

The Rise of Literary Journalism in the Eighteenth Century

Anxious employment

Iona Italia

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The Rise of Literary Journalism in the Eighteenth Century

The 1980s, 1990s and 2000s have witnessed a heightened interest in eighteenth-century literary journalism, an interest that reflects growing critical fascination with the development of the public sphere in the Enlightenment. While there are a number of individual studies on specific categories of publications, until now there has been little attempt to survey the broad field of the periodical itself as a literary phenomenon.

The Rise of Literary Journalism in the Eighteenth Century fills this gap in the existing scholarship. Examining the period from the launch of the first essay-periodical, Richard Steele's *Tatler* (1709), to the domination of the market by magazines in the 1760s, Italia surveys a range of monthly, weekly and sub-weekly publications, producing a study remarkable for its scope and admirable for its depth. The ten individual chapters focus on publications ranging from the *Spectator* to Frances Brooke's *Old Maid*.

Appealing to scholars studying media, history and literature, *The Rise of Literary Journalism* is a much-needed addition to the fruitful areas of literary journalism studies and the Enlightenment.

Iona Italia is a Lecturer in English Literature at the University of East Anglia.

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For Oliver

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Preface and acknowledgements

This book was inspired by the need for a basic, introductory critical study of the eighteenth-century periodical which would be more than simply a brief survey or annotated bibliography of publications, and which would range widely over the period 1690–1770, looking at the literary questions raised by a number of different publications. I hope to shed light on the traditions of eighteenth-century non-political journalism, in particular essay-periodicals and magazines, traditions which also raise more general questions about eighteenth-century authors and readers and provide a fresh perspective on the contemporary, but very different, development of the eighteenth-century novel. I make no claims to have written a definitive study of eighteenth-century journalism. It is a wide field, and some important publications and interesting aspects of journalism had to be left out of the book, for lack of space. I hope, however, that the book will form part of an ongoing debate about the literary characteristics of the periodical press in the Enlightenment and stimulate further studies of journalism, which was such a central part of the contemporary literary scene.

A version of Chapter 7 has appeared as ‘Samuel Johnson as moralist in *The Rambler*’ in *The Age of Johnson: a scholarly annual* (May 2003). I’d like to thank the editor for permission to use it here. Illustrations from the following texts were supplied courtesy of the British Library: the *Compleat Library* (C.189.a.1); *The Dunciad Variorum* (642.k.2.(1.)); the *Female Spectator* (94.c.12); the *Friendly Writer* (P.P.596.(1.)); the *General Magazine of Arts and Sciences* (205.k.8); the *Midwife* (1081.d.14); and the *Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure* (P.P.5439). Illustrations from the following texts were supplied courtesy of Cambridge University Library: the *Female Tatler* (item no. 1391 in Microfilm P247) and Charles Gildon’s *History of the Athenian Society* (R.8.52).

A number of people have read and commented on various stages of the manuscript and shared ideas about the development of this book. I’d like to thank Peter Barry, John Brewer, Beatrice Clarke, Elizabeth Eger, Richard

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Very special thanks are due to six people. John Mullan supervised the PhD at Jesus College, Cambridge, which formed the original germ of this book. Isobel Grundy gave me extensive help and advice when I was contemplating the arduous task of turning the thesis into a book. My friends Father Paul Kennington and Jonathan Bailey provided hospitality at their vicarages in East Sheen and Battersea, where I spent several happy summers during the initial stages of the writing. Nadia Valman has offered unstinting academic and personal support during almost every stage of this project. My biggest debt is to Oliver Josephs, who has immeasurably enriched my intellectual and personal life. The book's many faults are, of course, entirely my own.

Iona Italia

Notes on the text

Quotations from the *Tatler* are taken from Richard Steele, *The Tatler*, ed. Donald F. Bond, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987.

Quotations from the *Spectator* are taken from Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, *et al.*, *The Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965.

Quotations from the *Nonsense of Common Sense* are taken from Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *Essays and Poems and Simplicity, A Comedy*, ed. Robert Halsband and Isobel Grundy, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.

Quotations from the *Female Spectator* are taken from *Selected Works of Eliza Haywood*, series II, vols. 2 and 3, *The Female Spectator*, eds Kathryn R. King and Alexander Pettit, London: Pickering and Chatto, 2001.

Quotations from the *Rambler* are taken from *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, ed. W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1958–: III-V.

Quotations from Oliver Goldsmith's journalism are taken from *The Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith*, ed. Arthur Friedman, Oxford: Clarendon, 1966.

I have used the modern system for dates before 1752.

References to shorter periodicals give issue number (where available) in Arabic numerals, followed by date (where available). References to longer periodicals, such as magazines, generally cite the annual volume number, in Roman numerals, followed by the date (where available) and page number (if appropriate). Some periodicals have their own, more unusual, systems of references. I have noted within the text where this is the case.

