

Ashley Marshall. *Political Journalism in London, 1695-1720: Defoe, Swift, Steele and Their Contemporaries.* Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2020. x + 313 pp. \$115.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-78327-545-8.

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Antagonistic media outlets, and the politically charged public that engages with them, are not unique to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Though mass-circulation newspapers, the twenty-four-hour news cycle, and the internet have certainly done much to stoke our contemporary ideological divides, the roots of this phenomenon can be situated centuries ago, in Europe's locally distributed political periodicals. In considering the lineage of modern partisan journalism throughout the world, one could very easily look to eighteenth-century London as a suitable starting point. Beginning around 1700, a veritable torrent of newspapers began to appear that further pitted the (roughly characterized) "liberal" Whigs and "conservative" Tories against each another. But what emerged was not only a wave of mutually opposed publications. The papers, and invariably the writers and publishers behind them, also nurtured a marketplace of ideologically engaged consumers who eagerly absorbed them. The burgeoning Whig and Tory print skirmishes and the broader, often hostile social politicization they fostered are both dexterously revealed in Ashley Marshall's *Political Journalism in London, 1695-1720*.

The political publishing explosion of England's late Stuart and early Hanoverian periods has a rather robust and long-standing historiography.

Notable texts in this regard include J. A. Downie's *Robert Harley and the Press: Propaganda and Public Opinion in the Age of Swift and Defoe* (1979), Gary S. De Krey's *A Fractured Society: The Politics of London in the First Rage of Party, 1688-1715* (1985), and Mark Knights's *Representation and Misrepresentation in Later Stuart Britain: Partisanship and Political Culture* (2005). Though these scholars widely scrutinize the various legal and social mechanisms that made the publishing environment ripe for expansion, Marshall affirms that very few have "been devoted to the content and clashing, evolving ideologies of London's political papers" (p. 3). Bridging such a gap, in turn, serves as her principal scholarly effort throughout.

Key events of the seventeenth century molded London into a center of endemic political discourse and publishing. The civil wars of the 1640s and the events of 1688 challenged England's monarchical authority and fueled parliamentary and popular political participation. This, combined with the lapsing of the Licensing Act in 1695, which had previously regulated the applications of printing presses, largely shifted the public's consumption of journalism and their reactions to it. By c.1700, papers of disparate political leanings frequently and openly debated on scores of topics. The increasingly unpopular War of the Spanish

Succession (1702-13), constant disagreements over the limits of the church's and the monarchy's power, and Queen Anne's controversial appointment of Robert Harley as prime minister in 1710, among many other matters, all provided fodder for the new partisan publishing apparatus.

The vibrant press contingent that developed featured an array of Tory, Whig, and even some radical Jacobite publications. Joseph Addison's and Richard Steele's *Tatler* (1709-11), Daniel Defoe's *Review of the Affairs of France* (1704-13) (both Whig periodicals), and Jonathan Swift's, Delarivier Manley's, and William Oldisworth's high Tory *Examiner* (1710-14) are but a small fraction of works taken from the vast corpus examined. And in promoting their positions on the topics of the day, most contributed in some way to the era's ardent political divide. Marshall not only skillfully illustrates the stated positions of these publications but also how they sowed discord between increasingly opposed readership camps.

One of this study's most notable strengths is in its overt depiction of an ideologically fluid publishing environment. Fractures within each party, shifting domestic and foreign affairs and parliamentary politics, and monarchical favoritism all dictated the direction that papers went or were allowed to go. For instance, Queen Anne's reign (1702-14) saw a more balanced though vitriolic partisan landscape, while the first Hanoverian King George I (r. 1714-27) "rigorously restrained, harassed, and silenced" Tory publishers in support of a favorable Whig propaganda machine (p. 57). In order to stay relevant in the oscillating political winds, authors' and editors' positions on topical issues and debates varied greatly, or were even transformed completely. Marshall continually stresses this point, as observations such as "neither Whig nor Tory papers were consistent in their identities or objectives" and "among Whig and Tory papers one finds a wide range of interests, tones, and emphases" abound (pp. 5, 43). Judging or labeling the prominent periodicals

from the time in black-and-white terms, therefore, simply becomes problematic, and Marshall does exceptionally well to demonstrate this.

Yet she also posits that the stakes of her project are much higher than a chronicling of the kaleidoscopic, sardonic, and contentious affairs of the fourth estate. Marshall specifically uses the period's idiosyncratic publishing milieu to argue for the creation of what can broadly be referred to as "the public." By evaluating the "relationship between rhetorical strategies and journalistic ethos," *Political Journalism in London* seeks to illuminate a significant and innovative sociopolitical model not previously seen in related studies (p. 6). Does she succeed in this endeavor? Her compelling treatment of the argument, especially in chapter 6, very much suggests that she does. Marshall reveals that both Whig and Tory press people not only sold their respective political agendas to the masses; they went so far as to craft an image of their preferred political realities. "Journalists," she contends, "were also laboring to create, promote, and establish expectations for a particular manner of public engagement" (p. 247). By interweaving facts with misleading and ostentatious claims about their opponents, writers attempted to "invite and train readers [on how] to behave" (p. 201). The result was twofold: journalists manufactured their own politicized communities, and, via these communities' moral and financial backings, they established their own power bases.

A third distinction of Marshall's work lies not in its specific arguments *per se*, but rather in its historiographical positioning. She thoughtfully and thoroughly comments on or reacts to a range of scholarly arguments at seemingly every opportunity. This is, in part, punctuated by her exceptionally robust secondary bibliography. For aspirant researchers of this topic, however, arguably the crown jewel of the work is its comprehensive appendix of newspapers and periodicals from the twenty-five-year time frame considered. This "Tabular Representation" of roughly two hundred

circulated papers meticulously highlights their principal characteristics, if known, including their frequency of publication (e.g., daily, weekly, etc.), their general partisan leanings, and their main contributors and editors. These ancillary resources complement the work's scholarly offerings well, and make its value within the larger body of literature shine through.

Due to the sheer number of periodicals chronicled, Marshall's efforts might have become bogged down had she attempted to engage with every one of them. Therefore, in devoting the lion's share of her efforts toward the major figures of the time (Defoe, Swift, and Steele, among a few others), she attests that "this survey is representative rather than exhaustive" (p. 13). Her editorial choice to narrow the scope of this project offers other researchers countless opportunities for scholarly expansion. Dozens of other relevant publishers, writers, and editors also played some smaller role in the turbulent publishing climate of the time, so their narratives most certainly hold comparable value as well, especially if portrayed *in toto*. Additional studies of these more ephemeral and peripheral contributors could thereby do much to supplement the findings of Marshall's current project.

Despite whatever future inquiries this work might generate, its present possibilities for use in college classrooms are abundant. Much of the book's contents would dovetail nicely in courses surveying the history of publishing under the Houses of Stuart and Hanover, or journalism courses concerned with partisan publishing generally. Additional passages (particularly those from chapter 6) could also contribute much to a philosophy curriculum dealing with theoretical conceptions of "the public." There is no question that Marshall's monograph finds itself affixed to an extensive historiographical lineage, with academic interest in early eighteenth-century British publishing going back decades. But due to its distinctive breadth of content, its novel approach to examining the broader influence of the relevant

news writers, and its immensely accommodating bibliography, *Political Journalism in London* should receive consideration as the new standard-bearer of the field.

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