualise the works of the major authors covered in the middle part of this book: Defoe, Swift, and Steele. The ideological outlooks and apparent aims of major and minor journals – including ephemeral papers, where the extant issues are sufficient – are detailed in the tabular appendix to this book. That table indicates the range and diversity of the canon of political journalism during these years. This chapter does not treat Swift's, Defoe's, and Steele's major party periodicals at length, but does place those enterprises within the milieu of late seventeenth- and early-eighteenth century journalism. A key argument of this chapter is that the distinction between 'news' and 'expression of ideology' is problematic. This chapter answers three questions. First, what kinds of venture do we see in this period? Second, how did newswriters manage, varying indirectly, to take sides in partisan and ideological battles? And third, what exactly is the relationship between (particular) newspapers and (particular) advocacy journals?

### Context

The year 1695 was doubly important: the Licensing Act expired, and the first election was held under the new Triennial Act. Both changes contributed to fervent partisan rivalry, though the press would reflect that increased controversy more after c. 1700 than in the closing years of the seventeenth century. Queen Mary had died at the end of 1694; some

contemporaries felt that William was less legitimate as sole monarch than he had been ruling alongside James's daughter. Country Whigs – like their successors under Anne – advocated parliamentary sovereignty and checks on monarchical power; Country Tories queried the legitimacy of standing armies and voiced opposition to the expensive continental wars that lasted throughout William's and most of Anne's reigns. The two wars of our period involving England were the Nine Years' War or King William's War (1689–1697) with France and the War of the Spanish Succession (1702–1713). Most newspapers and advocacy journals respond in some way to these conflicts.

In the late seventeenth century, England became a recognisable fiscal-military state. The implementation of a standing army after 1688 was accompanied by a vast expansion in the operations of the English navy. Under William, the central government grew. The upsurge in fiscal bureaucracy was transformative, and it generated increasing anxieties about administrative corruption, venality, and the problematic implications of patronage.<sup>1</sup> The press served both to provide some sense of public scrutiny and to breed discontent and doubt. The constant warfare meant unprecedentedly high taxes and – for the first time – national debt in England. The need to mobilise national financial resources led to the foundation of the Bank of England in 1694. The development of the fiscal-military state put acute pressure on the landed interest, unhappy about the fact that new mechanisms for the production of wealth undermined their role at the head of society. Hence one major cause for the split between the Whig merchant classes, advocates of trade and money-making industry, and the Tories, committed to traditional hierarchies. That the English papers reflect and increase the polarisation between the parties, at least by Anne's reign, is not astonishing.

The Revolution of 1688 had redefined English monarchy, and in the generation that followed partisans debate the nature and validity of that redefinition. The events of 1688–1689, W. A. Speck concludes, 'inaugurated not merely a new reign but a new kind of kingship'.<sup>2</sup> Under William, the balance of power shifted decisively in favour of Parliament. Tory writers have little to say about parliaments; their Whig rivals repeatedly emphasise that the monarch is in executive terms secondary to the people's representatives. The fundamentals of political power were contested,

<sup>1</sup> See John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688–1783* (New York, 1988).

<sup>2</sup> W. A. Speck, *Reluctant Revolutionaries: Englishmen and the Revolution of 1688* (Oxford, 1989), p. 20.

and that contest looms large in early eighteenth-century periodicals: Mr. Review and Mr. Examiner promulgate radically different ideas about sovereignty, about the legitimacy of resistance (Defoe) versus the need for passive obedience and submission (Swift). In these years, in other words, party writers stake out positions not only on specific issues and events but also on the most basic and vital questions about power.

Domestic politics were dominated, in Anne's reign, by debates about the succession – as Joseph Hone has shown – and by religious controversy.<sup>3</sup> In 1702, Tories hailed the new Queen as the matriarch of the Church of England, and many dissenters were initially uneasy about what her rule would mean for them. But in her parliamentary address of 25 May 1702, Anne vowed to 'be very careful to preserve and maintain the Act of Toleration',<sup>4</sup> a promise of which Defoe frequently reminds both the queen and her public. Whatever potential balance Anne hoped to achieve between the High Church and the Protestant dissenters was never realised. Late in 1702, the Tories introduced a bill against the practice of occasional conformity, meant to prevent dissenters from taking occasional communion in order to become eligible for public office. The bill was defeated by a Whig majority in the House of Lords, but in 1704 the high-flyers 'tacked' it on to a land tax measure in an effort to guarantee its passage. The Tack failed, and the Whig outcry against the high Tories' dirty politics was considerable. The early volumes of Defoe's *Review* target the high-flying Tackers and work to create distance between them and more moderate Tories. Dissenters feared not only policy against themselves but also more violent acts of retribution.