The place of publication of all periodicals is London, unless otherwise stated.

Introduction

The rise of the periodical

In her review of George Frisbie Whicher's 1915 biography of Eliza Haywood, Virginia Woolf roundly dismisses Haywood's periodical writing, arguing that she 'left behind her a mass of unreadable journalism which both by its form and by the inferiority of the writer's talent throws no light upon her age or upon herself' (1979: 93). Woolf's comment reveals not only her low opinion of Haywood's skill as a writer, but her attitudes towards eighteenth-century journalism. For Woolf, it is the *form* in which Haywood wrote, as well as her lack of talent, which renders her journalism unworthy of scholarly attention.

The rise of the periodical coincided with an increasingly commercial literary marketplace, and journalism was often regarded as typifying all the worst qualities of the mass market, as unscrupulous hacks produced disposable literature, the 'Journals, Medleys, Merc'ries, Magazines . . . and all the Grub-street race', which cannot 'scape the martyrdom of jakes and fire' in Pope's *Dunciad* (1951: 5.273–4, 5.280). The frontispiece to the 1729 edition of Pope's mock-epic shows the crumpled sheets of periodicals dropping from the donkey's back, being blown away and littering the ground, conveying a vivid image of the transience of journalism (Figure I.1). Henry Fielding comments acidly in 1752 that most journalism serves only as toilet paper: the large number of periodicals proves 'there are . . . many B–ms in the World' (*Covent-Garden Journal* 1, 4 January 1752).

This book provides an account of the eighteenth-century periodical as a literary genre. The 1980s, 90s and 2000s have witnessed a heightened interest in eighteenth-century literary journalism, an interest that reflects growing critical fascination with the development of the public sphere in the Enlightenment. While there are a number of studies of individual papers or specific categories of publications – most notably, several books on periodicals by and for women (Ballaster *et al.* 1991; Maurer 1998; Shevelov 1989) – there has been little attempt to study the periodical itself as a literary phenomenon. Eighteenth-century genres are usually defined by their

THE
DUNCIAD,
VARIORVM.
WITH THE
PROLEGOMENA of SCRIBLERUS.

DEFEROR IN VICVM



VENDITEM THVS ET ODORES

L O N D O N .

Printed for A. DOB . 1729.

Figure I.1 Frontispiece of *The Dunciad Variorum* (1729).

structure – as novels, drama or poetry – or in terms of the specific themes and approaches which characterize particular styles such as the sentimental or the Gothic. The periodical does not fit easily within this scheme of categorization. While we might see the essay as a particular genre, governed by specific conventions and influenced by a rich literary tradition, the essay-periodical, we might argue, is not a genre in itself, but simply a form in which to market, distribute and publish essays.

An essay published in a book is very different, however, from one which appears as a single issue of an essay-serial and also distinct from an essay ‘buried’, as Oliver Goldsmith puts it, ‘among the essays upon liberty, eastern tales, and cures for the bite of a mad dog’ in the pages of a bulky magazine (1966: 4.111). The format and context in which a work is to appear profoundly affects its writer’s choice of literary strategies. In this book, I will describe and analyse the set of literary conventions which characterize the eighteenth-century periodical and suggest reasons why the periodical developed its distinctive literary traits.

The study encompasses the period between the launch of the first essay-periodical, Richard Steele’s *Tatler*, in 1709 and the domination of the market by the magazines in the 1760s. It spans the height of the essay-periodical’s popularity and describes the conception and early development of its powerful rival the magazine. By an essay-periodical, I mean a publication issued weekly or sub-weekly with a long leader essay, sometimes accompanied by a brief section of foreign and domestic news and a selection of advertisements. These publications were often written by a single writer, and were usually no more than two folio pages long. Magazines were bulky publications, usually issued monthly, with very diverse contents that often included abridged essays reprinted from weekly and sub-weekly publications, as well as articles on politics, scientific discoveries, mathematical questions, readers’ letters, poetry, serialized fiction, shipping news and the prices of goods and stocks.

While the distinction between essay-periodicals and magazines is central to this study, eighteenth-century periodicals cannot always be easily classified. Some studies of the genre have suffered from dividing the publications into somewhat arbitrary and often misleading categories. This study does not attempt to impose a strict system of taxonomy: the terms *periodical*, *journal* and *paper* are treated as approximately synonymous, and the anachronistic word *journalism* is used to describe periodical writing in general, not simply political reporting. Journals in this period were not always clearly defined by special interest, audience and approach. Many periodicals borrow features from several types of publication. Haywood’s lengthy and varied issues in the *Female Spectator* share features with both the essay-periodical and the magazine, for instance. It is often difficult to distinguish literary

from political papers. Publications such as the *Craftsman* (1726–50), which was primarily devoted to news reporting, often diversified their material with essays on manners and morals.

