COMMENTING ON THE NEWS:
THE SERIAL PRESS AND POLITICAL
CULTURE IN BRITAIN, 1641-c.1730

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Declaration

This thesis is submitted to the University of Warwick in support of my application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It has been composed by myself and has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree.
Abstract

Where most scholars have approached current affairs discourse in early modern Britain from the perspective of ‘news’, this thesis argues that commenting on current affairs was a tangible concept and practice in its own right. ‘Comment’ took conceptual shape through a specialist lexicon, including keywords such as ‘observations’, ‘reflections’ and ‘remarks’, and through physical differentiation of news and comment within and between publications. There was a substantial ‘comment media landscape’ that took oral, manuscript and printed forms, centred especially on pamphlets.

From the 1640s, comment was increasingly published through regular printed publications: the serial press. Most comment in serials was political and partisan, supporting royalists or parliamentarians in the civil wars, or Tories or Whigs during the ‘rage of party’. ‘Newspapers’, or printed news serials, were important vehicles for comment (as well as news) in the 1640s and 1650s, and again from the 1710s onwards, and they increasingly challenged pamphlets’ dominance during the eighteenth century. Between the 1680s and 1720s, there was a new tradition of ‘comment serials’ – previously overlooked as a holistic phenomenon by scholars – comprising regular publications whose explicit purpose was to provide comment rather than news, such as Roger L’Estrange’s Observator (1681-87) and Daniel Defoe’s Review (1704-13). The famous Tatler (1709-11) and Spectator (1711-12, 1714) can be usefully regarded as moral comment serials.

Finally, this thesis argues that the circulation of published comment contributed to the development of public political awareness and partisanship between the 1640s and 1720s, building on scholarship about the ‘public sphere’ and political culture. Focusing on the consumption of comment serials, it argues that encounters with comment serials were widespread, that they were read along partisan lines (both supportive and hostile), and that they emerged as de facto public voices of party through paper wars and through representations as direct party ‘mouthpieces’.
Conventions and abbreviations

Conventions

- Primary sources have been accessed digitally where possible, especially on HT, Burney, Nichols, BPO and ECJ.

- Quotations are usually given in their original form, retaining any capitalisation and italics. However, there are a few exceptions:
  - Black-letter has not been retained in my transcriptions.
  - In texts where italic is the main typeface and roman is used to highlight words – the reverse of usual practice – this has been silently inverted in my transcriptions.
  - Capitalisations of words on title-pages are usually retained in transcriptions, although lower-case is substituted for minor words such as ‘on’ or ‘upon’.

- Serials are usually identified with a single, simple title, regardless of any changes in title from across a serial’s run. For example, the Daily Benefactor (1715) is referred to as such, even though it was renamed the Benefactor part way through its run. Full bibliographical details can be found in NS, CK, ESTC, McLeod and NCBEL.

- Where different serials have the same title, as with various serials called Observator, a specific publication referenced can usually be deduced from the date of the issue cited, and otherwise is signified in another way if necessary.

- The titles of serials and pamphlets are given with initial capitals on major words, and punctuation is occasionally altered silently for flow (e.g. a comma in place of a full stop).

- As the titles of early modern publications can be lengthy, they are not always cited in full.

- Authors are given where known, according to ESTC, unless there is specific reason not to do so. Place of publication is given as on ESTC.

- The dating of serials is not always straightforward, because there is often ambiguity about whether to treat publications with the same or similar titles and authors as a single publication. For instance, there was a series of publications entitled Perfect Diurnall and edited by Samuel Pecke between 1642 and 1655, and Richard Steele authored two series of the Englishman between 1713 and 1715. Attempting to apply consistent rules here produces anomalies, so a pragmatic approach has been
adopted throughout this thesis. Again, detailed bibliographical information can be found in NS, CK, ESTC, McLeod and NCBEL.

Abbreviations

- **BL** = British Library.
- **BM** = British Museum.
- **BPO** = *British Periodicals Online*, online database, https://search.proquest.com/britishperiodicals/.
- **ECJ** = *Eighteenth Century Journals*, online database, http://www.18thcjournals.amdigital.co.uk/.
- **ESTC** = *English Short Title Catalogue*, online database, http://estc.bl.uk/.
- **HT** = *Historical Texts*, online database, http://historicaltexts.jisc.ac.uk/.
- **Weekly Pacquet** = *Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Rome* (NS 477), unless stated.
INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a contribution to scholarship about the media and political culture in early modern Britain. Its general argument is that commenting on current affairs was a tangible concept and practice in early modern Britain, and formed a significant and distinctive part of the media landscape. Its particular argument is that the serial press – regular printed publications, especially newspapers and, from the late-seventeenth century, a new tradition of dedicated ‘comment serials’ – developed as a key vehicle for publishing comment, whose regular circulation contributed to the development of political awareness and partisanship among the public during Britain’s long ‘revolutionary period’ between the 1640s and 1720s.

This introduction has four sections. The first introduces the concept of ‘comment’, and explores its relationship with the more familiar concept of ‘news’. The second discusses wider themes in political culture to which ‘comment’ can contribute fresh perspectives, including political awareness and partisanship. The third introduces the serial press, the form of media that provides the primary subject of the thesis. The fourth outlines the main arguments of the thesis, chapter by chapter.

Comment and news

When scholars have examined the flow of information about current affairs around early modern society, they have primarily conceived this in terms of ‘news’.\(^1\) My contention is that ‘comment’ should also be regarded as a tangible communicative practice in early modern Britain, interconnected with but frequently distinct from ‘news’. ‘Comment’ can be approached from two, overlapping perspectives. First, it can be taken conceptually, as discourse about current affairs that provided discussions or interpretations rather than reports. This is analytically helpful, even if distinctions between comment/interpretations and news/reports were often blurred in practice. Secondly, ‘comment’ can be defined in contemporary terms, as early modern Britons used a variety of keywords to indicate explicitly that they were providing opinion, discussion or analysis rather than news, such as ‘observations’, ‘reflections’ and ‘remarks’.

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\(^1\) This thesis uses ‘current affairs’ and ‘topical’, rather than ‘news’, as overarching terms for discourse related to contemporary events or issues.
We should begin with ‘news’. One seventeenth-century guide to the New World observed that ‘The whole race of mankind is generally infected with an itching desire of hearing Newes’.² As scholars have widely recognised, early modern Britain shared fully in this ‘itch for news’, and had a sophisticated infrastructure to enable people to scratch their itch. To start, a long-standing historiographical tradition has explored the emergence and proliferation of the ‘newspaper’, or printed news serial, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Newspaper history was inaugurated by a group of Victorian historians, and developed in the twentieth century through detailed studies of sub-periods by scholars such as Joseph Frank, James Sutherland, Michael Harris and Joad Raymond.³ In addition, there has been increasing awareness that newspapers formed only one part of a rich landscape of news media, which also encompassed non-serialised print media, such as pamphlets, and oral and manuscript media. Our understanding of these individual media has grown immeasurably, through specific work on, for instance, news pamphlets, news ballads, manuscript newsletters and the oral news ‘grapevine’.⁴ The balance of different

² Roger Williams, A Key into the Language of America (London, 1643), p. 61.
news media has also been examined for some periods, especially pre-1640. Out of such studies has emerged a picture of a rich, regular, multi-media flow of news around early modern Britain, already significant by the late-sixteenth century, and deepening substantially in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This has demonstrated that people’s access to news was greater than previously thought possible, and more generally has affirmed the importance of news in early modern culture.

Scholars have also considered news culture from other perspectives. Nicholas Brownlees and David Randall have explored the *discourse* of news, identifying the typical rhetorical features of news presentation, especially for c.1600-1660, sometimes using technical and quantitative processes. Joad Raymond and others have analysed news *networks*, considering how, and how effectively, news travelled across Europe, for instance through packet boats and road-based postal systems. A special issue of *Media History* considered the *management* of news: how governments, news-writers and readers


processed the vast quantities of news they encountered. There has also been interest in news consumption, as part of a wider ‘history of reading’. News consumption models include directionless reading without purpose (Joad Raymond), active and heterogeneous reading to build a picture of events (also Raymond), reading to judge credibility (David Randall), and reading for utility (Jason Peacey).

The nature, scope and importance of early modern news culture is thus widely acknowledged. But how do scholars understand the term ‘news’? One tension is that ‘news’ is deployed in two different ways, which can become conflated: narrowly as news reports – relations of events that are claimed to be recent and true – and broadly as an overarching term for all discourse relating to current affairs or topical issues. Recent developments in news studies, including news discourse and news networks, have tended to focus on news in its narrower sense. However, this can lead to a neglect of forms of topical discourse that did not comprise news reports per se. A concept of ‘comment’ provides an effective way to bridge this divide.

The OED defines ‘comment’ as ‘a remark or note in explanation, exposition, or criticism of a literary passage; an annotation; a remark or criticism (on or upon anything)’. Breaking this down, ‘comment’ can be understood as an expressed response to or interpretation of a specified subject-base. This definition does not presume anything about the content of the comment, which can range from objective analysis to partial opinion, and hence is preferable to the term ‘opinion’ as an overarching term.

To explore the utility of a concept of ‘comment’ in mitigating the limitations of the term ‘news’, a helpful starting-point is Brendan Dooley’s model of ‘political information’, defined as ‘whatever may be thought or said about events connected with the government of states and with cities and their peoples’. To consider the dynamics of ‘political information’ in a society in toto, it is necessary to examine not only the flow of information about recent events (‘news’ proper), but also the flow of analysis and opinion about these

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10 OED, ‘Comment’, definition 2a.
events (comment on the news, i.e. comment taking news as its subject-base), and the flow of analysis and opinion about other subjects of the moment (topical comment more broadly, i.e. comment taking another topical issue as its subject-base, such as a political party, religious policy or trading pattern). To be holistic, we need to understand how all of these flowed, and how they were consumed. In practice, of course, these elements might be bundled together or separate: comment might be rhetorically packaged within news (phrases or sentences within news reports), or placed alongside news within a text (as in the separate sections in a modern newspaper), or expressed in its own right (as in a pamphlet). But however co-mingled with news reports in practice, the term ‘comment’ is a helpful supplement to ‘news’ when examining the dynamics of topical communications. On a conceptual level, the terms ‘news’ and ‘comment’ can, between them, comprehend all of these communication flows in a way that ‘news’ cannot do alone.  

In modern news culture, this conceptualisation is strengthened by the fact that a distinction between ‘news’ and ‘comment’ (or ‘opinion’) is well-established in contemporary language, with practical expression in, for instance, separate news and comment sections in newspapers. One of the main arguments of this thesis is that these explicit distinctions first emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A rich lexicon of comment developed in early modern Britain, especially as used in the titles of printed publications such as pamphlets and serials, to signify that these were works of comment rather than news. Comment keywords include ‘observations’, ‘reflections’, ‘remarks’, ‘considerations’, ‘animadversions’ and ‘examination’, and contrast with the more familiar keywords of news such as ‘relation’, ‘occurrences’ and ‘passages’. A distinction between comment and news was also elaborated in practical terms, through the use of comment genres such as dialogues and essays, the growth of separate news and comment sections in newspapers, and the emergence of separate comment publications such as comment serials.  

A concept of ‘comment’ is not absent from early modern scholarship, but it is usually mentioned only in general terms. For instance, Joad Raymond has noted that ‘the provision of news became more entangled with political commentary’ during the seventeenth century; Jason Peacey has argued that the civil wars saw ‘the emergence of something approaching a shared national culture of news and comment’; and Susannah

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12 Although this thesis is primarily concerned with comment in the sphere of current affairs and topical discourse, this will not be delineated too rigidly. Some forms of comment that were not overtly on political subjects will sometimes be included, for instance comment on manners and morals. However, moral comment could itself be political. See below, pp. 187-8.

13 See below, esp. pp. 30-49.
Randall has lamented that ‘the problem for the historian attempting to define the term “newspaper” in the [Restoration] period is that there was no distinct line drawn between news and comment’.\textsuperscript{14} Scholars acknowledge that reporting and interpretation were both occurring as forms of topical communication, but do not give comment analytical weight, reflecting an assumption that comment is either anachronistic or unnecessary to consider more closely. In fact, as this thesis will show, neither of these assumptions is correct.

Early modern comment appeared in many forms, but one important theme is that it was often published. Today, the term ‘published’ is largely synonymous with ‘printed’ (or, latterly, circulating digital products), but in early modern terms ‘published’ simply meant ‘made public’, and therefore should be applied to all media aimed at audiences beyond one individual or a small and/or personally-known group.\textsuperscript{15} Like news, comment was published through many oral, manuscript and printed media (and overlaps between these forms), including sermons, plays, ballads, manuscript libels, manuscript pamphlets, printed books, printed pamphlets, newspapers and comment serials. Together, these can be conceived as having formed a substantial and sophisticated ‘comment media landscape’, through which comment was widely circulated and consumed.\textsuperscript{16}

In substance, early modern comment was varied, taking many subjects and styles. Comment might discuss domestic politics, foreign wars, the Church, trade or the press. For instance, subjects of comment might include judgements about a news report’s credibility, analysis of the French king’s chances of military success, satirical swipes against opponents, arguments for ecclesiastical reform or electoral advice. Some of these represent objective interpretation, others partial opinion; some comment on news reports, others on wider topical issues. Together, however, there was a rich body of opinion and discussion about current affairs in circulation. Patterns in the subject matter of early modern comment are a major theme of this thesis.

The styling of comment ranged from formal to familiar, polite to scandalous, serious to humorous. For reasons of space, style does not receive full attention in this thesis, although two recurring themes should be noted. One is the extraordinary prevalence of humour as a vehicle for comment. In early modern Britain, humour was


\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{15} For a use of ‘publication’ in this sense, see Harold Love, \textit{Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 35-6. In this sense, ‘published’ can be understood as a sliding scale rather than a single concept: some texts were more ‘published’ than others, if they reached wider audiences.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{16} For more on this, see below, pp. 49-54.}
widely conceived as an effective means to achieve serious or persuasive ends, drawing on the classical traditions of the joco-serious style (writing ‘betwixt jest and earnest’ in order to make earnest points more likely to be read and/or accepted), satire (moral reformation through humorous censure) and rhetoric (humour as a persuasive technique). The other is personas: the use of characters to frame the voices of comment, ranging from representations of the authors themselves to fictional personas, which were adopted to make comment more enticing or authoritative, or to problematise the comment being expressed. Personas are most associated with the famous moral essay serials, the Tatler (1709-11) and Spectator (1711-12, 1714), where they have been described as eidola (‘masks’), because they were fully-fictionalised characters whose perspectives were intended to be scrutinised by readers. In a broader sense, however, personas had been used to style comment at least as far back as the ‘Martin Marprelate’ pamphlets of the 1580s.

Applying a stronger concept of ‘comment’ to early modern Britain raises some issues of definition. It would be possible to adopt a very broad definition of ‘comment’ that included elements of news presentation. The royalist newsbook Mercurius Aulicus (1643-45), for example, routinely referred to parliamentarians as ‘rebels’ in its reports, arguably baking comment into its news merely through the selection of this word. A broad definition of ‘comment’ might also include ‘crypto-comment’, where political messages are buried within a text rather than presented openly. A specific difficulty relates to texts that were satires or burlesques of other forms, which were often not strictly discussions or interpretations, but in many cases would be perverse to exclude. Although these perspectives are important, I use ‘comment’ primarily to refer to its more tangible forms, in order to examine the emergence of commenting on current affairs as an explicit concept and practice.


For more on personas, see below, esp. pp. 125-6, 189. For Marprelate, see Raymond, Pamphlets, ch. 2.

Broadly speaking, these will be included where they are satires of comment forms (such as a satirical dialogue), but not where they are satires of news forms (such as a satirical newspaper), although this is admittedly a somewhat artificial distinction.
As a final note, the concept of ‘comment’ developed in this thesis may speak to a broader cultural phenomenon. Barbara Shapiro has identified a nascent ‘culture of fact’ in seventeenth-century England, as fields such as law, historiography, science and news developed and incorporated a more cogent conception of ‘fact’, as a statement of a human or natural phenomenon claimed to be true. In the case of news, this emergence of a concept of fact – reports of true recent events – necessarily led to greater definition of what was not fact, including a growing distinction between comment on the news and the news itself. How far a distinction between fact and comment occurred in other fields is beyond the scope of this study, but it is likely that the growth and consolidation of comment on the news in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was part of an emergent ‘culture of comment’ more widely.

Comment and political culture

‘Comment’ is an important concept when examining communications about current affairs in early modern Britain. This has implications for wider themes in political culture, especially the growth of public political awareness and the growth of partisanship, both of which were shaped by the dynamics of publishing and consuming comment. More elusively, comment also provides evidence for a broad shift from cultural norms of secrecy and privilege to norms of open discussion during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The first theme concerns how far, and in what ways, the British populace became more aware of and engaged with national politics in the early modern period. This has often been framed around Jürgen Habermas’s model of a ‘public sphere’, according to which there emerged out of civil society a space for public discussion, distinct from the state, that was characterised by ‘rational-critical’ discourse, and came to be regarded as having a role in legitimating and judging the state. For Habermas, the public sphere emerged in Britain in the 1690s, before spreading around Europe in the eighteenth century.

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21 I am using ‘political awareness’ in a general sense here, referring to the degree of people’s knowledge about political events, ideas, institutions and practices. A critique of the term ‘political awareness’ as applied in more specific senses (the idea of subjects becoming citizens, and the idea of people perceiving local disputes in national political terms) can be found in Noah Millstone, Manuscript Circulation and the Invention of Politics in Early Stuart England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 7-12.
Scholars have challenged many details in Habermas’s model as applied to Britain, including its supposed rationality, inclusivity and separateness from the ‘state’, and the dating of its emergence. Discussion has now largely outgrown the particular debates around Habermas, although the issues raised from this controversy remain pertinent. There is widespread acknowledgement that the early modern period witnessed more political awareness among more people, but there is no consensus about the precise dating and nature of this development.

How can comment contribute to our understanding of political awareness? On one level, published comment can be used as a simple metric for political awareness. As Marie Peters has argued, ‘This rich variety of comment would not have been produced unless it found a market. Its very existence indicates the presence of a broad political nation, well informed and actively interested’. Peters made this observation for mid-eighteenth-century Britain, but it can be applied back to at least the mid-seventeenth century. In more specific terms, published comment indicates political awareness by enabling better understanding of the nature of people’s diet of current affairs media, through a close

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examination of the forms, quantity, reach and dating of the comment as well as the news that people encountered.

In addition, analysing how this comment was consumed can help to explain how ‘public opinion’ was formed. ‘Public opinion’ is a key concept in the debates around political awareness, defined partly as the growth of people forming and expressing opinions on current affairs, most obviously manifested in oral comment in public spaces such as coffeehouses, taverns, marketplaces and bookshops. For instance, Dagmar Freist has emphasised the importance of the ‘voicing of opinions by ordinary men and women on state affairs’ during the civil wars, arguing that ‘[u]nder the impact of the politico-religious conflicts of the 1640s there was a gradual politicization of everyday talk’, and that ‘[p]ublic opinion “happened” when men and women moved from ordinary discourse and the habitual exchange of news to discussing politics’. Similar observations can easily be applied to later periods too. Scholars have sometimes related the formation of public opinion to the reading and hearing of news – people consuming news and expressing comment – but the ubiquity of published comment suggests that public opinion would also have developed in response to the widespread reading and hearing of comment, so the dynamics of consuming comment require closer examination.

A second theme concerns how far, and in what ways, political culture became partisan. Party has long been recognised as a central feature of early modern political culture. Older literature explored the birth of the first political parties, the Whigs and the Tories, as organised entities that operated largely within the world of high politics. This has now been supplemented and superseded by a broader history of partisan ship and partisan culture, pioneered especially by Mark Knights and Tim Harris. This has emphasised the roots of partisan divisions in royalist-parliamentarian clashes in the civil wars or even religious divides in the sixteenth century, the complex and shifting constructions of party divisions beyond the ‘Whig’ and ‘Tory’ labels to a broader and more unstable vocabulary, the expression of partisanship as a national rather than just a high-political or parliamentary phenomenon, and the construction of partisan identities as ‘imagined

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25 ‘Public opinion’ is also defined as a rhetorical construct: as the growth of invocations of the public mood in political discourse. See Zaret, Origins, p. 8.
26 Freist, Governed, pp. 178, 21.
27 E.g. Raymond, ‘Newspaper, Public Opinion, and the Public Sphere’.
communities’ based around labels and principles as well as organisations and structures.\textsuperscript{29} At the heart of all partisanship was \textit{dichotomisation} – the setting of ‘this’ against ‘that’, in terms of principles, individuals, groups or identities – although party dichotomies were crystallised in myriad shifting patterns by different people and in different moments.

Published comment in the seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries was frequently partisan, and can therefore contribute various perspectives to understanding partisan culture. First, it provides insights into partisan \textit{practices}, because the publication of comment was a significant activity conducted by party politicians and supporters. Moreover, given that partisan identity was constituted by its expression in language, published comment is key to understanding how parties were constructed. Indeed, published comment was the chief mechanism for defining what a party was, and for representing distinctions between parties: much comment painted an opposing party as a nefarious ‘faction’ or group of ‘rebels’ who had unjustifiable principles, while presenting its own side as natural, true and universal. Comment can therefore indicate the ways that party was formulated, for instance in terms of principles, attitudes, individuals, groups or publications. In addition, analysing how comment was \textit{consumed} is essential for understanding how partisan identity and alignment developed, for instance through equipping people with partisan arguments or building personal attachment to a party.

As a third and final theme of political culture, comment also provides evidence for a broad cultural shift, identified by David Zaret, from norms of ‘secrecy’ and ‘privilege’ in the early-seventeenth century to norms of open discussion by the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Zaret has attributed this shift to changing patterns in communicative practice, especially the explosion of print culture in the civil wars.\textsuperscript{30} ‘Comment’ is helpful here because published comment inherently indicates the existence of a culture of open discussion to some degree. Published comment opens a window onto how the open discussion of politics and current affairs – often denigrated by contemporaries as ‘meddling with state affairs’ – developed, and how this became consolidated and normalised during the seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries.

These themes will be revisited in the final chapter and the conclusion, where they will be addressed in connection with the evidence presented in this thesis. At this stage, two additional matters require comment. First, the importance of a \textit{consumption} angle to


understanding the relationship between comment and political culture should be emphasised. This is the particular concern of the final chapter, and necessitates the use of a strand of scholarship that has developed since the 1980s: the history of reading. There has been growing recognition of the importance of studying the consumption of texts, and various techniques have been developed, often based around what Roger Chartier has called ‘microhistories’ of reading: characterising the features of reading ‘moments’ for which rich evidence happens to have survived, such as heavily-annotated books. There are difficulties when applying these methods to cheap print, but they remain central to any consideration of consumption.31

Secondly, the conventions for discussing partisanship in this thesis should be laid out. The labels used to denote party were complex, contested and shifting, being based variously around, for instance, constitutional principles (e.g. Whig, Tory), religious principles (e.g. high-church, dissenter, Catholic), or preferences for the succession (e.g. Williamite, Jacobite, Hanoverian). Any discussion of party risks either being too simplistic, reducing everything to (say) Tory and Whig, or too complex, using myriad labels without emphasising their tendency to coalesce into dichotomies. Different approaches are taken in this thesis, depending on context. In many cases, party identities are simply gathered under four main labels – royalist and parliamentarian for the 1640s-1660s, and Tory and Whig for the 1680s-1720s – if they represent the necessary dichotomies sufficiently, but elsewhere it is necessary to use more specific terms. In general terms, ‘royalist’ is used for supporters of the king between the 1640s and 1660s, including Charles I’s court in Oxford in the first civil war, royalist ‘rebels’ seeking to overturn parliamentarian rule in the late 1640s and early 1650s, and supporters of Charles II around the Restoration. ‘Parliamentarian’ is used not only for the king’s military opponents in the first civil war, but also, in a looser sense, for the series of de facto national governments into which they morphed up to 1660, although ‘pro-Commonwealth’ is usually used for the period after 1649, and sometimes particular reference is made to Presbyterians, Independents, the army and the Levellers.32 ‘Tory’ is used for the 1680s to the 1720s, sometimes comprehending labels such as non-juror, Jacobite and high-church, although the latter are also separated where necessary. ‘Whig’ is used for the same period, and, in the same way, sometimes comprehends labels such as low-church, dissenter or Hanoverian, while sometimes the latter are kept separate. For the

31 See below, pp. 198-203, for further discussion about approaches to the consumption of early modern cheap print.
32 Notwithstanding the fact that some of these groups sometimes allied or worked with royalists.
period before 1681, when ‘Whig’ and ‘Tory’ became mainstream, ‘opposition’ and ‘loyalist’ are preferred, following the practice of Mark Knights.\textsuperscript{33}

\textbf{Comment and the serial press}

The comment media landscape was complex and multi-media in nature: too much to cover in full in this thesis. Therefore, the discussion focuses on one part of this landscape: comment in regular printed publications, or the ‘serial press’. Comment in serials had a peculiar reach and traction, as some serials published comment weekly over several years. In addition, serial comment provides a good window onto the wider culture of comment, because this was comment that must have found success in finding readers, in the long-running serials at least, in order to justify their continued publication – unlike one-off pamphlets, which can less easily be proved to have found an audience. Another reason for focusing on comment in serials is that this has been relatively neglected by scholars. Pamphlets have received more attention as vehicles for comment, and serials have tended to be approached from the perspectives of news, manners and ‘literary’ features.

What is the serial press? The serial press can be defined in broad terms as ‘regular printed publications’: printed publications that appeared in continuous instalments spread across time, often monthly, weekly, sub-weekly or (from the early-eighteenth century) daily.\textsuperscript{34} The earliest and most common kinds of early modern serial were news serials, which collectively can be called ‘newspapers’ – serials primarily designed to provide reports of recent events, or which were physically constructed as if this was their primary purpose.\textsuperscript{35} Newspapers took many varieties – they could be neutral or partisan, could focus on domestic or foreign news, could contain news alone or package news with other features, could be written in a plain or rhetorical style, could be serious or satirical – but all shared the common feature of being orientated around news provision.\textsuperscript{36} In addition, by the late-seventeenth century, serials were diversifying into new forms, including question-

\textsuperscript{33} Knights, Politics, p. 356.
\textsuperscript{35} This definition deliberately allows for newspaper burlesques as well as ‘genuine’ newspapers.
\textsuperscript{36} This is discussed further below, pp. 56-8.
and-answer serials, miscellanies and, most importantly for this thesis, dedicated serials of comment, which can be called ‘comment serials’.\textsuperscript{37}

Within this broad definition of the serial press, there are particular issues about whether to include certain kinds of publications: those \textit{intended} to be serial but which only reached a single issue; those that appeared in irregular rather than regular instalments; those that were linked but did not share a title; those designed to have a finite number of instalments; those with no more than a ‘part 1’ and ‘part 2’; and those published annually, such as almanacs.\textsuperscript{38} It should also be noted that non-printed serial media are excluded, most importantly manuscript newsletters and weekly sermons.

I am using the term ‘serial press’, rather than the more usual ‘periodical press’, for two reasons.\textsuperscript{39} The first, more pedantic reason relates to a problem mentioned above: ‘serial’ includes anything published \textit{sequentially}, in continuous instalments, whereas ‘periodical’ technically denotes items published at regular time intervals.\textsuperscript{40} Strictly, the term ‘periodical’ raises issues with publications such as Roger L’Estrange’s \textit{Observator} (1681-87), a prominent Tory comment serial, which was published on an irregular schedule of between two and four times a week. The more important reason is that ‘periodical’ carries connotations that could confuse definition. ‘Periodical’ is sometimes reserved for publications with a more literary bent, to be contrasted with ‘newspapers’, and therefore is not well-suited for use as an overarching term that needs to \textit{include} newspapers. ‘Serial’ does not share this problem.

Serials have attracted significant scholarly attention, but, due to structural divisions in the scholarship, comment has been underplayed as a theme.\textsuperscript{41} There are two main traditions – the history of ‘newspapers’ and ‘journalism’, and the history of ‘literary periodicals’ and ‘periodical essays’. Scholars have examined newspapers in many sub-periods of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. There is extensive scholarship about civil war newspapers, most importantly by Joseph Frank, A.N.B. Cotton, Joad Raymond and Jason McElligott. Aspects of later-seventeenth-century newspapers have been examined by

\textsuperscript{37} For ‘comment serials’, see below, chapter 3, \textit{passim}. For the ‘periodical essay’ as an ambiguous case of a variety of serial, see below, pp. 112-4.

\textsuperscript{38} Broadly speaking, the first two categories in this list will be treated as serials here, and the rest will be judged on a case-by-case basis.


\textsuperscript{40} For this difference between seriality and periodicity, see Raymond, \textit{Pamphlets}, p. 101.

\textsuperscript{41} The bibliographical literature for serials is well-developed. See esp. NCBEL; CK (covering 1620-1800); McLeod (covering 1702-1714); NS (covering 1641-1702).
James Sutherland, R.B. Walker and Susannah Randall, while early-eighteenth-century newspapers feature in the work of Michael Harris, Jeremy Black and Bob Harris. Recent general narratives of early modern British newspapers include studies by C. John Sommerville, Bob Clarke and Bob Harris. These studies tend to explore issues of form, content and practical organisation. Scholarship around literary periodicals and periodical essays is centred on the work of Walter Graham in the 1920s and 1930s, with important subsequent contributions by Richmond Bond, Robert DeMaria, Iona Italia and Richard Squibbs. This tends to centre on the emergence of the Tatler and Spectator, their precursors, their innovative nature, and their successors. However, both scholarly traditions subordinate comment, the former by treating comment as a sub-theme within news, and the latter by privileging the moral and literary over the political. The chief practical consequence of this has been a failure to give due recognition to the ‘comment serials’ identified in this thesis as a tangible and significant phenomenon in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, and which effectively fell between these two traditions.

The rest of this section provides a historical introduction to the serial press between the early-seventeenth and mid-eighteenth centuries, paying particular attention


to two themes that shaped patterns of serial publication: partisanship and press controls.44 Before beginning the chronology, the significance of these forces should be outlined.

Vast numbers of serials, of all varieties, had a partisan function, being designed as weapons to advance political causes: royalist, parliamentarian, Tory, Whig. The biggest concentrations of serials appeared in periods with the greatest partisan activity: the civil wars, the Exclusion or Succession Crisis (1678-82), and the peak of the ‘rage of party’ under Queen Anne. Identifying a serial’s partisan alignment can present difficulties, because political messages might be hidden within texts, and the identities and motivations of those who published serials might be obscure, but the broad contours of partisan serial publication can be traced with relative ease.

Press controls also shaped fluctuations in serial publication, although not as straightforwardly as might be assumed.45 There was a progression of systems of pre-publication licensing and censorship – through the Star Chamber and elsewhere before 1641, under Licensing Ordinances between 1643 and 1659, and under Licensing Acts between 1662 and 1679, and 1685 and 1695 – according to which publications (theoretically) had to be approved officially before publication. These laws were supplemented by post-publication restrictions, most importantly the law of seditious libel, under which people were prosecuted for publications that defamed public figures. Press controls did not determine publication levels – there was not a consistent desire to publish that was only tempered by the changing effectiveness of press controls – but they did frame what was possible.

The idea of serial publication was not inherent to the emergence of print, but had to be invented.46 Specifically, serialisation was invented as a way to represent the rolling

44 The following draws on arguments made in this thesis, especially about ‘comment serials’, in addition to the existing scholarship.
nature of news. Its origins in Britain are traditionally dated to the 1620s, when the first ‘corantos’ appeared, carrying regular news of the Thirty Years War. The first English-language corantos were printed in Amsterdam in 1620, imitating a Dutch model, and corantos were printed in London between 1621 and 1632, and then again between 1638 and 1641, with government licence.\(^47\) In Europe, corantos were preceded by printed weekly newspapers in Germany and the Low Countries, the first of which appears to have been published in Strasbourg in 1605, and these were themselves preceded by the first printed news serial of any sort, \textit{Mercurius Gallo-belgicus}, a biannual Latin publication printed in Cologne from 1594. The British serial press also emerged from two other traditions of news publication. One was pamphlets: military news pamphlets were already being serialised \textit{de facto} in Britain in the 1590s, simply by stating that they continued the news from an earlier pamphlet and would be continued by others, even if they were not formally conceived as a single publication with multiple issues. The second was manuscript newsletters, which formed a thriving commercial operation of serial news across Europe by the late-sixteenth century.\(^48\)

The big moment of growth for British serials came in the 1640s, during the civil wars, when serials of \textit{domestic} news proliferated.\(^49\) Indeed, Joad Raymond has labelled this as the period of the ‘invention of the newspaper’. Between 1641 and 1655, there was a substantial market for serials, overwhelmingly conceived as news serials, and normally known as ‘newsbooks’ because they took a quarto ‘booklet’-style format. At their peak,

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Raymond, \textit{Invention}, pp. 6-13; Raymond, \textit{Pamphlets}, pp. 101-8, 128-38, 149-51; Pettegree, \textit{Invention}, ch. 9.}
\footnote{Although corantos only became fully serialised, through numbering, in 1622. See Raymond, \textit{Pamphlets}, pp. 132-4.}
\footnote{For key scholarship about news pamphlets and manuscript newsletters, see above, pp. 2-3, n. 4.}
\end{footnotes}
over a dozen newsbooks were available every week.\textsuperscript{50} Although individual newsbooks were published weekly, their publication days were staggered across the week, so there was normally a new newsbook available to readers every day except Sunday.

The first newsbooks appeared during the political crisis of late 1641, when the proceedings of the Long Parliament – previously available in manuscript – began to be regularly printed.\textsuperscript{51} Over the following year, newsbooks expanded their coverage from what was reported and done in Parliament to domestic news more widely. The emergence of newsbooks was made possible, but not directly caused, by the collapse of pre-publication licensing earlier in 1641. This moment of collapse has sometimes been interpreted as unleashing a printing ‘free-for-all’, because it broadly coincided with an ‘explosion of print’, but this is in fact a myth. In areas under parliamentarian control, there were measures to restrict the press in 1642, 1643, 1646, 1647 and 1649, even as printed publications (including newsbooks) boomed. Partly, this paradox is resolved by the difficulties of enforcing laws during a war. They did not apply in royalist-controlled areas, and many royalist newsbooks were printed secretly in London. However, as Jason Peacey has argued, these laws were not designed solely to curtail the press, as licensing could also be a positive force, enabling pro-parliamentarian material to be published with official approval.\textsuperscript{52}

Most 1640s and 1650s newsbooks were, implicitly or explicitly, parliamentarian or, later, pro-Commonwealth. Among the most important were the \textit{Perfect Diurnall} (1642-55), the \textit{Kingdomes Weekly Intelligencer} (1643-49), the \textit{Moderate Intelligencer} (1645-49), \textit{Mercurius Britannicus} (1643-46) and \textit{Mercurius Politicus} (1650-60). These ranged from plainer newsbooks, such as the \textit{Perfect Diurnall}, to more rhetorical publications like \textit{Mercurius Britannicus}.\textsuperscript{53} They had to be officially licensed after 1643, and licensers were connected with the House of Commons or the army. In addition, some newsbooks had more direct connections with parliamentarian politicians. \textit{Mercurius Britannicus} appears to have been launched by the ‘war party’ of MPs, before coming under the influence of the

\textsuperscript{50} Frank, \textit{Beginnings}, p. 56, states that readers had 12 newspapers to choose from by January 1644. Raymond, \textit{Invention}, p. 45, notes that 11-16 newsbooks were available every week during 1645. Even more were available in 1649, the peak year of newsbook publication.

\textsuperscript{51} Technically these were the first \textit{serial domestic} newsbooks. One-off domestic news pamphlets were common before this point, and the corantos had themselves adopted a quarto format for most of their run, from 1621 onwards.

\textsuperscript{52} Peacey, \textit{Politicians}, esp. pp. 134-5.

Earl of Essex, the first commander of the parliamentarian forces.\textsuperscript{54} In 1650, Marchamont Nedham wrote to the Commonwealth’s Council of State with a prospectus for publishing a new official newsbook, \textit{Mercurius Politicus}, which was ultimately published for a decade.\textsuperscript{55} In addition, newsbooks took different positions within the parliamentarian coalition. By the mid-1640s, many divided between Presbyterian, such as the \textit{Scotish Dove} (1643-46), and Independent, such as \textit{Perfect Occurrences} (1644-49), in line with disagreements about prosecuting the war and organising the peace.

There were also royalist newsbooks. During the first civil war, the flagship newsbook in royalist Oxford, directly commissioned by the king’s Secretary of State, was \textit{Mercurius Aulicus} (1643-45), although there were a few others.\textsuperscript{56} However, the main wave of royalist newsbooks was the royalist ‘Mercuries’ of 1647-50, an extraordinary proliferation of underground publications that lashed the parliamentarian regime and kept the defeated royalist cause alive. There were no overtly royalist newsbooks between 1650 and 1660, although some bore hints of crypto-royalism.\textsuperscript{57}

In 1655, Cromwell’s Protectorate restricted the serial press to a single newsbook, \textit{Mercurius Politicus}.\textsuperscript{58} Between 1655 and 1679, under both Cromwells and Charles II, a single, official, printed news serial was the norm: \textit{Mercurius Politicus/Publick Intelligencer} (1650/55-60), \textit{Parliamentary Intelligencer/Mercurius Publicus} (1659/60-63), \textit{Intelligencer/Newes} (1663-66) and finally the \textit{London Gazette} (1665-present).\textsuperscript{59} Press

\textsuperscript{55} Raymond, \textit{Making the News}, p. 335.
\textsuperscript{56} Thomas, \textit{Berkenhead}, pp. 31-2. The most important other royalist Oxford newsbooks were \textit{Mercurius Rusticus} (1643-44), which detailed parliamentarian atrocities in the war, and \textit{Mercurius Academicus} (1645-46), a successor to \textit{Aulicus}.
\textsuperscript{57} The last overtly royalist newsbook before their eclipse was \textit{Mercurius Elenticus} [sic] (1650), which ended in June 1650. The next instances appear to have been in the spring of 1660, immediately prior to the Restoration, e.g. \textit{Mercurius Honestus}, \textit{Mercurius Phanaticus} and \textit{Mercurius Aulicus}. It is hard to identify any crypto-royalist newsbooks in the intervening decade with certainty. Two likely candidates are \textit{Mercurius Pragmaticus} (1651) and \textit{Mercurius Pragmaticus} (1653), each of which adopted a title with strong royalist connections and gave a suspiciously exaggerated denial of crypto-royalism in its final issue: \textit{Mercurius Pragmaticus} (1651), 5 (‘Mercurius Scommaticus’, 8 July 1651), p. 34; \textit{Mercurius Pragmaticus} (1653), 8 (13 July 1653), p. 57.
\textsuperscript{58} Apart from the French-language \textit{Nouvelles Ordinaires} (1650-63?).
\textsuperscript{59} Serials in the 1655-79 period have received less attention from scholars. See esp. J.B. Williams, ‘The Newsbooks and Letters of News of the Restoration’, \textit{English Historical Review}, 23:90 (1908), pp. 252-76; Frank, \textit{Beginnings}, ch. 14; P.M. Handover, \textit{A History of the London Gazette}, 1665-1965 (London: HM Stationery Office, 1965); Thomas, \textit{Berkenhead}, ch. 7; Sutherland, \textit{Restoration Newspaper}, pp. 4-12. Some of these newspapers were technically pairs of overlapping titles, published on different days of the week, but which effectively functioned as manifestations of a single serial. For instance, \textit{Mercurius Politicus} was published on Thursdays and the \textit{Publick Intelligencer} on Mondays, but they shared their author (Nedham) and much of their content. These
controls were generally maintained for serials, if for not pamphlets, throughout this period, most importantly under the 1662 Licensing Act. The Gazette was particularly significant, because it marked a shift in format from newsbook to newspaper proper – from quarto ‘booklets’ to single half-sheet folio papers – which set the model for newspapers for fifty years. The chief exception to these monopolies was in 1659-60, immediately before and after the Restoration, when a newsbook wave appeared after the Protectorate collapsed in April 1659, variously supporting the restored Rump, the army, General Monck (from December 1659) and the monarchy (from spring 1660). Charles II’s reign was also an important era for manuscript newsletters: the official newspaper was supplemented by newsletters from the offices of the Secretaries of State.60

The Succession Crisis brought a new wave of serials between 1678 and 1683, especially after the Licensing Act lapsed in 1679.61 There were many partisan newspapers, both opposition/Whig, for instance the Protestant (Domestick) Intelligence (1679-81), the True Protestant Mercury (1680-82) and the Impartial Protestant Mercury (1681-82), and loyalist/Tory, for instance the Loyal London Mercury (1682) and Loyal Protestant (1681-83).62 This crisis also produced the first comment serials, led by the Whig Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Rome (1678-83) and the Tory dialogues Heraclitus Ridens (1681-82) and the Observator (1681-87). It is unclear how far these serials had formal political connections, but the Whig serials were coordinated to at least some extent by Whig-aligned publishers, and there is evidence of government involvement on the Tory side.63

The serial press was restricted again after 1683, limited to the London Gazette and the Observator.64 The Licensing Act was formally reinstated in 1685. In 1688, James II
launched a press campaign to promote his controversial policy of religious toleration, including a newspaper, *Publick Occurrences Truely Stated* (1688), and a comment serial, the *Test Paper* (1688). After William of Orange’s invasion and James’s first flight from London in December 1688 – and the consequent collapse of press controls – a brief wave of newspapers appeared, implicitly or explicitly aligned with William. The serial press was significantly restricted, again, between 1689 and 1695, although a Williamite/Whig comment serial, *Mercurius Reformatus* (1689-94?), was published during this time. There were also translations of French-language monthly news serials such as the *Present State of Europe* (1690-1738). These were longer and less frequent than traditional British newspapers, and provided the only newspaper alternative to the *Gazette* in the early 1690s.

Until the 1690s, most serials were newspapers or, latterly, comment serials. From this time, however, the serial press began to diversify. The *Athenian Mercury* (1691-97), a question-and-answer serial, satisfied public curiosity about subjects like science, religion and love. The *Gentleman’s Journal* (1692-94) was a monthly miscellany of verse and prose, inspired by the French *Mercure Galant*. The *Collection for Improvement of Husbandry and Trade* (1692-1703) provided economic advice and statistics. There were serials that provided abstracts and reviews of scholarly books and news, such as the *History of the Works of the Learned* (1699-1712).

Cutting across these developments was a major date in press history: 1695, the final lapse of the Licensing Act. This specifically meant the end of pre-publication licensing, not of post-publication restrictions such as libel laws, but it nevertheless had a significant impact on the serial press. A wave of newspapers appeared almost immediately, led by the ‘big three’ of thrice-weekly titles, the *Post Man* (1695-1730), *Post Boy* (1695-1736?) and *Flying Post* (1695-1733). In the first decade of the eighteenth century, these were joined by daily newspapers (most famously the *Daily Courant* from 1702), evening newspapers, and

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relevant sections of wider surveys such as Sutherland, *Restoration Newspaper*, pp. 22-5. *Mercurius Reformatus* will receive attention below, pp. 154-6.

65 There were a few exceptions, for instance book catalogues, the Royal Society’s *Philosophical Transactions* (1665-present), and trade lists, which were really a form of commercial news.


newspapers in provincial English towns and cities. Initially, the post-1695 newspapers were not especially partisan, unlike their Succession Crisis predecessors, although some became more partisan after c.1710, when, for instance, the *Flying Post* was identified as Whig and the *Post Boy* as Tory.

After 1702, there was a new wave of comment serials, led by John Tutchin and George Ridpath’s Whig *Observator* (1702-12), Daniel Defoe’s Whig/moderate *Review* (1704-13) and Charles Leslie’s Tory *Rehearsal* (1704-09), later joined and/or succeeded by the Tory *Examiner* (1710-14), Whig *Medley* (1710-12) and Whig *Englishman* (1713-1715), among others. Before 1710, any political connections for these serials remain obscure, apart from the *Review*’s sponsorship by Robert Harley and the Earl of Godolphin. After 1710, however, the Tory ministry and Whig opposition both sponsored comment serials directly. These comment serials generally took the form of a dialogue or an essay, the latter superseding the former during the 1710s. The 1710s produced a related form – serials of morals, manners, society and literature, epitomised by the *Tatler* (1709-11) and *Spectator* (1711-12, 1714), and usually described as ‘periodical essays’, although I will argue that they can usefully be approached as ‘moral comment serials’. These serials mostly avoided overt political comment, but often had an implicit partisan alignment. Comment serials – of political comment, moral comment or a mixture of the two – remained prominent in the 1710s and 1720s, but declined in the 1730s.

Newspapers were also evolving in the 1710s and 1720s, largely driven by Stamp Acts in 1712 and 1725. The 1712 Act taxed newspapers, but created a legal loophole by

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69 See below, chapter 3, for literature about comment serials and ‘periodical essays’. An important older study covering much of this subject is David H. Stevens, *Party Politics and English Journalism, 1702-1742* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1916), although this has largely been superseded.
which six-page newspapers would avoid the tax. As a result, a wave of six-page weeklies appeared after 1712, the most important of which were known as ‘weekly journals’, and which – partly due to a need to fill extra space – often carried fiction, essays or letters alongside their news. These newspapers were more partisan than their predecessors: *Read’s Weekly Journal*, for instance, was Whig, while *Mist’s* was Tory/Jacobite. The 1725 Act closed this loophole, and afterwards most newspapers adopted a four-page broadsheet form to maximise their tax efficiency. This brings the chronology to c.1730. Later developments are beyond the scope of this thesis, but include the continuing expansion of newspapers and the appearance of new forms such as the magazine (in the 1730s) and the review (in the 1750s).

Finally, three further matters require discussion. The main printed vehicles for regular published comment were ‘newspapers’ and ‘comment serials’, as defined elsewhere. However, comment also found a place in some other forms of serial, which should briefly be mentioned here. Question-and-answer serials such as the *Athenian Mercury* (1691-97) contained comment on a wide range of subjects, occasionally related to current affairs. The serial miscellany tradition, pioneered in Britain by the *Gentleman’s Journal* (1692-94), included a mixture of verse and prose items, some of which commented on current affairs, for instance panegyrical verse on monarchs or battles.

Secondly, some comment is needed on the relationship between serials and the agents – authors and publishers – who constructed them. Throughout this thesis, serials

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70 Technically, serials were taxed if constructed from a half-sheet (i.e. two folio pages) or a whole sheet (i.e. four folio pages), but not from one-and-a-half sheets (i.e. six folio pages).


73 See below, esp. pp. 56-58, 107-16.

74 For the *Athenian Mercury* and political comment, see Berry, *Gender*, pp. 23-7. E.g. *Gentleman’s Journal*, 1 (January 1692), pp. 2-4, contains a poem praising William and Mary.

are usually referenced, for convenience, as a single entity, but this belies great complexity in how serials were put together and the voices they contained. Although some serials bore the name of an author, most were anonymous or pseudonymous. In many cases, a main author or group of main authors can be identified, for instance Peter Heylyn and John Berkenhead for *Mercurius Aulicus* (1643-45), Marchamont Nedham for *Mercurius Politicus* (1650-60), Roger L’Estrange for one *Observator* (1681-87), and John Tutchin and George Ridpath for another *Observator* (1702-12). However, some serials had a team of authors, such as the *Examiner* (1710-14) in its early months. Complicating matters further, the text of serials could be more composite than the idea of ‘authorship’ allows: ‘primary’ documents such as proclamations and petitions were quoted in newspapers, for example, and readers’ letters were printed in many serials, especially from the 1690s. Moreover, the composers of the text were not the only agents involved in the production of serials. There were also those who can, loosely, be labelled ‘publishers’ – those involved in the logistics of printing or distribution, including printers, booksellers and those who were called ‘publishers’, who were effectively distribution managers (although these roles sometimes overlapped). In sum, beneath the apparent simplicity of a single title, serials were the expression of many agents.

Thirdly, the arguments of this thesis are overwhelmingly confined to Britain, for logistical reasons rather than reasons of substance, so it is necessary to outline the wider European context. Comment was far less prominent in European serials than British serials. As we have seen, the earliest European printed serials were news publications, predating British corantos by several decades. Newspapers spread around the German and Dutch lands first, soon after 1600, and had reached most of Europe by 1700. Many European newspapers were partisan, or at least politically aligned, for instance the pro-Habsburg *Nieuwe Tijdinghen* (1620-29) in Antwerp, or the official *Gazette* in Paris (from 1631), but they did not include comment as tangibly or extensively as British newspapers would. However, some French-language newspapers, printed in the Netherlands from the late-seventeenth century onwards, did contain comment sections – sections of ‘Reflexions’ – that were emulated in British newspapers. European serials were not confined to news: there were also serials of learning, such as the *Journal des Sçavans* (from 1665), and of

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78 See below, pp. 93-4.
society, such as the Mercure Galant (from 1672). Dedicated serials of political comment, however, do not appear to have been published outside Britain in the seventeenth or early-eighteenth centuries. Where there were more restrictive press laws, such as France, this was unsurprising. However, comment serials were also absent in places with freer press laws, such as the Netherlands, which had a strong culture of comment pamphleteering, but tended to reserve serial publication for news, as during the political crisis in the rampjaar of 1672. During the French Frondes (1648-52), when press restrictions were also weak, it was similarly pamphlets and newspapers that proliferated, not comment serials. The British experience was different. The use of the serial press for comment, and as an important expression of partisanship, developed earlier and more substantially in Britain than elsewhere.