Anglicans also felt besieged. In the previous reign, churchmen had been alarmed by the transformation of the episcopacy away from traditional High Church principles. As Steve Pincus observes, there was under William 'a revolution in the ideological and religious commitments of the episcopate', a change brought about by the installation of new bishops committed to Low Church notions of comprehension and toleration.<sup>5</sup> High Churchmen warmly welcomed Anne, anticipating a renewed

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Hone's *Literature and Party Politics at the Accession of Queen Anne* (Oxford, 2017) is a compelling account of cultural responses to the accession of Queen Anne and the politics of that moment; he argues that the best 'way of conceptualizing party politics is through contemporary arguments about dynasty, allegiance, and royal legitimacy' (p. 10). Though Hone claims a wide generic basis for his study – pamphlets, plays, newspapers, sermons, and so on – in practice he engages directly with very few periodicals.

<sup>4</sup> Anne's speech is quoted in *The London Gazette* (28 May 1702); see also Boyer, *History of the Reign of Queen Anne* (1703), 42.

<sup>5</sup> Steve Pincus, 1688: *The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven, 2009), p. 402.

commitment to their ideals and a guarantee of their continued centrality to English politics. One famous battle cry of Anne's reign was 'the Church in danger', issued loudly by Anglicans either convinced or trying to convince the Queen that Whig values threatened their establishment. Whig journalists explicitly mock High Church paranoia, maintaining that 'the Church in danger' is a disingenuous slogan meant to justify the marginalisation of dissenters. Addison and Steele, among lesser-known contemporaries, also disclaim the Church's exclusive claim on moral guardianship, offering as an alternative Whig notions of politeness and civility and self-regulation.

The multi-year news event of Anne's reign was the War of the Spanish Succession, and partisans fought about when and on what terms to treat for peace. The conflict arose from the death of the childless Charles II, the last of the Spanish Habsburgs, which left the Spanish throne in dispute. The details are complex; the crux is that Louis XIV wanted to install his grandson, Philip of Anjou, as the Bourbon king of Spain. Fearing a Catholic empire, England joined the Grand Alliance (along with Holland, Prussia, Hanover and other German states, and Austria, among others), determined to establish the Austrian Archduke (Charles) as king of Spain. Those were the contenders for the Spanish crown until the sudden death (April 1711) of Charles's older brother, the Austrian Emperor Joseph I. This death made Charles emperor of Austria, which meant – as Defoe and others insisted – that he should not be allowed to take possession of the Spanish throne as well. To give Charles both Austria and Spain would be as destructive to the balance of power in Europe as a Franco-Spanish union; earlier advocates of Charles's accession began instead to support a partition. The Treaty of Utrecht (1713) that ended the war for all allies but Austria – achieved via clandestine negotiations between England and France – stipulated that Philip should, after all, inherit the Spanish crown, but only on the condition that France and Spain never be united. In England, the other significant slogan of Anne's reign – 'no peace without Spain' – captured the convictions of the Whigs, who wanted to continue the war against France until Louis XIV accepted a treaty barring his grandson's rule of Spain. The other major proviso was that Louis acknowledge the Hanoverian succession and evict the Old Pretender – whom he had declared to be King James III after James's death in 1701 – from France. By 1710–1711, Allied victory in Spain looked increasingly impracticable, and that was the major problem with which Anne's last ministry had to deal. Debates about war and peace dominate Defoe's *Review*, and are also crucial to Swift's and Steele's journalistic missions.