In addition, it is almost impossible to identify a separate tradition of periodical writing by or for women. While the titles of many papers – *ladies' magazines*, *museums*, *companions* and others – suggest that they were aimed at a female readership, there is evidence to suggest that male readers constituted a sizeable proportion of the audience of these periodicals. The editor of the *Ladies Journal* (1727) promises that his paper will contain 'nothing . . . but the lighter Affairs of the Ladies', such as 'Love and Gallantry' (no. 1), but there is a clear assumption that such material will also appeal to men. His advertisement explains that 'several Gentlemen' had subscribed to a songbook that could not be published, as the printer absconded with the copy. The periodical, he assures them, 'was chiefly writ on their Accounts, wherein they have the . . . Songs, but also variety of the most entertaining Subjects' (no. 1). The poetry miscellany *Flowers of Parnassus* (1734–6) is explicitly aimed at 'THE LADIES of Great-Britain', but the editor adds that if women endorse the publication 'our own Sex must relish and approve' (1736, Preface). Helen Berry has calculated that 'seven out of ten "Ladies" issues of the *Athenian Mercury* (which were purportedly devoted to questions from women) where the sex of the correspondent was mentioned, there were in fact as many or more questions from men than from women' (2003: 61). She notes that these 'Ladies' issues were gradually phased out after vol. v of the *Mercury* and that the *Ladies Mercury* folded after only a few issues, 'suggesting that segregation by gender was not a profitable venture' (*ibid.*). Jean Hunter has shown that never less than a third and frequently more than half of all letters to the *Lady's Magazine* (1770–1832) bear a male signature (1977: 103–71). We cannot be certain of the actual sex of some of these writers, but their sheer numbers indicate that the magazine was regarded as eminently suitable for male readers. Publications which are addressed specifically to women often do not differ from those which claim a mixed readership. Jasper Goodwill's *Ladies Magazine* (1749–53) printed serialized histories of Britain, accounts of the 'Proceedings of the *British* Parliament' and the Court of Session, criminal biographies, reviews of novels, and a 'Chronological Diary of Foreign and Domestic Affairs' as regular features, beside occasional items of more traditionally feminine interest. In addition, the style of a female-edited paper is not always distinct from one written under a male pen-name. Oliver Goldsmith's pacifist essay 'Some Thoughts Preliminary to a General Peace' was first published in the *Weekly Magazine* for 29 December 1759, where he wrote as a male journalist addressing a male readership. Just over a year later, the article reappeared in an only slightly altered form in the *Lady's Magazine; or, Polite Companion* (1759–63) for October 1761 under the

heading 'Thoughts Upon the Present State of Affairs', written in the guise of the woman editor, Mrs Caroline Stanhope, and addressed to an explicitly female audience. Goldsmith allows the fictional Mrs Stanhope to apologize gracefully for 'indulging herself in political speculations', telling readers that 'none, not even women, should sit unconcerned in the calamities . . . of their country' (*Lady's Magazine*: II.150). However, the political sentiments expressed are considered as suitable to a female, as to a male pen. Papers like the *Orphan Reviv'd* (1718–20) combine a news section, '*Containing all Remarkable Occurrences Foreign and Domestick*', with material specifically intended to appeal to women such as '*The Tea Table Tatler; or, The Ladies Delight*'. Contemporaries did not necessarily think that a female pen-name indicated female authorship. The *Female Tatler* was often attributed to Thomas Baker (see Chapter 2). Roxana Termagant, editor of the *Drury-Lane Journal*, imagines male readers commenting sceptically on her sex: 'A woman pretend to write! – Pshaw, 'tis impossible. – No, no, – a mere humbug – a stale pretence – 'twon't do, 'twon't do' (2, 23 January 1752). Her female readers, however, 'all of them strenuously maintain, that I must be, and most certainly am what I pretend to be, – a woman', variously attributing the periodical's authorship to Eliza Haywood, Sarah Fielding and the transvestite soldier Hannah Snell (1723–92) (*ibid.*). Correspondents to the *Female Spectator*, ostensibly written by a club of four women, address the editors as '*Ladies, or Gentlemen, / Madam, or Sir*' (bk VII: 2.233) and express their doubts of the *Female Spectator's* sex: 'I very much Question whether you are of the *Feminine Gender* or not' (bk XXIV: 3.405).