Main arguments

This thesis is divided into four chapters. The main arguments are as follows. Chapter 1 discusses the concept and practice of commenting on current affairs in early modern Britain. It argues that comment developed as a tangible concept, frequently conceived by contemporaries as different from providing news, through the emergence of a broad lexicon of keywords that were used to label publications as works of comment. After surveying this network of terms, which included keywords of mental processes (e.g. ‘considerations’, ‘animadversions’), controversy (e.g. ‘vindication’, ‘confuted’) and genre (e.g. ‘dialogue’, ‘panegyric’), it examines two of the most important comment keywords in more detail: ‘observations’ and ‘reflections’. These were imported into the world of topical comment between the 1640s and 1680s from more respectable or objective fields such as biblical commentary, historiography and piety, and had become master-nouns of comment by the early-eighteenth century. The discussion then turns to comment in practice, by outlining the shape of the ‘comment media landscape’: the changing and burgeoning medley of comment media in circulation in early modern Britain, which took oral forms (e.g. plays, sermons), manuscript forms (e.g. libels, ‘manuscript pamphlets’) and printed forms (e.g. pamphlets, serials). It argues that the pamphlet was the primary form of published comment from the mid-seventeenth century onwards, and introduces serials as a medium of comment by examining the key advantages of comment being published serially, such as repetition, continuousness, flexibility and brevity.
Chapters 2 and 3 examine serials as vehicles for comment. Chapter 2 considers the place of comment in ‘newspapers’, defined as ‘printed news serials’: a group of genres that shared the essential characteristics of being regular printed publications with a stated purpose of providing news, ranging from ‘newsbooks’ in the 1640s to ‘weekly journals’ in the 1720s. Despite news-writers’ frequent disavowals of comment for representing a corruption of the ideals of plain and impartial news, newspapers contained a great deal of comment in practice. Newspapers were a site for extensive experimentation in how to relate news and comment within topical writing. This could take three forms: comment within news (comment built into news reports), comment alongside news (comment sections) and comment in place of news (comment supplanting news in discourse that was still presented as being news). Between the mid-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, there were two main periods with extensive and explicit comment in newspapers. In the 1640s and 1650s, newsbooks not only blended comment into news reports, but sometimes developed comment sections alongside news, taken from pamphlet forms such as prefaces, animadversions, queries and ballads. These currents reached their height in the ‘Mercuries’ of 1647-50, a group of jocular, partisan newsbooks that were often dominated by comment, despite retaining the outward appearance of news publications. The second period began in the 1710s, when six-page weekly newspapers pioneered new comment sections, especially introductory essays, which were taken from the ‘comment serial’ tradition.

Chapter 3 examines these ‘comment serials’, which are established as an important press phenomenon in late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century Britain. Serials designed specifically to provide comment emerged as a distinct form during the Succession Crisis of 1678-82, evolving out of the pamphlet and newspaper traditions. Filled with opinion and analysis about the constitution, religion, parties, foreign affairs and the press, they were primarily fashioned as weapons for party conflict, being more direct and persistent vehicles for comment than pamphlets and newspapers. Their most important model was ‘Observators’ – serials of ‘observations’ – whose three chief manifestations were Roger L’Estrange’s Tory Observator (1681-87), James Welwood’s Williamite/Whig Mercurius Reformatus, or the New Observator (1689-94?) and John Tutchin and George Ridpath’s Whig Observator (1702-12). Their heyday was at the peak of the ‘rage of party’ in the 1700s and 1710s, when Whig and Tory comment serials were a near-continuous presence in the media landscape. Comment serials experienced a ‘moral turn’ in the 1710s, led by the Tatler (1709-11) and Spectator (1711-12, 1714). Addison and Steele’s famous serials can be usefully approached as ‘moral comment serials’, as they had significant
resemblances to and connections with earlier comment serials. They spawned a direct line of moral comment serials, and shaped the development of the ongoing publication of political comment serials. By the 1720s, a single, broad comment serial tradition comprising political, moral and other comment had emerged. However, in the 1730s, comment serials were in decline, having been superseded by newspapers with introductory essays as the main medium of regular published comment.

Chapter 4 turns from the supply of comment to its demand, by considering the circulation and consumption of comment serials: patterns of consumption and their significance for the wider themes in political culture outlined in the introduction. It argues that comment serials were widely encountered by early modern Britons, despite the apparent limitations of print-runs, because per-issue print-runs need to be multiplied by the number of issues of a serial; because multiple people could directly encounter each copy; and because people could encounter comment serials indirectly by consuming discussions of them in conversations, letters and other printed publications. Encountering published comment shaped public political awareness by exposing people to myriad opinions as well as news. The consumption of comment serials tended to take the form of partisan reading: reading in ways that reflected either political support for or opposition to the text, often from a position of pre-judgement, based on the reader’s own political allegiances. When people consumed comment serials, they affirmed their individual partisan identities, built partisan communities of a real character (e.g. coffeehouses, congregations), virtual character (e.g. among correspondents) or ‘imagined’ character (following Benedict Anderson’s famous idea of ‘imagined communities’), and were galvanised into partisan actions such as debates and letter-writing. The aggregated experience of partisan consumption of comment contributed to the development of a national partisan culture. Comment serials also shaped the construction of partisanship by representing party divides in elaborate paper wars – in which they answered, and were answered by, many pamphlets and other serials – and by being received as the official public voice of their parties, irrespective of any actual connections with politicians.
CHAPTER 1. Commenting on current affairs in early modern Britain

In 1715, a high-church Tory, possibly Joseph Browne, published a compilation of his pamphlets.\(^1\) Originally issued individually over the previous decade, they all contained discussions of topical political issues. They included a ‘character’ portrait of a ‘Modern Whig’, a high-church critique of Daniel Defoe’s comment serial, the *Review*, and a satirical dialogue between Louis XIV’s mistress, Madame de Maintenon, and Queen Anne’s influential bedchamber woman, Abigail Masham, alleging plotting between British politicians and the French king. The compilation gathered these pamphlets under a collective title, *State Tracts: Containing Many Necessary Observations and Reflections on the State of Our Affairs at Home and Abroad* (Fig. 1). The second part of this title indicated to readers that the pamphlets contained commentary on the news – ‘observations and reflections’ on domestic and foreign affairs – and not the news itself.

This chapter argues that commenting on current affairs was a tangible concept and practice in early modern Britain, frequently conceived by contemporaries as being different from providing news. Those who wished to discuss current affairs had access to a rich lexicon that could be used to signify the presence of comment rather than news. The two keywords used in the *State Tracts*, ‘observations’ and ‘reflections’, were particularly common. Imported from scholarly and philosophical contexts in the mid-seventeenth century, they had become master-nouns of topical comment by the early-eighteenth century. They were at the heart of a web of comment-signifying keywords, which also included terms such as ‘remarks’, ‘considerations’, ‘animadversions’, ‘examination’, ‘vindication’ and ‘confutation’.

Turning from concept to practice, the comment media landscape in early modern Britain was a medley of oral, manuscript and printed forms, but the most important vehicle for published comment was the pamphlet. Pamphlets – short, printed, unbound publications – first became significant in the comment media landscape in the late-sixteenth century, before rising to pre-eminence in the mid-seventeenth century, and remaining dominant through the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and even

\(^1\) The title-page gave the author as ‘the Author of the EXAMINER’. The *Examiner* was the title of a series of Tory comment serials between 1710 and 1716. Browne was the author of the *Examiner* being published at the time the *State Tracts* appeared, although *Examiner* papers had had many other authors, most famously Jonathan Swift. Individual pamphlets within the *State Tracts* have sometimes been attributed to other authors, including John Dennis, Edward Ward and Delariviere Manley. It is not impossible that these pamphlets had different authors and were compiled under the ‘Examiner’ persona.
beyond. From the 1640s onwards, pamphlets were joined by printed serials – effectively serialised pamphlets – which gained peculiar significance because they were conduits for regular comment. Through repetition, continuousness, flexibility and brevity, serials provided the most prominent and persistent voices of comment in early modern Britain. Through serials, figures such as Marchamont Nedham, Roger L’Estrange and John Tutchin spoke to the public every week over many years.

The first two parts of this chapter examine the lexicon of comment. The first contains a survey that demonstrates the richness of comment keywords, and the second takes case studies of two major keywords, ‘observations’ and ‘reflections’. The final section sketches the contours of the comment media landscape, identifying pamphlets as the most important medium of comment, and examining the significance, advantages and features of comment that was published in printed serials. Altogether, this chapter establishes the key contexts for the examination of comment in serials in chapters 2 and 3.

Figure 1. Joseph Browne’s State Tracts, containing ‘observations’ and ‘reflections’ (1715).
A lexicon of comment

Towards the end of *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726), Gulliver makes a (doomed) wish about the reception of his narrative:

I hope, I may with Justice pronounce myself an Author perfectly blameless; against whom the Tribes of Answerers, Considerers, Observers, Reflectors, Detectors, Remarkers, will never be able to find a Matter for exercising their Talents.²

Here, perhaps unwittingly, Gulliver identifies many of the main terms that denoted ‘comment’ in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. When early modern Britons wanted to provide commentary on a subject, they indicated this explicitly using keywords, among which – to translate Gulliver’s terms into their standard forms – were ‘answer’, ‘considerations’, ‘observations’, ‘reflections’, ‘detection’ and ‘remarks’. These formed part of a rich lexicon that manifested comment as a concept in topical discourse.

This is a familiar argument in relation to early modern ‘news’. Scholars such as Joad Raymond, Nicholas Brownlees and Paul Arblaster have identified a lexicon of keywords that denoted various forms of news, including ‘advice’, ‘intelligence’, ‘proceedings’, ‘passages’, ‘tidings’, ‘occurrences’, ‘affairs’, ‘account’, ‘gazette’, ‘transactions’, ‘relations’, ‘reports’ and ‘news’ itself.³ These were ubiquitously placed in the titles of pamphlets and newspapers to indicate that the item contained an account of recent events. Indeed, this lexicon helped to give shape to the very phenomenon of news as it burgeoned during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. However, what has not been acknowledged is that there was also a collection of keywords that denoted comment, opinion and discussion in this period, which together indicate that the practice of commenting also had contemporary resonance.⁴

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⁴ This analysis of the lexicon of comment does not consider any European parallels, although these must have existed. For example, ‘observations’ and ‘reflections’ had cognates in French.
Although this lexicon of comment has not attracted the attention given to the lexicon of news, there has been some consideration of contemporary distinctions between concepts of news and comment, through Barbara Shapiro’s model of a ‘culture of fact’. As indicated above, Shapiro argued that the seventeenth century saw the emergence of ‘fact’ in various fields, including history, chorography and science. She also hinted that a concept of comment was developing in response, although without fully bringing this into focus. In history-writing, for instance, she argued that ‘fact’ was distinguished from ‘conjecture, inference and reflection’. She also argued that ‘the distinction between a relation of matters of fact and commentary or conjecture on those facts’ was imported into the ‘news media’, observing that “[e]ditors and readers of the “news” were familiar with the distinction between facts and commentary, and some editors, like some historians and some naturalists, tended to view going beyond the facts as legitimate while others did not’. These are useful points, but should be augmented with analysis of the terms in which comment was expressed.

To survey the main contours of this lexicon of comment, I have examined the titles of pamphlets published between the mid-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, focusing on three sample years with a high concentration of political drama and concomitant publication: 1644, 1682 and 1713. As will be discussed further in the final part of this chapter, pamphlets were the most important vehicle for comment in the early modern period, and their titles were where authors or publishers signified a pamphlet’s nature to readers. The lexicon that emerges from this survey is complex – some keywords carry comment-related connotations rather than denoting comment directly, some have alternative non-comment meanings, and some have meanings that overlap with ‘news’ or ‘fact’ – but its ubiquity indicates that it played a key role in defining published comment. Indeed, the force of the keywords was often heightened by the bundling of multiple terms

6 Shapiro, *Culture*, pp. 55, 86, 95.
7 I have surveyed pamphlets using ESTC. As I have only surveyed the pamphlets listed under these years, some may actually have been printed in adjacent years. One caveat to the following survey is that it is largely a static analysis: it does not attempt to track the development of this lexicon over time. In addition, this discussion does not consider the lexicon as it developed in serials, as this will be covered in later chapters, but it should be acknowledged here that comment keywords were frequently used to label both comment serials and newspaper comment sections from the 1680s onwards, especially ‘observations’, ‘reflections’ and ‘remarks’.
8 The survey is not intended to be comprehensive or exhaustive. One other important term with connotations of comment is ‘information’, which Raymond has described as ‘something that shaped the reader’s judgement… the interpretative editorial rather than raw intelligence’: Joad Raymond, ed., *News Networks in Seventeenth Century Britain and Europe* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), p. 3. See also Raymond, *Invention*, pp. 159-62. See below, pp. 68-9.
in the same titles. Most comment keywords were imported into current affairs commentary from other contexts, such as scholarship, which brought connotations of gravitas, and religious controversy, which already operated within a partisan dialectic that could easily be transferred to political partisanship.

The survey should perhaps begin with the most prominent words in modern topical discourse: ‘comment’ and ‘opinion’ themselves. Both were in use in the early modern period, but neither was pre-eminent as a signifier of topical comment.9 ‘Comment’ was primarily associated with scholarly textual commentaries – notes, explanations and interpretations of scripture and other important texts – and did not generally appear in topical print.10 ‘Opinion’ is more complex. Joad Raymond has noted that it could refer both to a ‘judicial or judicious judgement’ and ‘the outcome of radical religious and political speculation’ – in other words, to objective interpretations and to subjective, ‘mere’ beliefs.11 However, contemporaries were concerned about the spread of ‘opinion’, most famously reflected in a 1642 broadside, The World is Ruled & Governed by Opinion, which depicts Opinion as a blind woman in a tree, surrounded by pamphlets: an inversion of Justice, spreading confusion rather than order (Fig. 2).12 Carrying such negative connotations, ‘opinion’ was not a major comment keyword among those who sought to indicate the presence of comment in their own writing.

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9 See below, p. 83, for a few exceptions.
10 For ‘comment’ as interpretation, see OED, ‘Comment’, definitions 1, 2a, 3. However, comment could also have other senses. Etymologically, ‘comment’ ultimately derives from the Latin comminiscor, ‘devise by careful thought, contrive, invent’, with commentum originally meaning ‘invented thing, fiction’. In the early modern period, it had an additional sense of ‘memoirs, notebook, history’, as in Caesar’s Commentaries.
12 Raymond, News Networks in Seventeenth Century Britain, p. 4.
More important were a number of terms that denoted comment by carrying the sense of discourse deriving from reliable, personal mental processes. Some of these keywords relate to thinking, i.e. rational, well-considered thought, especially ‘reflections’, ‘considerations’ and ‘animadversions’, and to a lesser extent ‘meditations’,
‘contemplations’ and ‘thoughts’. Others relate to seeing, i.e. discerning or noticing the nature or significance of something, especially ‘observations’, ‘remarks’ (which originally carried the sense of observing or noticing) and ‘examination’, but ‘speculation’, ‘view’ and ‘review’ are also common. These words – like many throughout this survey – are also often found in participle form, as in ‘considered’ or ‘examined’. Two of these words – ‘observations’ and ‘reflections’ – were particularly prominent, and will be examined as case studies in the next section. ‘Remarks’ was also particularly common, especially from the 1680s.

In addition, there were comment keywords connected with objective scholarly inquiry. These included keywords of questioning (‘enquiry’, ‘queries’, ‘questions’), of causation (‘causes’, ‘motives’), of explanation (‘explanation’, ‘exposition’, ‘explication’), of argument (‘arguments’, ‘debated’, ‘reasons’, ‘grounds’), and of annotation (‘annotations’, ‘notes’). There were also keywords of analytical description (‘state’, ‘condition’, ‘case’, ‘anatomy’), which presented the key features of a subject under the appearance of analytical comment.

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13 For the origins of ‘remark’ as observing or noticing, see OED, ‘Remark’, definitions 1, 4.
14 Examples of keywords of direct comment: Henry Hammond, Considerations of Present Use Concerning the Danger Resulting from the Change of Our Church-Government (London, 1644); Gryffith Williams, An Examination of Such Particulars in the Solemne League and Couenant (Oxford, 1644); Richard Steele, The Importance of Dunkirk Consider’d (London, 1713); Daniel Defoe, And What If the Pretender Should Come? Or, Some Considerations of the Advantages and Real Consequences of the Pretender’s Possessing the Crown of Great-Britain (London, 1713); Daniel Defoe, A View of the Real Dangers of the Succession, from the Peace with France (London, 1713); Daniel Defoe, Some Thoughts upon the Subject of Commerce with France (London, 1713).
15 On ESTC, titles do not contain ‘remarks’ or ‘remarques’ before the 1650s, from which point its usage grows gradually over the next few decades. Examples: Remarques upon the New Project of Association (London, 1682); Remarks on the Grovvth and Progress of Non-Conformity (London, 1682); A Few Remarks upon the Royal African Company, in Respect to Their Trade and Settlements (London, 1713); Some Seasonable Remarks upon the Seasonable Warning by the Commission of the Church of Scotland, Concerning the Danger of Popery (Edinburgh, 1713).
16 Examples: Reasons and Grounds for the Necessitie, Equalities, and Expedienie of an Excise (Edinburgh, 1644); Ezekias Woodward, Inquiries, into the Causes of Our Miseries, Whence They Issue-Forth upon Us: And Reasons Wherefore They Have Born-Us Down so Low, and Are Like to Carry Us Yet Lower (London, 1644); Some Sober and Weighty Reasons Against Prosecuting Protestant Dissenters, for Difference of Opinion in Matters of Religion (London, 1682); Sober and Serious Quæries About the Popish Plot, and the Protestants of England (1682); The Whigs Speak Truth: Or, Reasons Why We Shall Have No Peace at Last (London, 1713); Daniel Defoe, Reasons Concerning the Immediate Demolishing of Dunkirk: Being a Serious Enquiry into the State and Condition of That Affair (London, 1713).
17 Examples: Edward Calver, Englands Sad Posture; Or, a True Description of the Present Estate of Poore Distressed England, and of the Lamentable Condition of These Distracted Times, Since the Beginning of This Civil, and Unnatural War (London, 1644); John Cokayne, Englands Troubles Anatimized: VWherein Is Related the Rise, Cause, Beginning, Unhappy Progress, of This Uncivill VVar (London, 1644); The State of the Silk and Woollen Manufacture, Considered: in Relation to a French Trade (London, 1713).
Other comment keywords did not carry objective connotations, but explicitly indicated their support for or opposition to particular people or principles. These terms were associated with sixteenth-century religious controversy, but were later applied to topical comment more generally, becoming especially useful in the partisan divisions in the civil wars and the rage of party. These included keywords of defence, among which ‘vindication’ was perhaps most prominent, alongside ‘proof’, ‘demonstration’, ‘defence’, ‘asserted’, ‘justification’, ‘apology’, ‘maintained’ and ‘established’, and keywords of attack, through terms such as ‘refuted’, ‘confutation’, ‘objections’ and ‘condemned’. Linked to the latter were keywords of exposure, represented by terms like ‘discovery’, ‘unmasked’, ‘displayed’, ‘unfolded’, ‘laid open’, ‘unveiled’, ‘detected’ and ‘exposed’. These represented attacks on opponents through the idea of revealing something hidden, but functioned as terms for hostile comment. Overall, keywords of controversy had a more limited capacity than terms like ‘observations’ and ‘reflections’, as they were restricted to an oppositional mode, and their explicit identification with one side risked alienating readers.

Cutting across these categories are keywords that denoted answering other arguments or publications, such as ‘answer’, ‘reply’, ‘response’ and ‘rejoinder’. Many of the words already mentioned also carried an answering connotation, especially ‘animadversions’, and also ‘observations’, ‘reflections’ and ‘remarks’. A common associated term is ‘antidote’, which represented answering as providing a remedy to a poison.

Another important group of comment keywords came from the language of genre. Genre is connected to comment because some genres were inherently concerned with discussion or opinion. For instance, the ‘sermon’ was innately a site of discussion, drawn from a scriptural base, and this discussion often turned on topical events. A ‘panegyric’ provided adulatory comment, while a ‘satire’ (or ‘satyr’) usually provided censorious

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18 Examples: An Apologie and Vindication (From All False and Malignant Aspersions) for His Excellencie, the Right Honourable, and Most Noble, Robert D’Evreux, Earle of Essex (London, 1644); Semper Ego Auditor Tantum? Or a Vindication of His Royal Highness the Duke of York (London, 1682); The Principles and Practices of the Present Sett of Whigs Defended (London, 1713).

19 Examples: The Hypocritical Whigg Displayed (London, 1682); Whigs Defended: Or, the High-Church Saint Detected and Expos’d (London, 1713); The Plot Discover’d: Or, a Trick to Bring in the Pretender (London, 1713).

20 Examples: Against Universall Libertie of Conscience. Being Animadversions upon Two Letters Written to a Friend Pleading for It (London, 1644); Sir Edmundbury Godfreys Ghost: Or, an Answer to Nat. Thompsons Scandalous Letter from Cambridge (London, 1682 edn); An Answer to the Examiner’s Cavils Against the Barrier Treaty of 1709 (London, 1713); An Antidote Against Popery; Or, an Argument. Whereby the Meanest Protestant May Overthrow the Very Foundation of the Romists Faith (London, 1713).

21 Examples: Matthew Newcomen, A Sermon, Tending to Set Forth the Right Vse of the Disasters That Befall Our Armies (London, 1644); Thomas Wilson, A Sermon on the Martyrdom of King Charles I (London, 1682).
comment. A ‘character’ described the key features of a type of person, often pejoratively. All of these genres were vehicles for comment, and the names of these genres acted as comment keywords.

One genre that was especially associated with comment – and will be important in the later discussion of comment in serials – was dialogue. Timothy Dykstal has defined the dialogue as ‘an exchange of opinion in a represented conversation between two or more speakers that gives the other fair hearing’, while Jake Halford has recently described it more broadly as ‘literature with two or more people in discussion… a text that had two or more voices in it that spoke about various topics’. Common to both definitions is the idea that dialogue inherently contained comment. This was the case across different forms of dialogue, ranging from Platonic-Ciceronian philosophical dialogues that sought to tease out truth through conversational inquiry, to Lucianic satirical dialogues that provided comic commentary, most famously in ‘dialogues of the dead’ in which figures in the underworld cast a satirical eye at events above ground. In 1684, Ferrand Spence presented these forms as two ends of a spectrum:

Now of Dialogue (We are told) there are three kinds, each of which has it’s peculiar use and Character. First come the Dialogues which are properly called Didactic, and have no other Aim and tendency, then to instruct... The Second kind replies in Opposition to the former, and we stile them Dialogues of Railery, which consist only of Sprucenesses and Fine Things, instruct by Mirth and Drollery, and Lead us

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24 For dialogue in serials, see below, esp. pp. 124, 139-40.

through the *Sweet to the Profitable*... betwixt these two sorts lies a *Third*, which... borrows something of *Both*.[26]

Dialogues were widely used as vehicles for topical comment in pamphlets in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[27] Many dialogue pamphlets included the term ‘dialogue’ in the title, acting again as a comment keyword. In addition, the spatial arrangement of these texts – with character names or initials preceding the lines of text – identified them as dialogues in a way that can be regarded as signifiers of comment in a broader sense.

Another genre associated with comment, and which also pertains to serials, was the essay. Although ‘essay’ is today defined broadly as any kind of discursive prose about a particular subject, it had a more specific sense in the early-eighteenth century, when it was used to describe a kind of rambling prose *contra* methodical argument.[28] As Joseph Addison explained in the *Spectator*,

> When I make Choice of a Subject that has not been treated of by others, I throw together my Reflections on it without any Order or Method, so that they may appear rather in the Looseness and Freedom of an Essay, than in the Regularity of a Set Discourse.[29]

In 1725, a piece in the *British Journal* explained,

> The Paper I now send you is very much after the Model of *Montaigne’s* Essays. He is a rambling Writer, fleeting in almost every Chapter, from one Subject to another: And, for that very Reason, proves more entertaining to many Readers than he would be if he had thought in a Method, and made his Discourses regular.[30]

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[28] Useful discussion of essays can be found in Richmond Bond, *Tatler*, ch. 6; Scott Black, ‘Social and Literary Form in the *Spectator*’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 33:1 (1999), pp. 21-42. Cf. OED, ‘Essay’, definition 8: ‘A composition of moderate length on any particular subject, or branch of a subject; originally implying want of finish, “an irregular undigested piece” (Johnson), but now said of a composition more or less elaborate in style, though limited in range’.

[29] *Spectator*, 249 (15 December 1711), r.

The ‘essay’ – literally ‘attempt’ – originated with Montaigne in the late-sixteenth century, was developed in Britain by Francis Bacon in the early-seventeenth century, and became common in printed publications, including topical comment, in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries. In 1682, it was largely used in contexts such as morality and poetry rather than current affairs, or in its literal sense. These contexts were still found in 1713 – by which time the Tatler and Spectator had been published as successful moral essay serials – but by then there were topical, political ‘essays’ too.

Comment was a tangible concept in the discourse of current affairs in early modern Britain. There was a rich lexicon of comment in the seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, widely used to identify works such as pamphlets as comment publications. People knew that they were publishing and consuming comment in these pamphlets, just as they knew that they were publishing and consuming news in publications labelled with keywords of news. To explore these themes in more detail, the next section will examine two of the most important keywords of comment: ‘observations’ and ‘reflections’.

‘Observations’ and ‘reflections’

‘Observations’ and ‘reflections’ were two of the most prominent comment keywords in early modern Britain. Both originated in respectable contexts, including textual commentary, history and piety, and developed as terms for current affairs commentary in order to transfer these positive connotations to topical subjects. They were versatile terms that functioned in topical comment in multiple ways. One of their most prominent uses was to indicate comment on texts, for instance letters, pamphlets, proclamations or books, but they were also used more widely to denote comment on items of news or other topical

33 The relevant senses in OED are ‘Observation’, definitions 6, 8; ‘Reflection’, definitions 7, 8. Both terms also had senses unconnected with topical comment, including ‘observation’ as literally seeing or noticing something, ‘observation’ as following or obeying a command or rule, and ‘reflection’ as the bending back of light.
subjects, including policy, political or religious theory, political figures or groups, and ‘the times’ in general. ‘Observations’ and ‘reflections’ were often used for oppositional comment, attacking a subject across a partisan divide, in which case they acted as a cloak of impartiality to conceal the partial content within. ‘Observations’ emerged into topical comment first, in the early 1640s. ‘Reflections’ followed later, and more gradually, coming to prominence by the 1680s. Although the two terms were used in similar ways, ‘reflections’ carried particular philosophical overtones, and may have emerged precisely in order to convey more dignity and sobriety than the longer-established ‘observations’. By the early-eighteenth century, they were both in frequent use. To examine ‘observations’ and ‘reflections’, I have primarily surveyed printed publications in three sub-periods: 1641-45, 1681-85 and 1711-15.34 The discussion begins by considering how ‘observations’ and ‘reflections’ were used to indicate topical comment in pamphlets, before explaining these developments with reference to their connotations and wider contexts.

As ‘observations’ emerged first, it is sensible to begin here. Before the civil wars, ‘observations’ was not generally used to refer to topical comment in pamphlets. There were a few exceptions, such as Observations Concerning the Present Affaires of Holland and the United Provinces (1621), which included negative discussion of English military intervention in the Netherlands, and the apparently unrelated More Excellent Observations of the Estate and Affairs of Holland (1622), which commented on the need for the Dutch to increase trade in the West Indies, but these were atypical.35

‘Observations’ fully emerged as a term for topical comment in the 1640s, as part of the wider ‘explosion of print’. During the first sub-period examined in this analysis, the early 1640s, it was used in a number of different ways. In many cases, it referred to comment on texts. At a time when two (or more) sides of a partisan divide were issuing myriad declarations, proclamations, polemic and other print, there was a need for the

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34 I again used ESTC for this survey. These searches have been supplemented with other searches on ESTC, especially pre-1641 uses of these terms, and other assorted evidence. Specifically, I looked up ‘observations’, ‘obseruations’, ‘reflections’ and ‘reflexions’. This excludes other words based on an ‘observ-’ or ‘reflect-’ stem, and uses of these words in the content of publications, because I am primarily concerned with the development of the plural noun form as a prominent label on these items. Their uses in serials are not discussed here, although both were prominent descriptors for comment serials and comment sections in newspapers in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries. See below, esp. pp. 92ff, 107-8. I attempted some surveys of these terms in the content of pamphlets using the University of Lancaster’s corpus linguistics database (http://cqbweb.lancs.ac.uk), but this did not produce useful data due to the multiplicity of meanings of ‘observations’ and ‘reflections’. Even an attempt to produce statistics about the use of ‘observations’ and ‘reflections’ in titles, based on ESTC, would be meaningless for the same reason. For example, ‘observations’ appears frequently in the titles of almanacs, and thus skews the data. 35 In this section, publications whose title is given at length or in full in the text, and where any quotations are found on the title-page, are not cited separately in the footnotes.
other (or another) side to respond, and the term ‘observations’ was deployed to indicate comment on opposition texts. In 1642, for instance, Parliament printed a pamphlet called *Two Letters, the One from the Lord Digby, to the Queens Majestie: The Other from Mr. Thomas Elliot, to the Lord Digby, with Observations upon the Same Letters*. This contained the text of two royalist letters, prefaced by a section of ‘OBSERVATIONS upon The ensuing LETTERS’, which provided a pro-parliamentarian interpretation. One of the most famous pamphlets of topical ‘observations’ on a text was the parliamentarian polemist Henry Parker’s *Observations upon Some of His Majesties Late Answers and Expresses* (1642), a commentary on the royalist *His Majesties Answer to the XIX Propositions of Both Houses of Parliament* (1642). In his pamphlet, Parker articulated a conception of popular sovereignty, represented in Parliament, against the king’s conception of a constitution balanced between king, Lords and Commons. This was effectively a short treatise of political theory, but framed as ‘observations’ on a text, again across the partisan divide. A royal proclamation defending the Book of Common Prayer was reprinted by parliamentarians in 1645 with an attached section of numbered hostile ‘observations’, justified on the grounds that ‘upon [this proclamation] I thought fit to publish the following Observations, lest many too-credulous people might be ensnared by the specious and flourishing pretences thereof’ (Fig. 3).36

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Moreover, ‘observations’ were not just published by parliamentarians on royalist texts. In *Certaine Observations upon the Two Contrary Covenants* (1643), a royalist ‘set down 5 Observations which I have taken’ on two covenants, one issued by the ‘Malignant party’ (the parliamentarians), which is criticised, and the other a ‘Kings Covenant’ that is defended. The pamphlet concludes with the text of both covenants, introduced by the statement that ‘I have here set down the Text with the Comment’. 37 ‘Observations’ were also published between different parliamentarian factions: William Prynne’s *Twelve Considerable Serious Questions Touching Church Government* (1644), which advocated Presbyterianism, received an Independent response in *Certain Briefe Observations and Antiquæries* (1644).

‘Observations’ in the early 1640s also went beyond the specific sense of comment on texts to indicate topical comment more generally. A 1642 pamphlet officially printed by Parliament, *A Declaration of the Lords and Commons Assembled in Parlament* [sic], included ‘some Observations and Directions to the Knights, Gentlemen, and other Inhabitants of Yorkshire, and other the Northerne Counties’. These ‘observations’ were a partisan analysis of the times, depicting a kingdom in danger and Parliament as its only possible saviour, thereby impelling readers’ support. The pamphlet argued,

> we thinke fit to publish and declare some few Observations, whereby the good Subiects of this Kingdome may better discern their owne danger, and be stirred up with more earnestnesse to assist us in the maintenance of Religion, and of the common Iustice and Liberty of the Kingdome, which seemes to be in no less hazard, then if we had an Army of the Irish Rebels in the Bowels of the Land.

As with other 1640s observations, they were numbered:

> The first Observation is this, that now it plainly appeares to the world that there was good ground of those fears and iealousies, so often expressed by both Houses, That his Maiesty intended to make warre against his Parliament[]. 38

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37 *Certaine Observations upon the Two Contrary Covenants* (London, 1643), pp. 3, 6.
38 *A Declaration of the Lords and Commons Assembled in Parlament* [sic] (London, 1642), sig. A2v.
This pamphlet was not alone in using ‘observations’ to refer to the political situation in general: a pamphlet of *Observations upon the Times* (1642) argued that the constitution had disintegrated due to pride, arbitrary justice and irreligion.

The term ‘observations’ denoted a policy recommendation in *Englands Safety in Navie and Fortifications* (1642), which contained ‘Necessary Observations Concerning Dover, and Other Sea-Towns of England’, directed at Parliament, expressing the opinion that England’s sea-defences needed to be fortified. There were also ‘observations’ on parties, for instance some royalist ‘Historicall Observations Upon The Proceedings, Pretences, & Designs of a prevailing party in both Houses of PARLIAMENT’, in a pamphlet called *Sober Sadnes* (1643), which commented on the malicious parliamentarian party. On the other side, *Some More New Observations Concerning the King and Parliament* (1642) provided ‘Twenty Considerations of the dangerous estate the Kingdome now standeth in by reason of a MALIGNANT Party’, lambasting the royalists. Another parliamentarian pamphlet, *Symbolum Veritatis* (1643), contained

> Several Observations upon the maine Reasons and Arguments which the Royalists bring for their practice. Wherein it is proved, that that which they gather out of them, is derogatory to the Kings Supremacy it selfe, in which the Parliament is truely vindicated, and the Cavaliers beaten with their owne Staffe.

Other pamphlets that used ‘observations’ in similar ways included *Some New Observations and Considerations upon the Present State of Things in England* (1643), *Some Observations Concerning jealousies Betweene King and Parliament, with Their Causes and Cures* (1642), and *The Honest Informer or Tom-Tell-Troth’s Observations upon Abuses of Government* (1642).

In the second sub-period, the early 1680s, ‘observations’ remained a prominent keyword of topical comment, both in its narrow textual sense and its broader range of uses, and frequently for partisan purposes. During the Succession Crisis and its aftermath, when partisan activity dominated political culture and topical opinion was widely published, it is unsurprising that ‘observations’ remained part of the discourse. A few examples will suffice. *Observations upon a Late Libel* (1681) was a short pamphlet by George Savile, Marquess of Halifax, that attacked a Whig pamphlet called *A Letter from a Person of Quality*, which had
criticised Charles II’s dissolution of the Oxford Parliament. A Tory pamphlet of 1681 was entitled *Some Observations upon the Tickling Querie, (Viz.) Whether the Admitting of a Popish Successor, Be the Best Way to Preserve the Protestant Religion?* Another pamphlet, *Observations on a Paper* (1684), provided anti-Catholic commentary on a ‘declaration’ of William, Lord Petre, a Catholic nobleman who had died as a prisoner in the Tower of London after being implicated in the Popish Plot. This pamphlet was divided into sections entitled ‘Letter’, giving the text of the declaration, and ‘Observations’, giving the response.

By the early 1680s, ‘reflections’ had also emerged as a keyword of topical comment. There had only been one relevant ‘reflections’ publication in the early 1640s: a royalist pamphlet of *Considerations Touching the Late Treaty for a Peace Held at Uxbridge, with Some Reflections upon the Principal Occasions and Causes of the Frustration Thereof* (1645). However, four decades later, ‘reflections’ had become as prominent as ‘observations’. The ways it was used were broadly similar to ‘observations’. Often, ‘reflections’ specifically referred to comment on texts, for instance in Edmund Bohun’s Tory ‘reflections on a pamphlet’ in 1683, which responded to a Whig pamphlet called *A Just and Modest Vindication*. In his preface, Bohun wrote, ‘When I had [this libel]… I then resolved to make some short Reflections upon it… I am not without all hopes that these Reflections may by Gods blessing prevent some part of this mischief’. He could have used ‘observations’ here, so why did use ‘reflections’? One clue can be found in Bohun’s apology about the nature of his text:

> My Reader therefore, I hope, will pardon me, if his [i.e. the Whig pamphlet writer’s] Passion happens to move one in me, in any part of these Reflections; because it is difficult to converse patiently with a man of this temper.

This suggests that ‘reflections’ had connotations of sobriety, rationalism and dispassionateness – albeit ones that would be broken here – which ‘observations’ did not carry in the same way. ‘Reflections’ was perhaps more effective than ‘observations’ in cloaking partisanship in the garb of impartiality, especially as ‘observations’ had been used for partisan comment for decades, while ‘reflections’ was still relatively new.

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39 There is further discussion of printed publications around the time of the Oxford Parliament below, pp. 133-48.
41 Ibid, pp. 1-2.
Partisan ‘reflections’ pamphlets were common in the early 1680s, on both sides. A Tory sheet, An Elegie on the Never to Be Forgotten Sir Thomas Armstrong Knight (1684), a satirical elegy on a Whig who suffered a traitor’s death for his involvement in the Rye House Plot against the life of Charles II, contained ‘some Satyrical Reflections on the whole Faction’. A Whig ‘character’ pamphlet of 1681, The Reformed Papist, or High-Church-Man, was framed around ‘Reflections on his Principles and Designs’. A Whig dialogue of 1682, Reflections upon the Murder of S. Edmund-Bury Godfrey, attacked Tory refutations of Whig claims that Sir Edmundbury Godfrey, a justice who had been investigating the Popish Plot, had been murdered by Catholics. There was a Whig pamphlet of Some Modest Reflections upon the Commitment of the Earl of Shaftsbury (1681), and another Whig pamphlet, The Tears of the Press (1681), contained ‘Reflections on the Present State of ENGLAND’.

‘Observations’ and ‘reflections’ were firmly established as master-nouns of topical comment during the party conflict of the third sub-period, the early 1710s. For ‘observations’, Jonathan Swift’s The Publick Spirit of the Whigs (1714) discussed Richard Steele’s The Crisis (1714) by offering ‘Some Observations on the Seasonableness, Candor, Erudition, and Style of that Treatise’. There were Some Observations upon a Late Pamphlet, Intitled, A Modest Representation of the Past and Present State of Great Britain, Occasion’d by the Late Change in the Administration (1711), a Whig defence of the Godolphin ministry that had recently been displaced by Robert Harley’s Tory ministry. The Earl of Nottingham wrote an influential pamphlet called Observations upon the State of the Nation, in January 1712/3 (1713) that critiqued the Tory ministry’s peace policy, as part of Nottingham’s notorious volte-face from Toryism to working with opposition Whigs. These ‘observations’ were Nottingham’s analysis of the political situation: ‘I shall... declare my Apprehensions of the State of Affairs in this publick Manner’.42 Another pamphlet, The Trade with France, Italy, Spain, and Portugal, Considered (1713), contained ‘Some OBSERVATIONS on the Treaty of Commerce between Great Britain and France’.

For ‘reflections’, a 1711 pamphlet, An Account of the Obligations the States of Holland Have to Great-Britain, provided ‘REFLECTIONS upon the PEACE’. John Oldmixon’s The Dutch Barrier Our’s (1712) gave some Whig ‘REFLECTIONS on the Insolent Treatment the Emperor and States-General have met with from the Author of the CONDUCT [i.e. Swift], and his Brethren’. A Fair View of Our Present Case (1712) provided ‘Just and Natural Reflections on The Arguments for making Peace, or continuing the War’. A Whig pamphlet,

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Reflections on the Management of Some Late Party-Disputes (1715), attacked high-church Tories and Jacobites for threatening ‘Religion’ and ‘Civil Society’. In 1712, there were some Reflections upon the Present Posture of Affairs: With Relation to the Treaty of Peace, Now on Foot, which themselves prompted some ‘REFLECTIONS upon REFLECTIONS’ in a response by Charles Leslie, Salt for the Leach (1712).

Why did ‘observations’ and ‘reflections’ gain such currency? One advantage of both terms is that they could be used for any kind of comment or discussion – unlike some of other terms outlined above, which inherently referred, for instance, to support for or opposition to something – and this gave them versatility. Specifically, both words carried connotations of objectivity and respectability, inherent in the words themselves and expressed through their use in other contexts, which enabled topical and partisan commentary to appear under a more neutral and positive banner. Just as ‘moderate’ could mean radical and ‘impartial’ could mean partial, so ‘observations’ and ‘reflections’ could cloak partisanship.43

To ‘observe’ was to use one’s sensory faculties with care and attention to notice the most important features of something.44 ‘Observations’ had featured in British print for many decades before the 1640s, and continued to have many uses unrelated to topical comment afterwards. ‘Observation’ had a cultural premium in various contexts. For example, it was an important term in science, as Baconian methods emphasised the importance of accurate observations as the basis for scientific judgements; John Woodward, a natural historian, argued that ‘Observations are the only sure Grounds whereon to build a lasting and substantial Philosophy’.45 Travel and chorographical narratives, ubiquitous in this age of exploration, emphasised the ‘observation’ of places, peoples and cultures.46 However, two other applications of ‘observations’ particularly help to explain the term’s transfer to topical comment: scholarly textual commentary and historiography.


‘Observations’ had long been used for scholarly textual commentary, especially biblical commentary. The aim of scholarly commentaries was twofold: to explain a text’s meaning on a line-by-line basis, and to explicate broader analytical points deriving from the text that would be useful to readers. ‘Observations’ referred specifically to the second of these processes. A 1645 commentary on Ezekiel distinguished the ‘exposition’ of the text, designed to ‘shew you what is the sense of Scripture’ and ‘take what is in the bowels of the Text’, from the ‘useful observations’: 47

Some would have Expositors only give the literal sense without observation or application of any thing: if all people could prophesie, were skilfull in Scriptures, as Ezra, mighty, as Apollo, I could like it. But because many truths lie so deep, and so closely couch’d, as all cannot easily discern or extract them, it is necessary to give the sense, and draw forth points observable, yet with a brievous perspicuity and perspicuous brevity. 48

Thus, after a passage of exposition, a passage of observations would begin in terms such as the following:

Let us see now what observations will arise from hence: 1. Observe, that God is not tied to places... 2. Observe, that no place is so wicked, but God can raise up instruments to do him and the Church service there. 49

Another commentary, Comfort for Beleevers (1645), defined observations as ‘what may be deduced & drawne by Consequence from [biblical verses], or found positively, and absolutely in them... many rich, & pleasant Truthes’, before presenting a series of numbered points. 50 In scholarly commentary, therefore, ‘observations’ functioned as analytical comment, carrying a sense of utility. Scholarly commentaries had a strong influence on 1640s pamphlets of ‘observations’ as topical comment, indicated by the prominence of ‘observations’ specifically on texts, and the use of numbered observations.

‘Observations’ was also a significant term in historiography, where it referred to analysis drawn from the ‘fact’ of historical events and biographies, to be used as a basis for

49 Ibid, pp. 31-32.
moral lessons or political predictions. A 1602 treatise, Observations Vpon the Lives of Alexander, Caesar, Scipio, gave ‘observations’ on classical figures – analytical essays about character rather than biographies – as exemplars for modern readers. A 1712 book of Observations and Remarks upon the Lives and Reigns of King Henry VIII, King Edward VI, Queen Mary I, Queen Elizabeth, and King James I aimed to accommodate the Reader with Brief Remarks on the Lives and Reigns of the[se] several Monarchs... As also with the just and genuine Characters, of the most Eminent Persons both in Church and State; not omitting OBSERVATIONS on the Prudence and Policies, Successes and Miscarriages, Rise and Falls of some Great Men and peculiar Favourites.51

The author explained that

Observations on Men’s Lives and Characters... are more beneficial and useful to the Reader, than either Chronology or Narration; for there are many Excellent Persons, that deserve better than dispersed Reports or barren Eulogies; and consequently a modest Enquiry into great Mens Natures and Inclinations, must necessarily Excel the other Parts of History... History being nothing else, but Deductions of Morals into Examples.52

Observations, here, are analysis of individuals. The same conceptualisation, but opposite conclusion about its implications for how to write history, can be found in the work of John Rushworth, whose history deliberately contained ‘onely matter of fact in Order of time without observation or Reflection’.53 For Rushworth, observations polluted rather than applied the historical discourse. However, one supporter of Rushworth commented that his history can ‘yield us... useful Observations’ – the ‘observations’ being supplied by readers rather than contained within the history.54 This can be connected to Noah Millstone’s concept of ‘politic observation’ – the Tacitean practice of perceiving people’s real political aims and habits from behind external appearances – which applied a similar sense of

51 Observations and Remarks upon the Lives and Reigns of King Henry VIII. King Edward VI. Queen Mary I. Queen Elizabeth, and King James I (London, 1712), sig. A2r-v.
52 Ibid, sig. A3r.
54 Qu. in ibid, p. 147.
‘observations’ to contemporary politics or recent history. In all of these cases, ‘observations’ functioned as analytical comment with utility for readers, as in scholarly textual commentaries, but here based on history, and especially important figures from political history. Again, this carried analytical and respectable connotations that could be usefully imported into topical comment.

If ‘observing’ was based on sensory faculties, ‘reflecting’ was to use one’s cognitive faculties with care and attention to form rational thoughts. A 1685 treatise, Logic; Or, the Art of Thinking, had ‘reflections upon ideas’ as the subject of its first section; Locke gave ‘reflection’ an important place in his theory of mind. However, ‘reflections’ had fewer applications in English print culture than ‘observations’, appearing in no publication titles before 1645, and only gaining momentum from c.1655 onwards. ‘Reflections’ was used in a similar way to ‘observations’ – referring to useful analysis drawn out of a subject – but often appeared specifically in works relating to morality or piety. For instance, Horæ Consecratæ (1682) contained ‘Occasional MEDITATIONS and Gratulatory Reflexions upon particular Providences and Deliverances’, and A Looking-Glass That Flatters Not (1711) contained ‘CONTEMPLATIONS AND REFLECTIONS UPON The several Degrees and Changes of Human Life, from the Prince to the Peasant’. Roger L’Estrange published an edition of Aesop’s fables that alternated sections of ‘fable’ (the story), ‘moral’ (the point made by the fable), and ‘reflexion’ (this point’s application to contemporary life). An imitator of L’Estrange added ‘MORAL REFLEXIONS over and above [proverbs], as suitable and agreeable to the Humour of the Age as... possible’, and which were designed to be ‘useful and instructive, as well as plausible and diverting upon the Perusal’. ‘Reflections’ also specifically referred to maxims. Rules for Conversation (1683), ‘A Collection Of Moral

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56 Latin reflecto literally meant ‘to bend back, turn backwards, turn about, turn away’. See Charlton T. Lewis, An Elementary Latin Dictionary (New York: American Book Company, 1890), as transcribed at http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/. It acquired its comment-related meaning when the idea of ‘reflecting’ was applied to the mind. The earliest instances in English cited in OED, including one referring to ‘the reflection of himself upon himself’, date from the late-fourteenth century, but this is not to say that the mental sense of reflection, in Latin, French or English, was not older.
58 Although a few titles, not relevant for the present argument, contained the singular ‘reflection’ or ‘reflexion’.
59 There was a second relevant sense of ‘reflection’, meaning ‘criticism’. See OED, ‘Reflection’, definition 9.
60 Roger L’Estrange, Fables, of Æsop and Other Eminent Mythologists: With Morals and Reflexions (London, 1692).
Maxims and Reflections’, contained numbered ‘reflections’ – which were also described as ‘observations’. The Duc de la Rochefoucauld’s famous collection of *Maximes*, printed in French as *Les Réflexions ou Sentences et Maximes Morales* (1665), were translated into English by Aphra Behn as ‘Reflections on Morality’. Importing ‘reflections’ into the lexicon of topical and partisan comment could thus bring a moral or philosophical – or indeed French – sheen that went beyond ‘observations’.

‘Observations’ and ‘reflections’ were prominent keywords of comment on current affairs in the seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries. They presented themselves as the product of rigorous or intellectual mental activity, based on accurate perceptions of an external reality (for ‘observations’) or on reason (for ‘reflections’). This gave – or attempted to give – the topical comment expressed under these terms an objectivity and respectability that it was lacking under terms like ‘opinion’.

**Pamphlets, serials and the comment media landscape**

This core of this thesis examines comment published in printed serials. Before the main discussion can begin, however, it is necessary to consider how serials fitted into the wider comment media landscape, and especially the pamphlet. Pamphlets were the most important medium of published comment from the mid-seventeenth century until well into the eighteenth century, and perhaps beyond. They also provide the key context for serials, because serials were effectively serialised pamphlets, having emerged out of the pamphlet tradition, and continuing to resemble pamphlets physically for most of the period under discussion. This section will also examine the key advantages and features of regular comment (as published in serials) as opposed to one-off comment (as published in pamphlets).

There was a substantial, sophisticated comment media landscape in early modern Britain. As already indicated, comment was published and circulated through a range of interconnecting media, in oral and manuscript forms as well as print. Oral comment was published in sermons and plays, which engaged with topical issues before public audiences...
(and might afterwards be recirculated in manuscript or print). Published manuscript forms containing comment include ‘libels’ – in this context meaning verse, often scurrilous and satirical – and ‘manuscript pamphlets’, both of which were widely circulated in the early-Stuart period. Printed publications containing comment include printed books and, most importantly, various forms of short, cheap print: printed pamphlets and printed serials.

‘Pamphlets’ cannot be defined in exact terms. Literally meaning ‘small books’, they tended to comprise either a single, folded piece of printed paper or a gathering of printed papers that were stitched rather than bound. In format, they were typically quarto, resembling a short, folded booklet, but this could vary. Most were short, perhaps 8, 16 or 24 pages, but pamphlets could reach up to 96 pages, and longer pamphlets of this sort were more common in the eighteenth century. In addition, pamphlets cannot usefully be distinguished from single, unfolded pieces of printed paper (usually half-sheet folio, resembling a single sheet in ‘portrait’ orientation, sometimes known as ‘papers’), as all were forms of cheap print: these will also be treated as ‘pamphlets’ here. Pamphlets had their roots even before 1500, but they primarily emerged in Britain in the late-sixteenth century, and their numbers exploded in the late 1630s and early 1640s, in the political crisis
preceding the civil wars. Thereafter, they were a permanent and major part of the media landscape until the nineteenth century.