Among the most divisive moves Anne made during her rule was the ministerial change of summer 1710. Swift's primary job in *The Examiner* was to cultivate support for that change. In retrospect, that alteration appears all but inevitable. In the 1709 Barrier Treaty, Britain had offered huge concessions to the widely distrusted Dutch, and the Getruydenberg peace proceedings of early 1710 had failed because of unreasonable Allied demands of the French. The duumvirate of the Earl of Godolphin and the Duke of Marlborough was determined to continue fighting, but the English populace were weary of an expensive, seemingly interminable war. Ever more oppressive taxes, the bloodbath of Malplaquet, and the bill for naturalisation of foreign Protestants all intensified anti-Whig sentiment. By the late spring of 1710, popular discontent with the Whigs had erupted into a furore, and Anne had lost faith in her counsellors. Godolphin fell in August; by September the dismissal of his ministry was complete; and the Tories routed the Whigs in the October general election. Thus commenced Robert Harley's tenure as 'prime minister', lord treasurer, and leader of what he hoped would be a moderate, non-partisan cohort. His chief objectives were simple: restore financial stability and end England's involvement in the war. Through a process of secret and separate negotiations with France, the Harley ministry finally achieved peace (spring 1713), but the nature of that peace would prove extremely controversial in 1713–1714 and would lead to charges of treason against Harley *et al.* in George I's reign. The Treaty of Utrecht guaranteed Philip's renunciation of the French – rather than the Spanish – throne, a highly unsatisfactory compromise for English subjects justly suspicious of the House of Bourbon. Other concessions made to France further outraged the Whigs (though in fact Harley's treaty was advantageous to England).

The last year of Anne's reign – and of Stuart rule in England – was tumultuous. The peace had been hard-earned. In addition to creating unrest among the Whigs at home, the ministry had drawn the enduring hostility of Hanover, which had unequivocally expressed its desire to have the war continue until better terms could be secured. Harley and St. John, as well as the Duke of Ormonde and servants of the ministry such as Matthew Prior and Swift, would be in hot water under the Hanoverian regime as of the winter of 1714–1715. As of 1712–1713, moreover, Harley and St. John were pulling in different directions. Harley favoured moderation and a coalition of moderate Whigs and Tories, while St. John supported a High Church administration. On 27 July 1714, Anne dismissed Harley from his post as lord treasurer; St. John was finally in charge, but only for a few days. The Tory party had fragmented, and when Anne died on 1 August, it was left hopelessly divided. The party's political marginality under George

I and George II was by no means unavoidable at that point, but – to the immense frustration of Swift and fellow travellers – the Tories could not regroup and become a meaningful oppositional force.

The newspapers and advocacy journals of this period, especially those from 1702 to 1714, reflect tremendous political disagreement. The treatment of dissenters, the basis of political power, England's relationship to France and to the Dutch and her other allies, the assessment of public credit and the value of trade, the Queen's right to change her ministry without apparent cause – all of these issues are fervently debated, along with a host of other policies and occurrences. A fundamental question underlies all of these debates among journalists – to wit, how they should be relating to the people and to the state, and what the nature of their mediation between those two forces should be. To that issue, we will return in Chapter 6, but the emergence of a sustained corpus of political journalism clearly meant that the journalists were daily politicising English subjects in an unprecedented and enduringly metamorphic way.

### The culture of journalism under William III

The termination of the Licensing Act inevitably had a transformative effect on the political press. The day after the act expired (3 May), Richard Baldwin recommenced his *Historical Account of the Publick Transactions in Christendom*, and three days later *The Flying Post* was launched, one of the three major triweeklies to appear in 1695 and last beyond Anne's reign (the others were *The Post Boy* and *The Post Man*). Between March 1696 and the king's death in 1702, more than a dozen new papers emerged, only three of which continued for any significant length of time: *Dawks's News-Letter*, *The London Post*, and *The Protestant Mercury*.<sup>6</sup> Scholars have justly concluded the Williamite press to be dramatically less interesting and dynamic than what we find in Anne's reign. R. B. Walker describes the newspapers under William as 'reticent', light on editorial commentary and devoted mostly 'to safe areas such as criticism of Louis XIV and the Jacobites'.<sup>7</sup> Partisan remarks were unacceptable. Extant issues of John Dunton's *Pegasus* (1696) exhibit virulent anti-Jacobitism; he himself highlights the unusual nature of focused polemical journalism: 'This Paper being written in a different Method from all other News Papers. . .' (no. 19). His 'news'

<sup>6</sup> R. B. Walker, 'The Newspaper Press in the Reign of William III', in *The Historical Journal* 17 (1974), 691–709, at p. 701.

<sup>7</sup> Walker, 'The Newspaper Press', p. 708.

is supplemented by 'Observations' on current events, making *Pegasus* an early precursor to the editorial style of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*. But Dunton's partisan outlet represents an exception to the rule in the nine-ties. In general, as C. John Sommerville suggests, only after 1700 would 'papers . . . speak more directly' and 'tell readers what they thought'.<sup>8</sup> Before then, readers were left to assemble the news for themselves, using limited resources – namely, the *Gazette* and *Votes of the House of Commons*, in addition to pamphlets, newsletters, and the foreign broadsheets found in coffeehouses and taverns.