Some papers modified their titles, perhaps to reflect the changing gender balance of their readership. The *Ladies Diary* (1704–1871) became first the *Lady's and Gentleman's Diary* and then the *Gentleman's Diary; or, the Mathematical Repository*, before finally reverting to the title of the *Lady's and Gentleman's Diary*. Tipper's companion publication the *Monthly Entertainments* (1713) begins as a collection of 'Delightful Arithmetical Questions . . . sent me by the Fair Sex' (*Ladies Diary* 1713, Advertisement). By 1728 almost all the mathematical questions are both proposed and answered by male correspondents, but Tipper still describes his readership as '*British Ladies*' (*Ladies Diary* 1728, Advertisement). Tipper's *Delights for the Ingenious* (1711) is addressed 'to all Gentlemen, Ladies, and Others' (January 1711) and alternately singles out male readers – 'Which are the most prevailing Arguments to persuade a *Woman*, that we *really love her*?' (*ibid.*) – and female ones – 'Oh ye charming fair *Female Readers*' (*ibid.*). By the middle years of the century, most literary publications promise to contain articles of interest to men and women. This is reflected in their titles and subtitles: in the *Gentleman and Lady's Companion*, *Gentleman and Lady's Polite Magazine*, *Gentleman and Lady's Repository* and *Gentleman and Lady's Palladium* among many others.¹

Addresses to the fair sex, together with letters from female correspondents and discussion of issues of relevance to women, are ubiquitous in eighteenth-century journalism, whether written by men or women. In the first issue of his *Tatler*, Steele promises to include material 'which may be of Entertainment to the Fair Sex', in whose honour, he claims wryly, he has chosen the name of his publication. The editor of the *Free-thinker* addresses his paper to 'the Fair Sex (whose Approbation most flatters the Heart of a Writer)' (1, 24 March 1718), and the editor of the *Visiter* proclaims that 'the Ladies I design as my peculiar Care' (1, 18 June 1723). Adam Fitz-Adam of the *World* claims proudly that 'during the course of these my labours, there is nothing that I have applied myself to with more diligence and attention . . . than the reformation of the fair sex' (158, 8 January 1756). The editor of Haywood's *Parrot* declares, 'I thought it my Duty, as well as found it my Inclination, to pay a peculiar Homage to that Sex [women]' (no. 7). In the second issue of the *Gray's Inn Journal*, the editor, Charles Ranger, tells his readers, 'Having recommended myself, in my last *Saturday's* Paper, to the Patronage of the male Part of my Readers, I shall dedicate the present Essay to the *British Fair*' (6 October 1753). Samuel Johnson complains in his *Rambler* that he has been 'censured for not imitating the politeness of his predecessors, having hitherto neglected to take the ladies under his protection' (*Rambler* 23), while the editor of the *Connoisseur* tells us in the periodical's fourth issue that his female readers already 'exclaim against me for not having as yet paid my particular addresses to the Fair' (21 February 1754). A correspondent of Fielding's *Champion* rebukes him for having 'most shamefully neglected the Ladies; as if we had foresworn reading', threatening that he ignores her 'at his Peril' (327, 15 December 1741).

The feminization of the periodical is linked to a gentrification of the genre. Studies of the eighteenth-century novel have often focused on the figure of the vulnerable and naïve female reader and have seen the novel's associations with women as a sign of its lack of literary respectability. In the periodical, by contrast, addressing a female audience and discussing topics of traditionally feminine interest came to be viewed as a mark of literary and social cachet. As women were increasingly portrayed as indifferent to party politics, an address to women was taken to signal a high-minded political disinterestedness and preference for literary subjects, which would guarantee that the publication would outlast the scurrilous work of mercenary hacks, paid to inflame and perpetuate party squabbles. Periodical editors tried to shake off journalism's associations with a male, urban, trading readership who anxiously monitored foreign policy and the prices of goods and stocks. While gentlemen were merely a sub-group of male readers, by polite convention all female readers were regarded as ladies.

The periodical's early literary history clearly demonstrates the ways in

which the conditions of the literary marketplace can shape the development of a genre. The neglected periodical is, perhaps, a casualty of our abiding fascination with the novel. However, it shares a number of important historical features with the novel: most notably its historical youth, relatively low price, dubious respectability, widespread availability and particular association with female readers. Its popularity raises important questions about the transition from intensive to extensive reading, the growth of a non-aristocratic readership and the status of the professional writer in the eighteenth century. The majority of the writers, both male and female, who form the focus of this study were professionals who turned to journalism as an opportunity of making a living.

The periodical illustrates a central tension in eighteenth-century writing: a preoccupation with class coupled with a blurring of traditional class boundaries. While editors were increasingly seen as mercenary hacks writing for a semi-literate mass audience, within the periodicals they maintain a pretence of gentility. More than in any other form of eighteenth-century writing, class and genre are intricately connected in the periodical. All the major features of the genre were influenced by the desires of periodical writers to shake off journalism's disreputable image. The work of each of the individual writers in this study represents a different approach to the problem of securing a measure of literary respectability.