Comment was the primary function of many – perhaps most – pamphlets. This is indicated most clearly by their being labelled with comment keywords, as outlined above. By their very nature, pamphlets were well suited to a comment function. Physically, they tended to be short, cheap and easily reproducible, were often written in simple and engaging language, and could be produced and distributed quickly, so were a good vehicle for making timely political interventions to a maximised audience. Comment pamphlets included many with better-defined generic forms, such as dialogues, animadversions, sermons, declarations, queries, letters, controversy, characters and various forms of verse – in addition to burlesques and parodies of these – but also others that provided comment outside a formal generic framework. Comment pamphlets not only discussed the news, for instance of wars, negotiations or legislation, but also other topical subjects such as individuals, parties, publications and constitutional and religious principles. Many comment pamphlets were partisan, designed to advance political causes: Catholic or Puritan, royalist or parliamentarian, Tory or Whig. Subjects of comment pamphlets varied, but, broadly speaking, there was an expansion from an emphasis on religious comment in the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries, outwards to include more political and constitutional comment from the mid-seventeenth century, and outwards again to include other subjects such as trade and the economy by the late-seventeenth century.

Not all pamphlets were primarily designed to convey comment. Many were constructed as vehicles for news, for instance military news from foreign wars and ‘strange news’ of wonders and miracles. Many news pamphlets had comment as a secondary function, for instance interpolated into news reports, or embedded in the quotation of texts such as proclamations. However, to speak of a ‘news-driven pamphlet culture’, as Michael Mendle has for the civil war period, does not reflect the wider picture, that there were myriad pamphlets whose primary function was comment, and that these should not be subordinated to the concept of ‘news’. The importance of pamphlets as vehicles for comment waxed and waned over the early modern period. Between the 1580s and 1630s, they were important but occasional,

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69 Ibid, chs 1-2, 5.
71 The place of comment in news-writing is discussed further below, pp. 56-64.
72 Mendle, ‘Pamphlet Culture’, p. 57.
publishing comment in particular contexts such as the Marprelate controversy and the Spanish Match. Manuscript comment was probably more prominent in this period, especially in the form of manuscript libels, and perhaps in Noah Millstone’s ‘manuscript pamphlets’. Printed pamphlets largely displaced these manuscript forms as the predominant vehicle for published comment in the 1640s, during the civil wars. They had further peaks in the political drama of 1659-60 and 1679-83, although they were also important around and between these moments, for instance during the Anglo-Dutch wars. Pamphlets continued to consolidate and expand their position in the comment media landscape throughout the ‘rage of party’ of the late-seventeenth and early-eightheenth centuries, especially after the final lapse of pre-publication licensing in 1695. Certain moments produced particular clusters, such as the standing army controversy of the late 1690s. Pamphlets remained prominent as comment media throughout the eighteenth century.

As outlined in the introduction, pamphlets began to be formally serialised in the 1620s. Although serialisation was first developed to represent the rolling nature of news, serials emerged as a significant vehicle for comment from the 1640s. Publishing comment in serials had many advantages. Circulating comment regularly increased its chances of having an impact on readers. Audiences could be built and maintained over time: serials did not have to acquire new audiences with each issue in the way that one-off pamphlets did. Serial comment also made it possible to establish themes early on and then repeat them week after week, in a way that maximised public exposure to simple messages (a technique not unfamiliar in modern electioneering). In addition, serialisation enabled long and complex comment to be divided into smaller chunks to increase accessibility to readers, by making it cheaper and easier to read. In this way, expensive and impenetrable books could be opened to broad audiences. Finally, comment in serials was easier to keep up to date, by providing a vehicle through which ultra-topical comment could be published, whereas new

75 On the relative significance of print and manuscript, I am following the argument of Raymond, Pamphlets, p. 128, contra that of Harold Love.
pamphlets had to be conceived from scratch. Serials were a nimble and flexible mechanism for publishing comment.

These advantages led serial comment towards taking certain forms in practice.\(^{77}\) One major theme was *discussion of the veracity of news*. As news was continuous, discussions of the quality of news reports lent themselves naturally to appearing in serials. Indeed, this was one of the earliest forms of comment in serials, being found as early as the royalist newsbook *Mercurius Aulicus* (1643-45), which used a semi-regular comment section to challenge war news emanating from parliamentarian sources. This was also found in later serials, most famously Daniel Defoe’s *Review* (1704-13), whose ‘Scandalous Club’ section in 1704-05 challenged newspaper reports.

A second theme of regular comment was *context and analysis for foreign news*. During European wars, such as the Nine Years’ War (1688-97) and the War of the Spanish Succession (1702-13), detailed news of battles and sieges in far-flung places might be confusing for readers, so comment was published in serials to help them make sense of events. In the 1690s, there was even a specialist serial of this sort, the *Gentleman’s Journal for the War* (1693-96).

A third context was *answering publications*. When press output was continuous for one party cause, it was sensible for another party cause to have a vehicle that could respond to these publications as they came off the presses. This need was particularly pressing in periods of strong party conflict, such as the 1680s and 1700s, in each of which an ‘Observator’ – Roger L’Estrange’s Tory *Observator* (1681-87) and John Tutchin and George Ridpath’s Whig *Observator* (1702-12) – had a major function of responding to the deluge of Whig and Tory publications respectively.

A fourth theme was *negative representations of another party*. Authors of serials used the form’s regular publication schedule to build and sustain negative images of opposing parties, relying on repetition to press home their critiques. For example, the parliamentarian newsbook *Mercurius Britannicus* (1643-46) consistently attacked royalists, and *Mercurius Aulicus* as their chief print representative, for their vices and weaknesses, while the Tory *Examiner* (1710-14) relentlessly attacked the Whigs for threatening Crown and Church.

A fifth and final context for regular comment was *providing bitesize chunks of theory or history*, designed to be accessible to popular audiences, bridging the gap between complex discussions and the public. *Mercurius Politicus* (1650-60) provided republican

\(^{77}\) Further discussion of the following examples will be given in chapters 2 and 3.
political theory in prefaces in the early 1650s, laying the ideological foundations for the nascent republic. The Whig *Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Rome* (1678-83) performed a similar function in the Succession Crisis by providing a history of the Catholic Church, designed to expose the dangers of the alleged Popish Plot.

In sum, serials were an important part of the comment media landscape, alongside pamphlets, and comment in serials had particular advantages and features. The context is now established for the detailed discussion of serial comment in the next two chapters.

**Conclusion**

Comment is not only useful for approaching early modern political culture for conceptual reasons, but was also tangible in contemporary terms, through the widespread deployment of keywords of comment, such as ‘observations’ and ‘reflections’, to indicate the practice of commenting on current affairs. Comment was published in many media, but most importantly in pamphlets, which came to prominence from the 1580s and to pre-eminence from the 1640s, and held their position at the heart of the comment media landscape until well into the eighteenth century, and perhaps beyond. Comment pamphlets took a variety of forms, including dialogues, animadversions, letters, verse and characters, and were often designed to advance a partisan cause. Comment was also increasingly published in serials, which provided a mechanism for circulating regular comment to readers, taking advantage of repetition, continuousness, flexibility and brevity. Because of this, comment in serials developed a particular prominence, with some voices being projected to the public weekly or sub-weekly over many years.

The next two chapters examine serials as vehicles for comment in detail. They focus on two main forms of serial: news serials, or ‘newspapers’ (in chapter 2), and dedicated serials of comment, or ‘comment serials’ (in chapter 3).
CHAPTER 2. Comment in newspapers, 1641-c.1730

This chapter explores the place of printed news serials, or ‘newspapers’, in the comment media landscape. Although newspapers were primarily a medium of news, they also emerged as an important vehicle for comment, especially in the civil wars and after the Hanoverian succession. Like all forms of news-writing, compiling a newspaper necessitated making choices around how far to follow models of plain, factual news, and how far to indulge various political, commercial or other impulses to include comment. News-writers negotiated this tension in various ways, ranging from including substantial tranches of comment to eschewing comment altogether. When they did include comment, they did so in three ways: placing comment within news, by interpolating it into the structure of news reports or quoting documents such as proclamations and petitions that contained embedded comment; placing comment alongside news, in distinct comment sections; and including comment in place of news, where the comment supplanted the news content in a publication that ostensibly contained news. Although these news-comment relations could occur in all news media, it was in newspapers that the impulse to comment was most fully indulged.

Two main arguments will be made. First, comment had a significant, if fluctuating, place in newspapers in seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century Britain. Newspaper comment first became prominent in the 1640s and 1650s. Although much of this comment was included within the structure of news reports, some mid-century newspapers also developed the practice of including discrete sections of comment, by adapting pre-existing forms of comment in pamphlets – prefaces, animadversions, queries and ballads – as mechanisms for placing comment alongside news. The most comment-heavy newspapers of the period were the ‘Mercuries’ of 1647-50, which included comment in place of news as well as within and alongside it: maintaining the appearance of news publications while often being filled with comment in practice. Comment in this period was overwhelmingly partisan, designed to advance royalist or parliamentarian causes, and humour and personas were important features of its style. After half a century in which newspapers had a lesser comment function, a second period of significant newspaper comment was pioneered by six-page weekly newspapers in the 1710s, spreading to other newspapers by the 1730s. The most important form of comment was now the introductory essay, which typically filled one or two pages before the news. Compared with their civil war predecessors, these newspapers contained a wider variety of partisan, moral, analytical and other comment, although in stylistic terms they shared the use of humour and personas. This phase of
Comment was primarily borrowed from other serials – comment serials, miscellanies, and foreign monthly news serials – rather than pamphlets.

The second argument is that newspapers’ sustained experimentation with form in relation to comment contributed to increasing definition in the wider conceptual relationship between news and comment by the early-eighteenth century, which arguably had a cultural impact beyond the world of published news. Where comment in mid-seventeenth century newspapers was indulged in a tentative and sometimes subversive fashion, early-eighteenth century newspapers accessed and contributed to a more consolidated concept of comment that was explicitly distinct from news, and could be positively utilised within and alongside news. This follows David Zaret’s argument, made in relation to the emergence of public opinion, that developments in communicative practice preceded and shaped the formal theorisation of concepts: the practice of demarcating comment contributed to its greater definition as a concept. In this way, developing practices in how to compile newspapers provide some evidence that Barbara Shapiro’s emergent ‘culture of fact’ was accompanied by a complementary ‘culture of comment’.

This chapter begins with a discussion of comment’s place in early modern news-writing in general, before taking a chronological approach to assess its place in newspapers in particular, in four sections. The first discusses comment sections in newsbooks in the 1640s and 1650s, during the first full flowering of comment in British newspapers. The second takes a narrower focus on part of the same period by examining the most comment-heavy group of newspapers that appeared in the seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, the 1647-50 ‘Mercuries’. In the third section, discussion turns to the relative paucity of comment in newspapers between the 1660s and 1710s, when some important formal experimentation with comment was nevertheless taking place. The final section considers the second main period of newspaper comment sections in the 1710s and 1720s.

Comment and early modern news-writing

In early modern Britain, news publications may be defined as publications that had a primary stated purpose of providing reports of recent events. They usually drew on a

2 See above, pp. 8, 31.
heterogeneous bundle of conventions in format, style and lexicon, including a structure organised around headings giving a date and/or place (which indicated the source of the news item or the date that the news had been written or had arrived), titles or subtitles containing news keywords such as ‘affairs’, ‘proceedings’ and ‘occurrences’, and the use of the ‘news paragraph’, a discrete block of reporting that was unconnected to the paragraphs before and after, as the basic discursive unit. Different news publications adopted different combinations of these conventions to different extents, and sometimes did so satirically rather than seriously, so they cannot be regarded as a single, unified genre, but they nonetheless represented a tangible, linked phenomenon within the landscape of early modern media.

As indicated in the introduction, published news could take many forms, in oral, manuscript and printed media. To recap, one important kind of news publication was the printed news pamphlet – short, individual works that reported on, for instance, military or political news, or ‘strange’ news of human or natural wonders – which were most prominent in the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries. Another was the manuscript newsletter – a serial, handwritten form of news publication, which was initially commercial in intent but later could also be partisan or semi-official – whose heyday was between the late-sixteenth and early-eighteenth centuries. A third category, the primary focus of this chapter, is those varieties of news publication that were regular and in print, and which may be called ‘newspapers’. Newspapers became an increasingly prominent part of the landscape of published news during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They did not form a single genre, but, as a group of genres that shared the essential characteristics of being regular printed publications with a stated purpose of providing news, they can usefully be considered collectively.

It would also be helpful to reiterate the chief varieties of newspaper published in Britain in the seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries. The earliest British newspapers, published between 1620 and 1641, were the ‘corantos’, which contained solely foreign news. A second wave, between 1641 and 1666, and usually known as ‘newsbooks’ because they took a quarto pamphlet format, initially focused on domestic news in the context of the civil wars, although they later included foreign news as well. Many were partisan, aligning themselves with the royalist or parliamentarian/Commonwealth causes, or sub-

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4 See above, pp. 2-3, n. 4.
5 See above, pp. 16-23, for a fuller description.
groups within them. Newsbooks were superseded by the first printed news serials that were technically newspapers proper, in that they took a half-sheet folio format – a single piece of paper, printed on both sides – which constituted the dominant form of newspaper between the 1660s and 1710s. It was pioneered in Britain by the London Gazette (1665-present), which mostly contained foreign news, but many of its successors – especially in 1679-83, at the time of the Succession Crisis – contained domestic news, and often had a partisan agenda. From the late 1680s, there also emerged a separate tradition of monthly news serials, following continental models, which took the form of longer pamphlets. Newspapers proliferated, permanently, after the final lapse of the Licensing Act in 1695, containing a mixture of foreign and domestic news, and becoming more partisan in the 1710s. The dominance of the half-sheet folio format was hit by the 1712 Stamp Act, which prompted the development of tax-avoiding, six-page weekly newspapers, often called ‘weekly journals’. After this loophole was closed in 1725, many newspapers shifted into a four-page format.

What place did comment have in news-writing? One way to approach this question is to examine how contemporaries discussed the features of good and bad news-writing. Good news-writing tended to be associated with characteristics such as truthfulness, plain-style reporting, seriousness of tone or impartiality, while bad news-writing might be associated with lies, florid expression, humour or partisanship. Comment was generally placed in the negative column. Indeed, many news publications made a virtue of excluding comment in order to build credit for carrying truthful and respectable news. Comment carried negative connotations of fiction and partiality, and might be conceived as meddling illegitimately in affairs that were properly the preserve of the regime. Some also held that readers should be sovereign in making their own comments on the news, rather than absorbing the comments of others.

Claims that comment was inimical to good news-writing can be found across the period under consideration, often using comment keywords of the sort outlined in the previous chapter. Among 1640s and 1650s newsbooks, for example, the author of the Kingdomes Weekly Post (1643-44) stated that he ‘present[s] his newes... without any gilded

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6 These discussions often took place in partisan contexts, to build credit for one’s own side’s news and undermine the credit of an opponent’s news, but they nonetheless indicate what was considered to constitute good or bad news.

glosings, invented fixions, or flattering Commentaries, and in plain truth communicates to
the kingdome such newes as is intrusted with his packet’, while the author of the *Weekly
Intelligencer* (1650-55) declared that ‘my business in this weekly Paper [is] to give you
matter of Intelligence, and not to declare my Judgment’. A short-lived *Mercurius Britannicus*
(1652) claimed, ‘No Satyr I profess;/ But perfect News from North and South;/ Armies, and
their Success’, while *Occurrences* (1659), promised to ‘communicate the Truth of those
Forraigne Affairs, as we receive them verbatim, without any Animadversions, or *Political
Observations* of our own’.

During the Succession Crisis, the *Currant Intelligence* (1681) promised ‘such
passages of Foreign and Domestick Affairs, as may be useful as well as pleasing to the
Reader, without any reflections upon either persons or things, giving only the bair matter of
fact, as it shall from time to time occur to his Knowledge’. Meanwhile, the *London Mercury*
(1682) was ‘not only to give a true, but an *Impartial* account of such matters as are
reasonably fit for such Papers to intermeddle withall, always avoiding Reflections both on
Church and State, public Transactions, and particular Persons’.  

Many post-1695 news-writers also rejected comment. The *Old Post-Master* (1696)
was ‘to contain only matters of Fact, without Reflections on Persons or Things’. The
compiler of Britain’s first successful daily newspaper, the *Daily Courant* (1702-35),
specifically disavowed comment, claiming in the first issue that he would not ‘take upon
him to give any Comments or Conjectures of his own, but will relate only Matter of Fact;
supposing other People to have Sense enough to make Reflections for themselves’. He later elaborated,

he hopes he shall be thought to perform what he takes to be the proper and only
Business of a News-Writer; first, giving the freshest Advices from all Quarters... And
next, delivering Facts as they come related, and without inclining either to one Side
or the other... He thinks himself obliged not to launch out of his Province, to amuse
People with any Comments or Reflections of his own; but leave every Reader to
make such Remarks for himself as he is capable of.

The *Monthly Register* (1703-07) promised news ‘Without any Reflections’, while the
*Evening Post* (1709-32) was to include ‘no Remarks or Reflections made for the Reader’.

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399; *Mercurius Britannicus*, 1 (26 July 1652), p. 1; *Occurrences*, 3 (19 July 1659), p. 18; *Currant
Intelligence*, 1 (26 April 1681), r; *London Mercury*, 2 (10 April 1682), v.
The *British Mercury* (1710-16) said, ‘All Partiality shall be carefully avoided; nor shall political Reflections be allow’d any Room, the Design of this *Mercury* being to give a fair and equal Account of such Facts and Incidents as come within its Sphere’. The *General Post* (1711) stated, ‘No Room shall be lost upon Politicks, but the Facts fairly deliver’d in the same Terms as represented at the Places the Letters came from; nor shall there be any Party Reflections or Scandalous Insinuations’. The *Historical Register* (1716-38) said, ‘We shall be religiously scrupulous, in all our Relations, to insert only bare Matter of Fact, stript of all Disguise and sly Insinuations, and without any Remarks of our own upon them, either of Dislike or Affection’. A foreign affairs section of the *Weekly Medley* (1718-20) began,

The following Paragraphs will, if read with Attention, give a great Light into the whole Posture of Affairs abroad, without any Commentary or Explications. The Matter all appears very plain, and declares and speaks for its ownself sufficiently without standing in need of any more Remarks, than this one Advertisement to the Reader, That it consists of the freshest and likewise the truest Advices.\(^9\)

For all of these news-writers, comment was represented as a corruption of the ideals of pure news.

Paradoxically, the stridency with which these news-writers disavowed comment provides a strong indication that there were various reasons why news-writers might in fact want to include comment. Publishing comment through news publications enabled authors to circulate their comment to news-reading audiences who might not pick up a separate comment pamphlet or comment serial. News publications with a partisan agenda could use comment to strengthen their messages: the royalist newsbook *Mercurius Aulicus* (1643-45), for example, not only expressed its partisanship through its news – by selecting stories such as military victories that presented the royalist cause in a positive light, and by expressing them in language that indicated royalist virtues and parliamentarian vices – but augmented this with occasional longer passages of comment, praising figures such as Charles I and Archbishop Laud or triumphing in the overall royalist success in the war (in 1643 at least).\(^{10}\)

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\(^{10}\) E.g. *Mercurius Aulicus*, 1.15 (16 April 1643), p. 188 (comment that the parliamentarian cause was nearly dead); 1.47 (25 November 1643), p. 663 (panegyric on Charles I); 12 January 1645, p. 1340 (panegyric on Laud).
Providential comment was sometimes presented as having a legitimate place alongside news in civil war newsbooks, such as the Presbyterian \textit{Scottish Dove} (1643-46). Comment in news publications might also serve a commercial function. This partly explains the growth of comment directed at entertainment, curiosity and utility in the early-eighteenth century, such as comment about social mores, for instance in the introductory essays in \textit{Mist’s Weekly Journal} (1716-37), and comment explaining the historical and geographical context of foreign news, for instance the country-by-country ‘Reflections’ sections in the \textit{New State of Europe} (1701), although these might also be justified in their own right.\textsuperscript{11} There was also a more prosaic impulse for including comment in news \textit{serials}, in particular: if news was lacking, and space needed to be filled. This might be necessary if the expected foreign mails containing the latest batch of European news had not arrived, but was also a significant reason for including comment in the six-page weekly newspapers of the 1710s and 1720s.\textsuperscript{12}

Driven by these various impulses, news publications included a \textit{lot} of comment in practice.\textsuperscript{13} Three forms of news-comment relations within news-writing can be conceptualised: comment \textit{within} news (comment built into the structure of news reports), comment \textit{alongside} news (discrete comment sections placed next to news sections), and comment \textit{in place of} news (comment substituting for news in publications framed as news publications). The discussion in this chapter will focus primarily on the second and third of these modes, as these were the main mechanisms that turned the newspaper into a vehicle for comment. However, the first form of news-comment relations, comment within news, was widespread, and so should briefly be outlined here.

Comment \textit{within} the news could take various forms. News reports were often written with passages of comment \textit{interpolated} into them: phrases, sentences or paragraphs inserted in order to interpret elements of the report. News reports might also contain \textit{reported} comment by quoting comment made by others, for instance comment embedded in proclamations or petitions that were directly carried by news publications. These techniques were, unsurprisingly, especially prominent in partisan news publications, such as royalist and parliamentarian newsbooks in the 1640s and 1650s, opposition/Whig

\textsuperscript{11} See below, pp. 68-9, 94-5, 100-3.
\textsuperscript{13} The fullest consideration of comment in news publications is in the work of a journalist: Jim A. Hart, \textit{Views on the News: The Developing Editorial Syndrome, 1500-1800} (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1970). Hart traces the origins of ‘views on the news’ in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Britain as part of an attempt to excavate the archaeology of the ‘leading article’ in modern American newspapers. Although this account is useful in many respects, it contains many anachronisms.
and loyalist/Tory newspapers in the 1679-83 period, and Whig/Hanoverian and Tory/crypto-Jacobite newspapers in the 1710s and 1720s. At a lower level, however, comment within news was ubiquitous in news publications. There was interpolated comment about the credibility of news as far back as the corantos, and even the plainest newspapers contained reported comment.\textsuperscript{14} For example, the London Gazette (1665-present), a byword for plain news, often filled its first page with loyal addresses – texts presented to the monarch from various communities to affirm and explain their loyalty – which contained florid, panegyrical royalist comment. In this way, the Gazette publicised Tory arguments without sacrificing the purity of its plain news.

In addition to focusing on the more substantial expressions of comment – comment alongside and in place of news, rather than comment within news – the ensuing discussion focuses on newspapers in particular, not news-writing more widely.\textsuperscript{15} Comment forms were better developed in newspapers than in other forms of news-writing. In news pamphlets and manuscript newsletters, for instance, comment was present, but its features were not as well-defined as in newspapers. In news pamphlets, the primary form of comment was within the news: interpolated and reported comment. This occurred, for instance, in pamphlets that reported news through a providential framework, or that adopted an epistolary style, as Nicholas Brownlees has identified in his study of early-seventeenth-century news pamphlets.\textsuperscript{16} In addition, there were sometimes demarcated sections of comment within news pamphlets. Examining a corpus of news pamphlets printed in 1643-44, a few include comment sections of one sort or another, drawing on forms previously used in other contexts. One contains a set of numbered pro-parliamentarian observations after an account of the failure of the royalist siege of Gloucester in September 1643, resembling the sets of demarcated observations in pamphlets discussed in the previous chapter. A second contains a preface whose purpose is to comment on the news that follows. A third contains a long section filled with comment, although not labelled as such, before a self-conscious shift to ‘news’.\textsuperscript{17} However, from this sample at least, there was no

\textsuperscript{14} For comment in corantos, see Brownlees, ‘Narrating Contemporaneity’, pp. 240-3.
\textsuperscript{15} The focus will also be on newspapers printed in London (and royalist Oxford during the civil wars) rather than in Scotland, Ireland or English provincial towns.
\textsuperscript{17} I have examined around 60 pamphlets listed in ESTC for 1643 (i.e. being printed in 1643 or the years adjacent), with the words ‘news’, ‘newes’, ‘intelligence’ or ‘passages’ in their titles. These three examples are A Briefe and Exact Relation of the Most Material and Remarkable Passages That Happned in the Late Well-Formed (And as Valiently Defended) Seige Laid Before the City of Gloucester (London, 1643), pp. 13-15; An Addition to the Relation of Some Passages About the English-Irish
sustained and self-conscious presentation of comment in news pamphlets. As we shall see, this was to occur more substantially and significantly in newspapers.

Manuscript newsletters could also contain comment. As with some news pamphlets, the epistolarity of the form could lend itself to a discursiveness that encouraged a blending of comment into news. This was especially the case with the more partisan newsletters of the later-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, such as the semi-official newsletters of Henry Muddiman and the independent partisan newsletters of the Whig Giles Hancock and the Tory John Dyer. In addition, as a manuscript form, there was, perhaps, a greater tendency to include subversive comment within the news due to a lower risk of legal ramifications. However, comment was not universal to newsletters. It was largely absent from the commercial, factual newsletters of the early-seventeenth century. Indeed, Ian Atherton has argued that, before the late-seventeenth century, the only comment in newsletters concerned the reliability of news. In the 1620s, one newsletter by James Palmer concluded, ‘and thes beinge the text the observations is left to your judgment’. In addition, newsletter comment was within the news: newsletters did not contain separate comment sections of the sort that appeared in newspapers.

A final point to emphasise before turning to the chronological discussion is that comment in newspapers interacted with other media traditions. In the civil wars, newsbook comment interacted especially with the wider pamphlet tradition, drawing features from pamphlets, especially prefaces, animadversions, queries and ballads, or even resembling comment pamphlets directly. This interaction between the newsbook and pamphlet traditions is unsurprising, because newsbooks were pamphlets: quarto, eight-page booklets mostly indistinguishable from one-off pamphlets. In the eighteenth century, comment in newspapers interacted more with other serials. Newspapers drew features from comment serials (introductory essays), miscellanies (having a medley of sections) and foreign monthly news serials (‘Reflections’ sections), and influenced the continuing development of the comment serial tradition.

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At this point, it would be helpful to outline the comment serial phenomenon, before its full discussion in the next chapter. There were a substantial number of printed serials, concentrated in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, that were explicitly designed to provide comment rather than news, and which were therefore different from the newspapers discussed in this chapter. They were distinguished by, *inter alia*, generic indicators such as the dialogue and essay and keyword signifiers such as ‘observations’ and ‘reflections’. This is not to say that a rigid classification of serials into ‘newspapers’ and ‘comment serials’ would be possible or desirable – there are ambiguous cases, and each group was heterogeneous rather than a single genre – but real differences emerged between newspapers and comment serials by the end of the seventeenth century, and especially in the first two decades of the eighteenth century.

It is now time to examine the first major expression of comment in British newspapers: comment sections in civil war newsbooks.

**Comment sections in newsbooks, 1640s-1660s**

The first British newspapers containing substantial comment – and which consequently gained a foothold in the wider comment media landscape – were civil war newsbooks.21 The civil wars encouraged royalists and parliamentarians to fashion newsbooks into partisan weapons, designed to fire ‘paper bullets’ to support their political and military campaigns. Newsbooks were moulded as partisan weapons in many ways, including the slanted selection and presentation of news reports, and the placing of comment within news (interpolated and reported comment). They also experimented with including comment sections alongside news.

Comment sections were not an inherent part of newspapers. They were not a feature of corantos or the first domestic newsbooks in 1641-42.22 However, the practice of including comment in a demarcated space alongside news was developed in newsbooks in the 1640s.23 This was because dedicated sections of comment provided a more effective

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21 I am using ‘civil war’ as a shorthand for the whole period of mid-century turbulence, from the early 1640s to the early 1660s.

22 There was a limited exception in some corantos, in what Brownlees, ‘Narrating Contemporaneity’, p. 241, calls ‘prefatory editorials’.

23 This discussion does not relate to ‘design’ sections that sometimes headed the first issue of a new serial, where the serial’s nature and purpose was set out. These appeared from at least *Mercurius Aulicus* onwards, and were common in the later-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.
way to circulate comment through newspapers than interspersing comment within the news, by making comment more overt, by allowing it to be elaborated more fully, and by enabling it to take a wider range of subjects (being unconstrained by the need to fit into the content of news reports). To include comment, newsbook writers borrowed a clutch of forms from pamphlets: prefaces, queries, animadversions and ballads. The content of this extended comment, which was overwhelmingly partisan, was also familiar from the wider pamphlet tradition, including satirical attacks on opponents, political theory and pious exhortations. These forms were first used in newsbooks in 1643-44, and peaked in the late 1640s and early 1650s. However, by the 1660s, newspaper comment sections had died away: none of these forms established a permanent place in newspapers.

The first, and most important, pamphlet form used as a comment section in newsbooks was the preface. From 1643, many newsbooks contained introductory comment sections. Although these were not labelled, they tended to be physically separated from the news that followed, which was often itself labelled as ‘news’ or ‘intelligence’ or marked with date and/or place headings. How should these sections be interpreted? Scholars have sometimes called them ‘editorials’ or ‘leading articles’, but this is anachronistic, drawing from a historiography of newspapers that imposed modern journalistic categories on early modern publications. They are more accurately considered as prefaces, or preambles. For example, the Kingdomes Weekly Intelligencer (1643-49) referred to ‘the Preface to this Intelligence’, the London Post (1644-45) promised that ‘Wee will be short in our Preface, because wee intended to be the longer in our Intelligence’, and a 1652 pamphlet.

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25 It should be reiterated that the most comment-heavy forms of newsbook – the jocular, partisan newsbooks that comprised the ‘Mercury’ tradition of 1647-50 – are discussed properly in the next section. There were also a few minor civil war serials that were explicitly designed to contain comment, which are discussed below, pp. 135-6.

26 They are described as ‘editorials’ in, e.g., Joseph Frank, The Beginnings of the English Newspaper, 1620-1660 (Cambridge, MS: Harvard University Press, 1961); Hart, Views; Laurent Curelly, An Anatomy of an English Radical Newspaper: The Moderate (1648-9) (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017). Raymond, Invention, p. 161, discusses discrete ‘intelligence’ sections, and notes the presence of ‘prefaces’, but does not discuss the nature of these prefaces. Joad Raymond, ‘Exporting Impartiality’, in Kathryn Murphy and Anita Traninger, eds, The Emergence of Impartiality (Leiden: Brill, 2013), p. 155, argues that ‘[i]t was in the 1640s that the modern newspaper format of news-editorial-advertising was first devised’. Nigel Smith, Literature and Revolution in England, 1640-1660 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 55, argues that in the ‘later 1640s… separate commentary and political theory… emerged, and it was usually printed before the news items themselves’. Raymond, Invention, p. 156, notes more generally that ‘the editorial voice was most inflected’ at the beginning of newsbooks.
referenced the ‘notable preambles’ in *Mercurius Politicus* (1650-60). Prefaces were widely used in pamphlets for comment, by providing context or interpretation for the main content that followed, and were brought into newsbooks for the same purpose. However, their legitimacy in newsbooks was contested. George Wither concluded the introduction to his pamphlet, *Mercurius Rusticus* (1643), by stating, ‘But, lest like one or two of the fore-mentioned News-mongers I tire you with Prefaces and Preambles, trifling out more time then my Intelligence will be worth, I proceed to the matter’. *Mercurius Civicus* (1643-46) promised,

> It being my intention rather to search out the naked Truth (as neer as possible) then to study Rhetorical flourishes; I shall accordingly... [not] run into any unnecessary preambles, but... present you with such affaires of concernment, as I have... received from the most approved and knowing hands.

A satirical newsbook of 1651 promised, ‘Without any fribbling preamble or argumentation, the news from all quarters is briefly thus’. However, statements like these were testament to the strength of the preface rather than its weakness.

Prefaces first appeared as regular features of newsbooks in late 1643 and early 1644, most importantly in *Mercurius Britannicus* (1643-46, with prefaces from September/November 1643), the *Scotish Dove* (1643-46, with prefaces from December 1643), the *True Informer* (1643-45, with prefaces from December 1643/February 1644) and the *Spy* (1644, with prefaces from February 1644). Soon, a ‘preface-intelligence formula’ – a comment preface followed by a main section of news – became well-established as a

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29 *Mercurius Britannicus* has a clear shift from an anti-Aulicus section to a ‘news’ or ‘intelligence’ section from issue 4 (19 September 1643), p. 28, onwards, and this is formalised into a sub-heading, ‘The Intelligence’, from issue 12 (16 November 1643), p. 94, onwards. Frank, *Beginnings*, p. 316, n. 78, says that the *Scotish Dove* had prefaces from issue 12 (5 January 1644), but a coalescence of the discourse into a comment section and a news section can be detected by issue 6 (24 February 1644), p. 45, and this is signified explicitly as a shift to ‘intelligence of newes’ from issue 11 (29 December 1643), p. 85. The *Spy* separated its ‘Intelligence’ section from issue 3 (13 February 1644), p. 23. Frank, *Beginnings*, p. 66, argues that the *True Informer* had ‘pious and hortatory editorial openings’ from February 1644, perhaps referring to issue 23 (24 February 1644), but some form of preface is also found earlier, in December 1643 and January 1644, in issues 11, 14, 16 and 18. The *Parliament Scout* (1643-45, NS 485) also introduced queries at this time, as will be discussed below, pp. 72-4.
model of newsbook structure, being taken up by many major newsbooks, including the *Kingdome Weekly Intelligencer* (1643-49), the *Moderate Intelligencer* (1645-49), *Mercurius Melancholicus* (1647-48), *Mercurius Pragmaticus* (1647-49), *Mercurius Elencticus* (1647-49), the *Moderate* (1648-49), the *Perfect Summary* (1649), *Mercurius Politicus* (1650-60), *Perfect Passages* (1650-53) and the *Faithfull Scout* (1651-55). These newsbooks all included prefaces as at least a semi-regular feature for some of their run, although the preface was never a permanent fixture. For instance, the *Kingdome Weekly Intelligencer* only had prefaces from 1646, and Joseph Frank has calculated that these featured in fifty out of seventy issues in late 1646 and early 1647.\(^{30}\) *Mercurius Politicus* contained over a hundred prefaces over its first two years, placed before the main section of ‘intelligence’ (which was organised under day-by-day headings), but virtually no prefaces after 1652 (Fig. 4).\(^{31}\) More broadly, many newsbooks began with a rhetorical flourish before the news. The heyday of the comment preface was the 1640s: they became less common in the 1650s, and died out in the 1660s. The last significant prefaces can be found in the newsbook wave of 1659-60, for instance in short-lived newsbooks with the familiar titles *Faithfull Scout* (1659-60) and *Mercurius Aulicus* (1660).

\(^{30}\) Frank, *Beginnings*, p. 120.

The comment in these prefaces provided more concentrated and diverse expressions of partisanship than was possible in or within news. Prefaces might simply contain more extended discussion of one’s own side’s successes or virtues or opponents’ failures or vices, but also could include providential analysis, piety, satirical attacks on political opponents, animadversions on opponents’ publications, or political theory. For example, one of the earliest locations of comment prefaces was the *Scotish Dove* (1643-46), a newsbook written by George Smith, a Presbyterian.\(^{32}\) Smith used prefaces to support the parliamentarian cause by providing pro-parliamentarian providential interpretations of the news and exhortations to maintain personal piety and Presbyterian policy in order to maintain God’s favour. Prefaces discussed subjects such as the justness of the war, the need to subscribe to the Solemn League and Covenant (the English parliamentarians’ military alliance with the Scots, signed on Presbyterian lines), the vices of the evil counsellors around the king, and the sinfulness of Independents and sectaries, often supported by biblical and historical examples.\(^{33}\) The preface’s distinctness emerged gradually, from a *de facto* separation of comment and news, to a sentence marking the shift from comment to ‘news’ or ‘intelligence’, to the separation of the preface by physical space and a fresh heading, such as ‘For Intelligence thus’.\(^{34}\) Throughout the *Dove*’s run, however, a recognisable preface commonly filled a third or even a half of the entire issue. Smith conceptualised his preface by distinguishing between two functions in his newsbook: ‘intelligence’ (news, in the main part of the newsbook) and ‘information’. As Joad Raymond has explained, ‘information’ was about providing *interpretations* for readers to embrace. Smith wrote,

> And as I would satisfie the desires of men in communicating Intelligence; so I would informe their judgements of the grounds and cause of the vicissitude of things, the alteration and changes of times and men, from prosperous to calamitous; that so there may be a healing of such evils as break out from corrupt causes.\(^{35}\)

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\(^{32}\) The *Scotish Dove* is discussed by Frank, *Beginnings*, pp. 55-6, 62-3, 92-3, 109-10, 125-6; Cotton, ‘Newsbooks’, ch. 4; Raymond, *Invention*, pp. 34-5. All three are dismissive of the quality of the *Dove*’s prefaces. The eponymous ‘Dove’ flies around the country to gather the news, and brings it back to London to be reported in the newsbook. In the context of civil war, this is safer than conventional land-based news-gathering. See *Scotish Dove*, 1 (20 October 1643), pp. 1-2.

\(^{33}\) E.g., respectively, *Scotish Dove*, 15 (26 January 1644), 47 (6 September 1644), 39 (13 July 1644), 122 (18 February 1646).

\(^{34}\) This full demarcation appears to have begun with issue 126 (18 March 1646).

\(^{35}\) *Scotish Dove*, 52 (18 October 1644), p. 402.
Elsewhere, Smith described his prefaces in terms of ‘instruction’ and ‘discourse’, other comment-related keywords. One opponent labelled the preface in the *Dove* as a ‘Sermon’, associating it with another form of comment – indeed, another regular form of comment.

Two other newsbooks, the *Moderate* (1648-49) and *Mercurius Politicus* (1650-60), used prefaces in a different way: to circulate radical political ideas during the most turbulent phase of the civil wars, before and after the regicide. Indeed, these are the most famous examples of newsbook prefaces, having attracted attention from scholars of political thought. The *Moderate* was a parliamentarian newsbook, perhaps written by Gilbert Mabbott, a print licenser, that expressed radical and sometimes Leveller sympathies, and its prefaces included justifications of the king’s trial and execution based on popular sovereignty. *Mercurius Politicus* was the official newsbook for successive post-regicidal regimes, written by the serial newsbook author Marchamont Nedham, and it contained two series of prefaces that articulated a classical theory of republicanism. In both cases, the prefaces were connected with wider pamphlet literature: the *Moderate* shared the text of some of its prefaces with pamphlets, and Nedham also published his prefaces separately as two pamphlets, *The Case of the Common-Wealth of England, Stated* (1650) and *The Excellencie of a Free State* (1656). In Nedham’s case, the text appeared in a more simplified form in the newsbook than in the pamphlets, lacking some examples and critical apparatus, suggesting that Nedham was aiming the newsbook at a broader audience than the pamphlet. In addition, it should be emphasised that political theory prefaces were

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37 Wither, *Great Assises*, p. 28. Cotton, ‘Newsbooks’, p. 111, also calls it a ‘sermon’, although it is unclear how metaphorically and mockingly he uses the term.
40 Curelly, *Moderate*, ch. 2; Raymond, *Making the News*, ch. 8. *Case* pre-dated the equivalent *Politicus* editorials (1650-51), while *Excellencie* post-dated the equivalent *Politicus* editorials (1651-52).
only a small part of the Moderate and Mercurius Politicus: both newsbooks also contained prefaces on other subjects (the first fifteen prefaces in Politicus mostly contained anti-royalist satire rather than political theory); neither included prefaces throughout their run (the Moderate did not have prefaces at the outset, and there were virtually none in Politicus after 1652); and the preface filled only a fraction of each newsbook, which mostly contained news. Nevertheless, it is striking that each of these newsbooks used prefaces to convey political theory in regular instalments.

Prefaces were sometimes combined with a second form of pamphlet comment that was imported into newsbooks: animadversions. This was the formal process of answering or commenting on a text, and had featured in pamphlets since the late-sixteenth century, especially in religious controversy such as the Puritan ‘Martin Marprelate’ tracts. In the civil wars, animadversions were widely used in royalist-parliamentarian pamphlet exchanges. Animadversions sometimes took the form of alternating passages of text (often in italics) and answer (often in roman typeface) – what has been called ad locum animadversion – and this model was imported into newsbooks. Most often, animadversions were used to respond to other newsbooks, to ‘correct’ their news. Some newsbooks had an animadversions section, at the end or the start, where it doubled up as a preface. In a few minor cases, serials designed solely or primarily to convey animadversions appeared.

The earliest example – indeed, the earliest comment section in any newsbook – was in the king’s official newsbook, Mercurius Aulicus (1643-45). In around half of its issues, beginning in March/April 1643, the day-by-day news sections were appended by animadversions on the London newsbooks, designed to counter their false, parliamentarian-tinged news (Fig. 5).

And now we are fallen on the detection of untruths, I shall next make a generall muster of those trimme inventions, which occurre in some of the last London-newes-books, being six in number; (for so many weekly cheats do they publish...
constantly to gull the people of their mony) who differ as much from each other as they all do from truth.\textsuperscript{45}

This section constituted a series of numbered, italicised quotes from other newsbooks, alternated with bracketed comments that corrected facts about numbers, places, times and people's casualty status (\textit{Aulicus} liked to mock parliamentarians for claiming that certain royalists were dead, when they remained alive and well). In one issue from January 1644, for example, it contained twenty-four numbered items over two pages, but this varied greatly.\textsuperscript{46} Admittedly, this was not fully developed as a comment section: it was not introduced with a headline or space, was not a consistent feature, and shared its italics-bracket form with comment on texts quoted elsewhere in the newsbook. Nonetheless, it provides the first example of including comment alongside news rather than just within it.

\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Mercurius Aulicus}, 1.30 (29 July 1643), p. 406.

\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Mercurius Aulicus}, 2.1 (6 January 1644), pp. 765-6.
primary functions was to act as the parliamentarian answerer of Aulicus. As Britanicus noted, ‘perhaps Aulicus may call me his Commentator in time, for I write upon him every weeke’. He later claimed success in his aims: ‘Have I not uncovered the Aulicus, the Pamphlet of Iniquity, and laid it open to the Kingdom, and all Posterity that read me?’ Sometimes these animadversions featured in a final section headed ‘Aulicus’ (Fig. 6), which mirrored Aulicus’s own final section, but often they were placed as the initial, dominant feature of an issue, filling six pages before a final news section headed ‘Intelligence’. In these sections, Britanicus usually alternated between paragraphs that described points in Aulicus and paragraphs that provided a response. This model of animadversions preface was imitated by other newsbooks, notably the Spie (1644) and Diutinus Britanicus (1646-47). Animadversions on texts other than newsbooks were less common, but did occur. Mercurius Britanicus included controversial animadversions on a cache of the king’s private letters that was seized at Naseby. Diutinus Britanicus used animadversions on various royalist publications to expose the royalists: ‘to unvaile the Vizards and disguises of the Malignant Scribers and Pharases, who are weekly contriving paper plotts, for a Popish Prelaticall cause’. Thus, taking one royalist pamphlet, ‘I shall by examination discover something of the designe, which I shall endeavour to doe to undeceive the people’.

Less commonly, some newsbooks deployed a third form of pamphlet comment, the query. Questions and answers were found in various contexts, including formal scholarly inquiry, religious controversy and catechisms. Queries were brought into newsbooks at a similar time to prefaces, in late 1643 and early 1644, especially in Mercurius Britanicus (from November 1643) and the Parliament Scout (from January 1644).


48 Mercurius Britanicus, 7 (10 October 1643), p. 52; 51 (30 September 1644), p. 399.

49 The latter was probably written by Britanicus’s first author, Thomas Audley.

50 Diutinus Britanicus, 4 (23 December 1646), pp. 25-6. The royalist pamphlet answered is An Answer Sent to the Ecclesiastical Assembly at London (Newcastle?, 1646). Diutinus Britanicus, 7 (13 January 1647), responds to a royalist almanac.

51 Mercurius Britanicus contained ‘queries’ from issue 14 (30 November 1643) and ‘doubts and satisfactions’ from issue 17 (21 December 1643). The Parliament Scout included them from issue 30 (19 January 1644). Other examples of queries in newsbooks include Scotish Dove, 13 (12 January
however, they were usually located after the news. Britanicus contained both ‘queries’, asking pointed questions such as ‘Whether arming of Papists be a good way to suppress Popery?’ (implied answer: no), and ‘doubt’ and ‘satisfaction’ sections, modelled on catechisms, by which Britanicus queried matters such as ‘Whether had the King or people their designe first in agitation?’ (given answer: the war was the king’s fault) (Fig. 6). The inclusion of a ‘weekly satisfaction at the bottome of the sheete’, Britanicus argued, meant that ‘it may be a word or two thus, may reach further than a Volume, and the satisfactions being cheaper, may be more universall’.52

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One minor newsbook drew heavily on the query. The *Compleate Intelligencer and Resolver* (1643), possibly written by George Smith of the *Scotish Dove*, ran to five issues, each divided into ‘intelligence’ and ‘questions and resolutions’ sections. The latter section provided commentary on matters such as the king’s cessation with Ireland, the parliamentarian agreement with the Scots in the Solemn League and Covenant, and the future of Archbishop Laud, and explicitly contained ‘Observations’:

I shall now entertaine you, and hereafter with an exact Relation, and because meare relations are but windy, and scarce leave any dint or impression behind them, I shall bind up some Observations with them, and since the change of our affaires are such, as must introduce an Alteration in both *State* and *Church*, I shall begin now to give you weekly resolutions upon the Scruples either in businesse of *State* or *Religion*, that so the Kingdome may be at once informed, and reformed.

The newsbook further elaborated its twin aims of summarising news and resolving issues through comment:

Because there are so many Pamphlets that the Reader cannot well get through the crowde of them to the newes, nor come handsomely at the Intelligence for the multitude of those that relate it, not being able to see wood for trees, I present to you one entire and *Compleat Intelligencer*, and because these are times of *Doubts* and *Scruples*, and *Differences*, I have made it my methode to resolve some of them every weeke.\(^53\)

Although queries were less common in newsbooks than prefaces and animadversions, they were a particularly direct vehicle for comment.

A fourth form of pamphlet comment imported into newsbooks was *ballads*. Ballads were popular poems or songs that crossed boundaries between oral, manuscript and printed media, and were an important site of political comment.\(^54\) In civil war newsbooks, they were primarily a feature of the 1647-50 ‘Mercuries’, which usually began with a ballad that offered commentary on the week’s news, the state of the times or the balance of


power between parties. The ballad was particularly used for jocular, subversive comment. The Commonwealth’s official newsbook, *Mercurius Politicus*, which framed itself as an answer and successor to the 1647-50 ‘Mercuries’ – which were mostly royalist – deliberately eschewed ballads in order to mark a break from the past and underline the eclipse of the royalist cause:

WHY Should not the Common-wealth have a Fool, as well as the King had?... you’ll say, I am out of fashion, because I make neither Rimes [i.e. ballads] nor Faces, for Fidlers pay, like the Royal Mercuries.

Although some 1650s newsbooks did contain ballads, this form, like prefaces, animadversions and queries, was not a lasting vehicle for including comment alongside news within newspapers.

Comment sections were a new and significant feature of the civil war newsbook. Utilising pre-existing forms of pamphlet comment – prefaces, animadversions, queries and ballads – newsbook writers included partisan comment to increase the effectiveness of their publications as partisan weapons. Its subjects included opinions on the virtues and vices of the two sides, providential interpretations of the war’s course, exhortations to action, political theory, commenting on opponents’ publications and analysis of the balance of forces. However, comment sections did not become a lasting feature of newspapers at this time. The next part of this chapter remains within the civil war period, by considering in more detail the group of newsbooks that were most filled with comment: the ‘Mercuries’ of 1647-50.

‘Mercuries’, 1647-1650

Civil war newsbooks reached their maximum capacity as vehicles for comment in the ‘Mercuries’ of 1647-50, an extraordinary proliferation of newsbooks, mostly supporting the royalist cause, during the most revolutionary phase of the civil wars (Fig. 7). Although

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55 Raymond, *Invention*, p. 165, gives a few examples of pre-1647 newsbook poetry. The ‘Mercuries’ are discussed in the next section.
56 For an example of a ballad in a Mercury of 1647-50, see below, p. 77, fig. 7.
58 Contemporaries and historians have defined ‘Mercuries’ in different ways, ranging from a broad synonym for ‘newsbooks’ to a narrow category of royalist publications of the late 1640s. In this
Mercuries took diverse forms, most leaned heavily on comment. They contained not only comment within news (interpolated and reported comment) and comment alongside news (comment sections), but often also comment in place of news (comment supplanting news). They identified with Mercury, the Roman messenger god, who represented news-bringing, and was used as a mask or persona who spoke to readers in a jocular, partisan and opinionated style. Each Mercury adopted a different aspect, such as Melancholic Mercury (Mercurius Melancholicus), Warmongering Mercury (Mercurius Bellicus), and Refuting Mercury (Mercurius Elencticus). Lying at the intersection of newsbooks and pamphlets, Mercuries show the flexibility possible when constructing printed news serials, but also their ultimate limitations. At a time when ‘serials’ could still only be conceived as ‘news serials’, those who wished to publish regular comment had to adapt the newsbook form to their needs. Sometimes, this even meant treating the newsbook form as a shell, and substituting partisan comment for news for much of the substantive content. Ultimately, the generic instability of Mercuries explains why dedicated comment serials developed later in the century to manage the same impulses more directly.

discussion, the term ‘Mercuries’ is used to refer to comment-heavy newspapers, of both sides, of the period between 1647 and 1650. This is not intended to imply that they were a distinct genre, or that other definitions are not possible, but is a convenient shorthand for an important phenomenon in serial comment. The chief authorities on these Mercuries are Frank, Beginnings; Lois Potter, Secret Rites and Secret Writing: Royalist Literature, 1641-1660 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Raymond, Invention; Jason McElligott, Royalism, Print and Censorship in Revolutionary England (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2007). See also David Underdown, ‘The Man in the Moon: Loyalty and Libel in Popular Politics, 1640-1660’, in his A Freeborn People: Politics and the Nation in Seventeenth-Century England (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 90-111; Jason McElligott, ‘John Crouch: A Royalist Journalist in Cromwellian England’, Media History, 10:3 (2004), pp. 139-55; Laurent Curelly, “Ha, Ha, Ha”: Modes of Satire in the Royalist Newsbook The Man in the Moon’, Revue de la Société d’Études Anglaises et Américaines des XVIIe et XVIIIe Siècles, 70 (2013), pp. 73-90.
The Mercuries appeared during dramatic historical circumstances. The royalists had lost the civil war, the king was imprisoned, tried and executed, and a republic was proclaimed. In the absence of the exiled court in Oxford, which had been the centre of the royalist cause until 1646, royalists had scattered and gone underground. In this context, groups of royalists began to publish serials to keep the royalist flame alive, to irritate the victorious parliamentarians, and to galvanise dejected royalists into restoring Charles I through a new civil war (in 1648) or advancing Charles II’s claim to the throne (in 1649 and 1650). These aims led many of these serials to adopt a punchy, satirical, irreverent manner – and to be filled with partisan comment. The most successful were *Mercurius Melancholicus* (1647-48), *Mercurius Pragmaticus* (1647-49), *Mercurius Elencticus* (1647-49), *Mercurius Bellicus* (1647-48) and *Man in the Moon* (1649-50), but there were many dozens, often short-lived, with titles such as *Mercurius Clericus* (1647), *Mercurius Morbicus* (1647).
and *Mercurius Psitacus* (1648).\(^{59}\) Even listing these titles is misleading, because the major Mercuries were masks that were worn by multiple people: it is not always possible to distinguish between different iterations of, say, *Mercurius Pragmaticus*.\(^{60}\) Although most Mercuries were royalist, there were parliamentarian/pro-Commonwealth Mercuries too, for instance *Mercurius Britanicus* (1648), *Mercurius Censorius* (1648), *Mercurius Honestus* (1648) and *Mercurius Britanicus* (1649).\(^{61}\) There were also pamphlet Mercuries, some of which closely resembled serial Mercuries.\(^{62}\) Indeed, many serial Mercuries were barely serial at all, only appearing for one or two issues.