The early 1690s were dominated by literary periodicals that might now seem apolitical but which did foster popular engagement with the press and with the (broadly defined) culture of the day. Works like J. de la Crose's *History of Learning* (1691) and *Memoirs for the Ingenious* (1693), collecting individual creative submissions, helped create a virtual public. Among the most successful ventures of the 1690s was Dunton's *Athenian Mercury* (1691–1697), a wide-ranging question-and-answer style journal treating subjects religious, historical, literary, social, and so on. The late seventeenth century was a rich time for these intellectual journals. Although these and like ventures do not engage in party politics, they are by no means apolitical. One need look only to Swift's *Tale of a Tub* to see conservative anxiety about the challenge posed to ancient authority by modern Whig innovation. These ventures encouraged English readers to speak for themselves, with having given them a sense of their own imagination; they helped create an engaged readership even if they could not fully anticipate the political implications of such engagement.

The major triweeklies and other news ventures launched in the 1690s lasted into Anne's reign, and others lived and died under William. What is the nature of these new enterprises, papers like Benjamin Harris's *Intelligence Domestick and Foreign*, Ichabod Dawks's *Protestant Mercury* (1696–1700) and his *Dawks's News-Letter*, and Anne Baldwin's *New Observer* (launched in 1701)? They tend to be overwhelmingly foreign in their coverage, offering reports from abroad, mostly relating to sieges and other military happenings. They malign safe targets such as Jacobites, the Pretender, France, and the Catholic Church. Even where editorialising is light, these writers do betray their (conventional) Protestant bias, expressing sympathy with persecuted continental Protestants and promoting the war with France. These papers, along with the weekly *Historical Account of the Publick Transactions in Christendom* (Aug 1694–1695?), are conspicuously

<sup>8</sup> C. John Sommerville, *The News Revolution in England: Cultural Dynamics of Daily Information* (Oxford, 1996), p. 14.

reticent on domestic matters, no doubt a response to William's desire to monitor the press. Between October 1689 and April 1695, seventeen trials were held for unlicensed printing.<sup>9</sup>

The bottom line on late seventeenth-century journalism is that it was not intended to shape political controversy. Under William, journalism mostly unifies rather than divides. What Englishmen would take for granted by the end of Anne's reign, in other words, was essentially unheard of under William. The papers of the nineties were less partisan than those of the Exclusion Crisis had been, and drastically less polemical than what follows in the next decade.

## Content and outlook, 1702–1714: the newspapers

Little has been said about the content of early eighteenth-century newspapers. Scholars routinely note the predominance of foreign news in these papers: 'Local news,' says William Bragg Ewald, 'was comparatively sparse.'<sup>10</sup> Andrew Pettegree has affirmed this notion of early eighteenth-century newspapers: they 'continued to eschew overt editorialising,' sticking to foreign reportage and maintaining an 'extremely circumspect' treatment of domestic politics.<sup>11</sup> This is not untrue, though the tendency has been to treat these papers as *either* focused upon the continent *or* disseminating ideology. Plenty of papers do both, albeit with different degrees of directness. The precise nature of advocacy in journalism – the editorialising presence – has been significantly underexplored. One of the most prolific students of eighteenth-century newspapers, Jeremy Black, offers this characterisation: 'The contents of the newspapers [over the eighteenth century] were similar. ... [T]he age was a deeply conservative one, eager to support God and the king, despite the actions of prelates and monarchs.'<sup>12</sup> Such a summation does not do justice to do the more radical journals (e.g., *The Observer*), and it blurs important distinctions among the whole corpus of politicised papers. I offer only brief characterisations of a few major examples here; the point is to illustrate the different ways in which writers of straight news signal their ideological commitments, and the development of specialist enterprises that focus on particular aspects of the political milieu.

<sup>9</sup> Lois Schwoerer, 'Liberty of the Press and Public Opinion: 1660–1695,' in J. R. Jones (ed.), *Liberty Secured? Britain Before and After 1688* (Stanford, 1992), p. 229.

<sup>10</sup> William Bragg Ewald, Jr., *The Newsmen of Queen Anne* (Oxford, 1956), p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Pettegree, *The Invention of the News: How the World Came to Know about Itself* (New Haven, 2014), p. 247.

<sup>12</sup> Jeremy Black, *The English Press in the Eighteenth Century* (Philadelphia, 1987), p. 26.