While some of the works examined by this study were to gain lasting literary fame, the periodical as a genre was never to attain significant literary prestige. The essay-periodical, which represents the genre's most literary, least commercial product, was moribund by the end of the period covered by this study. While essay-periodicals continued to be published after 1770, they were never to regain the popularity they enjoyed during the early decades of the century. In the course of this study, I will suggest some reasons for the failure of journalism to achieve the privileged literary status accorded to the novel. First, however, I will place the study's central texts in their wider context by describing the historical conditions which led to the development of journalism and charting the main features of the genre.

General historical background

Periodicals flourished and grew both in number and diversity throughout the period 1690–1770. They ranged from the learned to the lewd. The scholarly *Phoenix Britannicus* (1731), which contains rare pamphlets from the Civil War period, together with the equally erudite *Miscellaneous Observations* (1731–2), which offers textual criticism of the Classics, appealed to 'the Curiosi of these Realms' (*Phoenix Britannicus* 1, January 1731). At the other end of the scale, comic miscellanies like *Heraclitus Ridens* (1703–4 and 1718)

and Ned Ward's *Humours of a Coffee-House* (1707–8) published collections of bawdy jokes, riddles and anecdotes. Learned abstracts such as the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* (1665–present day) and De la Crose's *History of the Works of the Learned* (1699–1712) carried reviews of scholarly publications, together with accounts of scientific experiments and theological debates. These erudite publications were later to develop into book reviewing journals such as the *Monthly Review* (1749–1844) and the *Critical Review* (1756–1817), which began by reprinting lengthy extracts and summaries of mainly non-fictional texts and gradually diversified to provide critical comment on a wide range of publications.² The ambitious *Edinburgh Review* (1755–6) presents itself as a 'national benefit', which will encourage 'a more eager pursuit of learning' among Scots, enabling them 'to distinguish themselves, and to do honour to their country' (1, July 1755). The *Scots Magazine* (1739–1826) also wishes to 'revive that universal esteem which SCOTLAND so justly acquir'd among her neighbours by the valour and learning of our ancestors' (vol. 1, Preface).

A number of historical circumstances concurred to make the early to mid-eighteenth century a particularly propitious time for the development and proliferation of journalism. The first English newsbooks and corantos, modelled on Dutch publications, appeared in the 1620s in London (Harris 1978: 83). The breakdown of governmental controls during the Civil War fostered the appearance of a multitude of periodical publications. With the Restoration, conditions of publication became far more restrictive. The Licensing Act of 1662 placed the press under the supervision of a series of licensers. In 1684, the Stationers' Company was granted a royal charter and a monopoly on printing. Printing was restricted to 20 master printers from the Company, each of whom was allocated a set number of presses. In 1695, the Licensing Act was allowed to lapse, and at the same time the Stationers' Company lost their monopoly. There was to be no further registry of printing presses until 1799 (Brewer 1997: 135–7).

The official government vehicle for news, the twice-weekly *London Gazette*, had been established in 1665, but in 1695 non-official newspapers appeared, beginning with the *Post Boy*. The first daily newspaper, the *Daily Courant*, was launched in 1702 and the first evening paper, the *Evening Post*, in 1709. Provincial presses were quickly established, and local newspapers rapidly emerged, beginning with the *Norwich Post* in 1708. A newspaper provided a steady source of income and required only a small investment. It was also a cheap advertising medium for the bookseller or printer's other wares. By the 1730s, every major provincial centre had its own newspaper (*ibid.* 132). Provincial bookshops spread rapidly, increasing from 400 outlets in 200 towns in 1749 to nearly 1,000 in 300 locations in the 1790s (*ibid.* 137). The number of journals rose steadily throughout the eighteenth

century. R.P. Bond has estimated that in 1711 there were 66 periodicals available in the British Isles, 90 in 1750 and 140 in 1775 (1969: 4). Robert Mayo lists 120 essay-periodicals for the period 1740–1815, about half of which were non-political papers (1962: 72).

The size of the readership of eighteenth-century periodicals is difficult to gauge. We do not usually have access to printers' and booksellers' ledgers, and print historians have often been forced to rely on the claims of editors, who may well have exaggerated their own success. Since periodicals were frequently lent out, shared, read aloud or consulted in a public place, a single copy may have been read by many people. Addison claims that each copy of the *Spectator* had 20 readers (*Spectator* 10) whilst one contemporary describes the *Craftsman* as having 'no more than 40 Readers to a Paper' (Harris 1987: 48). Historians have estimated the sales figures of some of the most popular publications. The *Craftsman*, an enormously successful polemical paper, achieved a sale of around 13,000 per week (*ibid.* 86). At the height of their influence, the major Opposition papers were bringing in profits of around £1,000 p.a. (*ibid.* 92). Major weekly periodicals of mid-century, which combined news and non-political features, often enjoyed sales of up to 10,000 per issue (*ibid.*). Monthly magazines had a readership of between 5,000 and 15,000 from the 1760s onwards (Mayo 1962: 84). In 1710, the official news organ, the *London Gazette*, printed 1,000 copies per issue, some of which may have been remaindered (R.P. Bond 1971: 39).