Scholars have characterised Mercuries by emphasising their inclusion of satire, humour and comment and their tendency to exclude genuine news. P.W. Thomas claimed that ‘all were commentators rather than reporters’. Lois Potter argued, ““News”… is the wrong word for their contents, which can best be read as satiric fantasy tempered by a talent for verse’. For Joad Raymond, ‘[m]any paid little attention to the news, but indulged in sexual and political satire, and criticized other newsbooks for scurrility and inaccuracy’. Jason McElligott, the most thorough scholar of these newsbooks, argued:

There was little, if any, hard ‘news’ in most of these titles; more often than not they are filled with comments or reflections upon events which were widely known to the public because they had been reported elsewhere. They read less like books of ‘news’ or newspapers than the works of pugnacious and opinionated newspaper columnists.

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\(^{59}\) Full lists can be found in NS. Some serials that did not bear the ‘Mercury’ name nonetheless shared the characteristics of ‘Mercury’ newsbooks, and therefore deserve to be treated as Mercuries. The most important example is *Man in the Moon*, but others include the *Parliament-Kite, Parliaments Vulture, Parliaments Scrich-Owle, Martin Nonsense, Hermes Stratjcus* (although Hermes was the Greek name for Mercury) and two serials named the *Royall Diurnall*.

\(^{60}\) See Jason Peacey, “‘The Counterfeit Silly Curr”: Money, Politics, and the Forging of Royalist Newspapers During the English Civil War’, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 67:1 (2004), pp. 27-57; McElligott, *Royalism*, pp. 100-5. The dates I am using follow NS, but a case could be made for including titles such as *Mercurius Pragmaticus* (1649-50, NS 370) and *Mercurius Elencticus* (1649, NS 316) under the broader ‘Pragmaticus’ and ‘Elencticus’ headings.

\(^{61}\) For clarification, this *Britanicus* is NS 282, and *Britannicus* is NS 285.

These are reasonable assessments, although two points should be stressed.\textsuperscript{63} First, Mercuries were diverse. As will be demonstrated by the examples that follow, one Mercury might indeed be full of little but comment, but another might resemble a partisan newspaper – sometimes even varying between issues of the same Mercury. This is not to downplay the importance of Mercuries as vehicles for comment – they were the most comment-heavy newspapers of the seventeenth century – but they should not be regarded simply as comment-dominated serials.

Secondly, Mercuries were, in form at least, a group of newsbooks – newsbooks with a penchant for comment, jocularity and partisanship, but which retained the appearance and (sometimes) function of newsbooks nonetheless. They represented an experiment in the flexibility of the newsbook genre, not the pioneering of a new genre. They generally carried subtitles containing the terms ‘news’ and ‘intelligence’: \textit{Mercurius Melancholicus} promised ‘NEWES FROM WESTMINSTER, and other Parts’, while \textit{Mercurius Pragmaticus} was ‘Communicating Intelligence from all parts, touching all Affaires, Designes, Humours, and Conditions, throughout the Kingdome’. \textit{Mercurius Pragmaticus} began, ‘Here’s a time indeed to undertake \textit{Intelligence}!... ‘tis a dangerous businesse now to write Newes; for, Truth comes within the compasse of Treason’, and \textit{Mercurius Elencticus} opened, ‘Roome for another \textit{Mercury}... my heart is honest, and my Intelligence true’.\textsuperscript{64} Mercuries referred to themselves and one another as ‘intelligencers’, and often indicated the start of the main news content with phrases such as ‘Now for Newes’ or ‘But to Intelligence’. Some were built around day-by-day news headings, for instance certain issues of \textit{Mercurius Elencticus} and \textit{Man in the Moon}.\textsuperscript{65} The major newsbooks also had a clear news function. \textit{Mercurius Pragmaticus} provided some of the best parliamentary news of the era, for instance giving a detailed account of Pride’s Purge in December 1648, perhaps benefiting from a mole within Parliament.\textsuperscript{66}

The 1647-50 Mercuries were part of a longer tradition of ‘Mercury’ in news publications: a late-1640s evolution from a mid-1640s subversion of an earlier understanding of ‘Mercury’, and which was itself subverted in the 1650s.\textsuperscript{67} ‘Mercury’, or

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\textsuperscript{63} Thomas, \textit{Berkenhead}, p. 151; Potter, \textit{Secret Rites}, p. 15; Raymond, \textit{Invention}, p. 60; McElligott, \textit{Royalism}, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{64} \textit{Mercurius Pragmaticus}, 1.1 (21 September 1647), pp. 1-2; \textit{Mercurius Elencticus}, 1 (5 November 1647), p. 1.
\textsuperscript{65} E.g. \textit{Mercurius Elencticus}, 57-59 (26 December 1648, 2 January 1649, 9 January 1649); \textit{Man in the Moon}, 24 (10 October 1649).
\textsuperscript{66} Raymond, \textit{Invention}, pp. 67, 176.
\textsuperscript{67} Cf. \textit{Britanicus Vapulans}, 1 (4 November 1643), p. 1, for an early genealogy of ‘Mercury’ in news publication, linking \textit{Mercurius Gallobelgicus}, corantos and \textit{Mercurius Aulicus}.
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rather ‘Mercurius’, referred to the Roman messenger god. The original connotations of
‘Mercurius’ in news publication were, simply, of being a messenger of news, carrying
Latinate respectability. Mercury was first used to label news publications on the continent.
As indicated above, the first printed news serial in Europe was Mercurius Gallobelgicus, a
biannual Latin summary of European news launched in Cologne in 1594, and this headed a
long tradition of ‘Mercurius’ long-timespan news serials in Europe.68 The label was first
applied to British newspapers in the 1620s, when corantos adopted the imprint ‘printed for
Mercurius Britannicus’ in 1625-26.69 The reference was to Gallobelgicus, which was well-
known in Britain: the Franco-Belgian Mercury was answered by the British Mercury. This
was the context for the royalists’ use of ‘Mercurius Aulicus’ – the Court Mercury – as the
title of their official newsbook in January 1643, contrasting with the vulgar, vernacular titles
of parliamentarian newsbooks such as Diurnall Occurrences and Some Speciall Passages.70
Following Aulicus, the Mercury label proliferated in Britain, featuring in the title of over a
hundred serials, in addition to many pamphlets. In its British context, too, the fundamental
meaning of Mercury was simply of a messenger of news. A 1656 dictionary explained that
Mercury was ‘commonly used for a swift messenger, or for a book of news, because such
books are (as it were) the messengers of the newes’. A minor Mercurius Elenticus (1651)
affirmed the Mercury/news link when it claimed, ‘I profess a Mercury, not an Orator, and
the delivery of news more than of opinion’.71 Indeed, observers often used ‘Mercury’ as a
catch-all term for printed news serials, synonymous with ‘diurnals’, ‘newsbooks’ and
‘intelligencers’.

However, the meaning of Mercury also began to shift in the mid-1640s, acquiring
new connotations of comment, partisanship and jocularity. This was largely due to the
examples of the sparring royalist and parliamentarian newsbooks, Mercurius Aulicus (1643-
45) and Mercurius Britannicus (1643-46), which were associated with these characteristics.
Aulicus was blatantly partisan and increasingly adopted a witty style, especially after John
Berkenhead became its chief author in September 1643.72 Indeed, parliamentarians played
up Aulicus’s partisanship and jocularity – or rather, its attempted but empty wit – in their

68 Raymond, Invention, pp. 6-7. For more on European uses of ‘Mercury’, see Noah Millstone,
‘Designed for Collection: Early Modern News and the Production of History’, Media History, 23:2
69 Raymond, Pamphlets, p. 137.
70 Raymond, Invention, p. 26.
71 Thomas Blount, Glossographia (London, 1656), sig. Bb5r; Mercurius Pragmaticus, 3 (24 June 1651),
p. 19.
72 Thomas, Berkenhead, pp. 33-4.
critiques of the newsbook, to undermine its credibility. One parliamentarian pamphlet alleged that all minds in Oxford were harnessed for coming up with jests for *Aulicus*:

> For they say there is deepe Excise put upon all Braines that pretend in the least wise to Wit, and that the Returnes of all Jests, halfe-jests, quarter-jests, and Quibbles, happening within the limits of the Camp, Court, or the Taverns, that may any waies twitch the Round-heads, are once a week made upon just account, into *Berkinheads* Office, towards the maintenance of this same *Aulicus*.

Then, in turn, the main parliamentarian answerer of *Aulicus*, *Mercurius Britannicus*, was itself the most partisan and jocular newsbook on its own side. *Britanicus* was also the first major newsbook that made comment a central part of its design, including through techniques that have already been indicated, such as animadversions (which could fill up to three-quarters of newsbook space) and queries. *Britanicus* was not a comment serial – its avowed design was ‘Communicating the affaires of great BRITAINE’, and its news function was real, especially in weeks without an *Aulicus* to answer – but as a newsbook, its flexibility was unprecedented. Other minor serials in the mid-1640s adopted a similar style, for instance the *Welch Mercury* (1643-44) and *Diutinus Britannicus* (1646-47). The example and reputation of *Britanicus*, in particular, provided a foundation on which post-1647 Mercuries would build.

The fact that Mercury was a *character* also contributed to its transformation from plain messenger of news into a comment-heavy form. Newsbooks and their critics alike widely personified a newsbook’s author, or even the newsbook itself, as ‘Mercury’. The label ‘Mercurius Aulicus’, for instance, was sometimes simply used to describe the newsbook, but sometimes was the figure of Berkenhead, or even a fictionalised character who represented the newsbook. This meant that Mercury could tend towards a more discursive and personal style. This effect was enhanced by the array of adjectives used to

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76 Raymond, *Invention*, p. 153, explicitly links the ‘jocular aggression’ of *Britanicus* to the 1647-50 Mercuries.
77 For more on *Aulicus*’s reception, see below, pp. 232-4.
qualify ‘Mercurius’ in newsbook titles, which established personality traits that shaped the styling of a Mercury newsbook.

The reshaping of Mercury was augmented by wider associations of the term. Although the term ‘Mercury’ was brought into news publication for its core sense of carrying news, its meaning adapted in line with other connotations of Mercury as a god, planet or chemical. The 1656 definition of ‘Mercury’ cited above indicates that Mercury could also be talkative, deceitful, humorous or destructive:

Mercury... the god of Eloquence, Merchandize, Chivalry, and Thievery; also author of the Harp, and guider of the way, he was said to have wings on his arms, and feet... Mercury, with the Alchymists is Quicksilver. Also one of the seven Planets.

Mercurial... born under the Planet Mercury; hence humorous or fantastical; Also prating, talkative; subtil, or deceitful.

Mercurialize... to be humorous; or phantastical, to be light footed, to prattle or babble; Also to be eloquent, as Mercury was.78

Critics of Aulicus and Britanicus soon made the link. One parliamentarian commented of Aulicus, ‘Oxford Mercury is Ovids Mercury, that steals Oxen, and with a charmed Rod endeavours to beslumber and stupifie the people’. Of Britanicus it was said,

For use of Mercury hee was accus’d,
Which weekly hee into his inke infus’d,
Thereby to murther, and destroy the fame
Of many, with strange obloquie, and shame.

Another contemporary observed that ‘all Mercuries having the Planet Mercurie predominant at their Nativities, cannot but retaine a twang of Lying’. The Spie (1644), a parliamentarian newsbook, explained that it came ‘under the name of the Spie, rather then Mercurie; for this Mercurie is proved such a juggler, that I am loth to trust him’.79

78 Blount, Glossographia, sig. Bb5r.
79 Intelligence from the Armie, p. 1; Wither, Great Assises, p. 10; Wither, Mercurius Rusticus, pp. 1-2; Spie, 1 (30 January 1644), p. 1.
These currents reached their apogee in the Mercuries of 1647-50. These Mercuries were more broadly conceived than previous newsbooks, moving the form towards comment. Some Mercuries identified themselves with comment directly. *Mercurius Pragmaticus* (1647-49) praised itself on its first anniversary by arguing that ‘he which is Master of these Pamphlets, needs no other Comment upon this last yeares Proceedings, of the Houses and the Army’. The royalist *Mercurius Veridicus* (1648) explained, ‘i am resolved to call a Spade, a Spade, a Rebell, a Rebell, a Traytor, a Traytor... I shall take leave to Comment upon their Actions, that the world may rightly understand them; That shall be my taske’. One issue of *Mercurius Dogmaticus* (1648) was subtitled ‘The Opinionist’.

More commonly, however, Mercuries used language that indicated comment in more particular ways. One keyword was ‘discovery’, which was designed to comment negatively on political opponents through the concept of exposure. The royalist *Mercurius Publicus* (1648), for example, promised ‘the further discovery of that Mystery of Iniquity the present PARLIAMENT at WESTMINSTER’, by ‘laying open unto the publique; their Oppressions, Corruptions, impostures, forgeries, robberies, rapines, perjuries, Murthers, Sacriledge; all their deceipts, and villanies, and their breach of the publique Trust’. Similarly, *Man in the Moon* (1649-50) opened by announcing, ‘Make room there for the Man in the Moon, that his Nocturnall walkes, hath discovered more Knavery then ever (before these prodigious times) was acted by any People under the Sun’.

In a similar way, ‘truth’ was a nominally factual term, but was used in Mercuries to represent judgements and opinion about the times. *Mercurius Militaris* (1649) described itself as ‘Times only truth-teller, faithfully undeceiving, the expectations of the vulgar, (who are daily abused by a crew of brainlesse and brazen-faced news-scriblers (whether royall, martill, or Parliamentall)’. *Mercurius Melancholicus* lamented, ‘The State-Machiavillians have been long time in a deep study how to suppresse me and the rest of the telltroths of the Age’, while *Pragmaticus* looked back on its first year saying that ‘it was my care ever to write nothing but Truth’.

Mercuries also defined themselves in terms of ‘satiric whips’ that lashed political opponents through negative comment. Just before the regicide, *Mercurius Pragmaticus* said, ‘let me knott my Satyrick Whip-coard and sting your cauterized Consciences a little

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81 *Mercurius Publicus*, 1 (16 May 1648), p. 2; *Man in the Moon*, 1 (16 April 1649), p. 3.
82 *Mercurius Militaris; Mercurius Melancholicus*, 56 (25 September 1648), p. 178; *Mercurius Pragmaticus*, 2.20 (15 August 1648), sig. Y1r.
with some more *rugged* and serious Reprehensions; ye obdurate Rebells at *Westminster*. 
*Man in the Moon* promised,

> With *pricking Bushes* at my back,  
> I’le make *Satyrick Whipps*,  
> There’s not a *Traytor* but Ile *thwack*  
> Untill he *winch* and *Skipp*.

Later in the same issue, it added:

> neither will I spare them in the least, for I carry a bundle of Rods at my back to  
> chastize their Pride, and have an old *Dogge*, that is as well flesh’d at themselves,  
> will *bite sore*, and fetch *blood* where ever he lays hold with his *Satyrick Thwangs*,  
> and therefore let them take this for a *fair warning*, amend their lives, repent of  
> their Wickednesse, and become more honest, or else take what follows.\(^8^3\)

Through discovering, truth-telling and satirising, Mercuries came subtly, but firmly, into the world of published comment.

What did this mean in practice? Mercuries utilised all of the forms of comment section that featured in civil war newsbooks: prefaces, queries, animadversions, ballads. Indeed, Mercuries often began with a ballad and a prose preface. Some minor Mercuries combined these forms to an extraordinary degree: one issue of *Mercurius Publicus* (1648) included a ballad, queries, prayer and general prose comment as well as news.\(^8^4\) Although some Mercuries resembled a supercharged version of the ‘preface-intelligence’ model, for other Mercuries, comment spread across the whole publication.\(^8^5\) Some minor Mercuries were effectively comment serials in newsbook form, for instance *Mercurius Clericus* (1647) and *Mercurius Honestus* (1648), the latter of which contained a dialogue involving a ‘Malignant’ and ‘Doctors’ named ‘Pragmaticus’ and ‘Elencticus’.

Comment in Mercuries was hyper-partisan. Royalist Mercuries were designed to unite and inspire the royalists in defeat, so were filled with defiant comment about the

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\(^8^3\) *Mercurius Pragmaticus*, 2.42 (30 January 1649), sig. Hhh1r-Hhh1v; *Man in the Moon*, 1 (16 April 1649), pp. 1, 3.
\(^8^4\) *Mercurius Publicus*, 2 (26 May 1648).
\(^8^5\) Issues with a preface-intelligence model include *Mercurius Elencticus*, 57-59 (26 December 1648, 2 January 1649, 9 January 1649). Issues where comment filled most of the publication include *Mercurius Melancholicus*, 25-26 (19 February 1648, 28 February 1648).
royalists’ chances of success, panegyrical comment about the king, and satirical comment against parliamentarian leaders. These themes can be illustrated by a case study. On 11 November 1647, Charles I escaped from Hampton Court, where he had been imprisoned by the army for around eleven weeks, after receiving information that his life was in danger. Four royalist Mercuries – *Melancholicus, Pragmaticus, Elencticus and Bellicus* – all responded to this significant event over the following fortnight.86

Their primary theme was defiance about the king’s escape and optimism about the eventual success of the royalist cause. *Elencticus* began by commenting that anti-royalist forces always failed during the month of November, citing the Gunpowder Plot as a precedent:

Tis... a most unlucky moneth to destroy Kings in. *Faux* [i.e. Guy Fawkes] and his fellowes in the Powder Treason found it fatall; and *Fairfax* his Agitators [i.e. anti-royalists in the army] very infortunat[e].

*Bellicus* ended with a couplet that confidently predicted an ultimate royalist victory:

That *CHARLES* must raigne, and when he once doth Raigne,  
Our greatest Losse, shall prove our greatest Gaine.

*Melancholicus* had a title-page poem addressed to the Independents, the pro-army faction within Parliament, that predicted their failure, and the issue concluded, ‘His Majesty is wel, and merry, God be thanked’.

This optimism was accompanied by praise for the king as a virtuous and saintly figure, and biblical and providential language that associated God with royalism. The opening poem in *Pragmaticus* associated the king with Christ, his capture and maltreatment by the parliamentarians as akin to crucifixion, and his escape as a resurrection (Fig. 7). *Elencticus* emphasised the king’s virtue and his suffering:

86 The four issues discussed are *Mercurius Melancholicus*, 12 (20 November 1647); *Mercurius Pragmaticus*, 1.9 (16 November 1647); *Mercurius Elencticus*, 3 (19 November 1647); *Mercurius Bellicus*, 1 (22 November 1647). There are in fact two *Pragmaticus* issues for this week; I have considered that at BL, E.414.(15.), which was probably written by Marchamont Nedham, cf. Raymond, *Making the News*, 8.05. See above, p. 77, fig. 7, for the first page of this *Pragmaticus*. 85
And wilt thou not (O England!) resent the sad Condition of thy Soveraign? Or art thou not yet sensible of His unparallell’d sufferings? Seest thou not His Constancy to His Religion, His Patience, and Pietie[.] 

Melancholicus deemed this a ‘week of wonders, wherein... the death of our dear and dread Soveraign, the confusion of an Army, the utter destruction of Parliament and Kingdom were determined, but by divine prudence rescued and prevented’. For Elencticus, ‘it pleased God to deliver Him out of their Bloody hands’, while Bellicus commented on his ‘miraculous deliverance from those miscreant Infidels’.

Panegyrical and providential language around the king was matched by attacks on his opponents. These Mercuries expressed revulsion at the plot to have him killed, as part of a wider denigration of the parliamentarians and army. Using a historical analogy, Pragmaticus speculated on a possible parliamentarian plan to kill the king, ‘considering the madnesse of a former Age hath given them a Precedent for the practise of as damnable a vilany, when they carried that unfortunate Prince Edward the Second from place to place... till at length he was murdered in Berkeley Castle’. Elencticus commented on ‘their most Treasonable and damned designe of dissolving the English Monarchy in the Blood of our Gracious King Charles’, and attacked them in a couplet:

They’re very Lumps of sin, whose filth excels,
The blackest Customes of blind Infidells.

Bellicus demanded that the king’s captors be punished: ‘they must be hang’d’.

Two prominent elements of style in these Mercuries were the use of animal and hunting imagery, and, more widely, the use of humour. In Melancholicus, multiple animal images are mixed within the same paragraph: the king had ‘escaped from the hands of those bloody Vultures’, and ‘now the net is broke and the bird is escaped’, and, in seeking to recapture him, ‘the hungry blood-hounds are upon the scent: Was it ever heard that barking Currs durst hunt the angry Lyon?’. This language both dehumanised and demonised the king’s opponents, while presenting the king as a stately lion. Pragmaticus also used hunting imagery to discuss the attempt to recapture the king:

Come, come away Gentlemen of the Houses; winde your Horns, and let’s to the old sport of King-catching once againe. The Adjutators can provide you good Blood-hounds[.]
Humorous comment took many forms. *Pragmaticus* included a (presumably) fictional story about the parliamentarians taking action against the king’s dog, which had not taken part in the king’s escape:

the *Commissioners* of both *Houses* have taken his *Dog* (a poor *Curre* that his *Majesty* kept for pleasure) into safe Custody; for, he was not suffered to have any *Creature* else that was *loyall* to be familiar with; which being by great misfortune left behind, it is supposed the supreme Councell of *Adjutators* are drawing up an *Impeachment* against him, for being privy to the escape of his *Master*.

*Bellicus* indulged in a pun when calling for the execution of Colonel Whalley, who had been responsible for the king’s security: ‘*Whaly* hee shall be drown’d: and perpetually imprisoned in a *Whales* belly, and the great *Leviathan* shall bee his everlasting *Iaylor*’.

Comment, partisanship, humour: all were characteristic features of these *Mercuries*.

The *Mercury* as a form of comment-heavy newspaper was short-lived. Its heyday ended in 1650, when the final royalist *Mercuries* were suppressed, and the Commonwealth regime did not continue a similar model for its own purposes. The end was signified by the Commonwealth’s official newsbook, *Mercurius Politicus* (1650-60), which, as indicated above, asserted itself as the successor of the 1647-50 *Mercuries* while retreating from their rhetorical excesses. In 1651, a pamphlet mocked the *Mercuries* for having fallen silent:

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Why how now Gallants? is it possible
Such *rantum tantum* Heroes of the quill,
Which aw’d our ripest actions, should be
Thus silently damp’t in obscurity?...//
Seven tedious winters have they serv’d in rime
And obtrectation to reprove the Time[.]87
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Although there were dozens of new ‘*Mercurius*’ serials in the 1650s and early 1660s, these mostly took *Mercury* in two alternative directions: in a *more* subversive direction, represented by the nonsense news of *Mercurius Democritus* (1652-54) and the crypto-

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87 The *Hue and Cry After Those Rambling Protonotaries of the Times* (London, 1651), pp. 1-2. This pamphlet links the *Mercury* tradition back over seven years, i.e. presumably to *Mercurius Aulicus*, rather than demarcating the serials of 1647-50 as I have done here.
royalism of some later *Mercurius Pragmaticus* serials, and in a less subversive direction, towards plainer news. In 1660, a brief royalist Mercury of late-1640s mould, *Mercurius Phanaticus*, looked back on the Mercury tradition:

> Gentlemen, You may wonder that since the world hath put to silence those Famous Writers, *Democritus, Aulicus, Melancholicus*, there should be any one so hardy as to dare to assume their Stile and Elocution; ´tis true they were the Torches in their time, whose blaze lighted you out of the Cells of Melancholy to the pleasant Chamber of delight, where they burnt till they came to the Sockets and so expyr´d... But to shew the world that *Mercury* cannot dye, though *Democritus* may, or *Brittanicus* may: he is resolved to try one journey or two from the Press to the Shops, and to make himself the more acceptable to you, he hath ventured upon one *Metamorphosis* more, and stiles himself *Phanaticus*.[89]  

Mercury did not disappear altogether from serial titles after the Restoration. Mercury had a broad range of applications in the later-Stuart period, including partisan newspapers such as the *True Protestant Mercury* (1680-82), plain newspapers such as the *British Mercury* (1710-16), comment serials such as *Mercurius Reformatus* (1689-94?) and *Mercurius Politicus* (1705), and even the innovative question-and-answer serial, the *Athenian Mercury* (1691-97). But 1647-50 Mercuries were the product of a particular time, and the next moment of extreme partisan pressure, the Succession Crisis, brought the comment serial in their place.

**Between waves, 1660s-1710s**

Between the Restoration and the Hanoverian succession, newspapers were a minor part of the comment media landscape. There were a few exceptions, when newspapers did convey more comment – especially during the Succession Crisis and the 1710-14 Harley ministry – but they generally confined their comment to material within the news. Comment sections

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88 Subversive Mercuries include *Mercurius Democritus, Mercurius Phreneticus*, another *Mercurius Phreneticus*, *Mercurius Heraclitus, Mercurius Fumigosus* and *Mercurius Nullus*. News Mercuries include *Mercurius Bellonius, Mercurius Britannicus* (1653) and *Mercurius Poeticus*. Collectively, early 1650s Mercuries are, to this author, the most perplexing group of serials of the entire 1641-c.1730 period to comprehend. See above, p. 19, n. 57.  
were all but absent from British newspapers over this half-century. Despite, or perhaps because of, the example of civil war newsbooks, even the most partisan newspapers had not admitted a place to comment alongside news, even though many of these newspapers shared the partisan objectives of their civil war predecessors.

Why did comment sections virtually disappear from newspapers after the 1660s? Initially, it partly reflected physical restrictions on newspaper publication – both the Protectorate and the Restoration monarchy enforced a monopoly of printed serial news, so a thriving newsbook market simply ceased to exist. Partly it reflects the influence of the London Gazette, the official newspaper after 1665. The Gazette’s more sober, comment-free news influenced other newspapers such as the Daily Courant, whose rejection of ‘reflections’ was quoted above. In addition, the shift from the quarto format of the newsbook to the half-sheet folio format of the newspaper, which was catalysed by the Gazette, took newspapers further away from the wider pamphlet tradition, which was perhaps more accommodating of comment.

One of the most important reasons for the paucity of comment sections in later-Stuart newspapers lies in the relationship between newspapers and the new ‘comment serials’ that emerged in the 1680s. Comment serials increasingly absorbed the function of publishing regular comment from newspapers, until, by the 1700s, a clear division of labour had developed between the two forms, with newspapers concentrating on news and comment serials concentrating on comment. Comment serials, not newspapers, were the later-Stuart heirs to the comment functions of civil war newsbooks.

In addition, a cultural shift against ‘opinion’ in the 1660s, due to its associations with sedition and revolution, may have dampened the inclusion of overt comment in newspapers, especially among opposition/Whig newspapers of the Succession Crisis, which were trying to reject loyalist/Tory claims that they were reheated, 1640s-style ‘rebel’ publications. Perhaps, these news-writers were simply following readers, who may have expected newspapers to contain news, and been correspondingly sceptical about newspapers that were blatant vehicles for comment and partisanship. In addition, news may have been considered sufficiently effective as a vehicle for conveying political messages. Benjamin Harris could express anti-Catholicism in his Protestant (Domestick) Intelligence (1679-81) forcefully enough through a relentless series of news reports that presented papists and Jesuits in a terrible light.

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90 See above, p. 59.
91 Full discussion of this is in chapter 3.
Notwithstanding these pressures, there were a few cases of newspapers with comment sections under the later Stuarts. These deserve attention for going against the trend, and for establishing patterns that would become significant after the Hanoverian succession. One example, albeit *sui generis*, was James II’s newspaper, *Publick Occurrences Truely Stated* (1688). This frequently contained long prefaces that justified the king’s controversial toleration policy, which had alienated his Tory supporters. In the autumn of 1688, with crisis coming and a growing need to shore up support, comment prefaces filled an increasing proportion of the newspaper, bringing it close to being a *de facto* comment serial. One issue in September 1688, for example, was three-quarters comment, advocating union among the people and liberty of conscience.\(^92\)

R.B. Walker, a leading scholar of 1690s newspapers, claimed that post-1695 newspapers contained occasional ‘editorials’ on ‘rare occasions of special news’.\(^93\) Even setting aside the anachronism of the term ‘editorial’, this appears to overstate the case. On the few occasions when more substantial expressions of comment were included in these newspapers, they tended to feature *within* date/place news headings rather than separately, so did not have the spatial differentiation of comment sections that featured in civil war newsbooks and Hanoverian-era newspapers (although they sometimes functioned as comment sections in a *de facto* sense).\(^94\) Indeed, one example that has been referenced in this context has been misinterpreted. David Ogg argued that the *Flying Post* of 3 March 1696 contained a ‘leading article’ that analysed the case for and against a French invasion of Britain. Citing this, Ogg claimed, ‘In no other European state was such a reasoned exposition of a critical situation available for the public’. However, this passage is actually *reported* comment (or at least is alleged to be), narrating a discussion in Louis XIV’s council. This does not negate this passage’s functioning as a vehicle for comment, but it is not an ‘editorial’.\(^95\) These newspapers also featured verse comment on special occasions, such as celebrations of the Treaty of Ryswick and the Battle of Blenheim.\(^96\) However, the structure

\(^92\) *Publick Occurrences*, 30 (11 September 1688).
\(^94\) E.g. *Post Man*, 14 September 1704, where some discussion of the Battle of Blenheim is contained within the news structure.
\(^96\) *Post Boy*, 25 September 1697 (verse on Ryswick); *Post Man*, 9 September 1704 (verse on Blenheim).
of post-1695 newspapers was overwhelmingly built on news paragraphs and date/place headings in the usual manner.

However, from the 1680s, there was some experimentation with new forms of comment in newspapers, in a way that would lay the groundwork for the full re-emergence of comment sections in the 1710s. This came from two sources. The first was comment serials. Although the primary consequence of their emergence in the 1680s was to draw a comment function away from newspapers, the creation of a new model of serialised comment also had some immediate impact on newspapers. In a few cases, independent comment serials were transferred into newspapers as comment sections. A lost Whig comment serial called Truth and Honesty (1704) was moved into the London Post in 1704-05, and a more famous Whig comment serial, the Medley (1710-12), was brought into the Flying Post in 1712-13 (Fig. 8).97 In the latter case, the decision was financially motivated, driven by the introduction of stamp duty in 1712.98 In both cases, however, the author or publisher may also have decided to unite a newspaper and a comment serial on more positive grounds, to make the newspaper more distinctive, and thus potentially more appealing to readers, and the comment serial more likely to be read by being encountered by the larger audiences that newspapers seem to have attracted.99 Indeed, this foreshadows common practice in the 1720s and 1730s.

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97 McLeod, pp. 11, 16.
99 On these audiences, see below, pp. 206-8.
In a few other cases, comment sections that were inspired by comment serials were introduced into newspapers. A minor newspaper of the Succession Crisis, *Mercurius Bifrons* (1681), devoted its recto to ‘intelligence’, and its verso, in its third issue, to ‘talk[ing] news like Jest and Earnest, ‘tis Modish, and Dialoguing of News: or this new Dialoguing pleases many people very well’.100 ‘Jest and Earnest’ referred to the flagship Tory comment serial *Heraclitus Ridens* (1681-82), a dialogue between characters named ‘Jest’ and ‘Earnest’. John Dunton’s newspaper *Pegasus* (1696) followed its ‘News’ section with a section entitled ‘Observator’, designed to ‘let no momentous affair pass without remarks’, which contained Whig political arguments and interpretations of the news (Fig. 9).101 This alluded to the ‘Observator’ comment serial tradition of Roger L’Estrange’s *Observator* (1681-87) and James Welwood’s *Mercurius Reformatus, or the New Observator* (1689-94?) – serials of ‘observations’.102 There was also a *Flying Post and Medley* (1714) that contained ‘Two Parts, the first of News Foreign and Domestick’, while ‘In the second part of the Paper, 

100. *Mercurius Bifrons*, 3 (3 March 1681), v.
102. *Heraclitus Ridens* and these *Observator* serials will be discussed in chapter 3.
the Author will handle such Political Subjects as from time to time he shall have in view'.

All of these comment sections were partisan, following the comment serials on which they were based.

The second source of experimentation was foreign monthly news serials. In the late-seventeenth century, French-language monthly newspapers were published in the Netherlands, and many reached Britain. These were long pamphlets that sought to provide more reliable, digested news than their rivals, taking advantage of a slower publication schedule. Part of this included analytical comment that examined political affairs across Europe, usually expressed by the term ‘reflexions’. For example, *Mercure Historique et Politique* (published from 1686) had ‘Le tout accompagné de Reflexions Politiques sur chaque Etat’ (‘all accompanied by political reflections on each state’), and alternating sections entitled ‘Nouvelles’ and ‘Reflexions’ (‘news’ and ‘reflections’). As argued in the

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103 *Flying Post and Medley*, 1 (27 July 1714), r.

104 This was translated as the *Present State of Europe*. 
previous chapter, the term ‘reflections’ arrived into British political comment from French, carrying connotations of sobriety and impartiality. From the late 1680s, some of these monthly newspapers were translated into English, and maintained ‘reflexions’ (or ‘reflections’) as a central feature. The earliest, *Modern History* (1687-89), promised to separate ‘the News from the Reflexions’. ¹⁰⁵ The *Present State of Europe* (1690-1738) contained ‘all the Publick and Private OCCURRENCES... that are most Considerable in every COURT... With Curious Reflections upon every State’. ¹⁰⁶ A rival, *Memoirs of the Present State of Europe* (1692-93) promised ‘the monthly account of occurrences ecclesiastical, civil and military: also of transactions in the republick of letters and polite studies. Together with the reflections necessary upon the respective events’. ¹⁰⁷ These newspapers, like their French predecessors, contained ‘Reflections’ sections that followed sections describing the main news in each country.

The practice of sections of ‘Reflections’ on foreign news also developed in some original English newspapers. The *New State of Europe, Both as to Publick Transactions and Learning, with Impartial Observations Thereupon* (1701) used its title to indicate the presence of both news (‘public transactions’) and comment (‘observations’) (Fig. 10). It aimed to collect the ‘quintessence of news’ and to ‘consider true interests of princes and states’, promising to double its publication frequency to twice-weekly if there was enough demand, in order to include ‘fresher news and more room for reflections’. ¹⁰⁸ Like the translated monthlies, it had country-by-country news sections alternating with country-by-country comment sections, variously called ‘Observations’ and ‘Reflexions’. However, this practice failed to take root: the comment sections disappeared after a few issues, and the newspaper itself soon vanished.

¹⁰⁶ *Present State of Europe*, 2.1 (January 1691), title-page.
¹⁰⁷ This is the subtitle as given on ESTC, without formatting.
¹⁰⁸ *New State of Europe*, 1 (23 May 1701).
Figure 10. Country-by-country ‘Reflections’ sections in the New State of Europe (1701).

Another example is the Flying Post (1695-1733), one of the most successful newspapers of the period. This was initially designed to contain a section of ‘remarks’, as indicated by its first subtitle: ‘An Impartial Account of the Present Occurrences Abroad...
Together with what is most remarkable at Home; with Remarks’. The author explained that these ‘remarks’ were intended to judge the veracity of news, provide contextual information, and analyse the European balance of power:

The Publick being so much impos’d upon by Common News-Letters, wherein some out of Ignorance, and others from Seditious Principles do Misrepresent Affairs both at Home and Abroad. It is thought that it may be good Service to the Nation, to give a true Account of things as related in France and the Confederate Countries, and also a faithful Account of the most observables Domestick Occurrences with some
Remarks tending to discover the Probability or Improbability of the things related, and which way the balance of publick Affairs in Europe seems to encline, and a short Description of all places of Sieges, Battels, Encampments, &c. as far as is needful. Our design is not to interfere with the London Gazzette, but to pursue another Method, there being many things below its Cognisance, that are yet useful to be known, and may give further Light into present Transactions.109

However, the Flying Post did not pursue this theme systematically. There was a ‘Remarks’ section in its first issue that challenged the veracity of the news in the French Gazette, but nothing in the second issue. The third provided remarks, giving context about the city of Ceuta, besieged by the Moors, ‘according to our promise to give a geographical description of any place besieged’. However, the section did not find a permanent place in the newspaper, and ‘remarks’ was soon dropped from the subtitle too.110

A final example of a newspaper with a comment section, combining the influence of comment serials and foreign monthly news serials, was the Master Mercury (1704). This was a short-lived newspaper, written by Daniel Defoe, containing a comment section called the ‘Reflector’.111 The newspaper was designed to provide ‘A Faithful ABSTRACT of all the NEWS both Foreign and Domestick. With Plain and Impartial Reflections both on Persons and Things’. The first issue elaborated:

we shall make Reflections upon Foreign and Domestick Affairs... the Reader will find the Publick Affairs duly, and as succinctly as possible, related from the best Intelligence, and so in the reading of this Paper, the World shall be supplied with all the material News, tho’ in this perhaps we may not out-go our Neighbours. But as every Article shall have its necessary and just Observations, which we find in some not at all attempted, and in others very lamely performed; in this Part we hope to give the World some Helps, please them both by Instruction and Diversion, and perhaps may say something, which no body says but ourselves.112

109 Flying Post, 1 (7 May 1695), r.
110 Although the eighth issue (1 June 1695) contains anti-French ‘remarks’ on a Jesuit sermon.
111 This has been reprinted as Daniel Defoe, Master Mercury, ed. Frank H. Ellis and Henry L. Snyder (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, 1977).
112 Master Mercury, 1 (8 August 1704), p. 2.
This desire to comment was manifested in the ‘Reflector’ section, which featured from the fourth issue onwards. However, the *Master Mercury* shut down after only a few months, and this newspaper did not set any precedent.

Newspapers were a minor part of the comment media landscape under the later Stuarts. However, experimentation with comment sections in some newspapers indicates that some models for including comment alongside news were consolidating below the surface.

Comment sections in newspapers, 1710s-c.1730

A significant shift in how newspapers were constructed took place in the 1710s, when scattered experimentation with comment sections gave way to widespread practice. Leading the way were the new six-page weekly newspapers, where comment sections were common by 1718, and spread to newspapers more generally in the 1720s and 1730s. As a result, newspapers entered a second period of holding an important place in the wider comment media landscape, alongside pamphlets and comment serials, and this time more prominently and durably than in the first period, the mid-seventeenth century. Comment sections took various forms, but the most important was the introductory essay (or introductory letter), which was imported from comment serials. Through this, the newspaper and comment serial traditions began to overlap; by the 1730s, newspapers would displace comment serials as the primary medium of regular published comment. The scope of these comment sections was broader than those in the civil wars, as they included more analytical, contextual, diverting, curious, instructive and moral comment. As with earlier incarnations of newspaper comment, humour and entertainment formed a significant part of their styling. By the 1720s, comment sections were firmly established within the generic conventions of newspapers. This reflected a growing perception of comment as a distinct concept that had a legitimate place alongside news.

Journal (1715-61), Mist’s Weekly Journal (1716-37) and the London Journal (1719-44), but others were not, for instance Weekly Remarks and Political Reflections (1715-16) and the Orphan Reviv’d (1718-20). Partly because of their need to fill six pages, these newspapers had a greater mix of functions and sections than their predecessors, and comment was a major part of this concoction. News was their main feature, but it was interspersed with essays, letters, poems, fiction and other material, much of which was designed to provide comment. They drew this medley from several models, especially from other serials. Partly, this comment resembled that of comment serials since the 1680s. In addition, the recent development of moral comment serials, represented most famously by the Spectator (1711-12, 1714), was acknowledged as the source of introductory essays and letters. The foreign news monthlies also contributed to the form, providing ‘reflections’ sections on foreign affairs. Their construction as a medley of sections was influenced by the serial miscellanies that had developed from the 1690s: serials containing a mixture of verse and prose pieces, many of them serving as comment. Miscellanies were pioneered in Britain by the Gentleman’s Journal (1692-94), whose use of the term ‘journal’ indicates the generic link with the later ‘weekly journals’. In addition, weekly journals leaned heavily on humour or entertainment, following the example of both serial miscellanies and comment serials, which also shaped their comment.

Comment was more overtly acknowledged in six-page weeklies than in previous varieties of newspaper. Some carried comment keywords in their titles, for instance Weekly Remarks, and Political Reflections upon the Most Material News Foreign and Domestick (1715-16), Robin’s Last Shift: Or, Weekly Remarks and Political Reflections upon the Most Material News Foreign and Domestick (1716), the Orphan; With Reflections Political and Moral, upon All Material Occurrences, Foreign and Domestick (1716), the Jesuite, with Political Reflections on the Most Material Occurrences Foreign and Domestick (1719), and the Weekly Medley… Containing an Historical Account of All News, Foreign and Domestic, Together with Observations on the Writings and Manners of the Age (1718-20). None of these was a comment serial – they were all newspapers in form – but they nevertheless...
made the idea of comment central to their design. The *Weekly Medley* explicitly offered ‘remarks and observations’ on the news, promising to

set in their proper Lights, the extravagant Turns which are usually given by the Writers of both Parties to pieces of important News, and afterwards make the Justest Remarks and Observations I can, with Regard to those tortured Articles of News, which these puzzling Adversary’s labour to Perplex and Disguise.\(^{118}\)

One correspondent to Read’s acknowledged the centrality of comment in weekly journals when he wrote,

I wish you wou’d some times digress from the dry Relations of News... tho’ I allow that to be the proper Business of a News writer; and take a little Freedom upon suitable Occasions of Recapitulation and Reflection... Let me tell you, most of your Brother News-writers, find their Account in this: Some of them excel in News Preaching, take a Paragraph or a Text, and fill up the rest, with Inferences, Annotations, Remarks, &c.\(^{119}\)

Taking a similar view, Nathaniel Mist said that his weekly journal was a ‘recapitulation of the occurrences of the whole week, with comments, explanations and annotations on all the ambiguous parts thereof’.\(^{120}\)

Comment was manifested in six-page weeklies in various ways. Many contained extensive comment within the news (interpolated and reported comment), especially the most partisan weekly journals, such as *Read’s* (which was Whig/Hanoverian) and *Mist’s* (which was Tory/crypto-Jacobite). Some had alternating country-by-country news and comment sections like those in the foreign news monthlies, for instance ‘Reflections’ sections in the *Jesuite* and *Orphan* and ‘Remarks’ sections in *Weekly Remarks and Political Reflections*, the *St James’s Weekly Journal* (1719-20), *Robin’s Last Shift* and the *Loyal Observator Reviv’d* (1722-23). Read’s had a medley of comment sections, many familiar from pamphlets. During the 1715-16 Jacobite rebellion, for instance, Read included poems,

\(^{118}\) *Weekly Medley*, 1 (26 July 1718), p. 3.

\(^{119}\) *Read’s*, 2 January 1720, p. 1490.

\(^{120}\) Qu. in Black, *English Press*, pp. 30-1.
characters (‘The character of a true English subject’), prophecies, queries (‘Queries showing the Tories to be fools’) and even drama (‘The Earl of Mar marr’d’).\textsuperscript{121}

However, the most important manifestation of comment in six-page weeklies was the introductory essay (or introductory letter), which was common after 1718 (Fig. 11).\textsuperscript{122} A division into initial comment and main news sections became typical, featuring in Applebee’s, Read’s, Mist’s, the Orphan Reviv’d, the London Journal, the Weekly Medley, the Freeholders Journal (1722-23), the St James’s Journal (1722-23), the British Journal (1722-31?), the Loyal Observator Reviv’d and the Universal Journal (1723-24). Normally extending across one or two pages, these initial comment sections were more firmly established in weekly journals than prefaces had been in civil war newsbooks. They owed something to the preface tradition, but they differed from these by drawing specifically on the forms of the essay and the letter, especially as manifested in comment serials. As discussed in chapter 1, ‘essays’ were understood as undirected discussions around a subject, as opposed to formal and methodical discourse, and rose to prominence in Britain in the early-eighteenth century, most famously in the Tatler and Spectator.\textsuperscript{123} Initial comment sections in six-page weekly newspapers were specifically constructed as ‘essays’: an introductory piece in the British Journal in 1725 explained that it was ‘very much after the Model of Montaigne’s Essays’, and Mist explained that his weekly journal ‘always begins with some entertaining Essay, either upon the Times, or else the Behaviour and Follies of Men, and the rest is a fair and impartial History of the whole World for a Week’.\textsuperscript{124} The essay often dovetailed with the letter – as it had, indeed, in the Tatler and Spectator – as a discursive and personal style had always been a feature of the epistolary tradition. Hence, in six-page weeklies, as in moral comment serials beforehand, some introductory comment was presented in the form of ‘letters introductory’: letters addressed to the newspaper proprietor, for instance to ‘Mr Applebee’, ‘Mr Mist’, ‘Mr Medley’ or ‘Mr Journal’. The derivation of these letters is often uncertain. Although some may have been written by readers, many were probably composed for the journal; Daniel Defoe, for instance, is thought to have written letters introductory for Applebee and Mist.\textsuperscript{125} However, regardless

\textsuperscript{121} \textit{Read’s}, 26 November 1715, 10 December 1715, 7 January 1716.
\textsuperscript{122} For convenience, these will be referred to as ‘essays’ in what follows.
\textsuperscript{123} See above, pp. 37-8.
\textsuperscript{124} \textit{British Journal}, 125 (6 February 1725), p. 1; Mist’s, 234 (20 April 1723), p. 1376.
of their provenance, these introductory essays functioned as significant manifestations of comment alongside news.126

Figure 11. An introductory essay (in the form of a letter), followed by a ‘Foreign Affairs’ news section, in the first two pages of Applebee’s Original Weekly Journal (1722).

Some introductory essays acquired a reach that exceeded any previous expression of comment in newspapers, transcending the ephemerality that was the usual fate of serials. Some series were gathered and reprinted, for instance ‘Cato’s Letters’, ‘The Speculatist’ and ‘Atticus’s Letters’, sometimes for many decades after their initial publication.127 In the 1730s, the primary purpose of the ‘magazine’, a new form of serial, was to gather the weekly comment in newspapers and other serials into monthly ‘storehouses’ (the literal meaning of ‘magazine’) for transmission to the country at large.128

126 Although Matthew Symonds is right to say we should not interpret them automatically as the voice of the publication, in the manner of an editorial. Symonds, ‘Newspapers of Mist’, p. 109.
This recirculation of newspaper comment sections has no precedent, except Nedham’s republican prefaces in *Mercurius Politicus* in the 1650s.

What kinds of comment did introductory essays contain? Their subject range was greater than previous forms of newspaper comment, including politics, manners and entertainment, with an expectation that they should instruct *and* divert. Among the more political essays, the best-known example is the ‘Cato’s Letters’ series by John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, featured in the *London Journal* and *British Journal* in 1720-23, which comprised essays critiquing the government’s handling of the South Sea Bubble crisis, and commercial interests more generally, from a radical Whig perspective. Less famously, most six-page weeklies during the 1722 election contained essays or letters of electoral advice – indeed, a letter in *Read’s* commented that ‘Tis at this time unfashionable to write upon any subject but elections’ – while the *Orphan Reviv’d* included a letter introductory expressing a wish that dissenters would join the Church of England. However, essays were not expected always to be political. One letter to *Applebee’s* expressed no preference about what the essays contained, as long as they avoided ‘Trifles’:

> you Writers of Journals take up the first Part of your Papers with what you call Letters Introductory... if the Letters you Print were but really Improving or Instructing, or were they always Merry and Diverting, it were well enough; but, I confess, if my Taste be good, it is very seldom that they are either of these... Advance something then Profitable to your Readers, and worthy a Paper of good Intelligence, and let no Trifles take Place in your Work.\(^{130}\)

Other essays were more moral than political: *Mist’s* included letters on subjects such as insolvency, marriage and grief. Elsewhere, political and moral comment overlapped, for instance in a letter in *Applebee’s* in 1722 that claimed that the avarice of South Sea fraudsters had reduced the ‘nation’s morals’.\(^{132}\)

The six-page weekly newspaper firmly established a place for comment alongside news within British newspapers. By the 1730s, introductory essays were common across

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\(^{129}\) E.g. *Freeholder’s Journal*, 7 March 1722, 14 March 1722; *London Journal*, 10 March 1722, 17 March 1722; *Mist’s*, 17 March 1722; *Read’s*, 17 March 1722 (from where this quotation is taken). *Orphan Reviv’d*, 68 (5 March 1720).

\(^{130}\) *Applebee’s*, 23 July 1720, p. 1801.

\(^{131}\) *Mist’s*, 3 January 1719, 2 January 1720, 9 June 1722.

\(^{132}\) *Applebee’s*, 3 March 1722. As will be shown in the following chapter, this range of comment reflected that of comment serials.
newspapers more generally, being included in daily and thrice-weekly as well as weekly titles. Indeed, regular comment was migrating from comment serials, where it had been concentrated in the first two decades of the eighteenth century, back into newspapers, where it had been situated during the civil wars. This was presumably because, once comment sections were a settled part of newspapers, it made sense to circulate regular comment primarily through newspapers, which had greater audiences than comment serials. This shift is neatly exemplified by the *Craftsman* (1726-50), the famous anti-Walpole serial. The *Craftsman* began in 1726-27 as a comment serial, consisting of an essay on a political or moral subject, but after forty-four issues it was changed into a newspaper — ‘turn[ed] Newswriter’, according to its patron, Viscount Bolingbroke – with an initial comment section. Another indication of the shift is provided by the Walpole ministry’s decision in 1735 to consolidate several pro-ministerial papers, including the *Daily Courant* newspaper (1702-35) and the *Free Briton* comment serial (1729-35), into a single title, the *Daily Gazetteer* (1735-1800+), which also had an initial comment section followed by the news. The two most famous opposition serials of the late 1730s, *Common Sense* (1737-43?) and the *Champion* (1739-43?), followed the same model. It had now become thinkable and desirable, for both authors and readers, to provide comment and news as separate and acknowledged components of a newspaper. After a century of diverse practice, the 1730s newspaper had found a durable way to accommodate news and comment within the same publication by placing them side by side. This paved the way for newspapers to take an even stronger position within the comment media landscape. By the second half of the eighteenth century, they equalled or even surpassed pamphlets as a vehicle for comment.

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135 Qu. in Varey, *Contributions*, p. xx.

136 Harris, *Age of Walpole*, p. 124.


Conclusion

Despite the frequent expression of ideals of truthful, impartial and comment-free news, early modern newspapers contained a great deal of comment in practice. In the civil wars and after the Hanoverian succession, newspapers were important vehicles for comment, alongside pamphlets and (in the second period) comment serials. In addition, continual experimentation with form contributed to the consolidation of comment as a distinct and positive concept alongside news by the early-eighteenth century. Much of this comment was partisan, especially in the first period, but newspaper comment could also take moral, analytical and other forms, and frequently adopted a humorous or entertaining mode. Newspaper comment was often within the news: built into the rhetorical structuring of news, in ways that adapted rather than overthrew conventions of news-writing, or quoted in documents such as petitions and proclamations. In addition, there was a developing practice of placing comment alongside news by demarcating sections of comment within newspapers – tentatively in the civil wars, when it drew on pamphlet forms such as prefaces, animadversions, queries and ballads, and then more positively in the early-eighteenth century, when it drew on serial forms such as essays in comment serials and ‘Reflections’ sections in foreign monthly newspapers. In some cases, comment can be found in place of news in newspapers, most notably in the 1647-50 ‘Mercuries’, when a wave of serials maintained the form of a newspaper while frequently centring their content on comment in practice. This model was a dead end: by the 1680s, expectations and conventions had developed to a point that enabled serials explicitly devoted to comment rather than news to be imagined and created. These ‘comment serials’ are the subject of the next chapter.
CHAPTER 3. Comment serials, 1678-c.1730

A new form of printed publication emerged in late-seventeenth-century Britain: the comment serial. Publications such as the *Observator* (1681-87), *Review* (1704-13), *Rehearsal* (1704-09) and *Examiner* (1710-14) were serials that were designed to convey discussion and opinion about current affairs, signified explicitly through comment keywords such as ‘observations’, ‘reflections’ and ‘remarks’, and the adoption of discursive genres such as the dialogue and the essay. This chapter argues that publications of this sort should be called ‘comment serials’, and that they represented a tangible, collective and influential phenomenon in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries. In their heyday, they were interconnected with, but distinct from, pamphlets and newspapers within the wider comment media landscape. As regular publications that were freed from the generic conventions of news – unlike their most comparable predecessors, the 1647-50 Mercuries, which were framed as publications of ‘news’ and ‘intelligence’ – they were fashioned as the most direct and persistent vehicles for comment in the period, and came to be among the most prominent public voices of their day. Comment serials first appeared during the Succession Crisis of 1678-82, and proliferated in the 1700s and 1710s. Most were constructed as crack partisan weapons, designed to fire regular ‘paper bullets’ into the ‘rage of party’, the intense political polarisation that characterised much of this period. Consequently, they were primarily vehicles for political comment – opinion and analysis about the constitution, religion, parties, foreign affairs and the press – although their scope broadened in the 1710s and 1720s, especially to include more comment on morals and manners, following the *Tatler* (1709-11) and *Spectator* (1711-12, 1714). Although they varied stylistically, humour and personas were prominent and recurrent themes. Like the development of newspaper comment sections that was explored in the previous chapter, the emergence of comment serials also contributed to a wider cultural consolidation of a concept of comment, by giving ‘comment’ concrete expression. By the 1730s, the heyday of comment serials was over, as they had largely been supplanted by newspapers carrying introductory essays, although there was a modest revival after 1750.

Despite their significance, scholars have never fully acknowledged comment serials as a press phenomenon, let alone explored their features and significance. They are sometimes interpreted within the established historiographical contexts of ‘newspapers’ or ‘periodical essays’, but both labels are problematic for making sense of these publications. Where they have been acknowledged as serials of comment, using terms such as ‘journals of opinion’ and ‘periodicals of reflection’, discussion tends to centre on a single serial or a
short period rather than the phenomenon as a whole, and the terminology has not been
stabilised. The label ‘comment serials’ provides a fruitful way to approach this phenomenon
holistically.

The first two sections of the chapter establish comment serials as a press
phenomenon and outline their chronology and key features. They are followed by
discussion of the relationship between comment serials and pamphlets, focusing on three
authors who used both forms simultaneously – Roger L’Estrange, Charles Leslie and Richard
Steele – which indicates that comment serials and pamphlets could take different but
complementary roles within the comment media landscape. As comment serials were used
to provide the most forceful, immediate and easily-digestible comment, being short and
regular, so these authors deployed pamphlets for longer, set-piece comment, designed to
make a definitive statement about a subject that could last beyond the timespan of an issue
of a serial.

After this, four aspects of the comment serial tradition are examined more closely,
on a broadly chronological basis. First, their origins: comment serials emerged out of the
newspaper and pamphlet traditions during the political and press ferment of the Succession
Crisis, designed to be more powerful than other forms of print. Foreshadowed by the
history-centred Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Rome (1678-83), they irrupted in the spring
of 1681, led by the Tory dialogue Heraclitus Ridens (1681-82). Early comment serials shared
much content and function with pamphlets and newspapers, but were distinct in form. The
second section examines the ‘Observator’ tradition, the most durable model of comment
serial. There were three main Observators (literally, serials of ‘observations’) – Roger
L’Estrange’s Tory Observator (1681-87), James Welwood’s Williamite/Whig Mercurius
Reformatus, or the New Observator (1689-94?) and John Tutchin and George Ridpath’s
Whig Observator (1702-12) – and each was a prominent public voice of comment in its
time. The third section considers the heyday of comment serials at the height of the ‘rage
of party’, between 1702 and 1716, when partisan comment serials that were visibly
different from newspapers were a near-continuous presence for both the Whig and Tory
causes, led by Tutchin and Ridpath’s Observator, Daniel Defoe’s Whig/moderate Review
(1704-13), Charles Leslie’s Tory Rehearsal (1704-09) and Jonathan Swift and William
Oldisworth’s Tory Examiner (1710-14). Finally, discussion shifts to the ‘moral turn’ in
comment serials, inaugurated by the Tatler and Spectator after 1709. These serials bore
considerable resemblances to traditional ‘political’ comment serials in keywords, content,
function and style, and so can be usefully approached as ‘moral comment serials’. They not
only inaugurated a direct tradition of moral comment serials in the 1710s and 1720s, but also shaped the ongoing tradition of political comment serials.

Introducing comment serials

Many serials in late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth-century Britain were centred, in form, function and content, on providing comment. However, existing historiographical frameworks are inadequate for interpreting them. Introducing the term ‘comment serials’ provides an effective way to approach this important press phenomenon.

Before the Succession Crisis, the most comment-heavy serials were the Mercuries of 1647-50. It has already been argued that these are best interpreted as newsbooks with a penchant for partisanship, comment and jocularity rather than a distinct form, because they were conceived as publications of ‘news’ or ‘intelligence’.¹ In the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, in contrast, a large number of serials were explicitly designed as comment publications. One indication of this is the adoption of discursive genres.² Some serials used the dialogue form, for example the Observer (1681-87), Heraclitus Ridens (1681-82), another Observer (1702-12), another Heraclitus Ridens (1703-04) and the Rehearsal (1704-09). Others adopted a discursive prose or essay style, including Mercurius Reformatus (1689-94?), the Review (1704-13), the Examiner (1710-14) and the Free-Holder (1715-16). As most serials before (and during) this period followed generic conventions associated with news, such as date/place headings and news paragraphs, this was doubly significant: by specifically rejecting these conventions, and by using forms inherently associated with discussion and opinion, these serials were constructed as publications of comment rather than news.

In addition, many serials from the Succession Crisis onwards, unlike in the 1640s and 1650s, were labelled with comment keywords such as ‘observations’, ‘reflections’ and ‘remarks’ (Fig. 12). Examples include: ‘innocent Reflections weekly on the Distempers of the times’ (Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Rome, 1678-83);³ ‘A Discourse… where many a True Word is spoken in opposition to all Libellers against the Government’ (Heraclitus Ridens, 1681-82); ‘PROTESTANT OBSERVATIONS upon Anti-Protestant PAMPHLETS’ (Observer

¹ See above, p. 79.
² There is further discussion of genre below, pp. 124-5.
³ Weekly Pacquet, vol. 4 (1681-82), title-page. The quotations in this paragraph are found in titles or title-pages of the first issue or volume unless otherwise stated.
Observ’d, 1681); ‘Reflections upon Modern Transactions’ (Dilucidator, 1689); ‘REFLEXIONS upon The most Remarkable Events, Falling out from time to time in EUROPE, and more particularly in ENGLAND’ (Mercurius Reformatus, 1689-94?); ‘SATYRICAL REFLECTIONS On the last Weeks Publick News LETTERS and OBSERVATOR’ (Weekly Lampoon, 1690-91); Weekly Remarks (1691); ‘Political Observations on ENGLANDS Benefits by the VVar with FRANCE’ (Weekly Memorial, 1692); Observations upon the Most Remarkable Occurrences in our Weekly News (1693); ‘WEEKLY OBSERVATOR Upon the most Remarkable Foreign, and Domestick Occurrences’ (English Spy, 1699); A New Observer on the Present Times (1701); ‘Weekly Reflexions on the State, and Present Dangers of Christendom’ (Politick Spy, 1701); ‘OBSERVATIONS on Transactions at HOME’ (Review, 1704-13);4 ‘Reflections on the present State of AFFAIRS’ (Mercurius Politicus, 1705); ‘Remarks upon the Affairs of the North of BRITAIN’ (Scots Observer, 1708); ‘Remarks upon the OBSERVATOR, REVIEW, TATLERS, and the rest of the SCRIBLERS’ (General Postscript, 1709); ‘Remarks upon Papers and Occurrences’ (Examiner, 1710-14); ‘CONSIDERATIONS on the State of the British Trade’ (Mercator, 1713-14); ‘Observations... Upon the state of the Crown... The State of the Church... And the State of the Nation as divided into Whigs and Tories’ (Reconciler, 1713);5 and ‘REMARKS Upon MEN, MANNERS, RELIGION and POLICY’ (Entertainer, 1717-18). These are all taken from titles and subtitles, and could easily be augmented by further examples from the content of serials.

5 The Introduction to the Reconcilers (London, 1713), title-page.
Moreover, some contemporaries explicitly regarded comment-centred serials as different from newspapers. Charles Leslie described the 1702 *Observer* and the *Review* as the Whigs’ ‘weekly penny Papers, which go through the Nation like News-Papers’. A 1707 book noted that people in coffeehouses read not only ‘printed News’, but ‘3 Papers besides, relating to the Government’: the *Review*, *Observer* and *Rehearsal*. When the newspaper *Pegasus* (1696), which initially had a comment section called ‘Observer’, was reinvented as wholly comment-based publication (Fig. 9), its author distinguished between serials of news and comment:

> The Publick being so well supplied with News already by other Papers, the Undertaker of this hath thought fit to supersede his Endeavours of that Nature, that there may be more Room for the *Observer*, which hath been Universally well...
approved of. And the Reflexions being always upon the freshest Occurrences, there seems to be very little need of placing the Text before the Commentary[.]

The authors of the 1681 Observator, Mercurius Reformatus and the Review all specifically denied that their serials were newspapers. The Examiner distinguished itself, a vehicle for comment, from the Post Boy, a newspaper, by distinguishing ‘politics’ and ‘news’: ‘this poor solitary Paper of mine... is the only one that pretends to meddle with Politicks: As to my Brother Abel [Roper, publisher of the Post Boy], his Business being News, he very seldom mingles any thing else in his Libel’.\(^6\)

The comment-centred nature of these serials is also clear in practice. This is easily demonstrated by outlining a few of the better-known serials of this sort.\(^7\) The first Observator (1681-87) was a Tory dialogue, written by Roger L’Estrange, that pummelled Whigs and dissenters while defending Crown and Church, serving in the vanguard of the ‘Tory Reaction’ that followed the Succession Crisis. The Review (1704-13), written by Daniel Defoe, began as a discussion of recent French history, designed to persuade readers of the importance of fighting Louis XIV, but later expanded to comment on trade, the union with Scotland and other domestic affairs, shifting between Whig and moderate political alignments. The Rehearsal (1704-09) was a Tory dialogue written by Charles Leslie, a non-juror and Jacobite, and advocated divine-right monarchy and high-church religious policies. The Examiner (1710-14), partly written by Jonathan Swift, was a Tory essay serial, and served as the official defence of the Tory ministry after 1710. All of these were voices of comment. They were not, except incidentally, vehicles for news: they were not constructed as series of news reports, but as media for circulating discussion and opinion.

Serials designed to convey comment were therefore a significant and tangible phenomenon. How should they be interpreted historiographically? One possibility is simply to comprehend them within a broad definition of ‘newspapers’, taking ‘newspaper’ as an inclusive term for any serial relating to current affairs. In many ways, this is not unreasonable. It complements our modern understanding of newspapers as regular publications containing news and comment, and by 1819 ‘newspaper’ was legally defined as ‘all pamphlets and papers containing any public news, intelligence, or occurrences, or

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\(^6\) Rehearsal, vol. 1 (1704-07), preface, p. [i]; The Present State of Great Britain (London, 1707), vol. 1, p. 137; Pegasus, 2.1 (24 August 1696), r; Observator, 1.325 (23 April 1683), v; Mercurius Reformatus, 1.1 (15 May 1689), r; Review, 5.1 (27 March 1708), p. 1; Examiner, 2.21 (24 April 1712), r. For Pegasus, see above, pp. 92-3.

\(^7\) All of these will receive fuller attention later in the chapter.
any remarks or observations thereon, or upon any matter in church or state’. Many scholars of the early modern press have taken this approach. For the Succession Crisis, for instance, Joad Raymond considered comment-centred serials as newspapers with an ‘accessible form of editorialising’; Peter Hinds argued that L’Estrange’s Observer ‘was... heavily engaged with day-to-day events and was published serially, [so] it... appears to have [much] in common with a newspaper’; and Susannah Randall argued that distinguishing the comment-centred Observer and Heraclitus Ridens from newspapers creates too ‘exclusive’ a definition of ‘newspaper’, causing more problems than it solves. For the eighteenth century, Bob Harris defined newspapers as ‘periodical publications that included regular comment and information on domestic and foreign political events’; Michael Harris’s study of newspapers in the age of Walpole included ‘essay sheets’ or ‘essay papers’ within the category of newspapers; and Jeremy Black’s study of eighteenth-century newspapers treated ‘newspapers’, ‘magazines’ and ‘essay-sheets’ as overlapping categories. Taking an inclusive definition of ‘newspaper’ makes more sense for some periods, such as the 1640s and 1740s, but the evidence already presented indicates that this is not sufficient for the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries.

As Randall rightly points out, treating serials of comment as different from newspapers does raise its own problems. However, it is possible to acknowledge nuance while recognising the essential tangibility of a comment serial tradition: it is not necessary to demonstrate the existence of two absolute categories in order to argue that ‘newspapers’ is inadequate and misleading as an overarching term. One ambiguity is that some contemporaries did refer to all of these publications as ‘newspapers’ – but this must be set against the rich contemporary evidence, given above, for the contrary view. During the Succession Crisis, Hinds and Randall are right to argue that there were significant overlaps in function and style between serials of news and comment. For instance,

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8 60 George III c. 9.  
L’Estrange’s *Observer* and *Heraclitus Ridens*, which were comment-orientated dialogues, and the *Loyal Protestant*, which was news-orientated, were all punchy Tory serials established in 1681 to defend the government. However, this underplays the differences in form between the dialogues and the newspaper: the dialogue serials were constructed on an entirely different basis from the period’s newspapers, taking their model from dialogue pamphlets. Moreover, a longer-term perspective indicates that serials of news and comment diverged further, in terms of function and content as well as form, in subsequent decades. By the early years of Anne’s reign, newspapers such as the *London Gazette, Post Man, Post Boy, Flying Post* and *Daily Courant*, which were centred on providing news reports and were not blatantly partisan like their Succession Crisis predecessors, were starkly different from Tutchin’s *Observer*, the *Review* and the *Rehearsal* as partisan comment serials. In the 1720s, serials of news and comment came to overlap again, as newspapers began to include introductory essays that resembled comment serials, but distinct comment serials nevertheless continued to appear. Overall, a comment serial tradition, substantially distinct from newspapers, existed between the reigns of Charles II and George II.

Another historiographical possibility is to approach serials of comment through the lens of the ‘periodical essay’. Periodical essays have traditionally been regarded as one of the two quintessential new eighteenth-century genres, alongside the novel, with discussion having centred especially on Richard Steele and Joseph Addison’s serials of manners, society and literature, the *Tatler* (1709-11) and *Spectator* (1711-12, 1714). However, ‘periodical essay’ is an inadequate label for comprehending all serials of comment, for several reasons. First, it does not easily include dialogue serials; any category must embrace dialogues as well as essays, as including the *Review* and *Examiner* but excluding the *Observer* and *Rehearsal* would be perverse. In addition, the term ‘periodical essay’ carries connotations of tending towards ‘literary’ subjects and away from politics. For instance, Richard Squibbs, a recent scholar of periodical essays, argued that they ‘professed to avoid engaging in political controversy’ and were devoted to ‘subjects of manners, of taste, of literature’.

A literary/moral v. political dichotomy is deeply rooted, having been influentially articulated by Walter Graham in his seminal studies of ‘literary periodicals’ in the 1920s and 1930s, and deployed more recently by scholars such as Iona Italia and

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Manushag Powell. Whatever its merits – and it is highly misleading in an era in which the literary and political were frequently fused – it renders the term ‘periodical essay’ problematic in the context of political comment. Linked to this is another problem, that the story of the periodical essay traditionally pivots around the Tatler and Spectator. Scholars from Graham to the present day have sought to identify the ‘precursors’ of Steele and Addison’s serials, and their ‘imitators’ and ‘successors’. Indeed, Donald Bond claimed that, with the Tatler, Richard Steele was the ‘virtual founder of a new genre – the periodical essay’. By treating the Tatler and Spectator as both a culmination and a fountainhead, studies of the periodical essay distort the wider picture, not least the place of political comment in the serial press.

Indeed, when scholars have allowed a place for the political in the ‘periodical essay’ tradition, this has only served to highlight the limitations of the term. J.A. Downie argued that the Tatler and Spectator had a ‘hidden political agenda’, labelled the Review a ‘journal of political comment’, and argued that Steele did not invent the periodical essay, but ‘chose simply to bring into prominence other aspects of the periodical journalist’s brief’. Similarly, Alvin Sullivan argued,

It has sometimes been asserted on the basis of [Addison and Steele’s serials] that the true periodical essay avoided politics, yet Addison in the Free-Holder wrote an important political essay series close in manner to his Spectator essays, and Steele in the Theatre included political papers among those of more general or literary interest.


Both Downie and Sullivan, however, made the *Tatler* and *Spectator* the crux of a story of literary development in which the political is of secondary concern. John McVeagh argued that the *Review* ‘lifted periodical journalism out of rabid politics or whimsy… Though literature may not have been Defoe’s primary object, he made the *Review* in some ways the most interesting example – as it was the first – of a new genre: the eighteenth-century periodical essay’. He also claimed that ‘[w]here Defoe’s *Review* chiefly differs from these predecessors is in its literary excellence’, and called it a ‘literary periodical’. This misleadingly divorces the *Review* from the context of political, partisan comment serials, setting it at the head of the ‘periodical essay’ tradition solely on the basis of style, rather than – as was actually the case – in the middle of a tradition of political comment serials that was already several decades old.

A new historiographical framework, different from ‘newspapers’ and ‘periodical essays’, is needed to interpret serials of comment – and one based on the idea of ‘comment’ itself. This is not a new idea: various scholars have made observations in this vein, but they have applied them to limited contexts, and they have usually only mentioned them rather than pursued them analytically. As long ago as 1934, Theodore Newton called for a study of the ‘journal of political controversy’ to join existing studies of ‘the English literary periodical’ and ‘the English newspaper’, but this has never been pursued.

Individual serials have often been identified as comment publications – the *Review*, for instance, has been variously described as a ‘journal of political comment’, a ‘journal of opinion’, a ‘paper of comment on current affairs and contemporary topics’, ‘an organ not of news, but of opinion’, and ‘a running commentary upon the leading events of the day’ – but without full consideration of the context and development of the form. Some scholars have also applied some iteration of this idea to short periods. James Sutherland’s study of Restoration newspapers, which focused on 1679-83, deliberately excluded ‘papers of political comment’, which he identified as Henry Care’s *Weekly Pacquet of Advice from...*  

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Rome (1678-83), Heraclitus Ridens and L’Estrange’s Observator. Lois Schwoerer referred to these same three serials as having ‘offered a varied fare of news, commentary, ballads, stories, [and] what passed for poetry’, contrasting with the Loyal Protestant ‘true newspaper’. Mark Goldie argued that L’Estrange’s Observator ‘did not invent, but… made familiar, the news commentary sheet cast in dialogue form, and provided the model for John Tutchin’s and Charles Leslie’s papers of Queen Anne’s reign’, the Observator and Rehearsal. R.B. Walker’s study of newspapers in 1688-1702 traced ebbs and flows in ‘journals of opinion’. Stuart Sherman commented that, in 1701-13, ‘[a]longside the thriving newspapers there developed new periodicals of “Reflection”, which offered a running commentary on politics (The Review, The Medley, The Examiner), literature, and the ways of the world (The Tatler, The Female Tatler, The Spectator). Discussing the first decade of the eighteenth century, W.A. Speck distinguished ‘newspapers’, which had ‘very little by way of political copy’, from ‘periodicals’, which he divided into two sorts: those that ‘kept their partisanship down to a minimum’, such as the Tatler and Spectator, and ‘overtly political’ ones such as the Review, Examiner, Observator, Rehearsal and Medley. For a similar period, W.B. Ewald distinguished between ‘newspapers’ and a ‘second type of periodical [that] concerned itself with extended comments related to the news, usually from a definitely partisan political standpoint’. These are broadly useful characterisations, although the terminology needs to be stabilised. They also raise particular questions about how the Tatler and Spectator tradition of moral and literary serials was related to the more political titles.

The term ‘comment serials’ provides a convenient way to answer these questions. The reasons for this have largely been rehearsed elsewhere. ‘Serials’ is a better term than ‘periodicals’ because it is divested of literary connotations, and is technically more accurate because it defines publication schedules on a sequential basis rather than regularity of time. ‘Journals’ should be avoided, because this term was associated primarily with miscellanies, and later newspapers, not political comment. ‘Comment’ is better than

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‘opinion’ because it can more easily embrace all forms of discussion, from objective analysis to partial argument. In addition, as a new and neutral term, ‘comment serials’ lacks historiographical baggage, and therefore provides the opportunity for a heuristic approach to definition. In particular, it can be used to handle Tatler- and Spectator-esque discourse, which can be approached from the perspective of ‘moral comment’, as well as direct ‘political’ comment.

A couple of additional qualifications should be made at this stage. First, contemporaries often referred to comment serials simply as ‘pamphlets’, ‘papers’ or ‘libels’, sometimes with the prefix ‘weekly’. This highlights that comment serials were part of the broader world of cheap topical print, but does not negate their distinctive features. Secondly, the term ‘comment serials’ becomes a less useful term by the 1720s, when essays were featuring both in newspapers and as comment serials, and clearly form part of a single tradition. However, this shift is only significant because newspapers and comment serials had previously been distinctive.

Having argued for the need to develop a concept of ‘comment serials’, it is now necessary to delineate it, and characterise its development and key features.

Characterising comment serials

To explore the nature, bounds and evolution of comment serials, I have compiled a list of 214 serials, published between 1678 and 1730, that I argue should be considered as comment serials (Appendix A). The list is divided into four sections, covering major and minor serials (defined as 11+ and 1-10 issues respectively) in the period 1678-1708, and major and minor serials in the period 1709-30. The first two sections list serials of political comment, while the last two sections include serials centred on comment of any sort, most importantly including serials of moral comment, beginning with the Tatler in 1709, alongside the more political titles, and some that commented on a mixture of subjects.21 For reference, of the 214 comment serials listed, 5 lasted 501+ issues, 15 lasted 101-500 issues, 18 lasted 51-100 issues, 65 lasted 11-50 issues, and 111 lasted 1-10 issues. The 20

21 This distinction is not meant to imply that moral comment serials were apolitical. On the contrary, many moral comment serials had a political intent, as is discussed below, pp. 187-8. Undoubtedly, some of my individual decisions about whether to include and how to describe particular comment serials could be challenged, but the overall shape of the list provides a useful heuristic device for exploring the comment serial phenomenon.
comment serials that lasted over 100 issues are listed below, in chronological order, along with their party alignment and whether they were primarily political or moral in nature.

- *Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Rome* (1678-83, 240 issues, Whig political)
- *Observator* (1681-87, 931 issues, Tory political)
- *Mercurius Reformatus, or the New Observer* (1689-94?, 149++ issues, Williamite/Whig political)
- *Observator* (1702-12, 1,065 issues, Whig political)
- *Review* (1704-13, 1,359 issues, Whig/moderate political)
- *Rehearsal* (1704-09, 348 issues, Tory political)
- *Tatler* (1709-11, 271 issues, Whig moral)
- *Female Tatler* (1709-10, 115 issues, Tory moral)
- *Examiner* (1710-14, 268 issues, Tory political)
- *Spectator* (1711-12, 1714, 635 issues, Whig moral)
- *Guardian* (1713, 175 issues, Whig moral)
- *Mercator* (1713-14, 181 issues, Tory political)
- *British Merchant* (1713-14, 103 issues, Whig political)
- *Patriot* (1714-15, 125 issues, Whig political)
- *Examiner* (1714-16, 142? issues, Tory political)
- *Free-Thinker* (1718-21, 350 issues, Whig moral)
- *Pasquin* (1722-24, 120 issues, Whig political)
- *Plain Dealer* (1724-25, 117 issues, moral)
- *Free Briton* (1729-35, 295 issues, Whig/Walpolian political)
- *Hyp Doctor* (1730-41, 534 issues, Whig/Walpolian political)

This section maps out the contours of the comment serial tradition across the entire 1678-c.1730 period, considering questions such as format, content, style and partisanship. Where relevant, comment serials are compared with their most important predecessors, the 1647-50 Mercuries, with which they had much in common in content, style and function, although they were different in form. Despite these resemblances, there is no evidence of any direct connections between Mercuries and comment serials, which flourished three decades apart. Each phenomenon was a product of the press and political context of its time, and their differences illustrate the greater consolidation of commenting on current affairs as a concept and practice between the 1640s and 1680s.
It would be helpful to begin with the core bibliographical facts about comment serials. The vast majority were printed in London, like pamphlets and newspapers. A few, however, were printed in Edinburgh and Dublin. These included some original comment serials, most importantly an Edinburgh Tatler (1711), and a group of late-1720s Dublin comment serials, the Intelligencer (1728-29), Tribune (1729) and Plain Dealer (1729-30). There were also some Scottish and Irish reprints of London serials. For example, Heraclitus Ridens (1681-82), Mercurius Reformatus (1689-94?) and the Review (1704-13) were reprinted in Edinburgh, and the Examiner (1710-14), Medley (1710-12) and Free-Holder (1715-16) were reprinted in Dublin. Comment serials were not printed in English provincial towns during this period, in contrast with the explosion of provincial newspapers after 1701.

Physically, most comment serials adopted a half-sheet folio format (i.e. a single piece of paper in ‘portrait’ orientation, usually printed on both sides), the same as most British newspapers between the 1660s and 1710s. In some cases, comment serials took their formats from other kinds of publication. Early on, there was a group of history serials, modelled on Henry Care’s Weekly Pacquet (1678-83), that tended to be eight-page quarto pamphlets. Indeed, Care described the Weekly Pacquet as a ‘Pamphlet-course’. The start of the biggest wave of comment serials, in Queen Anne’s reign, witnessed a competition between half-sheet folio and quarto pamphlet formats for dominance among comment serials, with the Review (1704-13), the Moderator (1705), Mercurius Politicus (1705), the Whipping Post (1705) and the Scots Observer (1708) all among the latter, but half-sheet folio ultimately triumphed. There were also a few six-page comment serials after the 1712 Stamp Act, for instance the Weekly Observer (1716), and a group of longer quarto serials in the late 1710s, such as Town Talk (1715-16), Chit-Chat (1716), the Plebeian (1719) and the Patrician (1719), which Rae Blanchard has called ‘pamphlet periodicals’ because they were essentially short series of pamphlets.

Most comment serials appeared weekly or sub-weekly, like most newspapers. In the early years, they tended to be weekly – with the exception of L’Estrange’s Observer (1681-87), which had an irregular schedule of two-to-four times a week. From the beginning of Anne’s reign, they were mostly either weekly or twice-weekly. The Review and Tatler (1709-11) led the way as thrice-weekly comment serials, and the Spectator (1711-12, 22-24This Dublin Intelligencer, which was partly written by Jonathan Swift, is available in a modern edition: James Woolley, ed., The Intelligencer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). Weekly Pacquet, 1.1 (3 December 1678), p. 2. Rae Blanchard, ed., Richard Steele’s Periodical Journalism, 1714-16 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), p. xx.
1714) was the first of a small group that were published daily, along with the *Guardian* (1713), the early issues of the *Reconciler* (1713), the early issues of the *Daily Benefactor* (1715), and a minor *Medley* (1715).\(^{25}\) The paucity of thrice-weekly comment serials is striking, given that thrice-weekly newspapers were common in this period, designed to enable distribution through the thrice-weekly posts from London to the provinces. This either suggests that comment serials were perceived to have a less urgent need for provincial distribution than newspapers, or that their market was more metropolitan.\(^{26}\)

There were also a few infrequent or irregular serial publications – whose labelling as comment serials is more open to question, although they have been included here because they were technically serial publications centred on political comment – such as *Bibliotheca Politica* (1692-94), *Censura Temporum* (1708-10) and the *Occasional Paper* (1716-19), which were more akin to pamphlets, and had quarto and octavo formats.

A broad chronology of comment serials, divided into four phases, is as follows. The first phase, between 1678 and 1683, marked the first appearance of comment serials. During the political ferment of the Succession Crisis, with a fierce paper war underway between the opposition/Whig and loyalist/Tory causes, comment serials were developed as a more powerful print weapon than pamphlets or newspapers. 20 comment serials were published in these years, of which 7 had 11 or more issues, and 3 were dominant: the *Weekly Pacquet* (1678-83), *Heraclitus Ridens* (1681-82) and L’Estrange’s *Observator* (1681-87). They were all political in content, and were published on both Whig and Tory sides. There was a particular concentration of comment serials in 1681: 14 of the 20 began in this year. As discussed below, this was the moment when comment serials fully burst onto the scene, in the build-up to the Oxford Parliament and its immediate aftermath.

This was followed by a second phase, between 1683 and 1702, which was a more fallow period for comment serials. In these years, there were only two substantial comment serials, both ‘Observators’ and both defences of their respective governments – L’Estrange’s continuing *Observator* to 1687 for Charles II and James II, and James Welwood’s *Mercurius Reformatus, or the New Observator* (1689-94?) for William III. However, there were 31 comment serials with 1-20 issues in this period, all of which were political, and of which 28 had 10 or fewer issues. This indicates that comment serials were consolidating as a form below the radar. To an extent, this mirrored trends in pamphlets and newspapers, which also contracted after the government regained political and press

\(^{25}\) There were two *Medleys* in 1715: CK 1585 (which was daily) and CK 1582 (which was twice-weekly). See Appendix A.

\(^{26}\) This is discussed further below, p. 213.
control in 1682-83, although comment serials remained subdued even after the final lapse of the Licensing Act in 1695, when newspapers, especially, surged. It is unclear why comment serials did not proliferate after 1695, although it may reflect the fact that party divisions were more complex in the late 1690s than they would become after 1700, that the ‘standing army controversy’ of the late 1690s was served sufficiently by pamphlets, or simply that comment serials had not yet become fully established as a model.

A third phase lasted from 1702 to 1716. This was the heyday of comment serials, at the height of the ‘rage of party’, when Whig-Tory divisions were strong and prominent: the war with France, religious debates, the union with Scotland, the ministerial revolution of 1710, debates about peace and succession at the end of Anne’s reign, the accession of George I and the Jacobite rebellion. In this period, there were 12 comment serials with 101+ issues, 9 with 51-100 issues, 30 with 11-50 issues and 42 with 1-10 issues. They were dominated by partisan, political comment serials, beginning with Tutchin’s Observator (1702-12) – the third major ‘Observator’ of the period, this time Whig and anti-ministry – and extending to serials such as the Review (1704-13), Rehearsal (1704-09), Examiner (1710-14), Medley (1710-12), Englishman (1713-15) and Free-Holder (1715-16). Political comment serials were a near-continuous presence in this period, on both Whig and Tory sides. Into this mix, after 1709, there also emerged serials that commented on morals and manners, led by the Tatler (1709-11) and Spectator (1711-12, 1714), which were not overtly political, although often had a partisan agenda. Comment serials in this period coincided with a proliferation of partisan pamphlets and a consolidation of the newspaper market, although newspapers were not blatantly partisan as they had been in the Succession Crisis, at least until the latter part of Anne’s reign.

A fourth phase ran from 1717 to c.1730. In this period, comment serials were still common, but a little less frequent than in the previous phase: there were 5 comment serials with 101+ issues, 8 with 51-100 issues, 28 with 11-50 issues and 29 with 1-10 issues. Political comment serials remained important, for instance the Tory True Briton (1723-24) and Walpolian Free Briton (1729-35). The moral comment serial tradition also continued, represented by serials such as the Free-Thinker (1718-21) and Plain Dealer (1724-25). In addition, this period saw the political-moral divide increasingly break down, with serials such as the Entertainer (1717-18) and Independent Whig (1720-21) drawing on both traditions. Pamphlets and newspapers were both common in this period, but the newspaper market was changing, as argued in the previous chapter, due to the inclusion of more comment. The rise of newspapers with introductory comment led to a dramatic decline in comment serials after 1730: only two new comment serials that reached over
thirty issues, the *Auditor* (1733) and the *Prompter* (1734-36), were launched in London during the following decade. Later developments are beyond the scope of this project, although there was a revival in comment serials in the 1750s, represented most famously by the *Rambler* (1750-52) and *Monitor* (1755-65).\(^{27}\)

Comment serials were not simply a group of separate publications that shared certain characteristics, but had a degree of collective identity, at least until the 1710s, through links of emulation and animadversion, both synchronic and diachronic. One prominent link was the ‘Observator’ label, which began with L’Estrange’s *Observator* in 1681, was adopted by Welwood in 1689 and Tutchin in 1702 for their major comment serials, and had its final expression as late as a minor comment serial in 1724-25.\(^{28}\) There was also a series of serials called *Heraclitus Ridens* (‘the weeping philosopher laughing’), represented by publications in 1681-82, 1689, 1703-04 and 1718, the latter three of which explicitly recalled the first one.\(^{29}\) Other serials had titles that referenced earlier titles, for instance *Democritus Ridens* (‘the laughing philosopher laughing’) and *Democritus Flens* (‘the laughing philosopher weeping’), both in 1681, which subverted the title of *Heraclitus Ridens*. The *Rehearsal* claimed to be the heir of L’Estrange’s *Observator*. The *Britain* (1713) presented the *Examiner* as the heir of L’Estrange’s *Observator*. Defoe stated that his *Review* was modelled on Care’s *Weekly Pacquet*, as both had a main, serious, historical prose section followed by a section of joco-serious relief (the ‘Popish Courant’ in the *Weekly Pacquet*, and the ‘Scandalous Club’ in the *Review*).\(^{30}\) Other links came from answering: among many examples, the *Rehearsal* both emulated and answered Tutchin’s *Observator*, the *Medley* answered the *Examiner*, and the *British Merchant* (1713-14) answered the *Mercator* (1713-14). By the 1720s, however, the collectiveness of the tradition had been weakened by the emergence of introductory essays in newspapers as a parallel form, and by the growing range of subjects of comment within comment serials.

The subject matter of comment serials was overwhelmingly, overtly political. The core of the comment serial phenomenon consisted of serials that provided comment about news, politics and current affairs. In this, they resembled their most significant predecessors, the 1647-50 Mercuries, although the scope of political comment in comment serials was broader, including more discussion of foreign as well as domestic news, and of


\(^{28}\) See below, pp. 148-63.

\(^{29}\) This is made clear in the first issue of each serial.

\(^{30}\) *Rehearsal*, 3.41 (28 August 1708), r; *Britain*, 36 (9 May 1713), r; *Supplementary Journal, to the Advice from the Scandal. Club* (September 1704), pp. 5-6.
constitutional and religious principles, as well as the usual fare of publications, parties and politicians. Politics was the mainstay of comment serials from L'Estrange's *Observator* to the *Free Briton*, via the *Rehearsal, Examiner* and *True Briton*. They ranged from generalist titles such as the various Observators, which commented on virtually anything, to specialist titles, such as the *Test Paper* (1688), which attacked the Test Act, and the *Director* (1720-21), which defended the South Sea Company after the bubble. The scope of comment in comment serials expanded in the early-eighteenth century. They included more discussion of trade and economic policy in the 1710s, including in dedicated serials such as the *Mercator*, the *British Merchant* and the *Manufacturer* (1719-21). As already indicated, the 1710s also witnessed the emergence of a new tradition of comment serials that included more discussion of manners and morals, virtues, vices and follies, from the *Tatler* to the *Plain Dealer* and beyond.

One subject area with an ambiguous relationship to comment serials is history. A number of serials during the Succession Crisis were defined primarily in terms of history, led by the *Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Rome* (a history of the Catholic Church), the *Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Germany* (1679-80; a history of the Protestant Reformation) and the *Weekly Discovery* (1681; a history of the origins of the British civil wars). The historical discourse in these serials was not ‘comment’ in the sense generally used here, but I have included them (and some minor successors down to the 1690s) because they were part of the initial breach between serial publication and news, and because many ‘Weekly Pacquet’ serials included direct political comment as well as history.\(^{31}\) Besides, as discussed below, the *Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Rome* evolved into a comment serial later in its run.\(^{32}\)

Despite their variety, these different kinds of comment serials shared similar aims. Most sought to instil good principles, opinions and/or behaviour in their readers, and to correct bad principles, opinions and/or behaviour. Usually, this was cast in political, partisan terms, as seeking to persuade and galvanise readers and equip them with arguments, in the context of forming opinions on constitutional and religious principles, the desirability and significance of particular news events, and the virtues and vices of individuals or groups. As Henry Care explained of the *Weekly Pacquet*:

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\(^{31}\) These serials are *Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Rome* (1678-83, NS 477); *Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Germany* (1679-80, NS 701); *Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Geneva* (1681, NS 700); *Postscript of Advice from Geneva* (1681, NS 556); *Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Rome* (1682-83, NS 478); *Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Geneva* (1683, NS 699); *Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Rome* (1689, NS 703); *Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Ireland* (1690, NS 702); *Pacquet of Advice from France* (1691, NS 476). Of these, NS 700, NS 556, NS 702 and NS 476 were particularly heavy on political comment.

\(^{32}\) See below, p. 145.
To give you a through [sic] insight into the Doctrines and practises of that dangerous Party, that none may be sillily seduc’d for want of due warning, or defensive Arms, shall be the scope of these successive sheets... to furnish meaner Capacities with such familiar Arguments, as every Judicious Christian ought to have at hand; and which may be enough to Guard their Reason, and baffle the Attempts of Jesuitical Assailants.

The Examiner’s design was ‘to inform and undeceive my Countrymen... I shall go on to furnish them with good Principles, and take off the Mask for those [i.e. the Whigs] that have so long misled them’. A similar formulation was shared by moral comment serials, which sought to improve and reform people’s behaviour. For example, the stated aim of the Guardian (1713) was ‘to protect the Modest, the Industrious, to celebrate the Wise, the Valiant, to encourage the Good, the Pious, to confront the Impudent, the Idle, to contemn the Vain, the Cowardly, and to disappoint the Wicked and Prophane’.33

Another link between comment serials of all varieties was partisanship. Most comment serials were designed to advance a partisan cause. Again, this directly resembled their predecessors, the 1647-50 Mercuries. Comment serials were as likely to support Tory/high-church politics as Whig/low-church/dissenter politics, contrary to any assumptions about ‘conservative’ reluctance to use the press (and resembling the proliferation of royalist as well as parliamentarian newsbooks during the civil wars). During the Succession Crisis and 1702-16 peak of the ‘rage of party’, comment serials were a near-continuous presence on both sides. In between these clusters, under James II and William III, and with press restrictions having been restored (until 1695), the few comment serials that appeared tended to support the government.34 Some later divisions between comment serials reflected realignments of party politics: there were Court Whig and Opposition Whig comment serials in the late 1710s, and pro-Walpole and anti-Walpole comment serials in the late 1720s. Some of the specialist comment serials also adopted particular political positions: in 1713-14, the Mercator advanced a Tory view of trade while the British Merchant provided a Whig response; the Tatler and Spectator advanced Whig

33 Weekly Pacquet, 1.1 (3 December 1678), p. 2; Examiner, 1.12 (19 October 1710), r; Guardian, 1 (12 March 1713), r. The relationship between political and moral comment serials is discussed further in the final section of this chapter.
34 After 1689, the only non-Williamite comment serial attested is the Jacobite Abhorrence/Observator, published in Jacobite-controlled Dublin in 1690.
positions through their moral comment while the *Female Tatler* (1709-10) and *Hermit* (1711-12) advanced Tory positions.\(^{35}\)

A harder question to answer is how far comment serials had links with party politicians, rather than simply being independent contributions to their party causes.\(^{36}\) The commissioning and subsidisation of comment serials by politicians can be attested with certainty in some cases, such as the *Review, Examiner, Medley, Englishman, Pasquin* (1722-24) and *Hyp Doctor* (1730-41). There are strong hints that links of this sort existed for some other prominent comment serials, such as L’Estrange’s *Observator* and the first *Heraclitus Ridens*. For many, however, direct evidence is weak or absent. Given that comment serial authors generally tried to claim credit for themselves by asserting their independence, and to discredit others by claiming that they were deceptive ‘hired pens’, it may be impossible to determine the truth about political connections for many serials. Regardless, it should be stressed that the existence of political connections does not render an author a mere ‘mouthpiece’ of a politician. Even if authors were hired, this was usually partly because they agreed with the cause, and they tended to have substantial freedom about what they wrote in practice.

In terms of genre, comment serials tended to be dialogues or discursive prose/essays. Dialogues were more prominent earlier in the period, and prose/essays were more prominent later in the period. This, of course, marked a big shift from the 1647-50 Mercuries, and civil war newsbooks more generally. The most important dialogue serials, as already indicated, included L’Estrange’s *Observator*, Rawlins’s *Heraclitus Ridens*, Tutchin and Ridpath’s *Observator*, Pittis’s *Heraclitus Ridens* and Leslie’s *Rehearsal*. The last major political comment serial that was a dialogue was the final *Heraclitus Ridens* (1718), and the last major moral comment serial was the *Casuist* (1719).\(^{37}\) Comment serials utilised all of the advantages of the dialogue form, both on the Platonic-Ciceronian analytical side, by using characters to ask questions and pose alternative points of view to be dismantled, and on the Lucianic satirical side, by including jocular conversations and characters who satirically impersonated particular individuals or groups.

The first essay is harder to identify, because ‘essay’ is less easily defined as a genre. As discussed in chapter 1, ‘essay’ in this period denoted a kind of rambling prose *contra* methodical argument.\(^{38}\) Therefore, it would not be accurate to label all discursive prose as

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\(^{35}\) See below, pp. 187-8.
\(^{36}\) Details for these political connections are given in the relevant parts of this chapter.
\(^{37}\) Although there were some minor dialogues later: *Projector* (1721) and *News from the Fairy Island* (1726).
\(^{38}\) See above, pp. 37-8.
'essays'. The essay form is particularly associated with the *Tatler*, which adopted ‘this Libertine Manner of Writing by Way of Essay’, and the *Spectator*, which utilised ‘the Looseness and Freedom of an Essay’. Other moral comment serials took up the term, such as the *Hermit* (1711-12), *Lay-Monk* (1713-14) and *Censor* (1717). However, ‘essay’ was used for political as well as moral titles: William Oldisworth labelled the *Examiner* ‘Essays on Government’, as did Addison the *Free-Holder*. For pragmatic reasons, I have decided to label pre-*Tatler* prose discussion as ‘prose’, and post-*Tatler* prose discussion as ‘essay’, although this is clearly imperfect. Setting aside these terminological issues, the earliest major serials that comprised continuous discursive prose were the *Weekly Pacquet* and *Mercurius Reformatus*, although both were more methodical in style. Before the *Tatler*, the other important comment serials that took prose form were the *New Observer* (1701), the early issues of Tutchin’s *Observator*, the *Review*, the *Moderator* (1705), *Mercurius Politicus* (1705) and the *Whipping Post* (1705). Prose/essays became dominant among comment serials in the 1710s and 1720s.

Stylistically, comment serials varied, depending on whether they were seeking to appear demotic or respectable: L’Estrange’s *Observator* and Defoe’s *Review* had an earthier prose style, and Welwood’s *Mercurius Reformatus* and Addison and Steele’s *Spectator* were more refined. One stylistic feature to emphasise is the preponderance of humour. Serials from the *Weekly Pacquet*, Rawlins’s *Heraclitus Ridens* and L’Estrange’s *Observator* in the Succession Crisis, to Pittis’s *Heraclitus Ridens*, the *Review* and the *Rehearsal* in the early part of Anne’s reign, to the *Entertainer* in the late 1710s, and beyond, all used humour as a means to convey their political messages. This represents another resemblance between comment serials and the 1647-50 Mercuries.

Another prominent stylistic feature of comment serials is that most adopted a narratorial persona. This can be seen most clearly in the titles of comment serials, many of which named an individual whose voice was to be expressed within the publication. This was led by the prominent term ‘Observator’, whose idea of ‘one who makes observations’ was later mirrored by the *Examiner* and the *Spectator*. Other person-titles include the *Moderator*, the *Hermit*, the *Plain Dealer*, the *Guardian*, the *Reconciler*, the *British Merchant*, the *Englishman*, the *Reader*, the *Patriot*, the *Free-Holder*, the *Censor* and the *Commentator*. These titles reflected the fact that the comment in comment serials tended to be presented

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39 *Tatler*, 172 (16 May 1710), r; *Spectator*, 249 (15 December 1711), r.

40 The collected edition of the *Hermit* was called, ‘The HERMIT: By WAY of Short ESSAYS upon several SUBJECTS’; the collected edition of the *Lay-Monk* was called, ‘The Lay-Monstery. Consisting of ESSAYS, DISCOURSES, &c’; *Censor*, 96 (1 June 1717), (vol. 3, p. 244, in collected edn, ESTC T98529).

41 *Examiner*, 3.23 (9 February 1713), r; *Free-Holder*, 55 (29 June 1716), v.
as the voice of a respectable individual. This could be expressed through a character in a
dialogue (for instance Tutchin as ‘Mr Observator’) or through a first-person prose style (for
instance Defoe in the Review). Some personas simply represented the qualities expressed
in the title, but others were developed more fully into characters, either as semi-
fictionalised representations of real individuals, as in Tutchin’s case, or as wholly-
fictionalised characters, as in the famous cases of Sir Isaac Bickerstaff in the Tatler and Mr
Spectator in the Spectator. These latter, fully-fledged personas have been called eidola or
‘masks’, and have been identified as key innovations of Steele and Addison. Albert
Furtwangler helpfully distinguished the ‘persona’ – ‘a first-person identity of the sort that
gives dramatic unity to a poem or short story’ – from the narrower category of the eidolon,
‘a figure to be seen, and then seen through’.42 However, innovative though the post-1709
eidola were, they need to be contextualised within a longer history of comment serial
personas. Moreover, looking further back, they can also be read in the context of personas
in civil war newsbooks. As we have seen, the 1647-50 Mercuries used the figure of
‘Mercury’ as a mask, carrying particular personality traits, both associated with Mercury
himself, such as cunning and playfulness, and associated with the adjectives with which
Mercury was qualified, such as ‘Melancholicus’ and ‘Bellicus’. Like later eidola, Mercuries
were fictionalised characters through which comment was expressed, although they did not
carry key features of eidola, such as a biographical back-story.