Very few estimates have been made of the circulation of literary periodicals: that is, all publications whose content was not primarily political. Most publishing history studies focus on newspapers. The *Tatler* and the *Spectator* were the most successful essay-periodicals, with sales of the original issues estimated at 3,000 and 4,000 respectively (R.P. Bond 1971: 39 and D.F. Bond 1965: lxxiv). Richmond P. Bond estimates the *Tatler's* original profits at around £37 per week (1971: 39). The mid-century literary essay-sheet the *World*, published by Robert Dodsley, edited by the dramatist Edward Moore and numbering among its star-studded band of contributors Lord Chesterfield, Horace Walpole, William Whitehead, Soame Jenyns, Richard Owen Cambridge and Joseph Warton, reputedly sold 25,000 copies per week (Mayo 1962: 118). Very few literary essay-periodicals achieved comparable readerships. Most probably had a circulation of no more than a few hundred in their original sheets. It was customary, however, to bind and print collected issues of a periodical at the end of the run, and many publications reached much larger audiences in volume form (*ibid.* 71). Those who owned incomplete sets of the original sheets were also encouraged to replace issues they had missed and bind them themselves. Back copies, indexes and title pages were often available from the printer (R.P. Bond 1971: 41). Literary essay-periodicals tended to have much shorter lifespans than most of today's

publications: in the majority of cases, the papers appear to have ended within a year, and many are only extant in two or three issues.

Periodicals were very widely available, especially in the capital. They could be bought at the publisher's office or ordered by subscription from the printer or from metropolitan or provincial booksellers. They could be purchased or hired from hawkers on the London streets, read at taverns, barbers' shops, chandlers and India houses (Jeremy Black 1991: 99–108). J.H. Plumb has estimated that there were around 2,000 coffee-houses in London during the reign of Queen Anne (1983: 269). Most held periodicals, which could be read on site or sometimes borrowed, and some played host to private book clubs, whose members purchased periodicals as a group and read them aloud over drinks or a meal (*ibid.* 269–70). By the 1720s, collected editions of periodicals could also be obtained from the new circulating libraries (*ibid.* 270).

Relatively little is known about the readership of eighteenth-century journalism. The extent of literacy in the period is difficult to estimate, and the means of defining literacy are contested. Those able to sign their names on a legal document – the usual measure of literacy in this period – were probably not all capable of reading Johnson's polysyllabic prose in the *Rambler*, for instance. However, most historians agree that literacy levels were rising rapidly, particularly in London and among women and merchants. John Brewer estimates that 45% of men could read and write in 1714, rising to 60% by mid-century and that female literacy rose from 25% in 1714 to 40% in 1750 (Brewer 1997: 167–8). He argues that the percentage of literate women in London changed more dramatically than elsewhere in the country, increasing from 22 to 66% between the 1670s and 1720s (*ibid.*). Wages for skilled workers in the capital seldom fell below 10s. a week, making periodicals affordable to many (Harris 1987: 192). Of the lower classes, shopkeepers were the most likely to be literate: 95% of them could read and write by 1775 (Brewer 1997: 168). The audience for periodicals in the first few decades of the century, then, was probably predominantly urban and included some shopkeepers, domestic servants and apprentices and their masters. It is likely that a significant proportion of that readership was female.

The cost of purchasing periodicals rose faster than the rate of inflation throughout the century, putting them quickly out of the price range of most unskilled and semi-skilled workers (Jeremy Black 1991: 107–8). This price rise is reflected in the style and focus of the periodicals themselves. As the century progresses, periodical editors increasingly portray their publications as genteel entertainment. The maverick literary entrepreneur John Dunton edited a number of popular epistolary periodicals in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, which reached a large and socially diverse audi-

ence. Dunton's papers, in particular the *Athenian Mercury* (1691–7) and the *Post-Angel* (1701–2), together with their later imitators, the *British Apollo* (1708–11) and the *Athenian News* (1710), contained a number of readers' queries and editors' responses on questions ranging from the nature of the soul to the reasons why prostitutes have so few pregnancies (*Athenian Mercury* i.1, 17 March 1690; i.18, 23 May 1691). The editor promises to answer queries sent in by 'All Persons whatsoever', providing a source of information to 'those whose Pockets could not arrive to a better Education' (*Athenian Mercury* i.1). No original letters to the *Mercury* have survived. However, Helen Berry's research suggests that Dunton's readership encompassed a wide range of society, including servant maids, shop assistants and apprentices (2003: 36–43, 63–5). Referring to the *British Apollo*, a correspondent of the *Female Tatler* comments acidly that 'the chief Querists are Drapers, Haberdashers, Grocers, Ale-house-keepers and such sort of Trash' (30, 14 September 1709).