Finally, some comment is necessary about serials that have been excluded from the
list of comment serials. An inclusive approach has been taken for the post-1709 period,
when serials whose primary function was comment, on any subject, have all been listed.
Pre-1709, however, serials have been excluded that did not have political comment as their
primary function, because the emergence of political comment serials is the key narrative
of the earlier period. The most important exclusions that contained some comment
function are: the Athenian Mercury (1691-97) tradition of question-and-answer curiosity
serials; the monthly prose-and-verse miscellany tradition inaugurated by the Gentleman’s
Journal (1692-94); John Houghton’s economic-news-and-advice-based Collection for the
Improvement of Husbandry and Trade (1692-1703); two half-sheet folio verse miscellanies,

For personas and eidola in comment serials more generally, see Richmond P. Bond, The Tatler: The
Making of a Literary Journal (Cambridge, MS: Harvard University Press, 1971), ch. 7; Lee S. Horsley,
‘Rogues or Honest Gentlemen: The Public Characters of Queen Anne Journalists’, Texas Studies in
Literature and Language, 18:2 (1976), pp. 198-228. Horsley argues that ‘persona’ is not an
appropriate term for serials such as Tutchin’s Observator because the character was just a projection
of the author, but this understates the common pattern of expressing comment through the voice of
a character, however fictionalised or elaborated or self-conscious it was.
the *Diverting Post* (1704-06) and *Poetical Courant* (1706); and two first-person travel narratives designed to expose vices and follies through description, the *London Spy* (1698-1700) and the *Wandering Spy* (1705). More controversially, a few minor serials that were centred on comment, but not political comment, have also been excluded: *Observations on the Weekly Bill* (1686, medical comment), *Hippocrates Ridens* (1686, satirical attacks on physicians), the *Gentleman’s Journal for the War* (1693-96, geographical and historical context for foreign affairs), the *Weekly Remembrancer* (1702-03, spiritual comment), and the *Comical Observator* (1704, dialogue discussion of vices and follies). However, these are sufficiently minor cases that they do not affect the overall picture.

Comment serials were a tangible and collective phenomenon in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries. Despite some blurred lines, they can be defined and delineated with a high degree of specificity. Although they shared a number of features with their 1647-50 Mercury predecessors, including a focus on political comment, a partisan function and the use of humour and personas, they marked a break from that tradition through their genre, and included a wider range of comment, for instance on economic and moral subjects.

**Comment serials and pamphlets**

What was the relationship between comment serials and pamphlets? Given that comment serials were, in effect, serialised comment pamphlets, the two kinds of publication overlapped significantly in form, function and content. In what contexts would authors choose to publish a comment serial rather than a pamphlet, or vice versa? What were the advantages and disadvantages of each form? Why did pamphlets continue to thrive when comment serials proliferated? These are broad questions, and no attempt will be made here to answer them comprehensively, but one approach is to examine three authors who used the two forms simultaneously: Roger L’Estrange in the 1680s, Charles Leslie in the 1700s and Richard Steele in the 1710s. These authors published comment serials to take advantage of their more flexible content, greater accessibility to readers and ability to respond quickly to events. They reserved the pamphlet form for more detailed discussions, comment that was focused on a specific subject, and pieces that were intended to make a substantial or longer-lasting impact beyond the lifespan of a single issue of a comment serial. In this way, comment serials and pamphlets could be complementary weapons in support of their political causes. Strikingly, for these authors, comment serials assumed
some of the advantages that were identified in chapter 1 as reasons for publishing pamphlets: flexibility and accessibility. This perhaps helps to explain an apparent growth in longer pamphlets in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries: as comment serials took on the functions of short pamphlets, pamphlets were more likely to be longer.\footnote{The primary discussion of L'Estrange's, Leslie's and Steele's comment serials can be found later in this chapter.}

Roger L'Estrange (1616-1704) was a prolific author of printed publications supporting royalist and Tory causes between the 1640s and 1690s.\footnote{For L'Estrange, see esp. George Kitchin, \textit{Sir Roger L'Estrange: A Contribution to the History of the Press in the Seventeenth Century} (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1971); Harold Love, ‘L’Estrange, Sir Roger (1616-1704)’, \textit{Oxford Dictionary of National Biography} (online edn, 4 October 2007); Anne Dunan-Page and Beth Lynch, eds, \textit{Roger L'Estrange and the Making of Restoration Culture} (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); Hinds, \textit{Horrid Popish Plot}.} One of his most intense periods of publishing activity was between 1678 and 1687, when he was the most prominent loyalist/Tory print polemicist attacking the opposition/Whig forces that, for loyalists, posed an existential threat to Crown and Church. Between 1678 and 1681, he performed this function entirely through pamphlets – around twenty separate titles, in addition to many new editions and reprints – which took forms such as narratives, animadversions and comical dialogues.\footnote{A bibliography of L'Estrange’s works can be found at Geoff Kemp, ‘The Works of Roger L'Estrange: An Annotated Bibliography’, in Anne Dunan-Page and Beth Lynch, eds, \textit{Roger L'Estrange and the Making of Restoration Culture} (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 181-223. Many of L'Estrange’s Succession Crisis pamphlets were gathered into a collected edition in early 1681. Kemp, ‘Works of L'Estrange’, A56, A56a. Cf. ESTC R12175.} From 1681, however, his polemic was published primarily through his comment serial, the \textit{Observator}. As a dialogue serial, this followed up L’Estrange’s success with comical dialogue pamphlets, notably the two parts of \textit{Citt and Bumpkin} (both 1680), in which urban ‘Citt’ and rural ‘Bumpkin’ agree on proto-Whig political principles that are subsequently demolished by ‘Trueman’.

Writing a comment serial brought L’Estrange a number of advantages compared with his pamphlets. The \textit{Observator} could cover all of the same content as pamphlets, but, as L’Estrange explained, ‘I have taken-up this way, of Little, and Often;... [because it] Carries these Three Advantages along with it; That it is Timely, Cheap and Easy’. It was ‘timely’ because it was a flexible vehicle that could be published several times a week: ‘oftner, or seldom, as I see Occasion’. As a single paper rather than a lengthy pamphlet, it was both ‘cheap’ and ‘easy’ to read, which increased his chances of maximising his audience. The \textit{Observator} was aimed explicitly at a broad public, as L’Estrange sought to win people back from Whig deceptions. As L’Estrange pithily said in the first issue of the \textit{Observator}, in
possibly the most quoted line of any comment serial, “Tis the Press that has made ‘um Mad, and the Press must set ‘um Right again.”

In addition, L’Estrange continued to publish pamphlets alongside the *Observator*. Between February 1681 and March 1687, when the *Observator* ended, L’Estrange published at least twelve original pamphlets, in addition to reprints of earlier titles and a clutch of pamphlets that republished small sections of the *Observator*. His use of the pamphlet declined over the course of the *Observator*’s run: eight of these twelve were published in 1681, two in 1682, one in 1683 and one in 1685, which perhaps suggests that part of the reason that his pamphleteering continued is simply that it took time for writing a comment serial to fully displace his earlier habits. However, he primarily wrote these pamphlets because they had purposes that could not be served as well in a comment serial. One was lengthy discussion: eleven of the twelve comprised between 34 and 90 pages, which could not be contained in an issue of a comment serial. Some were designed to provide detailed animadversions on other pamphlets, as part of a standard pamphlet war. For example, *The Character of a Papist in Masquerade* (1681) and *A Reply to the Second Part of the Character of the Popish Successor* (1681) answered Whig pamphlets by Elkanah Settle. Others were published as flagship pieces that summarised L’Estrange’s case about a particular issue, and were intended to last longer than the period between two issues of a comment serial. Most important here were the two parts of *The Dissenters Sayings* (both 1681), which aimed to condemn dissenters in their own words by gathering quotations that exposed the nefariousness of their thoughts and deeds. Although he frequently returned to these themes in the *Observator*, a pamphlet that summarised his attack on the dissenters was more durable. Indeed, L’Estrange referred to *The Dissenters Sayings* within the *Observator*, indicating that the pamphlet and the comment serial were designed to be complementary. A similar effect was intended for a few pamphlets of self-defence: *L’Estrange No Papist* (1681), in which L’Estrange defended himself from claims by Titus Oates and Miles Prance that he was a crypto-Catholic and had suborned witnesses, and *The Observator Defended* (1685), L’Estrange’s defence of his seemingly-contradictory simultaneous support for the Church of England and the new Catholic king, James II.
other pamphlets, L’Estrange provided durable and definitive Tory accounts to blacken the name of executed Whigs who were at risk of becoming martyrs, for instance Notes upon Stephen College (1681) for Stephen College, and Considerations upon a Printed Sheet Entitled the Speech of the Late Lord Russel to the Sheriffs (1683) for William, Lord Russell. Attacking these figures solely through the Observator diluted the impact of the Tory response; it was necessary to have a full Tory statement of their crimes, in pamphlet form, to which readers could be directed.

A second example is Charles Leslie (1650-1722), another polemicist who wrote in support of Tory causes – or often, more accurately, non-juring and Jacobite ones. Leslie published dozens of works on theological and political subjects between the 1690s and 1710s, ranging from attacks on Socinians, Deists and Quakers to defences of a patriarchalist interpretation of monarchy. After Queen Anne’s accession in 1702, he published pamphlets as part of a wider high-church press moment, including the two parts of the New Association (both 1702), which attacked those ‘latitudinarians’ within the Church of England who wished for greater comprehension for dissenters, and the two parts of Cassandra (both 1704), which excoriated the Whigs and Whig principles. Between 1704 and 1709, he also wrote a comment serial, the Rehearsal. Like L’Estrange, his desire to publish a comment serial was motivated by a wish to reach a wider audience and to be able to respond to Whig publications, and especially their comment serials, in a timelier manner. Indeed, he specifically emulated the chief Whig comment serials, Tutchin’s Observator and Defoe’s Review, because:

the Answer must be in the same Method as these Papers, to come out Weekly, and to be Read by the People[,] Else it wou’d signify nothing as to Them[,] And to Procure them to Listen to such an Antidote... it was Necessary, That... these Papers shou’d... Begin with that Pleasantry or Fooling with which they were so much taken in the other Papers[.]”

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51 Rehearsal, vol. 1 (1704-07), preface, pp. [i-ii].
In a pamphlet written shortly before the *Rehearsal* began, *The Wolf Stript of his Shepherd’s Cloathing* (1704), Leslie explained why he had focused his latest attack on the Whigs in an individual pamphlet:

The Faction... think to Oppress us with their Numbers. It wou’d be the work of a Society of Writers, such as they have, to Answer every one of that Multitude of Pamphlets, which... come out Thick and Threefold upon us every Day... Therefore, because it is endless to Answer every one of them Particularly, I have taken the Top and Chief of them.[].

The *Rehearsal* enabled him to take a more wide-ranging approach to tackle the ‘multitude’ of Whig publications, including the comment serials, responding flexibly to different items as he wished.

Like L’Estrange, Leslie continued to publish pamphlets alongside his comment serial. It is difficult to say how many, as they were all anonymous or pseudonymous, but ESTC suggests he may have authored over a dozen in this period. Leslie used the pamphlet form to publish longer arguments against Whigs and dissenters, such as *The Case of the Church of England’s Memorial Fairly Stated* (1705), which defended James Drake’s *The Memorial of the Church of England* (1705), and *The Second Part of the Wolf Stript of his Shepherds Cloathing* (1707), in which ‘the Designs of the ATHEISTS, DEISTS, WHIGS, COMMONWEALTHS-MEN, &c. and all sorts of SECTARISTS against the CHURCH, are plainly laid Open and Expos’d’. It is possible that the anonymity of these pamphlets was part of the reason that Leslie continued to produce them, as this enabled Leslie to create the impression that the high-church cause was more substantial than if they had all appeared under his name.

A final case study is Richard Steele (1672-1729), whose publishing career in support of Whig causes was concentrated in the 1710s. Between 1709 and 1713, he was primarily associated with the successful serials of manners and morals, the *Tatler, Spectator* and

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Guardian. From August 1713 onwards, however, he emerged as one of the leading authors of Whig political print. Partly, he published Whig comment through comment serials. He included some political papers in the Guardian, then launched the Englishman (1713-15) as a political comment serial. Steele’s use of comment serials was similar to his predecessors’, being a vehicle for accessible and timely arguments. In addition, Steele needed to respond to the flagship Tory comment serial of the era, the Examiner, which necessitated a serial response. Steele also had a particular incentive to write a political comment serial because he could present it as an evolution from his moral comment serials, which had already secured him a considerable reputation. In the first issue of the Englishman, the persona explained that the Guardian’s eidolon, Nestor Ironside, had told him, ‘It is not... now a Time to improve the Taste of Men... but to awaken their Understanding, by laying before them the present State of the World’. Hence, the political Englishman was to succeed the moral Guardian.55

Steele also wrote pamphlets at this time. Steele, like his predecessors, reserved pamphlets for longer or set-piece material. His first political pamphlet in this period was The Importance of Dunkirk Consider’d (1713), a lengthy defence of his case that the French fortified town of Dunkirk needed to be destroyed, in line with the terms of the Treaty of Utrecht, in order to prevent its being used as a base from which the French or Jacobites could launch an invasion of Britain. Steele had first expressed this view in an issue of the Guardian, when it had provoked a storm of angry print responses from Tories, and Steele’s pamphlet was his attempt to produce a definitive restatement of his position, and a response to his critics. This was followed by The Crisis (1714), one of the best-selling pamphlets of the entire period.56 The Crisis was intended to be a set-piece account of Whig concerns about the succession, as Whigs feared (or claimed to fear) that the succession of a Protestant Hanoverian after Anne’s death was in jeopardy under a Tory ministry that was allegedly flirting with Jacobitism. Most of the pamphlet comprised long quotations from laws and documents that affirmed the legality of the Hanoverian succession, with the final part reserved for Steele’s own arguments. That The Crisis was designed to make a substantial impact is indicated by the fact that it was advertised for a full three months – including in the Englishman – before it was published.57 Together, the Englishman and The Crisis appealed to the public in different ways: the comment serial provided the more accessible, repeated arguments, while the pamphlet provided a definitive account and a

55 Englishman, 1 (6 October 1713), r.
56 Winton, ‘Steele’.
57 Knight, Political Biography, p. 145.
big-hitting moment around which Whigs could coalesce. Together, they attracted Tory ire: in March 1714, Steele was investigated and expelled by the Tory majority in the Commons for these two ‘scandalous and seditious’ publications (he was a Whig MP).

Comment serials and pamphlets were both useful weapons in the party conflict of late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century Britain, but they had different strengths. Comment serials were useful for material that was more repetitive, more immediately topical, shorter and more accessible. The pamphlet form, however, was better for constructing set-piece publications designed to make a strong and longer-lasting impact, or for making definitive or detailed arguments about a subject.

It is now time to commence a more detailed consideration of comment serials, on a broadly chronological basis. The next section begins with their origins during the Succession Crisis.

**Origins, 1678-1683**

In 1681, a Whig pamphlet described two new Tory serials, the *Observator* and *Heraclitus Ridens*, in unflattering terms:

> They are Teeming Animals, that swell with Noise and Nonsence, but onely bring forth a Penny Pamphlet... the Weekly Infants are snatch’d from the Bosom of their Parents, and being [hu]rried into Publick, they create a Disturbance with their clamorous Shrieks. No sooner do the troublesom Brats yelp themselves into silence, and expire, but another Issue is successively continued... They arraign Officers, and cancel the very Private Acts of Magistrates; as if a Word must not be spoke, but these sawcie Scribbers must make the Comment. 

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In presenting these serials as ‘mak[ing] the comment’, this Whig author was, perhaps unwittingly, nodding to the origins of the comment serial. The comment serial was a product of the Succession Crisis, the most dramatic political moment of Charles II’s reign, when party conflict exploded in the context of opposition/Whig anxieties about the spread of ‘popery and arbitrary government’ and loyalist/Tory counter-anxieties about Whig

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threats to Crown and Church, combined with the lapse of the Licensing Act in 1679 weakening government mechanisms for controlling the press.\textsuperscript{59} The emergence of comment serials represented a raising of the stakes beyond the publication of pamphlets and newspapers to mould a more powerful kind of print weapon, in response to this extreme partisan pressure. The key moment of genesis came in the spring of 1681, when the political crisis was at its height – also, not coincidentally, the moment that the terms ‘Whig’ and ‘Tory’ came into common parlance.\textsuperscript{60} The chief comment serials were Henry Care’s Whig \textit{Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Rome} (1678-83), Edward Rawlins’s Tory \textit{Heraclitus Ridens} (1681-82) and Roger L’Estrange’s Tory \textit{Observator} (1681-87), but there were also 17 more minor titles. Many of these early comment serials were dialogues. Most, including the three leading comment serials, adopted a humorous style for at least part of the publication. Apart from \textit{Weekly Pacquet} – which occupies an ambiguous place in the development of the comment serial – the Tory comment serials largely led the way, with the Whigs catching up afterwards. Indeed, it is possible that the main phase of comment serial proliferation in early 1681 was spearheaded by direct regime action, as part of the king’s attempts to seize the initiative after a winter in which the Whig threat had grown substantially. Comment serials engaged in a continuous partisan paper war, interacting with newspapers, pamphlets and other comment serials, and shaped political discourse in the latter stages of the Succession Crisis.\textsuperscript{61} Their content was similar and repetitive – most were dominated by attacks on political opponents, in terms of principles, people and publications – but this relentlessness was the very point, as they were primarily aimed at building and sustaining a negative characterisation of the opposing party.

The first appearance of comment serials represented an evolution rather than a revolution. To understand how this happened, it is necessary to set out the press context. Press output exploded during the Succession Crisis, driven by both the political intensity of the period and the lapse of pre-publication licensing. Mark Knights has estimated that 5-10 million copies of pamphlets may have been in circulation between 1679 and 1681.\textsuperscript{62} There was also a thriving newspaper press: Susannah Randall has estimated 92 titles, representing

\textsuperscript{59} For the terminology of party in the Succession Crisis, see Mark Knights, \textit{Politics and Opinion in Crisis, 1678-1681} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), esp. pp. 355-6.
\textsuperscript{61} Cf. Schwoerer, \textit{Care}, ch. 6.
5,610 issues of newspapers, were published between 1677 and 1685. It is unclear how many physical copies of newspapers in circulation this represented, but even a conservative estimate of 500 copies per issue suggests this would also have reached millions.

Theoretically, comment serials were a natural step beyond pamphlets and newspapers, effectively representing a combination of these two traditions. Viewed from one perspective, comment serials represented the serialisation of pamphlets; viewed from another, they were the development of half-sheet folio, partisan news serials into half-sheet folio, partisan comment serials. In principle, neither of these steps required a great leap of imagination. However, this does not negate the fact that this had (mostly) not been done before, or that this small evolution in form had enormous consequences over subsequent decades, by enabling the entire comment serial tradition to develop. This is analogous to the emergence of the first domestic newsbook in 1641, as argued by Joad Raymond, which in itself ‘only’ represented the setting of a pre-existing manuscript newsletter for printing, but nonetheless made possible the explosion of printed newsbooks in the 1640s.

At this point, it is worth returning briefly to the 1640s and 1650s, because it is striking that comment serials did not emerge in the civil wars, even though this period witnessed a similar conjunction of partisan pressure and press proliferation as the Succession Crisis. As we have seen, civil war serials, including the 1647-50 Mercuries, were virtually all conceived as publications of ‘news’ or ‘intelligence’. However, there were a few minor civil war serials that were conceived differently. A single-issue New Christian Uses (1643) provided providential interpretations of the events of the civil wars. Some serials were solely designed to answer other serials, for instance Britanicus Vapulans (1643) and Anti-Aulicus (1644), which responded to Mercurius Britannicus and Mercurius Aulicus respectively. More innovative were three minor serials of 1654: Observations Historical, Political, and Philosophical, upon Aristotles First Book of Political Government and Politick Commentary on the Life of Caius July Caesar, both written by John Streater, and Marchamont Nedham’s Observator. These were all contributions to the debate around Cromwell’s Protectorate: Streater was a purist republican who opposed Cromwell, and Nedham was (at this stage) writing on Cromwell’s behalf. All contained comment keywords

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64 See below, pp. 206-8, for more on print-runs.
in their titles, and their primary function was comment: Observations was a commentary on Aristotle’s Politics, used as a mechanism to criticise Cromwell; Politick Commentary was a hostile commentary on Julius Caesar, who represented Cromwell; and the Observator answered publications that attacked Cromwell. None of these serials lasted very long, and Streater’s serials both contained news as well as comment, but the comment was still more explicitly foregrounded than in 1640s newsbooks. However, for the most part, the 1640s and 1650s did not bring about dedicated serials of comment.

Why did the 1640s produce Mercuries, while the 1680s produced comment serials? Part of the answer is simply that comment serials had not yet been invented in the 1640s. Serial publication was originally and indelibly linked with news – serial publication had been invented, after all, as a mechanism for carrying rolling news – so publishing a serial that was not about news was not obvious, even if it may have seemed so in retrospect. Perhaps, in the 1680s, some people just happened to realise that serials devoted to comment would enable more concentrated and potent comment to be circulated in public than was possible in newspapers or pamphlets, and developed comment serials accordingly. Alternatively, it may reflect wider cultural trends: a growing consolidation of a concept of commenting on current affairs, and a concomitant growing market for comment publications among readers. In addition, the fact that the Succession Crisis was not a military conflict perhaps placed greater pressure on the development of stronger paper weapons, and less pressure on the news function of serials. However, the emergence of comment serials can also be addressed more specifically by taking a detailed approach to the chronology of this period.

Although the key moment of emergence occurred in the spring of 1681, it is necessary to begin with an earlier serial that moved away from the newspaper tradition: the Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Rome (1678-83). The Weekly Pacquet began in December 1678, and comprised eight-page pamphlets, published weekly. It was written by Henry Care and printed by Langley Curtis, who were both active supporters of opposition/Whig politics, and the Weekly Pacquet was an early salvo for that cause. Its aim was to expose the dangers of popery, in the context of the national hysteria that followed.

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the (false) revelations of a ‘Popish Plot’ to assassinate the king and overturn Protestantism in England. As initially conceived, the *Weekly Pacquet* did this through two sections. The first section, of six pages, centred on a serialised history of the Catholic Church that emphasised its illegitimacy and vice, to dissuade readers from the lure of Catholicism. The second section, of two pages, was the jocular ‘Popish Courant’, which took the form of a parody newspaper, comprising satirical ‘reports’ from Catholic locations such as Rome and Ireland. This was partly designed to provide reader-friendly light relief after the heavy first section, and partly to undermine popery’s appeal through ridicule.

The *Weekly Pacquet* project was not inherently controversial. Indeed, it was initially licensed, and by the man who would later become the most prominent Tory in print, and Care’s rival: Roger L’Estrange. However, Care and Curtis got into legal difficulties in 1679 after the paper’s anti-Catholic stance drifted into implied criticism that some Church of England men within the regime were crypto-Catholics. Care was tried for unlicensed printing in July 1680 and ordered to cease publishing the *Weekly Pacquet*, although he circumvented this by using a different title for a few months.

In form, the *Weekly Pacquet* was an ambiguous publication. Vestiges of the newspaper tradition can be found here. The whole was a ‘pacquet of advice’ and the final section a ‘courant’, which used terms associated with news. The ‘Popish Courant’ took the form of a newspaper, albeit a parody. In other respects, however, the *Weekly Pacquet* broke from the conventions of newspapers more than any major serial had done before. In the first issue, Care described the project as a ‘Pamphlet-course’ which would be ‘Perform’d by a SINGLE SHEET, Coming out every Friday but with a continual Connexion’. Its subject was ‘The History of POPERY, A Deduction of the USURPATIONS of the Bishops of Rome, and The ERRORS and SUPERSTITIONS By them from time to time brought into the Church’.

Care used the serial form to break up and severally release a single, larger entity, specifically a history, and not to carry updates of news. Among earlier serials, this only resembled Streater’s short-lived publications of 1654.

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68 Schwoerer, *Care*, pp. 76, 80.
69 Philip Hamburger, ‘The Development of the Law of Seditious Libel and the Control of the Press’, *Stanford Law Review*, 37:3 (1985), pp. 686-9; Schwoerer, *Care*, ch. 5. Despite the lapse of the Licensing Act in 1679, the *Weekly Pacquet* was ‘unlicensed’ with respect to a judicial opinion of May 1680.
70 This was not a new phenomenon in the serial press. Earlier instances of newspaper parodies included *Mercurius Democritus* (1652-54) and *Poor Robin’s Intelligence* (1676-77), the latter of which was possibly written by Care.
Moreover, the main section of the *Weekly Pacquet* contained theological controversy as well as history, challenging Catholic doctrines such as papal supremacy, iconophilia and transubstantiation. Care indicated this function in the second part of his title: ‘The Papists Arguments are Answered, their Fallacies Detected, their Cruelties Registed, their Treasons and seditious Principles Observed, and the whole Body of Papistry Anatomized’. As he later explained, ‘we shall charge this sheet with matter which we conceive more important and useful, viz. To recommend to the Reader certain Means, or Expedients, requisite in the Interpretation of Sacred Scripture, or assistant for discovering the true genuine sence and meaning of the Holy Ghost therein’. This was nothing to do with reporting news.

Other features of the *Weekly Pacquet* also distanced it from newspapers or aligned it with comment. Although the ‘Popish Courant’ usually took the form of a parody newspaper, it was described as ‘occasional Joco-serious Reflections on Romish Fopperies’, using a comment keyword. In addition, it sometimes took other forms, such as one issue that provided the text of a ‘Catholic homily’ with critical parenthetical comments, and other issues that contained satirical voices of Catholic opinion. In addition, the fact that the *Weekly Pacquet* was an eight-page quarto pamphlet aligned it physically with pamphlets, at a time when newspapers were usually half-sheet folio in format. In all of these respects, the *Weekly Pacquet* was different from previous and contemporary serials, although it was not a fully-fledged serial of comment at this stage.

The full emergence of comment serials occurred in the spring of 1681. To explain why, it is necessary to set the precise context. At the start of 1681, the regime was on the back foot. The Whigs were in the political ascendancy, with numerical dominance in Parliament and control over the courts, the latter deriving from their possession of the London shrievalty. They were threatening to remove the king’s brother, James, Duke of York, from the succession through an ‘exclusion bill’ in Parliament (which is therefore sometimes known as the ‘Second Exclusion Parliament’), were attempting to impeach royal officials such as Lord Chief Justice Scroggs, and had secured the release of the Whig publisher Benjamin Harris from prison. One of the government’s chief defenders in print, Roger L’Estrange, who had been licenser and surveyor of the press before the lapse of the

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72 E.g., respectively, ibid, 1.1 (3 December 1678); 2.3 (25 July 1679); 3.27 (10 December 1680).
75 Ibid, 2.1 (11 July 1679), pp. 7-8; e.g. 3.28 (17 December 1680), pp. 223-4.
Licensing Act in 1679, had been driven into exile for fear of imprisonment. In the press, the Whigs were rampant. There was a new wave of Whig newspapers from December 1680, including a revived Protestant (Domestick) Intelligence and a new True Protestant Mercury, which heightened the paper war. The Whigs also published daily votes of the House of Commons, against precedent, to publicise their activity in Parliament.

From January 1681, a loyalist fightback began. Parliament was dissolved on 18 January, and elections were called for a new Parliament, which the king hoped to use to regain the political initiative. As already noted, this was also, not coincidentally, the moment when ‘Tory’ and ‘Whig’ became prominent as party labels. Tories and Whigs fought hard to win the battle for public opinion, and consequently for the composition of the new Parliament, which would determine whether the succession question, and other contentious political and religious issues, would continue or be shut down. Pamphlets advised electors to vote for candidates of one side or another, or contained ‘addresses’ (instructions to MPs) claiming popular support behind certain political principles. Newspapers provided partisan accounts of local electoral contests and the state of public opinion, including two new titles, Francis Smith’s Whig Smith’s Protestant Intelligence and Nathaniel Thompson’s Tory Loyal Protestant. And, as part of this mix, the general election of 1681 also produced the first full comment serials.

At the heart of this spring 1681 moment was the invention of the dialogue serial: regular publications containing series of linked conversations between given characters. The primary examples were Heraclitus Ridens, the Observer, and the ‘Popish Courant’ section of the Weekly Pacquet, which largely switched to dialogue in April 1681.77 Dialogues, especially of the Lucianic/satirical mode, were already a prominent genre in Succession Crisis pamphlets, for instance The Plot Discover’d: Or a Dialogue Between the Pope and the Devil (1678), A Dialogue Between Duke Lauderdale and the Lord Danby (1679), and A Dialogue Between Tom and Dick, over a Dish of Coffee, Concerning Matters of Religion and Government (1680), in addition to L’Estrange’s Citt and Bumpkin pamphlets.78 In 1681, dialogue was combined with the serial form for the first time, and quickly

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77 The non-dialogues included the Weekly Discoverer Strip’d Naked (prose), News from the Land of Chivalry (satirical biography), the Weekly Visions of the Late Popish Plot (dream narratives), and the Popish Mass Display’d (verse). See Appendix A.
78 To use a crude count from ESTC, a title search for ‘dialogue’ on ESTC yields 166 entries for the period 1678-81. This includes some longer dialogues that do not really fall within the world of topical comment, and no doubt excludes some that do not carry the word ‘dialogue’ in their titles. On Succession Crisis dialogue pamphlets, see Schwoerer, Care, p. 147; Hinds, Horrid Popish Plot, p. 108.
proliferated. The preponderance of dialogue in public party politics in 1681 was recognised by contemporaries, for instance in the following exchange in a minor Whig comment serial:

Some Body  What is your business with me?
No Body    Only to Dialoguise after the Mode.
Some Body  After whose mode?
No Body    The new Mode of Railing: Why should not we Rail a little against the Times, talk Non-sence, Rant, Fence, Examine, Observe, Abuse the People, Pamphlets, Manners, Religion and Government, as well as other Folk.80

Disparaging though this was, this makes clear the fashionableness of dialogue in political comment during 1681.

To understand how these developments unfolded, it is helpful to take a granular chronological approach through the months between February and May 1681. On 1 February 1681, the first issue of Heraclitus Ridens appeared (Fig. 13).81 This new weekly serial announced that it was to be a publication ‘where many a True Word is spoken in opposition to all Libellers against the Government’, especially the opposition/Whig press-men Francis Smith, Henry Care, Benjamin Harris and Langley Curtis. In this way, it was the first comment serial proper, fighting to win the people over to the Tory cause. Through its ‘discourse’, it would ‘advance your understandings above the common rate of Coffee-House Statesmen’ – the Whig sympathisers discussing politics in coffeehouses – ‘who think themselves wiser than the Privy Council, or the Sages of the Law’.82 From its second issue, it did this by taking the form of a dialogue between characters named ‘Jest’ and ‘Earnest’, who discussed the madness of the Whigs’ successes and the need for them to be vanquished. Jest and Earnest accused Whigs and dissenters of trying to overthrow Crown and Church, and pointed out their similarities with the rebels and regicides of the 1640s.

79 There had been a few minor uses of dialogue in civil war serials, such as a two-issue Mercurius Honestus in 1648.
80 New Dialogue between Some Body and No Body, 1 (25 November 1681), r. ‘Railing’ was a term for relentless, witty, abusive verbal attacks. See Raymond, Invention, pp. 153-4; Maria T.M. Prendergast, Railing, Reviling, and Invective in English Literary Culture, 1588-1617: The Anti-Poetics of Theater and Print (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).
81 For Heraclitus Ridens, see esp. Newton, ‘Mask of Heraclitus’.
82 Heraclitus Ridens, 1 (1 February 1681).
As these character names suggest, *Heraclitus Ridens* drew heavily on humour in its attacks on the Whigs. Jest tended to provide a jocular interpretation of events, for instance by bringing ballads or jokes to the conversation, while Earnest generally adopted a serious tone, most obviously through lists of queries. As a Whig critic observed, Jest ‘laughs at Plots, is tickled to see a Kingdom in a Flame, Tehees at Religion, Mocks at Liberty’. The serial’s alignment with humour was emphasised in the first issue, which promised to ‘mingle Advantage and Diversion’, and adopted the Horatian motto, ‘*ridentem dicere verum/ Quis vetat*’ (‘who would prevent a man, laughing, from speaking the truth?’). The serial’s title also referenced humour. Heraclitus was a pre-Socratic philosopher who was proverbially regarded as the ‘weeping philosopher’ because he bewailed the times, while his counterpart, Democritus, the ‘laughing philosopher’, laughed at them. ‘Ridens’ was Latin for ‘laughing’ or ‘smiling’, so the title expressed the paradoxical idea of the weeping philosopher laughing. Its precise meaning is not explained, but a few clues can be found elsewhere. In his discussion of dialogues in 1684, Ferrand Spence understood the

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83 *Democritus Ridens*, 1 (17 March 1681), r.
84 *Heraclitus Ridens*, 1 (1 February 1681), r. This adapts Horace, Satires, 1.1.24-5, with ‘*quis*’ instead of ‘*quid*’: ‘what would prevent...’.
‘Heraclitus Ridens’ paradox as the essence of the joco-serious style – seriousness conveyed through humour – by describing the hybrid form of dialogue as

having neither all the Severity of the first nor the later’s Gayety, and Facetiousness, Yet it borrows something of Both; and is a perfect Heraclitus Ridens. For, it Treats of Solid things, and treats of ’em Solidly: But it layes over ’em a Thousand Ornaments and Colours, that they may be the more taking.86

A later Heraclitus Ridens (1703-04) – another Tory comment serial – used the image in a different way, to suggest that the aim of the serial was to make Heraclitus laugh, which could only happen when the Whigs were defeated and the Tories triumphant.87

What were the origins of Heraclitus Ridens? According to its imprint, it was ‘printed for Benjamin Tooke’, which meant that Tooke was the owner of the title. Tooke was a prominent printer and bookseller with connections to the regime, who had served as the King’s Printer in Dublin, and in Anne’s time would become Printer to the Queen.88 Scattered contemporary references suggest it was written primarily by Edward Rawlins, an alcoholic Cambridge graduate and loudmouth loyalist often found in coffeehouses, possibly with help for the ballads from the miniaturist and poet Thomas Flatman, and maybe others.89 Certainly, Heraclitus Ridens was connected with London loyalist circles, eager to turn the tables on Whigs. However, its origins may have been more elevated. One account has Heraclitus Ridens and L’Estrange’s Observator (of which more shortly) as the direct product of government policy, as flagship vehicles for the government’s attempt to seize the initiative from the Whigs. According to this version of events, Francis North, the Lord Keeper, argued for the need to ‘set up counter writers, that, as every libel came out, should take it to task, and answer it’. The government acted on North’s advice, and ‘some clever writers were employed, such as were called the Observator and Heraclitus, for a constancy’.90 This account is plausible; certainly Charles II’s government was interested in publishing pro-regime print.91 There is also evidence that the king directly attempted to

87 Heraclitus Ridens, 9 (31 August 1703), r.
place items in *Heraclitus Ridens*.\(^2\) If North’s account is true, Charles II’s government was responsible for the invention of comment serials.

Another Tory serial that was not a newspaper appeared shortly after *Heraclitus Ridens*. The *Weekly Discovery* was launched only four days later, on 5 February, also ‘printed for’ Benjamin Tooke. What was being ‘discovered’ (i.e. ‘uncovered’) was ‘The Mystery of Iniquity, in The Rise, Growth, Methods, and Ends of the late Unnatural Rebellion in *England, Anno* 1641’: like Care’s *Weekly Pacquet*, this was a serialised history with contemporary political import. It was not, therefore, conceived as a serial of comment *per se*, although it deserves mention here because serialised history was closely connected with the early development of comment serials. The *Weekly Discovery* narrated events in the early 1640s, in the build-up to the civil wars and through the conflict’s first year, with the Tory implication that Whigs were dangerously risking the country’s stability today, like their parliamentarian forbears four decades earlier. The author lamented ‘the horrid Revolutions which happened in 20 years in our English World: Never was real Tragedy acted with more violence or less time’, before making the contemporary application clear:

> The great apprehensions which invade the minds of good and peaceful men, lest the sparks of that fire may break out again, and the violent symptoms as well as industry of some turbulent spirits, who spend most of their breath both by speaking and Printing to affront the Government, and fan the coals of Sedition, and furnish fuel for the fire; makes it not only a seasonable, but pious and necessary endeavour to awaken the remembrance of good men, to prevent and defeat the designs of ill men, and by setting up buoys and sea-marks of our former shipwrack to prevent a second.\(^3\)

The coincidence of timing and publisher with *Heraclitus Ridens* makes it highly likely that the two serials represented a coordinated effort. Both serials also had Edinburgh editions, suggesting that care was taken to maximise their impact.

Whigs quickly responded to these two new Tory serials with two weekly comment serials of their own: the *Weekly Discoverer Strip’d Naked* (from 16 February) and *Democritus Ridens* (from 17 March).\(^4\) There was clearly an immediate recognition by Whigs

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\(^3\) *Weekly Discovery*, 1 (5 February 1681), r.

\(^4\) Three other minor Whig serials also appeared in February: *News from Parnassus* (a satirical newspaper), *Mercurius Bifrons* (a newspaper with serious and satirical sections) and *News from the
that the new serials required a like response: pamphlets and newspapers would not be sufficient. In its first issue, the *Weekly Discoverer* bid the reader ‘to take Notice, That since our restless Adversaries have so STRANGELY under TOOK to spread abroad their Popish Poyson every Week, the publisher of this paper will in like manner Weekly supply him with an Antidote against it, which shall come out every Wednesday’. The adversaries were identified as *Heracitus Ridens* and the *Weekly Discovery*, who were presented as part of a Catholic campaign to revive the Popish Plot, which would be manifested in the coming Parliament. The *Weekly Discoverer* was mostly in prose, but also contained verse, queries and dialogue. *Democritus Ridens* was more straightforwardly a response to *Heracitus Ridens*: ‘a new Jest and Earnest pratling concerning the Times’. It mirrored the title of its predecessor by substituting the laughing philosopher for the weeping philosopher, and also appeared as a dialogue, between characters named ‘Comus’ and ‘Momus’, a proverbial wit and pedant respectively. Momus claimed that a new dialogue was needed because

> This *Heraclitus* I perceive is grown Triumphant, the *Weekly Discoverer* had not sufficiently Discovered him: Let us try for our Friend *Democritus* his sake, to break a Staff with him; you shall deal with Jest, and let me alone with Earnest as sowre as he is.97

Whether these two commentserials were part of a coordinated move by leading Whigs is less clear than on the Tory side. They were printed for two major Whig publishers, Benjamin Harris and Francis Smith junior respectively, who also published Whig newspapers and pamphlets. Harris and Smith were part of a network of printers and publishers who managed Whig print, which also included Curtis, who printed the *Weekly Land of Chivalry* (a satirical biography of Roger L'Estrange). I have only included the last in my list of commentserials, although they were all satirical Whig serials. All were very minor.

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95 *Weekly Discoverer Strip’d Naked*, 1 (16 February 1681), r. The unsubtle references in the notice to the reader are interesting here: Benjamin ‘TOOK’ is straightforward, but Roger L'E'STRANGE’ must be here because he was presumed to have been involved in one or both of the two new Tory serials. This may have been a false attribution, but was perhaps understandable given L'Estrange’s prominence in defending the regime in print. His time in comment serials was yet to come.

96 E.g. ibid, 2 (23 February 1681), r.

97 *Democritus Ridens*, 1 (17 March 1681), v.

Pacquet. Scholars have speculated about possible connections between Whig publishers and Whig political leaders such as the Earl of Shaftesbury, but these remain unproven.99

During February and March 1681, Care began to align his Weekly Pacquet with the emerging comment serial tradition. Its main section continued to mix anti-Catholic history and controversy, and the ‘Popish Courant’ had by now largely abandoned satirical news in favour of a satirical impersonation of a Catholic. The latter section quickly noted and responded to Heraclitus Ridens. The issue of 11 February began,

Since the Humour runs so much upon Jests and Queries, let us for once play the Fool (though not the Knave) for company. As for Jests, we Catholicks are never unfurnished… Our whole Religion is Mirth and Comedy.

It then included some satirical queries in the style of Heraclitus. The following issue adopted a straightforward Whig voice of comment to attack Heraclitus Ridens, before defending Whig claims about the Popish Plot.100

Despite Tory efforts, it soon became clear that the new parliament would be as dominated by Whigs as its predecessor. In order to detach the Whigs from their supporters on the streets of London, the king summoned the parliament to loyalist Oxford rather than Westminster. Nevertheless, the Oxford Parliament (or ‘Third Exclusion Parliament’), which met on 21 March 1681, quickly passed an exclusion bill through both houses, which prompted the king to dissolve it summarily on 28 March, after only a week. The king was determined to regain control of events, and did not summon another parliament during his reign. However, the dissolution of the parliament did not mark the end of the political crisis; in fact, partisan conflict stepped up. Tories made greater efforts to win the paper war, centred on the king’s Declaration to All His Loving Subjects, Touching the Causes & Reasons That Moved Him to Dissolve the Two Last Parliaments. The Whigs, outraged at the dissolution of the Oxford Parliament, were not going to give up the fight. This meant that the paper wars continued apace.101 In this context, comment serials consolidated their position.

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100 Weekly Pacquet, 3.36 (11 February 1681); 3.37 (18 February 1681).
101 For paper wars after the dissolution of the Oxford Parliament, see Knights, Politics and Opinion, ch. 10; Schwoerer, Care, ch. 6; Grant Tapsell, The Personal Rule of Charles II, 1681-85 (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007), ch. 5.
Soon after the dissolution of the Oxford Parliament, a new comment serial was launched: the *Observator*. This would ultimately be the most successful comment serial of the period. Beginning on 13 April, the *Observator* was another Tory dialogue, this time between ‘Question’ and ‘Answer’, who were characters in conversation rather than a list of queries. It was written by the seminal royal pamphleteer and former press licenser, Roger L’Estrange, who had returned from exile in February. Its aim was ‘the Undeceiving of the People; for they are well enough Disposed, of themselves, to be Orderly, and Obedient, if they were not misled by Ill Principles’, and this meant that the *Observator*’s comment, like that of *Heraclitus Ridens*, was centred on attacking Whigs and dissenters. As with *Heraclitus Ridens*, there are indications of regime connections: it is referenced in the Francis North quote mentioned above, and L’Estrange had been Charles II’s chief press agent for decades. There is also evidence that L’Estrange was supplied with official news and information for the *Observator*, and that he submitted drafts of some issues to Secretaries of State before publication. When virtually all serials were culled by the regime between 1681 and 1683, only the *Observator*, alongside the official *London Gazette* newspaper, was allowed to continue. However, as with other serials, this does not mean that the *Observator*’s comment was not L’Estrange’s own: political connections do not make a publication a mere mouthpiece. Indeed, as Mark Goldie has argued, the *Observator* had a distinctly Tory rather than official voice.

Shortly after the *Observator*’s foundation, the dialogue serial spread further still, when Care switched the *Weekly Pacquet*’s ‘Popish Courant’ section to dialogue on 22 April: ‘Since folks are so set upon Dialoguing, let you and I have a touch [at it]’. The characters in Care’s dialogue varied, but in the early months included ‘Papist’, ‘Masquerade’, ‘True Protestant’, ‘Trueman’ and ‘Tory’, which were voices that impersonated different political and religious positions. Care had presumably judged that one of the Whigs’ most successful serials needed to be re-equipped to counter the new Tory paper artillery, and

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102 L’Estrange’s *Observator* will be discussed in more detail in the next section.
104 *Observator*, 1.1 (13 April 1681), r.
105 Schwoerer, *Care*, pp. 69-70.
108 This section of the *Weekly Pacquet* was not consistent in form. Some later ‘Courants’ were not dialogues, and some were called, e.g., ‘The Protestant Courant’ or just ‘The Courant’.

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this meant imitating their technique. The design of the ‘Popish Courant’ was adjusted accordingly. It now comprised ‘innocent Reflections weekly on the Distempers of the times’: comment on the times in general, not just on Catholicism.\footnote{Weekly Pacquet, vol. 4 (1681-82), title-page.}

Most of the other existing comment serials also continued after the Oxford Parliament. Heraclitus Ridens maintained its weekly attacks on Whigs and dissenters, and Democritus Ridens kept up its response. The Weekly Discovery was continuing to expose the Whigs’ supposed predecessors for their destructive role in the civil wars. Of the earliest comment serials, only the Weekly Discoverer Strip’d Naked had ceased by this time, having effectively been superseded by Democritus Ridens and the Weekly Pacquet. In addition, new, minor comment serials also appeared in April and May. On the Whig side, the Popish Mass Display’d (April) provided anti-Catholic poetry, Weekly Visions (April) comprised allegorical visions with a Whig hue, and the Observator Observ’d (May) was a dialogue response to the Observator. On the Tory side, a Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Geneva (May) was a prose attack on dissenters, as a response to Care’s Weekly Pacquet’s attacks on Catholics and Tories.\footnote{Weekly Pacquet, vol. 4 (1681-82), title-page.}

By the summer of 1681, the continuing strength of the Weekly Pacquet, Heraclitus Ridens, the Weekly Discovery and the Observator, combined with this experimentation with minor comment serials, indicates that the practice of dedicated, serialised comment publication was now taking root in a way that had been unthinkable a few months earlier. The comment serial had been invented. However, their first moment proved to be relatively brief. They had significantly contracted by the end of 1682, and only the Observator lasted beyond 1683. This partly reflects the success of government efforts to restrict the press in 1682-83 – efforts that included the suppression of Tory as well as Whig publications – but there were also other factors at work. The Weekly Discovery ended in August 1681, ostensibly when its author was busy with another project.\footnote{Weekly Discovery, 30 (27 August 1681), v.} Heraclitus Ridens lasted until August 1682, when it claimed to have exhausted its usefulness now that the Whigs had (apparently) been defeated.\footnote{Heraclitus Ridens, 82 (22 August 1682), r.} The Weekly Pacquet survived longer – the longest of all Whig serials of the Succession Crisis period. It split into two variants in August 1682, which lasted respectively until May and July 1683.\footnote{There were two versions because Care and Curtis went separate ways. Curtis was printer of one (NS 478), which lasted until May 1683, although it ceased to include a ‘Courant’ in December 1682} It is possible that Care stopped writing

\footnote{This discussion of comment serials in 1681 excludes two minor publications: the History of Reformation (NS 190), which I have not seen, and the Mock-Press (NS 412), which I have not treated as a serial.}

\footnote{Weekly Pacquet, vol. 4 (1681-82), title-page.}

\footnote{Weekly Discovery, 30 (27 August 1681), v.}

\footnote{Heraclitus Ridens, 82 (22 August 1682), r.}
after coming to an agreement with the government.\textsuperscript{114} Among minor comment serials, the last Whig titles were a couple of dialogues in November 1681 (\textit{Democritus Flens} and the \textit{New Dialogue between Some Body and No Body}), and there were four minor Tory comment serials between late 1681 and 1683: the \textit{Postscript of Advice from Geneva} (December 1681), \textit{Englands Monitor} (March 1682), \textit{Scots Memoirs} (February 1683), and the \textit{Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Geneva} (1683).

Even the \textit{Observator}'s survival is, to some extent, surprising. Although its loyalist comment was in line with government policy, its continuation was not assured, given that other Tory publications, such as the \textit{Loyal Protestant} newspaper, were not allowed to continue.\textsuperscript{115} Indeed, there were attempts to close it down in 1683, although these apparently stemmed from a personal rival of L'Estrange rather than the regime itself.\textsuperscript{116} The survival of L'Estrange's \textit{Observator} beyond 1683 confirmed its status as an influential publication. Indeed, it would establish the chief model for comment serials over the following decades. The rise and fall of the ‘Observator’ tradition is the subject of the next section.

\section*{‘Observators’, 1681-1725}

The most important label in the comment serial tradition was ‘Observator’, which developed as a keyword for a serial of ‘observations’ in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries. Leading the way was Roger L’Estrange’s Tory \textit{Observator}, which established the concept. It was later adopted by James Welwood’s \textit{Mercurius Reformatus, or the New Observator} (1689-94?) and John Tutchin’s and George Ridpath’s \textit{Observator} (1702-12), which both cited L'Estrange as their direct predecessor, even though both were Whig publications (Fig. 14). More widely, ‘Observator’ was used in the title of over thirty serials between 1681 and the 1730s, the vast majority of which were comment serials on political subjects, usually taking a Whig or Tory alignment (Appendix B). This section explores the development and significance of the Observator tradition.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{114} Schwoerer, Care, pp. 182-3.
\item \textsuperscript{115} On the closure of the \textit{Loyal Protestant}, see Sutherland, \textit{Restoration Newspaper}, p. 20.
\end{itemize}
Figure 14. The three major Observators: L'Estrange’s, Welwood’s, Tutchin’s (1682, 1689, 1704).
The head of the Observator tradition was Roger L’Estrange’s *Observator*, which, as we have seen, was established as a Tory dialogue serial in 1681 to defend Charles II’s regime against the Whigs. What did L’Estrange mean by ‘Observator’ when he chose this title? Literally, the serial comprised ‘my Papers of *Observation*’, and in this way L’Estrange drew on the use of ‘observations’ as a term for published topical comment that had been established in the 1640s.\(^{117}\) L’Estrange appears to have understood ‘observations’ primarily in its original sense of answering texts, as the mainstay of the *Observator* in its earliest issues was responding to Whig pamphlets and newspapers. As noted above, L’Estrange stated in his first issue that ‘Tis the *Press* that has made ‘um Mad, and the *Press* must set ‘um Right again’, and he later defined the function of his serial as ‘Reply[ing] upon *Libells*’.\(^{118}\) However, L’Estrange’s understanding of ‘observations’ went beyond answering publications to include negative comment on Whigs and dissenters in general. As he explained in the opening issue,

> My business is, to encounter the *Faction* [i.e. the Whigs], and to Vindicate the *Government*; to detect their *Forgeries*; to lay open the Rankness of their *Calumnies*, and *Malice*; to Refute their *Seditious Doctrines*; to expose their *Hypocrisy*, and the *bloody Design* that is carry’d on, under the Name, and Semblance of *Religion*[].\(^{119}\)

L’Estrange’s ‘observations’ were to attack Whig publications, Whig principles, Whig individuals and the Whig ‘faction’ in general.