Early journals frequently describe their role as that of disseminating knowledge to those without the leisure, money or education to read books. The *Weekly Pacquet* (1678) promises to cater for 'meaner capacities', arguing that 'though there be good Books enow abroad, yet every Mans Purse will not allow him to buy . . . This Method is therefore chosen, as most likely to fall into Vulgar hands' (qtd. Jeremy Black 1991: 6). In a similar manner, the *Weekly Amusement* (1734–6) reassures its readers that 'nothing shall be inserted but what may be understood by persons of the meanest capacities' (no. 1). Few periodicals of the mid- to late eighteenth century acknowledge such a humble readership. Robert Mayo has noted the predominance of phrases such as 'elegant amusement', 'entertaining companions' and 'taste, fashion and politeness' in editors' descriptions of their publications after 1750 (1962: 220–1). The editor of the immensely popular *World* defines his readership as high society or 'the well-dressed, and . . . everybody one knows' (162, 5 February 1756). The titles of publications such as the *Royal Magazine* (1750–1), the *Court Miscellany*,³ the *St. James's Magazine* (1762–4) and the *Court and City Magazine; or, a Fund of Entertainment for the Man of Quality* (1770–1), announce their aristocratic pretensions. This does not necessarily imply that their readers were drawn from the upper echelons of society. As the authors of *Women's Worlds* have pointed out, 'Publishers and editors recognise their readers as "aspirational", aspiring to . . . a higher class or social bracket' (Ballaster *et al.* 1991: 11). A correspondent tells the *Court Magazine* that, although it is bought by 'the nobility', its chief readers are 'the servant in waiting, or the journeyman hair-dresser' (January 1762).

Michael Harris has argued that 'the press in this period did not succeed in substantially broadening the basis of its readership' (1978: 97) and believes that the readership of newspapers was largely drawn from the aristocracy,

gentry and clergy, although it also included a substantial number of self-employed craftsmen, tradesmen and shopkeepers (1987: 191–5). The readership of literary essay-periodicals was almost certainly smaller and less diverse than that of newspapers. While few editors and not many readers were actually drawn from the upper classes, by mid-century most editors maintained a pretence of mutual gentility when addressing their audiences.

Taxation and the cost of paper kept the price of periodicals high after the first quarter of the century. The Stamp Act of 1712 taxed single-sheet newspapers 1d. for every copy printed: printing, say, 8 copies would cost 8d. Publications of more than one sheet paid only 2s. per sheet irrespective of the number of copies: a 4-sheet publication, for example, would pay only 8s. duty, no matter how large its print run. Multi-sheet publications were also exempted from advertisement duty (Harris 1987: 19–20). It became more profitable to publish several sheets weekly, instead of one daily sheet. A number of newspapers converted to the miscellany format, combining news items with literary essays and miscellaneous items, including ‘scraps of Poetry, Trials of Highwaymen, pickpockets and many other subjects, that tend to debauch the morals of the community’, as one reader complained in the early 1720s (Harris 1978: 85–6). The Stamp Act of 1725 closed this loophole by requiring all newspapers to be stamped on every page, regardless of length. In the 1740s, tough legislation was introduced to suppress the illegal sales of cut-price, unstamped papers. The hawkers who sold them on the streets were liable to up to three months’ hard labour, and rewards were offered for information leading to a conviction (Harris 1987: 29–30). The stamp duty was doubled in 1757.

The stamp tax and the cost of paper were the largest expenses involved in setting up a periodical. At least £200 was needed to launch a newspaper in the 1730s (*ibid.* 49). Essay-periodicals brought in smaller profits, but also had smaller initial costs and overheads and could often be financed by individuals. As the costs of periodical production increased, there was a shift in the ownership of London papers, especially daily newspapers, from individual printer entrepreneurs to large groups of shareholding booksellers (Harris 1978: 92). This in turn was to bring about a significant change, not just in the way in which periodicals were produced, but in their form and content. It was to lead to a conception of journals not as the literary work of specific individuals, but as business enterprises undertaken primarily for profit, without a distinctive single editorial voice or artistic vision.

Although there was no pre-publication censorship, periodical printers and publishers were liable to prosecution for obscenity, blasphemy or seditious libel. Between 1715 and 1759 over 70 warrants were issued against newspapers, not including prosecutions for breach of parliamentary privilege. The reporting of parliamentary debates was to remain illegal until 1771

(*ibid.* 96). Printers and publishers were more likely to be arrested than authors, since they printed their names and addresses on their title pages, for commercial correspondence. Printers could be sentenced to a maximum of two years' imprisonment and fined up to £200. Even when a prosecution was unsuccessful, they were often imprisoned pending trial for a number of months – in some cases several years – and were released only when substantial bail had been raised. Printing materials and presses were often confiscated or damaged in government raids (Harris 1987: 142–7). A conviction could, however, make a paper more popular, by advertising its radical, salacious or titillating content. As well as taking legal measures, government officials at the Post Office could prevent the distribution of issues or threaten a paper's finances by intercepting orders and advertisements (*ibid.* 136–9). Despite these difficulties and restrictions, periodicals continued to flourish throughout this period, although these historical developments led to changes in the relative popularity of different forms of journalism. In the early part of the century the essay-periodical enjoyed considerable popularity, but by mid-century the periodical market was dominated by the magazines. I will be tracing the effects of these changes within the individual chapters of this book. First, however, it is important to understand the main characteristics of these two forms of periodical writing.

The essay-periodical

The single-essay periodical was pioneered by Richard Steele in his *Tatler* (1709–11) and then developed further by Steele and Joseph Addison in the *Spectator* (1711–12 and 1714). These periodicals were written in the guise of fictional personae. Both the *Tatler's* Isaac Bickerstaff and Mr Spectator were genial, mildly eccentric figures, who combined moral *gravitas* with loveable idiosyncrasy. The concise and manageable form of the single essay meant that the papers could be written by one individual. In most essay-periodicals, one writer had editorial responsibility for the publication, as well as composing most of the material him- or herself. I use the term *editor* in this context almost interchangeably with *writer*. Richmond Bond has attributed 47 *Tatler* papers to Addison, estimating that he wrote a further 22 in collaboration with Steele. Other possible contributors to the *Tatler* include John Hughes, Arthur Maynwaring, Anthony Henley, Temple Stanyan, William Congreve, William Asplin, Richard Parker, Charles Dartiquenave, Jonathan Swift and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (R.P. Bond 1971: 14–20). I treat the *Tatler*, however, as the work of Steele throughout, since he not only wrote 181 of the paper's 271 issues, but exercised full editorial control over all the material that was published (*ibid.* 15).

The use of a fictional persona allowed Steele to censure the faults and

follies of his society, without exposing himself to personal attacks or to the charge of hypocrisy. The device brilliantly combines wit with morality, ironic distance with direct appeal. As the editor of the *Medley* comments in 1711,

Isaac Bickerstaff . . . had the Skill to talk in a superior Air to his Opponents, and support himself in it, by giving himself a comical Figure at the same time. Without this Subtlety . . . the *Tatler* had been the most insufferably arrogant of any Writer that ever appear'd in the World.

(38, 18 June 1711)

In the *Spectator*, Addison also describes the liberating effect of writing in a mask. He tells his readers, 'That might pass for Humour, in the *Spectator*, which would look like Arrogance in a Writer who sets his Name to his Work. The Fictitious Person might . . . assume a Mock-Authority, without being looked upon as vain and conceited' (no. 555). Henry Fielding's *Jacobite's Journal* is unusual in the level of irony with which the author handles his persona, John Trott-Plaid. Fielding chooses to pose as a Jacobite in order 'to be laughed at for the Good of my Country' and to 'reduce all Men to be as great and as sincere Jacobites as myself' (*Jacobite's Journal* 1, 5 December 1747). However, Fielding abandons his alter ego after only 16 issues, declaring himself 'weary of personating a Character for whom I have so solemn a Contempt' and fearing that there is 'no Species of Wit and Humour so little adapted to the Palat of the present Age' as irony, as well as 'no kind of Humour so liable to be mistaken' (*Jacobite's Journal* 17, 26 March 1748). Most editors employ their personae more or less as mouthpieces – they are eccentric, perhaps, but ultimately respectable and authoritative spokespeople. The idea of the editor as a figure of moral authority was to remain central to conceptions of the genre.

It is impossible to overestimate Addison and Steele's influence on later periodicalists. The *Spectator*, in particular, continued to be read, anthologized and praised as a model of English prose and moral thought until the early part of the twentieth century. Editors frequently complain that because of the *Spectator* 'it is a . . . fashion to condemn all other writings of the same kind' (*World* 173, 22 April 1756). The editor of the *Gray's Inn Journal* sees the eminence of Addison and Steele's publications as a hindrance to other journalists: 'It has for a long Time been the Objection to the periodical Writer of Essays, that every Subject is pre-occupied; that the *Spectators*, *Tatlers* and *Guardians* have cultivated every Field of Reflection' (29 December 1753). Addison is lionized in Edward Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759) and in John Gilbert Cooper's *Letters Concerning Taste* (1755). In 1760, Hugh Blair held a series of lectures on rhetoric, many of