Two earlier uses of the term ‘Observator’ may have shaped L’Estrange’s adoption of the title. In the 1640s, ‘Observator’ was associated with the parliamentarian polemicist Henry Parker, whose *Observations upon Some of His Majesties Late Answers and Expresses* (1642) became a classic assertion of public sovereignty through Parliament, and led to his being widely known as ‘the Observator’.\(^{120}\) This nickname transcended the immediate pamphlet war around Parker’s *Observations* to become a public persona that endured until at least the 1670s.\(^{121}\) Given that L’Estrange would also become the public figure of ‘the Observator’, Parker was an important precursor, although L’Estrange would be an

\(^{117}\) Roger L’Estrange, *A Brief History of the Times* (London, 1687) (Wing L1203), first preface, p. 3.

\(^{118}\) *Observator*, 1.1 (13 April 1681), r; 1.325 (23 April 1683), v.

\(^{119}\) Ibid, 1.1 (13 April 1681), r.


\(^{121}\) Parker is described as ‘the observer’ in Fabian Philipps, *The Ancient, Legal, Fundamental, and Necessary Rights of Courts of Justice* (London, 1676), pp. 293-4.
‘Observator’ on a continuous basis, rather than because of a single *Observations* pamphlet. That said, it should be emphasised that L’Estrange initially used ‘Observator’ to refer to his publication, not to himself: the serial was initially anonymous, and neither of its initial dialogue characters, ‘Question’ and ‘Answer’, represented L’Estrange the man.

Another possible source for L’Estrange was Marchamont Nedham’s brief 1654 serial, the *Observator*. Given that the design of this Cromwellian ‘Observator’ – to provide rolling answers to the publications of Cromwell’s enemies – was almost identical to that of L’Estrange’s *Observator* at the outset, a connection between these two Observators seems plausible. Although Nedham’s *Observator* only lasted two weeks, it is likely that L’Estrange knew the earlier title because he had an obsessive interest in the mid-century press – and especially the output of Nedham, whom he described as ‘the Goliath of the Philistines, the great Champion of the late Vsurper’. However, L’Estrange’s *Observator* differed from Nedham’s by taking the dialogue form.

L’Estrange’s *Observator* was published for nearly six years, across two reigns, and reached 931 issues – approximately 2.4m words. Like many comment serials, it was a paradoxical mixture of homogeneity and heterogeneity: its core themes were consistent, and repeated ad nauseam over hundreds of issues, but it was also a sprawling and complex text, because it was written in separate instalments over a long period of time. As L’Estrange later summarised, the *Observator* contained ‘a Medly of Thoughts, When Every Day Started New Argument; And Every Paper was to be Accommodated to the Accidents and Emergences of the Season’.

In this medley, key features of the *Observator*’s content can be identified. Most importantly, it attacked the king’s opponents: the ‘faction’, which was cast in terms of a variety of labels, including Whigs, dissenters, republicans, commonwealthsmen, Presbyterians and fanatics. They were presented as a shady group that wanted to tear down the Church of England, or even religion itself, and to overthrow the monarchy. Like other Tories, L’Estrange included a historical dimension, tarring Whigs with the reputation

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122 See above, pp. 135-6.
123 Roger L’Estrange, *A Rope for Pol. Or, a Hue and Cry after Marchemont Nedham* (London, 1660), ‘An Advertisement to the READER’, p. [ii]. L’Estrange’s obsession with the mid-century press is made clear in his *Considerations and Proposals in Order to the Regulation of the Press* (London, 1663), which provides copious extracts from pamphlets and serials published throughout the 1640s and 1650s.
125 *Observator*, vol. 1 (1681-84), ‘Postscript’ of ‘To the READER’.
of rebels and regicides of the 1640s. L’Estrange also devoted significant space to answering Whig publications, including comment serials such as the *Weekly Pacquet*, newspapers such as the *True Protestant Mercury* (1680-82) and *Impartial Protestant Mercury* (1681-82), and pamphlets such as *Vox Populi* (1681), *Vox Patriae* (1681), *The Conformists Plea for the Nonconformists* (1681), *The Sheriffs Case* (1681), *The Assenters Sayings* (1681) and *Reflections on the City-Charter* (1682). He challenged Whig claims that there was a ‘Popish Plot’, and that Tories like himself were complicit in this, by exposing these allegations as ‘Ridiculous’, and arguing that Whigs and dissenters were in fact themselves more akin to papists. He also contested Whig claims to represent public opinion by exposing their published ‘addresses’ from the populace to MPs as false. He contrasted bad Whig principles with good Tory principles, for instance defending Robert Filmer against Algernon Sidney. He attacked individuals, including the Whig press-men Benjamin Harris, Langley Curtis, Henry Care and Richard Janeway, and ‘Popish Plot’ exposer such as Miles Prance and Titus Oates.

Reflecting his priorities, the *Observator*’s dialogue characters switched from ‘Question’ and ‘Answer’ to ‘Whig’ and ‘Tory’ in July 1681, with L’Estrange using the ‘Whig’ character to personify negative characteristics and the ‘Tory’ character to expose and correct him. A later shift in attention towards attacking Trimmers – those who (nominally) took a position between Whig and Tory, and whom L’Estrange considered to be crypto-Whigs – resulted in a further reorientation of his dialogue to conversations between ‘Observator’ and ‘Trimmer’ in November 1682. It is also significant to note what was not the subject of comment in L’Estrange’s *Observator*, for instance foreign affairs and trade: its focus was domestic politics, in Church and State, and countering the Whig threat. In style, L’Estrange leaned heavily on humour, like other comment serials, describing his paper as ‘Half-Jocular, Half-Earnest’ – ‘where the People are Fool’d Out of their Senses, and Duties, they must be Fool’d Into them again’ – and adopted a demotic, oral mode.

L’Estrange’s *Observator* attracted a great deal of attention from contemporaries, through which L’Estrange’s concept of ‘Observator’ as ‘Papers of Observation’ became

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127 L’Estrange’s responses to these serials are passim. His responses to these pamphlets are respectively at (e.g.) *Observator*, 1.1 (13 April 1681); 1.5 (25 April 1681); 1.16 (25 May 1681); 1.28 (29 June 1681); 1.86 (4 January 1682); 1.164 (4 July 1682).


129 E.g. ibid, 1.463-9 (26 December 1683-7 January 1684).

130 Ibid, 1.29 (2 July 1681).

131 Ibid, 1.240 (13 November 1682).

132 Ibid, 3.1 (11 February 1685), r. For the *Observator*’s orality, see Birrell, ‘Journalism of Orality’.
widely accepted. The *Observator* was received as a serial of comment, not just constructed as one. One Whig pamphlet referred to ‘his weekly (I had almost said *Quotidiano*) Observations’; another claimed that L’Estrange ‘beat down all before him with the *Club of Observation*’; a third included L’Estrange as a dialogue character who boasts that ‘the Rogues will buy up my Observations, take *Politic*-notes, and *Divinity*-notes too out of them’. \(^{134}\)

One important development was that L’Estrange himself, and not just his serial, came to be regarded as ‘the Observer’. This was occurring by at least November 1681, when a Whig pope-burning procession included a figure of L’Estrange as ‘a monstrous Animal with his face reverst, making Observations upon the Horse-tail... having a Paper pinn’d upon his Sleeve... inscribed, *I am an Observer*’. One Whig pamphlet in 1682 called on Tories to ‘blush at your *Observer*, do not hereafter... take matter of his *Weekly Pamphlets* for your *Reading Lectures* in a *Country-Church* — blush at your *Whory, Roary, Scory, Tory Observer*. A 1683 pamphlet provided ‘Historical MEMOIRS of the Life and Actions of Roger the Fidler; Alias, *The Observer*’. \(^{135}\) L’Estrange himself played into this when he made ‘Observer’ a character in his dialogue in November 1682: ‘Observer’ would provide the comment, and came to represent L’Estrange himself. \(^{136}\) Moreover, when the first collected edition of the *Observator* appeared in 1684, L’Estrange included a portrait of himself as a frontispiece. By these means, L’Estrange as ‘the Observer’ became one of the chief public partisan voices of his day. \(^{137}\)

The *Observator* ceased in 1687, when L’Estrange’s conscience left him unable to defend James II’s new pro-toleration religious policy. However, the serial had left such an impression on the media landscape that it established a direct precedent for comment serials for nearly four decades. The unfolding Observator tradition would not be constrained by the precise features of L’Estrange’s serial. Where L’Estrange’s *Observator*

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\(^{136}\) E.g. *Observer*, 3.1 (11 February 1685), r, has ‘Observer’ as 69 years old: L’Estrange’s own age.

\(^{137}\) L’Estrange was already a major public loyalist voice before the *Observer*, as reflected in nicknames such as ‘Crackfart’ and ‘Towzer’. See esp. Helen Pierce, ‘The Devil’s Bloodhound: Roger L’Estrange Caricatured’, in M. Hunter, ed., *Printed Images in Early Modern Britain: Essays in Interpretation* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 237-54.
was Tory, pro-government, dialogue in form, and earthy and humorous in style, later Observators could be Whig, anti-government, prose/essay in form, and more refined in style. ‘Observer’ – like ‘observations’ – was a flexible concept.

Two years – and one revolution – after the end of L’Estrange’s Observer, a ‘New Observer’ came before the public. Mercurius Reformatus, or the New Observer (1689-94) was founded in May 1689 by James Welwood, a Scottish physician and pamphleteer who was a strong supporter of the new regime of William III and Mary II, established after the Glorious Revolution of 1688-89.138 Mercurius Reformatus was the most significant of a number of comment serials designed to buttress the Williamite/Whig cause after the revolution, when James II was threatening to retake the throne with French, Irish and domestic Jacobite support.139 Whether Mercurius Reformatus was commissioned, sponsored or in some way directed by the government is unclear, although Welwood was personally associated with one of William’s closest advisors, Gilbert Burnet, Bishop of Salisbury, and he became a royal physician in 1690. Welwood denied any formal sponsorship when setting out his main aims:

they who were not acquainted with the Author of the New Observer, might be...

inclinable to believe him a Tool in this Government, as he that wrote the Old one,

was in the last. Which is so far a mistake, that I here declare to all the world,

Neither any of the King’s Ministers, nor any about Him, did put me at first upon

Writing; neither did they, nor any body else give me Instructions, Advice, or

Assistance, in the continuing of it; far less did I write for Place or Pension; but out of

a Zeal to a Settlement, that only could make these Three Nations happy.140

Welwood wrote 121 weekly issues of Mercurius Reformatus until November 1691. Then, the Commons accused him of breaching parliamentary privilege by criticising MPs’ attempts to attach strings to the finance they granted for the war against France, of which Welwood was a strong supporter, and had him brought into the custody of the Serjeant at Arms.

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138 For Mercurius Reformatus, see esp. Elizabeth L. Furdell, James Welwood: Physician to the Glorious Revolution (Conshohocken, PA: Combined Publishing, 1998). There is no evidence for any link between Mercurius Reformatus and the late-1640s ‘Mercuries’. Although the serial was called Mercurius Reformatus, it was the ‘New Observer’ in its half-title, and ‘New Observer’ was the most prominent part of its masthead.

139 Minor Williamite comment serials in 1689-91 include When All Is Done (1689), Dialogue Between Father Gifford (1689), New Heraclitus Ridens (1689), Dialogue Between Two Friends (1689), True Protestant Mercury (1689-90), Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Ireland (1690), Coffee-House Mercury (1690), Weekly Remarks (1691) and Pacquet of Advice from France (1691).

Spooked by these events, Welwood gave up the project. However, it was continued by a successor, possibly the Whig pamphleteer Samuel Johnson, until 1694 or 1695.  

As the ‘New Observer’, *Mercurius Reformatus* was presented to readers as the successor to L’Estrange’s *Observer*. It was also explicitly designed as a serial of comment: Welwood promised that his serial would provide ‘REFLEXIONS upon The most Remarkable Events, Falling out from time to time in EUROPE, and more particularly in ENGLAND’, ‘Reflections upon the most Disallowable Practices and Papers’, and ‘a fair State of, and Animadversions upon the publick and most remarkable Occurrences on the Theatre of these three Kingdoms, and of Europe in general’. Welwood made clear that *Mercurius Reformatus* was not a newspaper: ‘I take the Province of a News-monger somewhat below me’. Like L’Estrange’s *Observer*, Welwood’s was aimed at defending the regime, although from the other side of the Glorious Revolution, so its politics were the reverse of L’Estrange’s. Welwood expressed the tension inherent in his indebtedness to L’Estrange in his valedictory reflections on his serial in 1692:

Tho I do not repent me to have written the *New Observer*, yet I have found too late, that I have done it under a hateful and invidious Title. The Gentleman that began both the Thing and the Name, in the Two last Reigns, has justly entail’d upon the very word *Observer*, an indelible stain, that must needs stick to the softest and justest Pen, that shall ever attempt to write again under that Name.

Welwood partly navigated this tension by elevating his ‘New Observer’ in stylistic terms. It was written in discursive prose rather than dialogue, and in a more refined style – Welwood resolved ‘never to widen our Differences by a bitterness of Style, but to use the calmest Measures possible’ – in order to distance himself in tone and content from his

141 For the suggestion of Samuel Johnson as Welwood’s successor, see Robert Howard, *Letter to Mr. Samuel Johnson, Occasioned by a Scurrilous Pamphlet, Intituled, Animadversions on Mr. Johnson’s Answer to Jovian, in Three Letters to a Country-Friend* (London, 1692), p. 15, which addresses Johnson thus: ‘I leave it to you, Sir, to give this Opinion its due Correction, as you have promised in two of the Observers’. For the possibility that it lasted until 1695, see *A Fair Character of the Presbyterian Reforming’s Just and Sober Vindication of His Observations* (London, 1695), which responds to a ‘Weekly Observer’ that responded to a 1694 pamphlet, although it is possible that the comments of the ‘Weekly Observer’ were published in 1694. Volumes 6 and 7 of this serial were destroyed in the Second World War: Carolyn Nelson and Matthew Seccombe, *Periodical Publications 1641-1700: A Survey with Illustrations* (London: The Bibliographical Society, 1986), p. 96.

142 *Mercurius Reformatus*, vol. 1 (1689), title-page; vol. 1 (1689), preface, sig. B1r; 1.1 (15 May 1689), r.

143 Ibid, 1.1 (15 May 1689), r.

predecessor.\textsuperscript{145} His use of ‘reflections’ rather than ‘observations’ as his main comment keyword reflects this claim to refinement. Fundamentally, however, the fact that Welwood had written an Observator, despite its origins with the hated L’Estrange, indicates the utility of ‘Observator’ as a label and concept.

Welwood’s comment, like L’Estrange’s, primarily focused on negative characterisation of the regime’s political opponents – in this case, Tories, Jacobites and the French. Both Observators also attached significance to answering publications, as Welwood included animadversions on texts such as \textit{Parliamentum Pacificum} (1688), \textit{The History of Passive Obedience} (1689) and \textit{A Vindication of the Arch-Bishop and Several Other Bishops} (1690).\textsuperscript{146} The \textit{New Observator} had a greater emphasis on foreign affairs than L’Estrange’s \textit{Observator}, reflecting the more substantial foreign dimension of threats against the regime than in L’Estrange’s day; William III was threatened by developments in France and Ireland, whereas Charles II was primarily threatened by domestic opponents. Welwood provided analysis of key foreign actors such as Louis XIV and the pope, and of issues such as the state of Irish Protestants, as well as analysis and commentary on the progress of the war.\textsuperscript{147} There was also much discussion of history, for instance criticism of the pro-Catholic foreign policy of Charles II and James II in a run of early issues.\textsuperscript{148}

A third major Observator was founded by John Tutchin, a Whig poet and pamphleteer, in 1702.\textsuperscript{149} This \textit{Observator} was primarily designed to attack Tories, high-churchmen, Jacobites and papists, who were, in Tutchin’s view, threatening to subvert the ‘ancient constitution’ that protected Englishmen’s rights and liberties. The \textit{Observator} was ‘wholly designed for the Interest of England, its Antient Laws and Liberties’, and as ‘a Stumbling-Block in the way to Popery and Arbitrary-Power’, with ‘the Jacobites, Papists, and High-Flyers... [as] my Opponents’.\textsuperscript{150} The immediate context was the accession of the Tory-leaning Queen Anne, although Tutchin was always careful to praise the queen personally in his \textit{Observator}. Tutchin was an ‘Old Whig’, who remained faithful to pure 1680s Whig ideals and opposed the ‘Modern Whigs’ who entered William III’s ministry in the 1690s. As a result, this \textit{Observator}’s launch cannot have been connected to the chief Whig politicians of

\textsuperscript{145} \textit{Mercurius Reformatus}, vol. 1 (1689), preface, sig. B1r.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid, 1.12 (24 July 1689); 1.18 (4 August 1689); 3.4 (1 August 1690).
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid, 1.20 (18 September 1689) (for discussion of Louis XIV and the pope); 2.1 (4 December 1689) (for discussion of Irish Protestants).
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid, 1.2-7 (22 May-26 June 1689).
\textsuperscript{150} \textit{Observator}, 1.16 (17 June 1702), r; 2.74 (22 December 1703), r; 3.57 (7 October 1704), v.
the era, the Whig Junto, who were ‘Modern Whigs’ of the sort Tutchin despised – ‘What is it to poor England whether the Procurers of Her Ruin be Modern Whiggs or Old Tories?’ – although it cannot be ruled out that links developed later on.\textsuperscript{151} Tutchin wrote around 560 issues of this Observator for a period of over five years. He survived a number of legal and physical threats against him, including prosecution for seditious libel in November 1704. He ceased writing only at his death in September 1707, which was perhaps – although this is uncertain – a consequence of being beaten up by a Tory gang a few months earlier.\textsuperscript{152} The Observator was then taken over by another Whig, George Ridpath, a Scottish pamphleteer and author of the Flying Post newspaper. Ridpath reaffirmed Tutchin’s aims, stating that the Observator ‘continu’d upon the same View of defending our old Constitution, and such Parts of it as were happily restor’d to us by the late King William’, against the ‘Underminers of the Constitution’.\textsuperscript{153} After writing around 500 further issues, the imposition of stamp duty in 1712 forced the paper to close.

Like L’Estrange’s and Welwood’s Observators, this third major Observator was constructed explicitly as a serial of comment. Tutchin deployed the language of ‘observations’ to describe his serial, declaring that ‘My Business is to make Observations, and to draw Conclusions from occurring Circumstances’, and looking forward to a time when ‘we shall be so Happy in our Publick Affairs, that there will be no need of Observations’.\textsuperscript{154} Tutchin referred to L’Estrange as ‘My famous Predecessor’ and ‘The first Observator’.\textsuperscript{155} His Observator followed L’Estrange’s model more closely than Welwood had done, as Tutchin adopted the dialogue form and did not attempt a refined style.\textsuperscript{156} For Tutchin, the dialogue was cast between the ‘Countryman’, an honest but ignorant Englishman named ‘Roger of Coverly’, who travelled to London twice a week to gather the news, and the ‘Observator’, a learned patriot who represented Tutchin himself, who commented on the news that the Countryman brought to him.\textsuperscript{157} Tutchin therefore emulated L’Estrange in directly constructing himself as a public political commentator within the dialogue.

Tutchin’s Observator contained a similar medley of comment as its predecessor Observators. There was extensive character assassination of its political enemies, who were

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid, 1.76 (13 January 1703), r.
\textsuperscript{152} For threats against Tutchin, see also below, pp. 226-7. For Tutchin’s beating, see Observator, 5.96 (15 February 1707).
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid, vol. 6 (1707-08), preface.
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid, 3.41 (12 August 1704), r; 3.98 (24 March 1705), v.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid, 1.69 (19 December 1702), r; 4.16 (26 May 1705), r.
\textsuperscript{156} Although the Observator only became a dialogue in issue 1.19 (27 June 1702).
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid, 3.1 (25 March 1704), r.
presented as malicious, self-interested traitors with unjustifiable principles. For instance, Tutchin explained that

*A High-Churchman, is the Weather-Cock of a Steeple, turn’d about by the Wind of Secular-Interest... whose Mouth Vomits Wild-Fire, instead of Divinity... he’s for Passive-Obedience, Non-Resistance, and Soveraign Will and Pleasure, and other the Instruments of Slavery.*

There was strong emphasis on answering Tory publications. ‘Since the *Jacobites* and *Papists* take the Liberty to Write against the Government, the Rights of the Kingdom, and the Hannover Succession; I shall continue to oppose them,’ he wrote; ‘I only catch the *Fire-Balls* of *Contention* in my hand, and throw ’em back at the heads of those who first flung ’em’. Or, elsewhere: ‘While these Men Write I must continue to Answer them; ‘tis necessary *Publick Poison* should have a *Publick Antidote*’. The *Observator* answered myriad Tory pamphlets, including Henry Sacheverell’s *The Political Union* (1702) and *The Character of a Low Church-Man* (1702), Sir Humphrey Mackworth’s *Peace at Home* (1703), Charles Leslie’s *The Wolf Stript of his Shepherd’s Cloathing* (1704), Edward Ward’s *The Dissenter* (1704), James Drake’s *The Memorial of the Church of England* (1705) and Sackville Tufton’s *The History of Faction* (1705), and also the main Tory comment serials, *Heraclitus Ridens* (1703-04), the *Rehearsal* (1704-09) and *Mercurius Politicus* (1705). There was much discussion of foreign affairs, analysing and triumphing in the downs and (mostly) ups of the War of the Spanish Succession, and sometimes offering policy recommendations.

One important feature of Tutchin’s *Observator* was the prominence of constitutional principle: the repackaging and representing of Whig constitutional theory – what the Countryman referred to as ‘Whigish Notions of Liberty and Property, the Interest, Constitution and Laws of old England’ – to the public. This *Observator* aligned with the ancient constitutionalist strand of Whig thought, with a heavy emphasis on English history: how the English constitution had operated in the past was how it should operate now. ‘My way is to look back into former Times’, Tutchin wrote, ‘for if we do not know what our

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158 Ibid, 1.25 (18 July 1702), r.
159 Ibid, 3.67 (6 December 1704), v.
160 Ibid, 3.50 (13 September 1704), r.
161 For Tutchin’s responses to these pamphlets, see, respectively, ibid, 1.35 (22 August 1702); 1.39 (5 September 1702); 2.69-72 (4-15 December 1703); 2.73-5 (18-25 December 1703); 3.49-51 (9-16 September 1704); 4.33-7 (25 July-8 August 1705); 4.39-41 (15-22 August 1705). His responses to the comment serials are *passim*.
162 Ibid, 1.28 (29 July 1702), r.
Constitution and Privileges were *Ab Origine*, we cannot tell what Encroachments are made upon ‘em now’. A totemic theme was that ‘the Crown of England was never Hereditary, but as prescrib’d by Parliament; and no one was yet a Legal King or Queen of England, but by the previous Consent of the People’, which he illustrated with a six-issue-long, reign-by-reign English royal history.

Welwood’s and Tutchin’s Observators were not only linked to L’Estrange’s by their authors, but were also treated as an associated tradition by others. A 1695 Whig pamphlet responded to Tory criticism that the Archbishop of Canterbury ‘inform[ed] himself from the News Books, and Welwood’s Observator, rather than from the Bible’ by commenting,

Why might it not be as lawful for the Arch-bishop to take Information of Matters of Fact from Dr. Welwood’s Observator, as it was for the Clergy of our Author’s Party to quote L’Estrange’s from their Pulpits in the days of Yore? For certainly, as the Doctor had a better Cause to manage than Sir Roger, he was not under such Temptations as he to disguise Truth with Falshood.

A Tory pamphlet of 1704 wrote of Tutchin’s Observator that

the word Observator surpriz’d me to the last Degree. Sr. Roger, I knew, had lay’d down the Cudgels long ago, and what Genious cou’d or durst undertake it now, after Dr. Wellwoods doing Pennance at the Bar of the House, was my Amazement.

A Tory fable-writer in 1711 included a fable called ‘The Observator’ in which an ass, representing Ridpath, tries to take on the duties of a dog, representing L’Estrange. The moral of the story was that L’Estrange was the proper Observator, and Ridpath just an interloper:

If Observations Wise-men make,
And seek the Kingdom’s Good,
And busied for their Country’s Sake,

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163 Ibid, 3.99 (28 March 1705), v.
164 Ibid, 2.37 (14 August 1703); 2.48 (22 September 1703).
165 Ibid, 1.100 (7 April 1703), r; 3.9-14 (22 April-10 May 1704).
Write down what Wise-men shou’d.
Must trifling Fellows interpose,
And Pen their Nonsense down,
To show themselves their Country’s Foes,
And Enemies to the Crown.
Your Ridpaths are the Asses here,
And ought to stand the Flog,
While your Sir Roger’s make appear,
The Story of the Dog.

Memories of L’Estrange’s Observator clearly remained, nearly a quarter of a century after its closure.¹⁶⁶

Between the 1680s and 1700s, ‘Observator’ was also consolidating as a concept more widely. The idea of ‘an observator’ was developing as a general term for a serial of comment, or for an office of public commentator. Indeed, the title ‘Observator’ had also become commercially useful: Welwood and Tutchin were in fact both encouraged to adopt the title by their publishers.¹⁶⁷ In 1683, an anti-L’Estrange pamphlet, The Loyal Observator, included the following exchanges between ‘Ralph’ and ‘Nobbs’:

Ralph Prethee, Nobbs, let thee and I set up an Observator; ‘Tis a pretty Trade, and next to that of an Informer, one of the most Thriving in these dull times... But I bar all discourse of Religion or Government, and Reflections on particular Persons.

Nobbs Prethee hast thou got a new Invention to make Butter without Cream?... Alas man! ‘tis the very Essence of an Observator to be full of Mysteris [sic] of State, and its Priviledge to fall foul on any Body.

In 1696, George Ridpath – over a decade before he was authoring an Observator himself – defended his Flying Post newspaper from the possibility of government closure by arguing that it ‘might become more useful to the government than an Observator’ if comment were

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placed in the newspaper, as newspapers had bigger audiences than Observators. When Defoe turned his *Review* away from comment on foreign affairs and towards comment on domestic affairs in 1705, Tutchin mocked him on the grounds that ‘so *Great a Man* has undertaken the Office of an *Observer*.’ Speaking of Tutchin, the author of the *Poetical Observer* (1702-03) wrote that ‘a certain Notorious Incendiary Falsely, and Ignorantly, taking upon himself the Office and Character of an *Observer*, has of late with an uncommon kind of Impudence, Unfaithfully, Basely, and Scandalously Represented many Persons and Things’. The *Poetical Observer Reviv’d* (1703) was conceived as ‘a Monthly Observer, in which I intend to make Remarks upon all Books and Pamphlets, and all other Publick Occurrences that I conceive are any ways prejudicial to the Church and Monarchy’. As a final example, a short-lived *New Observer* (1704) stated, ‘I am resolv’d to avoid all useless and impertinent Reflections upon particular Persons, or descending to any other Theam unworthy of a true *English Observer*.’

The chief manifestation of this consolidating Observer tradition was the appearance of several dozen minor Observer serials (Appendix B). Most were serials of political comment, but they were a mixture of Whig and Tory, and dialogue and prose/essay, which again indicates the flexibility of the Observer tradition. Some Observators were specifically concerned with foreign affairs, for instance an *English Spy, or Weekly Observer upon the Most Remarkable Foreign, and Domestick Occurrences* (1699) that sought to ‘make solid reflections upon transactions currently in agitation among Christian princes’, and a *New Observer on the Present Times* (1701). Two related to Scotland, namely an Edinburgh *Observer* (1705-06) and the *Scots Observer* (1708), which provided ‘Remarks upon the Affairs of the *North of BRITAIN*. Most, however, were general vehicles for topical comment with a partisan hue, containing a typical mixture of comment on parties, publications, foreign affairs and domestic politics. There was a cluster in 1704-05, reflecting the high-point of Tutchin’s notoriety with his *Observer*, around the time of the legal proceedings against him. Indeed, the profusion of Observators at this moment was noted by contemporaries: a minor serial called the *Comical Observer* suggested in November 1704 that ‘Observators are so much in Fashion, that a Cobler cann’t go quietly to Work without he has one in his Stall by him’, and a letter to the *Review* in December complained that ‘the Town is, and has been, very much fill’d with Papers, called

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the Observators, some one way, some another'. In addition, a few Observators were not political comment serials at all. There was a Philosophical Observer (1695), which aimed to provide ‘Philosophical Observations... [to be a] fit Diversion for the Virtuosi, and matter of good Discourse, for all that are curious and inquisitive after Knowledge'; the Infallible Astrologer (1700-01, sometimes called the ‘Merry Observer’), which contained prophecies; and the Comical Observer (1704), which discussed manners and morals.

By the 1710s, the Observer tradition had passed its peak. Tutchin and Ridpath’s Observer was the last major comment serial with this title, and there were only a few minor ones afterwards, in 1715, 1716, 1718 and 1724-25. Part of the reason the tradition petered out was that it had become tainted, either by the memory of L’Estrange (for Whigs) or of Tutchin and Ridpath (for Tories), and by association with the earthy dialogue form that had now been superseded by the essay. As the Whig Observer of 1718 observed,

nothing can be more seasonable at this time, than AN OBSERVATOR. However, before I enter upon the Work of an Observer, I must in a few Words rescue my Title from the Reproaches, which Time and Ignorance may have heap’d up upon it, while it was in other Hands, and not upon the Title only, but on the very Thing it self... in the first place I shall remove all the prejudices which may be entertain’d in the Minds of Men against my Work, and take Care that I do not fall into any of the Errors or ill Conduct of other Observators, who have gone before me... I expect to suffer a little for my Title, not because it is not good in it Self, but because it is OLD, for Novelty is sure to please, when things once known may lose their Savor: It is a Title that has been well used and misused, either Party have had it, and both Sides have thereby given Testimony to the usefulness of it... It suffices then to tell those who Object against our Title, That whatever Use has been made of it before, a good Use shall be made of it now, viz. To Animadvert upon the Follies, the Madness, the Dissatisfaction, and the Division of these unhappy Times[].

In addition, now that comment serials were fully established on the market, authors had greater freedom in choosing more varied titles, as the full list of comment serials in Appendix A indicates. Even so, some later comment serials took titles that were synonyms of ‘Observer’, most obviously the Examiner and the Spectator. ‘Observer’ was also used

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169 Comical Observer, 1 (7 November 1704), r; Review, 1.80 (9 December 1704), p. 335.
170 Observer, 1 (10 February 1718), r.
in the title of two newspapers in the 1720s and 1730s, the *Loyal Observer Reviv’d* (1722-23) and the *British Observer* (1733-35). After that, the tradition had run its course.\(^{171}\) However, it had played a critical role in establishing comment serials in the media landscape of late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth-century Britain.

Although most comment serials were soon forgotten, some lingered in memory longer than others. A 1726 pamphlet printed in Philadelphia, *The Observer’s Trip to America*, had John Tutchin as ‘Mr Observer’ being reunited with Roger the Countryman across the Atlantic – it being revealed that Tutchin had faked his own death in 1707 and sailed to America – and indicates that comment serials could reach into unexpected places.

**The rage of party, 1702-1716**

The early-eighteenth century was the heyday of comment serials. Nearly half of all comment serials published between 1678 and 1730 were launched between 1702 and 1716.\(^{172}\) This period is well-known as the era of the *Review, Examiner, Tatler* and *Spectator*: of Defoe, Swift, Addison and Steele. However, our understanding of the period has been distorted by scholarly emphasis on these four canonical serials, on moral and literary over political content, and on the development of polite and refined styles. The proliferation of comment serials in fact began earlier than these four serials, with Tutchin’s *Observer* in 1702, and most comment serials in this period were overtly political in content. They were a product and feature of the most intense phase of the rage of party, broadly coinciding with the reign of Anne. The longest-lasting comment serials were Tutchin and Ridpath’s Whig *Observer*, Defoe’s Whig/moderate *Review*, Leslie’s Tory *Rehearsal* and Swift and Oldisworth’s Tory *Examiner*, but there were near-continuous runs of comment serials on both sides. For the Tory/high-church cause, the most important were the *Poetical Observer* (1702-03), *Heraclitus Ridens* (1703-04), the *Rehearsal* (1704-09), *Mercurius Politicus* (1705), the *Moderator* (1710), the *Examiner* (1710-14), the *Plain Dealer* (1712), the *Mercator* (1713-14), the *Monitor* (1714) and another *Examiner* (1714-16). For the Whig cause, the main comment serials were the *Observer* (1702-12), the *Review* (to an extent; the only other *Observer* serial during the rest of the eighteenth century was a two-part *Observer; or Remarks on the Impartial Examiner*, printed in Dublin in 1746 (ESTC P6101). There were, however, some ‘Observer’ serials from the 1760s onwards.

\(^{171}\) See Appendix A. 93/214 comment serials began in the period 1702-16, including 51/103 ‘major’ titles (with 11+ issues) and 42/111 ‘minor’ titles (with 1-10 issues).
1704-13), the Medley (1710-12), the British Merchant (1713-14), the Britain (1713), the Englishman (1713-15), the Patriot (1714-15), the High-German Doctor (1714-15) and the Free-Holder (1715-16). Before 1710, political connections cannot be attested with certainty for any comment serial other than the Review, which was sponsored from within the ministry. After 1710, the new Tory ministry and Whig opposition both sponsored comment serials, as did the Whig ministry after 1714. By 1716, the fiercest phase of partisanship had come to an end, with George I established on his throne after the Jacobite rebellion. This gives the 1702-16 period a unity that justifies its being taken together. This was also when newspapers and comment serials were at their most distinct, and the comment serial phenomenon took on its best-defined form. This section examines the proliferation of political, partisan comment serials during this period. The diversification of comment serials into moral comment after 1709, led by the Tatler and Spectator, was an important and related development, but should not overshadow the growth of the overtly political kinds of comment serial, so will be discussed separately in the following section.

Why did comment serials proliferate after 1702? The conditions were made possible by the lapse of pre-publication licensing in 1695, but since the new wave of comment serials only began in 1702 – unlike newspapers, which proliferated immediately after 1695 – other forces must also have been at play. The growth of comment serials coincided with the sharper party polarisation that emerged at the turn of the eighteenth century, as Whig-Tory divisions reasserted themselves more strongly than in the late 1690s. Party tensions were high over the next fifteen years, with foreign policy debates around the War of the Spanish Succession, culminating in a Tory peace against Whig opposition; religious debates around the position of Protestant dissenters, including a prominent high-church Tory campaign to outlaw ‘occasional conformity’, the practice of dissenters circumventing the Anglican test for public office by nominally taking communion once a year; debates around the union with Scotland (Whigs mostly in favour, Tories mostly against); and debates around the succession after Anne, specifically whether a Protestant Hanoverian should inherit the throne in accordance with the 1701 Act of Settlement (as most Whigs and many Tories desired), or whether Anne’s Catholic half-brother, James, should lead a Jacobite Restoration (as some Tories wanted, and more were alleged to want). These issues were kept in the foreground by frequent elections – there were eight

173 For the Review, see below, pp. 166-8.
174 Although a few serials that were more like political-moral hybrids will be included here. In this and the following section, I use the labels ‘political comment serials’ and ‘moral comment serials’ to capture this core difference between serials, without intending to imply that they were entirely distinct forms.
general elections between 1701 and 1715 – and by several changes of party control over parliaments and ministries. A Tory Commons and mixed ministry after 1702 gradually gave way to a Whig Commons and Whig ministry between 1705 and 1708, which dominated until 1710. Then, after a surge of popular Toryism, following the Whig prosecution of the high-church clergyman Henry Sacheverell and a growing desire for peace, a ‘ministerial revolution’ and general election brought Tories to power until 1714, with Robert Harley appointed as Lord High Treasurer (de facto prime minister) in place of the Earl of Godolphin, who had served in this office since 1702. After Anne’s death, George I appointed a Whig ministry, backed by a Whig election victory in 1715. In this maelstrom of party activity, comment serials provided one mechanism to advance Whig and Tory causes. As in the Succession Crisis, they were potentially more effective than pamphlets and newspapers, because they could provide more direct and persistent voices of partisan comment. In addition, there was a multiplier effect: when one side was publicly represented by a comment serial, a response was required from the other side. As comment serials became accepted and normalised, they were likely to continue to proliferate.

Comment serials in this period co-existed and were interconnected with newspapers and pamphlets, as part of a wider press moment. As we have seen, major newspapers in this period had no substantial tradition of comment sections. Some newspapers, especially after 1710, were developed as vehicles for partisanship through the slanted selection and presentation of news reports, for instance the Tory Post Boy of Abel Roper, often presented by Whigs as a ‘brother’ of the Examiner, and the Whig Flying Post of George Ridpath, who was also writing the Observator. In addition, this was a major era of pamphleteering. Famous pamphlets such as Henry Sacheverell’s The Perils of False Brethren (1709) and Jonathan Swift’s The Conduct of the Allies (1711) achieved a wide circulation, but overall pamphlet production was enormous in this period. Many authors of comment serials were also authors of pamphlets, including not only Charles Leslie and Richard Steele, as discussed above, but also John Tutchin, James Drake, Daniel Defoe and many others. Party-aligned publishers put out a mixture of pamphlets and comment serials to readers.

175 Other partisan newspapers include Abel Boyer’s Whig Protestant Post Boy (1711-12) and a series of Jacobite newspapers authored by George Flint in 1715-17, including Robin’s Last Shift, the Shift Shifted and Shift’s Last Shift. There were also manuscript newsletters that were partisan, most famously John Dyer’s Tory newsletter, for which the most recent treatment is Alex W. Barber, “It Is Not Easy What to Say of Our Condition, Much Less to Write It”: The Continued Importance of Scribal News in the Early 18th Century’, Parliamentary History, 32:2 (2013), pp. 293-316.
What about comment serials? The major ‘political’ comment serials contained a wide variety of comment, building on their Succession Crisis predecessors by including more observations about foreign affairs and trade, as well as the core discussion of parties, politicians, constitutional and religious principles and the press. Most comment serials were written to support a party cause, including many of those that claimed to be neutral or to moderate political extremes, such as the Tory Moderator (1710). The chief exceptions – political comment serials that did not have a clear party alignment – are Defoe’s Review, whose complex political positioning is discussed below, and another Moderator (1705), which appears to have been genuinely designed to challenge Whigs and Tories during the 1705 election.

To begin with the Whigs: the first, and arguably most important, Whig comment serial of the 1702-16 period was Tutchin and Ridpath’s Observator, which lasted from April 1702 to July 1712. The other possible contender for the title of chief Whig comment serial was Defoe’s Review, which ran from February 1704 until June 1713, and indeed had the most issues of any comment serial between 1678 and 1730: 1,359 issues, compared with 1,065 for the second longest-running, which was in fact Tutchin and Ridpath’s Observator. However, labelling the Review a ‘Whig comment serial’ raises certain difficulties: the Review was not straightforwardly Whig at its outset or in its final years, and initially it was dominated by history more than comment. However, it was a Whig comment serial for the central portion of its run, and contemporaries associated it with the Observator as twin Whig comment serials for most of its existence.

In form, at the outset, the Review was divided between a main historical section and a concluding section of diversion, following the example of Care’s Weekly Pacquet.

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176 For the purposes of this discussion, ‘Whig’ and ‘Tory’ are sufficient to label the partisan leanings of individual comment serials, although some defined themselves specifically according to religious principles (e.g. high-church or pro-dissent), constitutional principles (e.g. patriarchalism or elective monarchy) or the succession (e.g. Hanoverian or Jacobite).

177 This is my reading of this Moderator, based on a few surviving issues. Speck, ‘Politics and the Press’, p. 53, describes it as a ‘ministerial paper’, which trimmed between Whigs and Tories. McLeod, p. 31, describes it as a ‘middle-of-the-road’ journal of opinion.


179 See below, pp. 237-8.

180 Supplementary Journal, to the Advice from the Scandal. Club (September 1704), pp. 5-6.
The diverting section was the ‘Scandalous Club’, a satirical set of proceedings of a club that judged and sought to reform manners and morals, to correct vice and error. This has attracted extensive attention from scholars, but its significance should not be overstated: it was only an appendix to the serial, and ended in 1705. The historical section was designed for a contemporary political purpose – a history of France to explain French strength in the war, to challenge naïve and patriotic claims about French weakness and perhaps to build support for the war effort. As Defoe explained, ‘the end of this Paper is to set our Enemies in their proper Light, Examine their Condition, and represent them to our View, just as they really are, Stating their Magnitude in its proper Dimensions’. This was partly straight history, but partly historical comment: Defoe explained that the Review would contain ‘Truth of Fact, and not improper Reflections; the Stories we tell you shall be True, and our Observations, as near as we can, shall be just’, and that any good ‘History’ should contain ‘Observations and Reflections’ as well as ‘Matter of Fact’. Moreover, even in these early issues, Defoe frequently digressed from history into wider political comment.

In 1705, the Review formally expanded its remit to include ‘Observations on TRANSACTIONS at Home’: ‘Our Trade, our Manners, our City, Country, Court, Navy, Army, and Church, all call for a share in the Subsequent Observations’. This entailed discussion about subjects such as trade, finance and the union with Scotland, as well as the constitutional and religious fare that was typical for comment serials. By 1710, Defoe was boasting, in straightforwardly Whig style, ‘While I live... I shall never desist doing my Duty, in exposing the Doctrines that oppose God and the Revolution; such as Passive-Submission to Tyrants, and Non-Resistance in Cases of Oppression’. Despite its ambiguous origins, the Review was a serial of political comment for most of its run.

The politics of the Review shifted between Whig and moderate positions, although this summary does not do Defoe’s serial justice. Defoe had been a Whig pamphleteer of many years’ standing, and his comment reflected these political principles. However, the Review was also the first comment serial of this period to have direct links with the

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182 Downie, Harley and the Press, p. 65; Seager, ‘He Reviews Without Fear’, p. 132.
186 Ibid, vol. 6 (1709-10), preface, sig. A3r-v.
government, initially through the patronage of Secretary of State Robert Harley, which began either at the outset of the *Review* or after a few months. The significance of these political links should not be overplayed – Harley did not have day-to-day control over the *Review*’s content – but, nonetheless, changes in the *Review*’s political connections did parallel changes in its content. Certain positions in its early years, such as the rejection of Whig calls to send assistance to the French Protestant rebels of the Cevennois and criticism of both extreme Whigs and extreme Tories during the 1705 election, took the *Review* to a moderate political position that reflected the views of Harley. However, it swung towards Whig principles at the height of the Whig supremacy in 1707-10, when Defoe came under the control of Lord Treasurer Godolphin, Harley being out of the ministry after 1708. The *Review* later shifted back towards Harleyite moderation after the ministerial revolution of 1710 returned Harley to power, now at the head of a Tory ministry, and restored the *Review* to Harley’s personal patronage. In this period, the *Review* defended the Tory peace against Whig opponents, and asserted the need for moderation against the more extreme Tories. However, Ashley Marshall has recently argued that Defoe’s Whig politics were still evident in the final years of the *Review*.

The *Observator* and the *Review* were the dominant Whig comment serials before 1710. One Tory, addressing the *Review*, observed in 1705 that there was a ‘paper war, managed by yourself and Master Observer on one side’. However, there were also some minor Whig comment serials in this period. During 1704, a lost comment serial called *Truth and Honesty* was a Whig dialogue published by the veteran Whig publisher Benjamin Harris (who had published one of the main newspapers in the Succession Crisis), before being incorporated into Harris’s *London Post* newspaper as a comment section in December 1704. There were at least two brief imitation *Observators*, in 1704 and 1706. The *Rehearsal Rehears’d* attacked the Tory *Rehearsal* between September and November 1706.

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188 Cowan, ‘Defoe’s *Review*’, pp. 84-5.
192 *Reviewer Reviewed*, 3 (June 1705), p. 2.
193 See above, p. 91.
194 A sham *Observator* (1704) that appeared during a short period when Tutchin stopped writing his *Observator* after his trial, and a new *Observator* (1706) brought out by Tutchin’s first printer, John How. See Appendix A.
An *Observator Reviv’d*, probably written by John Pierce, ran as a Whig dialogue for a few months after Tutchin’s death in September 1707, even though the *Observator* had continued interrupted under George Ridpath’s stewardship.

Tory comment serials began to appear soon after the launch of Tutchin’s *Observator*. The first two were the *Poetical Observator* (October 1702 to January 1703, with a brief revival in April 1703) and *Heraclitus Ridens* (August 1703 to March 1704). Both were humorous dialogues, the former with a range of characters (initially ‘Whig’, ‘Tory’, ‘Trimmer’, ‘Meanwel’ and ‘Turncoat’), and the latter reviving the conversations between ‘Jest’ and ‘Earnest’ from the original *Heraclitus Ridens*. They shared a printer, David Edwards, so it is plausible that they were connected projects. *Heraclitus Ridens* was certainly conceived as the *Poetical Observator*’s successor, as its first issue noted that Tutchin had already ‘flung his Poetical Enemy... on [his Back]’.

The author of the *Poetical Observator* is unknown, but that of *Heraclitus Ridens* was William Pittis, a Tory pamphleteer. There is no positive evidence for any political connections for either serial. The *Poetical Observator* was presumably named in response to Tutchin’s *Observator*, while *Heraclitus Ridens* explicitly recalled the successful Tory serial of 1681-82. Both targeted not only the Whigs in general, but Tutchin’s *Observator* in particular as their main public representative, although they also attacked other Whig publications and advanced positive Tory and high-church principles. The *Poetical Observator* began as a response to the *Observator* and other anti-Church (in its view) publications. Its opening letter set out its design:

> Whereas many false and dangerous Reports, and many Scandalous, and Perfidious Libels are frequently dispers’d, tending directly to the Disreputation of the Church, the Amusement of the Publick, and the Disadvantage of the several Persons herein mention’d. And whereas a certain Notorious Incendiary Falsely, and Ignorantly, taking upon himself the Office and Character of an *Observator* [i.e. Tutchin], has of late with an uncommon kind of Impudence, Unfaithfully, Basely, and Scandalously Represented many Persons and Things. We have therefore thought fit... [to] cause a

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196 *Heraclitus Ridens*, 1.1 (3 August 1703), r.
197 For the unlikelihood of relations between Pittis and Harley, see Downie, *Harley and the Press*, pp. 66-7.
Weekly Paper to be Writ in Rhime, which we intend to Entitle, *The Poetical Observer*.198

The design of *Heraclitus Ridens* was as follows:

while the *Observer* was Publickly Tolerated to revive the Doctrines of *Forty One* against the Government and Church Establish’d, to stand in the Gap as long as I could, and Oppose his undutiful Intentions by the Principles of Obedience... To teach the Doctrine of Obedience, to dissuade People from taking Arms against those whom God has set over them.

However, Pittis stressed that *Heraclitus* would have a wider function than attacking the *Observer*. In the first issue, Earnest stated that

the Observer does not make such a Figure in the World, nor is his Paper so such an establish’d Repute as to take up all our Notice... The Common Occurrences of Life, the Publication of Books, the Defence of the Government and Church establish’d, is what we are to go upon.199

Neither serial lasted more than a few months. The reasons for the demise of the *Poetical Observer* are unclear, but Pittis stopped *Heraclitus Ridens* to save himself from a threatened prosecution.200

In August 1704, a few months after the demise of *Heraclitus Ridens*, one of the most important Tory comment serials of the period was launched. This was Charles Leslie’s *Rehearsal*, another dialogue, which ran until March 1709.201 As we have seen, Leslie was a polemicist whose politics lay at the harder end of Toryism, as he was a non-juror and Jacobite. His publications, including the *Rehearsal*, defended high-church principles and

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198 *Poetical Observer*, 1.1 (3 October 1702), r. Although the *Poetical Observer* contained verse, it was not in fact all ‘Writ in Rhime’.
199 *Heraclitus Ridens*, vol. 1 (1703), preface; 1.1 (3 August 1703), v.
201 For Leslie and the *Rehearsal*, see above, p. 130, n. 50. When it was collected into volumes, it was given the title ‘A VIEW of the TIMES, their PRINCIPLES and PRACTICES’, with the term ‘view’ functioning as a comment keyword. The title ‘Rehearsal’ was borrowed from ‘that most *Humorous* and *Ingenious* of our *Plays*, call’d, The *Rehearsal*’ — the Duke of Buckingham’s 1671 play — ‘which is indeed a *Satyr* upon the other *Plays* and *Lew’d Poems* of those Times... This seem’d something like the Task I was about to Undertake’. See *Rehearsal*, vol. 1 (1704-07), preface, p. [ii].
divine-right monarchy and lambasted Whigs and dissenters. However, he had a particular aim in the *Rehearsal* of responding to the Whig comment serials:

Their *Books* and *Pamphlets* have been solidly and seriously Answer’d. But their *Papers* have been neglected, that is their *weekly penny Papers*, which go through the Nation like *News-papers*. And have done much more *Mischief* than the others... the greatest Part of the *People* do not Read *Books*, Most of them cannot Read at all. But they will Gather together about one that can Read, and Listen to an *Observator* or *Review* (as I have seen them in the Streets) where all the *Principles of Rebellion* are Instill’d into them.²⁰²

Indeed, the *Rehearsal* began as a satirical impersonation of Tutchin’s comment serial: its first issue was called ‘*The Observator*’ and mimicked the ‘Observator’ and ‘Countryman’ characters used by Tutchin, although in such a way that the ‘Observator’/Tutchin was exposed as a dangerous figure. In the second issue, Leslie changed the serial’s name to ‘*The Rehearsal of Observator*’, which he retained for nearly a year. In July 1705, it became simply the *Rehearsal*, with the dialogue now formed of the ‘Rehearser’ (i.e. Leslie) and the ‘Countryman’. The *Rehearsal*, therefore, shared an emphasis on attacking Tutchin with the *Poetical Observator* and *Heraclitus Ridens*, although the *Review* and other Whig publications were also in Leslie’s sights. Positive Tory and high-church arguments were also prominent here, such as defences of episcopacy and monarchy, often founded on biblical historical arguments. For example, the *Rehearsal* included a famous assertion of Filmerian patriarchalism against Locke’s contract theory.²⁰³

An important feature of the *Rehearsal* was the use of the joco-serious style. Leslie explained that he could only fight the *Observator* and *Review* by giving readers ‘that *Pleasantry* or *Fooling* with which they were so much taken in the other *Papers*’, and that

All that Read these *Papers* wou’d not have Patience to bear long Discourses upon all these *Subjects*, they wou’d call it a Body of *Divinity*, and soon grow weary. Therefor it was Necessary to Intermix them with other things, that they might go down with the *Common People*, for whom they were chiefly Intended.²⁰⁴

²⁰² *Rehearsal*, vol. 1 (1704-07), preface, p. [i].
²⁰⁴ *Rehearsal*, vol. 1 (1704-07), preface, p. [ii]; vol. 2 (1707-08), preface.
There is no direct evidence that Leslie had political connections when setting up the *Rehearsal*, although he had personal links with the Hyde family, of whom the Tory Earl of Rochester was a prominent political figure in Anne’s reign, and he corresponded with the exiled Stuart court in France.\(^\text{205}\)

Other Tory comment serials appeared around the time of the *Rehearsal*, although none shared its longevity. Between September 1704 and January 1705, the *Observator Reformed* published dialogues between ‘Observer’ (Tutchin) and ‘Heraclitus Ridens’. As in the *Rehearsal*, the ‘Observer’ character is portrayed negatively, and the dangers of his Whig positions are exposed. *Mercurius Politicus* appeared between June and December 1705, written by James Drake, best-known as author of *The Memorial of the Church of England*, one of the most successful high-church pamphlets of the period. Drake’s stated aim was to defend the 1702-05 Parliament, which had just been dissolved, from Whigs (including the *Observer* and *Review*) who were criticising its attempts to pass Tory legislation, notably against occasional conformity. To this end, Drake published a series of Tory political essays, subjects of which included occasional conformity and the meaning of the term ‘moderation’ (which Whigs and dissenters had abused, in Drake’s view, by falsely adopting this label).\(^\text{206}\) Pittis returned to comment serial publication between June and October 1705 with the *Whipping Post*, which was conceived as a satirical court that tried opponents’ publications – ‘a New Session of Oyer and Terminer, For the Weekly Scriblers’ – and sentenced them to be whipped.\(^\text{207}\) Both Drake and Pittis were subject to legal action that led them to end their comment serials in late 1705.\(^\text{208}\)

More minor Tory comment serials were the *New Observer* (January-February 1704), which attacked Tutchin and promoted occasional conformity legislation; the *Loyal Observer* (January 1704), which also attacked Tutchin, using the ‘loyal’ label that had previously been used to mark Tory newspapers during the Succession Crisis; the *Reviewer Reviewed*, which attacked Defoe’s *Review* in May and June 1705; and Joseph Browne’s *Dialogue Between Church and No-Church* in spring 1706, which attacked the *Review* and Harley.\(^\text{209}\) After the *Rehearsal* folded, the autumn of 1709 brought forth two new comment serials by Edmond Stacey, another non-juring clergyman: the *Rehearsal Reviv’d* – which does not appear to have survived, but whose nature can be guessed from its title – and the

\(^{205}\) Frank, ‘Leslie and the Tory Party’, pp. 50-1.
\(^{206}\) There is no evidence for any link between *Mercurius Politicus* and the late-1640s ‘Mercuries’.
\(^{207}\) Newton, ‘Pittis’.
\(^{208}\) Downie, *Harley and the Press*, p. 89.
\(^{209}\) Ibid, pp. 74, 93.
General Postscript, a dialogue that aimed to provide ‘short Remarks upon the Observator, and the Review, the Tatler, and the rest of the Scriblers; to try, if ‘tis possible, to disabuse the People, and set Things in a true Light’. Stacey ceased both serials after the Whig Secretary of State, the Earl of Sunderland, had him arrested in November 1709.

Overall, there is no direct evidence of political connections for Tory comment serials in the decade before 1710, other than of personal connections between individual authors and politicians (such as Leslie and the Hydes), although this does not mean that political coordination of Tory press output did not exist. Why the Rehearsal survived for nearly five years while these other comment serials failed is unclear, especially as Leslie was subject to legal investigation in the same way as Drake, Pittis and Browne. Nevertheless, the Rehearsal was finally felled in 1709, like many of its fellow Tory comment serials, by the threat of legal action.

At the beginning of 1710, the Whig ministry was at the height of its powers. All of the Tory comment serials had ceased, while the Observator and Review continued to lead the paper war on the Whig side, the latter (at least) as an official publication. During 1710, the wider paper war ramped up significantly, during the political ferment that saw Tories take control of the ministry and the Commons from Whigs. New comment serials appeared on both sides. On the Tory side, the assault was led by the Moderator, which was published between May and November 1710, and which, despite its name, was a Tory comment serial whose main aim was to attack the Observator and Review, and the Whigs more generally. ‘When... the Authors of the Observator and Review... are sincere lovers of Truth and sound Argument’, the Moderator claimed, ‘Then I shall readily lay down my Pen as having obtained the full of my Desire and Drift in this my Undertaking’. One contemporary claimed that the Moderator was written by Charles Leslie, although this cannot be proven.

Over the summer, the Moderator was joined by a new Tory comment serial, which would become one of the most important publications of the period: the Examiner, an essay serial that ran from August 1710 until July 1711, and then again from December 1711.

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211 McLeod, pp. 18, 47.
213 Moderator, 1 (22 May 1710), r.
until July 1714.\textsuperscript{215} The first issue of the \textit{Examiner} bore the subtitle ‘Remarks upon Papers and Occurrences’, and declared its mission thus: ‘I meet with a great Variety of Papers, neither so Correct, so Moral, nor so Loyal as they ought to be... Some of these Papers I intend to \textit{Examine}, and set People right in their Opinions: My chief Business will be to instruct my Country-men’.\textsuperscript{216}

The \textit{Examiner} is strongly associated with Jonathan Swift, but he was directly responsible for writing the \textit{Examiner} for only a few months, and not at the outset. It was initially written by a group of high-church Tories led by Dr William King, probably at the behest of Henry St John, soon to be a leading member of Harley’s ministry.\textsuperscript{217} Swift assumed the authorship for 33 issues, between November 1710 and June 1711,\textsuperscript{218} perhaps at the instigation of Harley, although more likely also in connection with St John.\textsuperscript{219} Swift was perhaps a surprising choice of author, as ideologically he was a ‘high-church Whig’: high-church in religious matters, but Whig in constitutional ones.\textsuperscript{220} Swift also wrote pamphlets for the ministry, most famously \textit{The Conduct of the Allies} (1711) and \textit{Some Remarks on the Barrier Treaty} (1712). After Swift laid down his pen, the authorship of the \textit{Examiner} passed to more conventional high-church Tories, including Delariviere Manley and William Oldisworth, down to 1714.\textsuperscript{221} St John continued to be associated with the

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\textsuperscript{216} \textit{Examiner}, 1 (3 August 1710), r.
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\textsuperscript{218} Specifically, from 1.14 (2 November 1710) to 1.46 (14 June 1711).
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paper, and now financial lubrication can be attested: Oldisworth received 306 guineas for writing the *Examiner* over two years.\(^{222}\)

Across its whole run, the *Examiner*’s ‘Remarks upon Papers and Occurrences’ had broadly the same purpose as that of earlier Tory commentserials: to attack Whigs and dissenters, in this case especially the old Whig ministry, and to promote Tory politicians and arguments among the public. It also had the specific purpose of defending the peace that the ministry was negotiating. Unlike in the period before 1710, it is possible to perceive an organised Tory press programme in this period to at least some degree, perhaps directed by Swift, with links to publishers such as John Morphew and John Barber, and with the *Examiner* as the flagship title.\(^{223}\)

Several other Tory commentserials appeared in the same period. William Wagstaffe’s *Plain Dealer* defended the government between April and August 1712, before being felled by the Stamp Act. Defoe’s *Mercator* promoted the ministry’s bill of commerce, which sought to promote trade with France but had been defeated in the Commons, between May 1713 and July 1714.\(^{224}\) The *Monitor* – perhaps also by Defoe – supplemented the *Examiner* between April and August 1714.\(^{225}\) There was also a minor *Rambler* in March 1712, and Thomas O’Brien wrote a minor *Idler* in June and July 1714. Of these, the *Mercator* is the only title that was definitely connected with the ministry, building on Defoe’s relationship with Harley, although the *Monitor* was presumably also sponsored if it was indeed written by Defoe, and letters survive indicating that O’Brien approached Harley about the *Idler*.\(^{226}\) However, as P.B.J. Hyland has commented, Tories were unable to achieve press supremacy in 1713-14, despite controlling the government machine.\(^{227}\)

On the Whig side, the challenges of 1710 brought a new push for comment serials to join the *Observator* and *Review*. According to John Oldmixon, one of the main Whigs involved, the ‘old Ministry saw it was absolutely necessary to set up a Paper in Opposition to the *Examiner*, having now lost control of the *Review* to Harley. These unnamed

\(^{223}\) Downie, *Harley and the Press*, p. 162. A useful summary of the serials of these publishers in the 1702-14 period can be found in McLeod.
\(^{224}\) See Downie, *Harley and the Press*, p. 171.
\(^{226}\) This minor serial is the subject of an important article: J.A. Downie, ‘Periodicals and Politics in the Reign of Queen Anne’, in Robin Myers and Michael Harris, eds, *Serials and Their Readers*, 1620-1914 (Winchester: St Paul’s Bibliographies, 1993), pp. 45-61.
elements in the old ministry were in contact with the Whig MP and pamphleteer Arthur Maynwaring, and as they ‘knew well his uncommon Capacity for all literary Productions’, Maynwaring was tasked with establishing the new press campaign.\textsuperscript{228} Maynwaring asked Joseph Addison to help him launch the \textit{Whig Examiner} in September 1710.\textsuperscript{229} However, he was unsatisfied with the ‘Title and Turn’ of the new comment serial, so decided to scrap the project and start again.\textsuperscript{230} Maynwaring then turned to John Oldmixon for assistance in setting up a new paper, the \textit{Medley}, which began in October.\textsuperscript{231} The ‘sole Business’ of the \textit{Medley} was ‘to watch the Motions of the \textit{Examiner}, and guard against the ill Effects of them’, although its title enabled it to range more widely: ‘I can properly make use of any matter whatsoever... and the more various the Subject is, or the more different sorts there are of it, the more likely will it be to make what we mean by a \textit{Medley}'.\textsuperscript{232} The \textit{Medley} initially ran from October 1710 until August 1711, when the first series of the \textit{Examiner} ceased, before resuming for a second run between March and August 1712.\textsuperscript{233} Its primary authors were Maynwaring himself and Oldmixon, and Oldmixon was supposed to receive financial remuneration for his efforts, although this never materialised.\textsuperscript{234}

After the Stamp Act of 1712, the \textit{Observator} and \textit{Medley} both ceased publication.\textsuperscript{235} As the \textit{Review} had leaned towards the Tory ministry, no Whig comment serials – of the overtly political variety, at least – remained. The chief organiser of Whig print, Maynwaring, also died in 1712. From this nadir, there was a dramatic reversal in 1713-14, with a new wave of Whig comment serials in the context of the peace and succession debates in the final phase of Anne’s reign, through which the Whigs managed to achieve a substantial presence in print, despite being in opposition. Key figures involved in organising the new Whig print effort include George Ridpath (of the \textit{Flying Post} and \textit{Observator}), Richard Steele (of the \textit{Tatler} and \textit{Spectator}, and a Whig MP), and perhaps Robert Walpole (then a Whig MP), with probable connections to publishers such as Ann

\textsuperscript{228} John Oldmixon, \textit{Memoirs of the Press, Historical and Political, for Thirty Years Past, from 1710 to 1740} (London, 1742), p. 8.
\textsuperscript{230} Oldmixon, \textit{Memoirs}, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{231} Oldmixon, \textit{Life}, p. 168; Oldmixon, \textit{Memoirs}, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{232} Oldmixon, \textit{Memoirs}, p. 9; \textit{Medley}, 2 (11 October 1710), r.
\textsuperscript{233} There was also a split into two titles during 1712. See Appendix A.
\textsuperscript{235} Although the \textit{Medley} briefly became a comment section within the \textit{Flying Post} newspaper. See above, pp. 91-2.
Baldwin and Samuel Buckley. As on the Tory side, there are hints of subsidisation. The first Whig comment serial of this wave was the Britain, which lasted from January to May 1713. Taking the character of an ‘Honest Impartial Britain [i.e. Briton]’, this serial bewailed the ‘opprobrious Distinctions of Whig and Tory’ and aimed to ‘animadvert upon… [partisan] Papers and Pamphlets’, but in fact targeted its fire on Tories, especially the Examiner. The British Merchant provided Whig responses to Defoe’s Mercator between August 1713 and July 1714, arguing that increasing trade with France would undermine British finances. Steele’s Englishman expressed concerns about the peace and threats to the succession between October 1713 and February 1714. John Harris set up his Patriot as a successor to the Englishman from March 1714. It aimed to ‘convince men of our present free and happy Condition under Her Majesty’s Administration, and to rouze them into a real Concern and Watchfulness that it be not undermin’d and overturn’d by the Attacks of our private and open Enemies’. Although Harris criticised partisans on both sides, many of the ‘Enemies’ he described held Tory principles such as hereditary monarchy, passive obedience and non-resistance. The Patriot was joined in April 1714 by Philip Horneck’s High-German Doctor, which satirically attacked the ministry through an allegory of quack doctors, for instance depicting Harley as ‘Doctor Hermodactyl’; the collected edition contained a detailed index to enable readers to decode the complex satire.

These major Whig comment serials were accompanied by minor titles. There was John Dunton’s bizarre Dunton’s Ghost (March-April 1714), in which the eponymous author – who was not in fact dead – defended the Hanoverian succession in non-corporeal form because he was personally in danger: ‘the most Glorious Prince [i.e. the Elector of Hanover]… for whose Interest my GHOST appears, at the Hazard of all that’s dear to Mankind, viz. Liberty. And for that Reason I entitle this Weekly Monitor Dunton’s Ghost, as I am numbred among the Dead [i.e. forc’d to abscond]’. Steele’s Reader (April-May 1714) promised ‘plain Observations upon the Papers as they come out’ and attacked the Tory

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236 Blanchard, Englishman, p. xi; Blanchard, Steele’s Periodical Journalism, p. xvii; Downie, Harley and the Press, pp. 176, 178. Again, McLeod is useful for the serial output of these publishers.
237 Downie, ‘Periodicals, the Book Trade’, p. 266.
238 Britain, 1 (6 January 1713), r. v.
239 Downie, Harley and the Press, p. 177.
240 A modern edition of this is Blanchard, Englishman.
241 Patriot, 1 (22 March 1714), v; 3, (29 March 1714), r. v.
242 Dunton’s Ghost, 1 (4? March 1714), dedication, sig. A2r
Examiner, Monitor and Post Boy. The Muscovite (May–June 1714) combined moral
comment with Whig anxieties about the safety of the Hanoverian succession.

By August 1714, when Queen Anne died, Whig and Tory comment serials were
well-established, and were directly sponsored on both sides. Thomas O’Brien wrote in that
year that potential publishers of the Idler had told him that ‘there is no Paper of this kind
now or lately come out but what is carried on by the subscription, purse, or encouragement
of the Party, & Interest it espouses’. If this was indeed the case, it would explain why the
landscape of comment serials changed significantly after George I’s accession. The new king
made no secret of his partiality for the Whigs, who soon displaced Tories in both ministry
and Commons. Similarly, none of the Tory comment serials survived the arrival of the new
regime. In the autumn of 1714, and now in opposition, Tories twice revived the Examiner,
one as the Controller (between October 1714 and January? 1715), and once as the
Examiner (between November 1714 and March 1716). The first issue of the Controller
described the Examiner persona’s resurrection, brought about when a man whispered ‘New
Lies, new Lies, Ridpath, Ridpath, Fama volat, Ridpath, new Scandal, new Lies’ into his left
ear, and another ‘prais’d the Independents, the Anabaptists, the Presbyterians and all
Dissenters’ in his right ear. Startled back to life by such terrible mutterings, he explained his
desire to target the Whig writers, Oldmixon, Ridpath and Horneck. The new Examiner
stated its design as ‘to justifie the Constitution in Church and State, under the present
Administration of our most Gracious Sovereign King GEORGE’, but expressed this in Tory
terms:

I propose... To shew that the Members of the Church of England, (I mean such as
the Vile Slanderers of a Party... call High Church) are the very Persons that Settled
our present Sovereign upon the Throne of Great Britain, and are the only proper
Instruments to maintain him there in Peace and Glory; on the other Hand... I will
shew that the contrary or opposite Party of Men, call’d Whigs, always did, and ever
will, Study to make Divisions betwixt the KING and his People, and to keep up those
Divisions[.]

243 Reader, 5 (30 April 1714), r. A modern edition is found in Blanchard, Steele’s Periodical
Journalism.
244 McLeod, p. 34.
247 Controller, 1 (8 October 1714), r, v.
248 Examiner, 1 (3 November 1714), r.
The Controller was suppressed by the government, but the Examiner, now written by Joseph Browne, lasted through the period of the Jacobite rebellion. There were a couple of other minor Tory comment serials in 1716: the Free-Holder Extraordinary in March 1716, and the Citizen in June and July 1716.

Whig comment serials, on the other hand, thrived in the first years of George I, defending the Hanoverian succession and Whig principles against the old Tory ministry and Jacobitism. A couple continued from Anne’s reign: the Patriot, until January 1715, and the High-German Doctor, until May 1715. Steele revived the Englishman between July and November 1715, with government support. There were also new Whig comment serials. The Daily Benefactor was published in May and June 1716 to ‘give all Ranks and Degrees of Men right and just Notions of the Constitution in Church and State’, and to show ‘That the Principles and Actings of a Set of Men (under the specious Pretence of being the only Friends to Monarchy and the Church) have ever tended to the introducing Popery and Arbitrary Power’. A new Medley was published during the same months. Addison published his Free-Holder between December 1715 and June 1716, sponsored by the ministry. Addison’s essays defended the Hanoverian regime and Whig principles of liberty and property, aiming to ‘improve’ on military victories over the Jacobites ‘by carrying on our Successes over the Minds of Men, and by reconciling them to the Cause of their King, their Country, and their Religion’, and ‘to shew the Reasonableness and Necessity of our opposing the Pretender... if we have any Regard to our Religion and Liberties’. There was a Weekly Observator between April and June 1716, comprising pro-Hanoverian (and self-consciously ‘Whig’) dialogues between an ‘Observator’ and a West Country man named Ralph. Minor titles included the English Examiner (February-March 1715), Steele’s Observer (a brief successor to the Englishman, February-March 1715), and Steele’s ‘pamphlet periodical’ Chit-Chat in March 1716.

The period between 1702 and 1716 was the heyday of comment serials. Whig and Tory comment serials, centred on political subjects such as the constitution, religion, the war and the succession, were virtually a permanent presence during these peak years of

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249 Blanchard, Englishman, pp. xi-xii.
250 Daily Benefactor, title-page.
251 There were two Medley serials in 1715, one political and one moral. See Appendix A.
253 Free-Holder, 1 (23 December 1715), v; 55 (29 June 1716), v.
254 Chit-Chat is also included in Blanchard, Steele’s Periodical Journalism.
the rage of party. Comment serials led the paper wars and set the terms of debate. Although political connections cannot be attested before 1710 for any comment serials other than the *Review*, comment serials on both sides received political and financial support from politicians after 1710.

**The moral turn, 1709-c.1730**

What about the *Tatler* and *Spectator*? These two serials have legendary status in the literary canon. Written primarily by Richard Steele and Joseph Addison, they are regarded as the classic ‘periodical essays’, which discussed morals, manners, society and literature in a way designed to be improving and entertaining for readers. With their refined style, they epitomised a growing culture of politeness that rejected base partisan politicking, and hence are traditionally seen as marking a break from earlier serials of news and politics. However, I will argue that it is fruitful to treat them as part of the comment serial tradition – specifically, as *moral* comment serials – because their origins and nature had significant connections to and resemblances with ‘political’ comment serials. The *Tatler* and *Spectator* resembled comment serials in their use of comment keywords and their desire to inculcate better thoughts and actions in their readers. Although their primary purpose was ostensibly different – moral reform rather than political persuasion and galvanisation – there were significant overlaps in practice, as political comment serials often used the language of morality, moral comment serials often had a political purpose, and they shared stylistic features such as refinement, entertainment and personas. The *Tatler* and *Spectator* also shaped the ongoing development of comment serials in the 1710s and 1720s, both by spawning a new line of moral comment serials and by influencing the ongoing tradition of political comment serials. Indeed, by the 1720s, there was effectively a single comment serial tradition, containing a range of political, moral and other comment. I will address these two elements – origins and nature, and impact – in turn. One important theme underlying the discussion in this section is that comment serials lost their dominant position as vehicles for regular comment during this period, with the rise of newspapers with introductory essays, as discussed in the previous chapter. By the 1730s, comment serials were a marginal form.

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255 In this section, ‘political comment serials’ is used to refer to the *overtly* political titles: those of the kind discussed in the previous section. This is not intended to imply that ‘moral comment serials’ were non-political.
First, a brief factual introduction to the *Tatler* and *Spectator* (Fig. 15). The *Tatler* was established in April 1709 by Richard Steele, a Whig playwright and pamphleteer, and former army captain. Steele was soon joined by his old friend and fellow Whig, Joseph Addison. At the outset, the *Tatler* was a miscellany in the form of a parody newspaper, appearing three times a week. Each issue was divided into sections with satirical, newspaper-style place headings, although the places indicated were London public houses and the persona’s ‘own Apartment’ rather than newsworthy cities. Each place represented a different subject that the *Tatler* would feature, namely ‘Gallantry, Pleasure, and Entertainment’, ‘Poetry’, ‘Learning’, ‘Foreign and Domestick News’, and ‘what else I shall on any other Subject offer’ (from his ‘own Apartment’). The result was a medley of news, moral observations, theatrical comment and more. Over time, the *Tatler* came to comprise a single essay (or reader’s letter) under the ‘own Apartment’ heading, its news content declined, and its discussion of literature increased. The *Tatler* adopted the *eidolon* of Sir Isaac Bickerstaff, a fictional elderly gentleman. After 271 issues, the *Tatler* ceased in January 1711. A couple of months later, in March, the *Spectator* appeared, again written primarily by Steele and Addison. Published every day, the *Spectator* was fully in essay or letter form, and featured similar subjects to the *Tatler*, especially manners, morals and literature. It also adopted an *eidolon*, in this case ‘Mr Spectator’, who silently watched people’s behaviour in public houses. Mr Spectator was surrounded by a ‘club’ of other characters, including the Tory country gentleman Sir Roger de Coverley and the Whig merchant Sir Andrew Freeport. It continued until December 1712, before being revived by Addison (but not Steele) between June and December 1714. Altogether, the *Spectator* ran to 635 issues.

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i) Origins and nature

The literary origins and nature of the *Tatler* and *Spectator* have been located in a series of ‘precursors’, such as the *Athenian Mercury* (1691-97, for readers’ letters), the *Gentleman’s Journal* (1692-94, as a miscellany with an entertaining purpose), the *London Spy* (1698-1700, which aimed to expose vice and reform manners) and the ‘Scandalous Club’ section of the *Review* (which featured readers’ letters, shared the club motif adopted by the *Spectator*, aimed to reform manners and had an entertaining purpose). These are important, but the *Tatler* and *Spectator* were also a product and adaptation of the comment serial tradition. There are strong resemblances between these serials and the political comment serials examined earlier in this chapter. Their titles were similarly based on individuals, and, as already mentioned, ‘Spectator’ clearly recalled ‘Observator’ and ‘Examiner’ by referring to an individual who watches or notices. The *Tatler*’s chief keyword

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was ‘lucubrations’ (literally, ‘burning the midnight oil’) which has a similar force to ‘reflections’. One pamphlet response linked the Tatler’s ‘lucubrations’ to other comment keywords: ‘I am extremely pleas’d to hear of the happy Success of your Lucubrations in London, and the good Effects which your judicious Remarks and Observations have had on that great City’. The Spectator described its content as ‘speculations’ and ‘observations’, stated that it was to ‘publish a Sheet-full of Thoughts every Morning, for the Benefit of my Contemporaries’, and noted that ‘When I make Choice of a Subject that has not been treated on by others, I throw together my Reflections on it’. The Tatler’s opening also resembled the design of comment serials in claiming to ‘offer something, whereby such worthy and well-affected Members of the Commonwealth may be instructed, after their Reading, what to think’, such readers being defined as ‘Politick Persons, who are so publick-spirited as to neglect their own Affairs to look into Transactions of State’. Whether this should be read as the Tatler’s actual aim, or as a satire on the aims of others – or, probably, both – this situates the Tatler in the context of comment serials.

The main difference between the Tatler and Spectator and political comment serials was that their content had an alternative focus, in that their discussions were more centred on manners and morals, and less on subjects like war, the constitution, trade and the Church. Ostensibly, their primary purpose was moral reform: to improve behaviour, to discourage vice and folly, to promote virtue. The Tatler’s stated aim was to ‘observe upon the Manners of the Pleasurable, as well as the Busie Part of Mankind… to expose the false Arts of Life, to pull off the Disguises of Cuning, Vanity and Affectation, and to recommend a general Simplicity in our Dress, our Discourse, and our Behaviour’. It was headed by a famous quotation from Juvenal, ‘Quicquid agunt Homines nostri Farrago Libelli’, which indicated that ‘whatever men did’ was its subject. Its first issue gave ‘all Men fair Warning to mend their Manners’, and Sir Isaac Bickerstaff took on the title ‘Censor of Great Britain’. An imitator, the Female Tatler (1709-10), observed that ‘when… Peace… shall, instead of promoting Religion, Virtue and Sobriety, so far intoxicate Men’s Minds, as to draw ’em into Pride, Luxury and all Manner of ridiculous Excursions, an ingenious Tatler will conduce more to the Reformation of Mankind than an Hypocritical Society’. A supporter of the Spectator claimed, ‘The Wise and Ingenious SPECTATOR has contributed more by his

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259 Spectator, 1 (1 March 1711), v; 249 (15 December 1711), r.
260 Tatler, 1 (12 April 1709), r. See Downie, ‘Reflections’, p. 299.
Speculations to the advancing of Virtue and Morality, and given a greater Check to the growing Vices of the Times, than all the Endeavours of United Societies with florid Sermons and pompous Feasts'. The Spectator itself argued, 'I am amazed that the Press should only be made use of in this Way by News-Writers, and the Zealots of Parties; as if it were not more advantageous to Mankind to be instructed in Wisdom and Virtue, than in Politicks'. Where political comment serials were trying to instil good principles in readers, moral comment serials positioned themselves as trying to instil good behaviour in them.\textsuperscript{261}

However, the Tatler and Spectator were closer in substance to political comment serials than this distinction suggests, for two reasons. First, political comment serials themselves drew extensively on the moral language of virtue, vice and folly. Most famously, Defoe included ‘a Court of Justice, for the censuring and exposing Vice, and for a due Discouragement of the scandalous Manners of the Age’, the ‘Scandalous Club’, in his Review. Pittis’s Heraclitus Ridens included ‘The Common Occurrences of Life’ within its remit – and in fact concluded its design by quoting the same lines from Juvenal that would later be used in the Tatler. Blurring the political and moral, an opponent of Heraclitus Ridens claimed that ‘The whole Design of Heraclitus is against our Constitution, against the City of London, against the Reformation of Manners, and in order to Encourage Vice, Immortality, and Prophaneness’. In addition, just as Bickerstaff of the Tatler was the ‘Censor of Great Britain’, so Tutchin was presented as ‘Censor Morum’ (‘censor of morals’) in the Observator. An opponent of the Observator, William Fuller, addressed Tutchin, ‘I am astonished... that you should dare to set up for Reformer of the Estate of this Nation, and of Mens Lives and Manners’. Another opponent pithily summarised,

\begin{quote}
This is the Hero of such great Renown,
That should reform the Vices of the Town,
Instead of that, he multiplies his own.
\end{quote}

The language of morals did not emerge into comment serials with the Tatler and Spectator, but was already present in political comment serials.\textsuperscript{262}

\textsuperscript{261} Tatler, vol. 1, dedication, pp. iii-iv; 1 (12 April 1709); Female Tatler, 1 (8 July 1709), r; Richard Estcourt, A Letter from Dick Estcourt, the Comedian, to the Spectator (London, 1713), preface, p. [3]; Spectator, 124 (23 July 1711), r.
\textsuperscript{262} Review, 6.141 (2 March 1710), p. 563; Heraclitus Ridens, 1.1 (3 August 1703), v; London Lampoon’d Formerly in the Jacobite’s Songs; And at Present in a Scandalous Paper, Call’d Heraclitus Ridens (London, 1703), p. 32; Ward, Secret History, dedication, sig. A2r; William Fuller, Mr. William Fuller’s Letter to Mr. John Tutchin, Author of the Observator (London, 1703), p. 2; The Picture of the Observator Drawn to the Life (London, 1704), p. [ii].
Secondly, the *Tatler* and *Spectator* were themselves partisan – specifically Whig – serials. Contemporaries had no doubt that these were Whig serials. The Tory *Letter to the Examiner* (1710) linked the *Tatler* to the *Observer* and *Review* as the voices of the Whig ‘faction’:

such is the singular Modesty of that Faction... that you must expect to have the same Arguments still pursu’d. The *Observer*, the *Review*, the *Censor of Great Britain* [i.e. the *Tatler*], who resembles the Famous Censor of Rome in nothing, but espousing the Cause of the *Vanquis’d*, with the Crowd of Hireling Scriblers, will hope... at last to perswade the People, that the G[eneral] [Marlborough], the *quondam* T[reasure]r [Godolphin], and the J[un]tto, are the only Objects of the Confidence of the Allies.

The *Observer*, *Review* and *Tatler* were also treated as representatives of Whigs in two visual satires. *The Three Champions* (c. 1710) presented ‘Isaac Bickerstaff’, ‘Review’ and ‘Observer’ in three roundels (Fig. 16). This was accompanied by a poem that began,

> View here Three Brethren in Iniquity,  
> That vex the *Church*, and spight the *Monarchy*,  
> Cry up Resistance to the Power Supreme,  
> And Men of Loyal Principles Defame.

*The Funeral of the Low Church* (1710) included a scene in which, after the Tory election victory of that autumn, ‘Bickerstaff’, ‘De Foe’ and ‘Observer’ attempt to revive the Whig cause (Fig. 17, bottom-left). Defoe and Bickerstaff are seen trying to prop up another figure representing ‘Whiggism’, with the Observer standing by their side, while a Tory says, ‘Let Whiggism dye’. A Tory critic also suspected Whig leanings in the *Spectator*, despite its claims of non-alignment: ‘perhaps he shall shortly find, he has not Art enough to disguise himself; and that a Net is too thin a *Cloak* for a *Party-Man* to dance in’.263

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Figure 16. The Three Champions (c.1710).
What made the *Tatler* and *Spectator* Whig? Both serials included some direct political comment, although this was limited. Early on, the *Tatler* included allegorical praise for Marlborough and Godolphin, and, in the summer of 1710, six issues contained allegorical attacks on Harley and the Tories. For the latter, the *Tatler* was criticised for lowering itself to include ‘Politick Lucubrations’, and as having been

Unhappily seduced by a Malevolent Star... to descend from a Wit of Mode, to a most Ungracious Politician... the Political Lunacy unfortunately seized him: Which has entirely changed him into a Litteral Conjurer, Uttering himself in all the frightful Jargon of – Government – Ministry – Constitution – Party – Publick Good – Right – Nature – and Society.[]

Indeed, in the final *Tatler*, Steele lamented that ‘the least excusable Part of all this Work is, That I have, in some Places in it, touched upon Matters which concern both the Church and State’. The *Spectator*, meanwhile, contained some direct Whig political comment in early issues, including a dream allegory about ‘Publick Credit’ featuring Whig defences of
toleration and the need for a balance between liberty and monarchy. More generally, however, scholars such as Charles Knight, J.A. Downie and Brian Cowan have argued that the Tatler and Spectator should be understood as trying to inculcate a generalised Whig ethic rather than specific Whig arguments – essentially, to instil Whig manners rather than just Whig opinions. As a mode of behaviour, Whig politeness could be favourably contrasted with Tory base politicking.

The Tatler and Spectator also resembled political comment serials in three aspects of style – refinement, entertainment and personas. The refined style associated with Addison and Steele may contrast with that of comment serials such as L’Estrange’s and Tutchin’s Observators, but it was a feature of Mercurius Reformatus and the Examiner. Indeed, Welwood’s adoption of refinement for Mercurius Reformatus was, as we have seen, a Whig attempt to assert superiority over L’Estrange’s Tory baseness, just like Addison and Steele two decades later.

On entertainment, the Tatler and Spectator were intended to divert and entertain readers, both as a function in its own right (Oldmixon described the Tatler as ‘papers of pleasure and amusement’) and as a means to achieve moral reform, following long traditions of classical satire and the Horatian interplay of ‘instruction’ and ‘diversion’. The Spectator promised to ‘make... Instruction agreeable, and... Diversion useful’ and hence to ‘endeavour to enliven Morality with Wit, and to temper Wit with Morality’. A later Spectator of 1716 summarised the satirical impulse: ‘The Spectator is a very necessary Paper to Correct Vice by Ridicule, and expose Folly after a Satyrical manner; that with a smiling Countenance gives a secret Stab, and Wounds the very Person it delights’. In a similar way, entertainment had an important place in political comment serials, based on the idea of joco-seriousness, both in the use of wit and humour as a vehicle to convey political points (most obviously in the Heraclitus Ridens serials), and in the inclusion of diverting sections alongside serious sections as a way to get people to read the serial at all

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264 Examiner, 5 (31 August 1710), v; William Oldisworth, Annotations on the Tatler (London, 1710), part 2, sig. A2r-A3r; Tatler, 271 (2 January 1711), r; Spectator, 3 (3 March 1711). For the overtly political content of the Tatler and Spectator, see Richmond Bond, Tatler, pp. 59ff; Downie, ‘Periodicals and Politics’, pp. 51-4.


266 For Mercurius Reformatus, see above, pp. 155-6. The Examiner’s refined style is indicated by its use of Latin mottos to head its discourses, and the fact that its main author, Oldisworth, referred to it as ‘essays’. See above, p. 125.
(as in the *Weekly Pacquet*’s ‘Popish Courant’ and the *Review*’s ‘Scandalous Club’). The *Tatler* and *Spectator* therefore did not mark a complete break from the practice of political comment serials, although their inclusion of entertaining material was undoubtedly greater, and drew more heavily from other publications such as miscellanies and works of moral reform.267

On the use of personas, the development of Sir Isaac Bickerstaff and Mr Spectator (and his club) as elaborate, fictionalised characters that framed the voices of the serials had precursors in the comment serial tradition, albeit not to the extent of the fully-fledged *eidola* – in Furtwangler’s sense of ‘masks to be seen and seen through’ – of the *Tatler* and *Spectator*.268 Bickerstaff and Mr Spectator should be read in the context of the earlier use of characters through which the voice of a serial was projected. To take an obvious example, ‘Mr Observator’ was the primary persona of Tutchin’s *Observator*. Admittedly, he was a representation of a real individual, Tutchin, rather than an entirely fictional creation, but still functioned as a character within the *Observator*. He provided an elaborate backstory, and was engaged in a fictional dialogue with another character, through which he displayed personality traits such as learning, reason and calmness. Indeed, ‘Mr Observator’ was arguably constructed as a more scholarly character, well-versed in English constitutional history, than the real John Tutchin.269 Moreover, Tutchin’s dialogue also included a fully-fictional character – Tutchin’s ‘Countryman’ was a passionate older man called Roger of Coverly, who had a wife called Joan, and a tendency to threaten Mr Observator’s enemies with his ‘oaken towel’ (a detail that was frequently mentioned by Tutchin’s opponents, seeking to associate Tutchin with violence). Roger the Countryman was created as a voice for the common, honest but imperfect Englishman, and so bears some resemblance to the *eidola* of the *Tatler* and *Spectator* in being a character whose perspective was to be ‘seen and seen through’.270 Another obvious parallel should also be pointed out – where Tutchin’s *Observator* had characters called ‘Mr Observator’ and ‘Roger of Coverly’, the *Spectator* had characters called ‘Mr Spectator’ and ‘Roger de Coverley’ (although the latter Roger was of higher social standing). In sum, personas in the *Tatler* and *Spectator* had similarities to what was already practised in Tutchin’s *Observator*. And comment serial personas were not

267 Oldmixon, *Life*, p. xiv; *Spectator*, 10 (12 March 1711), r; *Spectator*, 1 (13 June 1716), r.
268 See above, pp. 125-6.
269 E.g. *Observator*, 4.42 (25 August 1705) (a detailed biographical back-story); 6.2 (8 March 1707) (on his being covered in dust due to excessive study of the ‘musty Rolls of our Ancestors’).
270 E.g. ibid, 2.9 (8 May 1703) (an example of Roger’s anger, needing to be calmed down); 3.1 (25 March 1704) (Roger’s biography); 4.15 (23 May 1705) (Roger and Joan).
confined to Tutchin – Leslie had a similar formulation in the *Rehearsal*, and dialogue serials of all sorts relied on character creation in one way or another.

All of this is not to deny that there were important differences between the *Tatler* and *Spectator* and the political comment serials, or to argue that they should be regarded as having solely emerged out of the comment serial tradition. However, there were undoubtedly important connections and resemblances. As a final thought on this subject, let us consider Robert DeMaria’s definition of the ‘periodical essay’ in his important survey of the genre. He identifies periodical essays as having four features: regularity, contiguity between the essay and the serial, correspondence with readers, and personas. All of these were also features of political comment serials.271

**ii) Impact**

What impact did the *Tatler* and *Spectator* have on the wider comment serial tradition? Their influence was undoubtedly significant, but was not as overwhelming as – or was at least more nuanced than – is usually implied in scholarship that takes these two serials as the pivots of the story of the ‘periodical essay’. Nineteenth-century claims that they had hundreds of ‘imitators’ are excessive in bringing later serials into the orbit of the *Tatler* and *Spectator*.272 If we examine the serial press in the 1710s and 1720s, there were a number of moral comment serials that were direct imitators of the *Tatler* or *Spectator*, but there was also a more substantial, continuing tradition of political comment serials – which was itself affected by the legacy of the *Tatler* and *Spectator* – as well as ambiguous or hybrid cases. It is helpful to conceptualise the emergence of a range of political and moral comment within a single comment serial tradition, shaped but not initiated by the *Tatler* and *Spectator*.

Let us begin with the direct tradition of moral comment serials.273 The *Tatler* and *Spectator* headed a line of imitators that openly acknowledged their debt to these two precursors. Major examples include the *Female Tatler* (1709-10), the *Tory Tatler* (1710-11), the *Visions of Sir Heister Ryley* (1710-11; this cited the *Tatler* as its model); two *Tatler* continuators in 1711, an Edinburgh *Tatler* (1711), the *Hermit* (1711-12), Addison and Steele’s own *Guardian* (1713); the *Lay-Monk* (1713-14; ‘the sequel of the Spectators’),

272 Graham, *Beginnings*, p. 72, quotes two nineteenth-century estimates of 221 and 121 imitators.
Steele’s *Lover* (1714; ‘written in imitation of the Tatler’), new *Spectators* in 1715 and 1716, the *Censor* (1717; ‘followed... upon the heels of the inimitable Spectator’), the *Wanderer* (1717), the *Free-Thinker* (1718-21; cited the *Spectator* as its model), the *Mirror* (1719), the *Casuist* (1719-20), the *Visiter* (1723-24), the *Tea-Table* (1724), the *Plain Dealer* (1724-25) and the *Tatler Revived* (1727-28). These serials shared with their model a stated focus on manners and morals, on spreading virtue and exposing vice. For instance, the *Lay-Monk* consisted of ‘Essay[s]... for the promoting of Learning, Morality, Politeness, or the Knowledge of human Nature’; the Edinburgh *Tatler* was ‘rather to entertain than instruct, or at least to reprove People for their Faults in a diverting Manner’; the *Visiter* encouraged people to adopt a ‘Method of reflecting upon their own Actions and Morals... [and] setting Vice and Vertue in a true Light’; and the *Plain Dealer* was to discuss ‘the Passions, the Humours, the Follies, the Disquiets, the Pleasures, and the Graces of Human Life’. Like the *Tatler* and *Spectator*, many of these had some overtly political content and had partisan aims. For instance, the *Free-Thinker* was Whig and the *Hermit* was Tory.

However, most comment serials in the 1710s and 1720s were not direct imitators of the *Tatler* and *Spectator*. Most were overtly political in content and partisan in purpose. Indeed, Addison and Steele themselves wrote political comment serials after the *Tatler* and *Spectator*, most importantly Steele’s *Englishman* (1713-15) and Addison’s *Free-Holder* (1715-16). As we have seen, the *Guardian* (1713) included some political papers in August 1713 when Steele began to advocate the destruction of Dunkirk, a prominent Whig party cause of that summer. One opponent mocked Steele for his political turn in the *Guardian*:

> a Delirium of Greatness had possess’d him ever since he enter’d into the Service of the Whigs. He talks no more of fine Taste and Sentiments, Delicacy of Stile, Turn of Thought, Beauty of Expression, and other beaten Epithets and Phrases... but is transform’d from Censor of the Manners, to Guardian of the Liberties of Great-Britain.

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274 Lay-Monk, 1 (16 November 1713), (p. 6 in collected edn, ESTC N19410); Tatler (Edinburgh), 5 (27 January 1711), r; Visiter, 1 (18 Jun 1723), r; Plain Dealer, 1 (23 March 1724), v.

275 For the *Free-Thinker*, see the relevant entry in Sullivan, *British Literary Magazines*. The *Hermit*’s Tory alignment is made clear by one of the aims listed in the title of the collected edition: to ‘Reprove the Corruptions Introduced by the Execrable Doctrines of Forty One, and Propagated by a REVIVAL of the same’.

Another addressed Steele thus:

You a long while entertained us very agreeable with your *Tatlers*; and your *Spectators* furnish’d the Ladies Tea-Tables as long, with Chat and Raillery on their Fashions and Behaviour: But your *Guardian*, you told us, was at first designed for a Paper of Instruction; and such indeed it was, whilst it only gave us Lectures of Virtue and Morality: But how useful and instructive a Paper will it now be! since you will no longer confine it to the Ladies Apartments, nor your Self to the dull Themes of Virtue and Morality; but have launched out at once into the noble Depths of Politicks, and undertaken to instruct the Q—n what Measures she ought to Rule by, and her Ministers, What, How, and When they are to Act.

Then Steele ended the *Guardian* and began the overtly-political *Englishman*. One pamphlet mocked Steele in his *Englishman* days for having become the heir to Tutchin, presenting Tutchin’s ghost as appearing before Steele and saying,

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Arise, Arise, Renowned S---tor,
No more a *Guardian, Tatler, or Spectator*;
But be like me, Thy Predecessor, Base,
Insipid, Haughty, Infamous, traducing
The best of *Governments* and *Ministry*
As near Perfection, as you Mortals can be;
And henceforth let it be in *Scorn* and *Irony*,
When Mortals the old Proverb use, and say,
As bright, or true as *Steele*...
Rise up, rise up, rise up, *O Englishman*[.]

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However, Steele defended his decision to write the *Englishman*. He argued,

I thought what Favour I had obtained by being the Author of an instructive Way of representing the Manners of Men, and describing Vices and Virtues in a Stile that might fall in with their ordinary Entertainments, could not be more worthily employed, improved, or lost, than in Defence of such Men, and of the Constitution it self, which they had supported./ When the Subjects of Peace and War were all
the Conversation in Town, I took upon me to be as concerned as I thought I had a Right to be, and speak my Sentiments with the Freedom of an English Gentleman.

Steele’s apology indicates that the political should not be interpreted as a ‘lower’ or less important form than the moral in this period.277

There were many other political comment serials in the 1710s and 1720s. Those up to 1716 were described in the previous section; some of the more important titles in the late 1710s and 1720s were as follows.278 In the late 1710s, the Scourge (1717), Entertainer (1717-18), Freeholder Extraordinary (1718) and a final Heraclitus Ridens (1718) advanced high-church Tory or crypto-Jacobite arguments. On the Whig side, the Honest Gentleman (1718-19) defended Whig principles, the Commentator (1720) defended the Whig ministry, and the Independent Whig (1720-21) attacked ‘priestcraft’. There were exchanges between Court Whigs and Opposition Whigs during the Whig split of 1717-20, including specialist comment serials that debated the 1719 Peerage Bill – for which Addison wrote in favour (the Old Whig) and Steele against (the Plebeian). The Manufacturer (1719-21), Weaver (1719-20), Spinster (1719) and a new British Merchant (1719-20) discussed cloth manufacture and trade. Several serials were concerned with the fall-out from the South Sea Bubble in 1720, for instance the Projector (1721), Director (1720-21) and Moderator (1721). In the early 1720s, the Tory True Briton (1723-24) faced off against the Whig Pasquin (1722-24), Briton (1723-24) and Honest True Briton (1724). Later in the decade, the Citizen (1727), Senator (1728), Free Briton (1729-35) and Hyp Doctor (1730-41) all supported Walpole, while the Country Gentleman (1726) and the Craftsman (1726-27 as a comment serial) supported the opposition. Many of these were sponsored by politicians: Pasquin and the Hyp Doctor were part of Walpole’s press programme, for instance, while the Craftsman was associated with the opposition politicians Viscount Bolingbroke (the former Henry St John, of the Examiner) and William Pulteney.

The development of political comment serials in the 1710s and 1720s was influenced by the Tatler and Spectator, as some comment serials were effectively a hybrid of the two forms. One minor but blatant example is the Political Tatler (1716), which did exactly as it claimed, praising dissenters for their support for the Hanoverian succession through the eidolon of ‘Joshua Standfast’, and writing ‘From my own Apartment’. Two more


278 A full list is given in Appendix A.
important examples of comment serials that were essentially political, but were framed in the language of moral comment serials, were the *Entertainer* (1717-18) and the *Independent Whig* (1720-21). The *Entertainer* sounded like the *Tatler* when it adopted the same Juvenal quote of discussing ‘whatever men do’, and stated that it wanted to ‘expose our Lucubrations to the publick View’. However, much of its comment was straightforwardly political. The subtitle of its collected edition, ‘Remarks upon Men, Manners, Religion and Policy’, captures its hybrid political/moral character. The aim of the *Independent Whig* was to ‘reform mankind’, but it argued that others who had tried to do this before – meaning the *Tatler* and *Spectator* – had often focused on trifles of manners, when it was more important to attack priestcraft and tyranny. Hence, the moral and political were again blended: *Spectator*-esque language was combined with a political goal.

By the 1720s, political and moral comment serials together formed a successful press phenomenon. However, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, newspapers were increasingly including introductory essays in the style of comment serials – both political and moral – during the 1720s. For political comment, a famous example is ‘Cato’s Letters’, Trenchard and Gordon’s series of Opposition Whig papers in the *London Journal* and *British Journal* in the early 1720s. For moral comment, the most obvious example is the *Universal Spectator* (1728-46), a newspaper carrying an opening moral essay in the manner of the *Spectator*. As a result, the newspaper and comment serial traditions began to merge. Before long, newspapers were displacing comment serials as the principal vehicle for regular comment. Comment serials would never regain the prominence they had held in their heyday.

**Conclusion**

Comment serials were the most powerful press weapons available for party warfare in late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century Britain. Whigs and Tories fashioned comment serials to fire relentless rounds of paper bullets at one another and (where the metaphor breaks down) at the public, seeking to galvanise them into their desired principles and behaviour. Evolving out of pamphlets and newspapers during the Succession Crisis in the early 1680s, their heyday was the first two decades of the eighteenth century, when they

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279 *Entertainer*, 1 (6 November 1717).
280 *Independent Whig*, 1 (20 January 1720).
proliferated at the peak of the ‘rage of party’. They diversified into moral comment via the *Tatler* and *Spectator*, which should be understood as adaptations of political comment serials, as well as being the product of better-known ancestors such as question-and-answer serials, miscellanies and social satire. Moral comment serials did not supersede political comment serials, which remained significant in the 1710s and 1720s, but helped to build a single, wide-ranging comment serial tradition. Altogether, the tangibility of the comment serial tradition both reflected and contributed to the wider cultural definition of a concept of comment by the early-eighteenth century, which was also developing through the emergence of a lexicon of comment in pamphlets and practical experimentation with news-comment relations within newspapers.

In the 1730s, comment serials became a marginal form. Only four comment serials with thirty or more issues were published in London in the 1730s – the *Free Briton* (1729-35), *Hyp Doctor* (1730-41), *Auditor* (1733) and *Prompter* (1734-36). The former two were pro-Walpole political comment serials, and the latter two were moral comment serials. There were several reasons for the form’s decline. As we have seen, newspapers with comment sections re-emerged in the late 1710s, and became common in the 1720s and 1730s. By the 1730s, regular comment had mostly shifted from comment serials back into newspapers, taking advantage of the bigger audiences that newspapers enjoyed. There were also wider format changes: reforms to stamp duty in 1725 made the four-page broadsheet financially preferable to the half-sheet folio as a format for serials, making the traditional format of comment serials less viable. The decline cannot be attributed directly to the end of the ‘rage of party’, because the clashes between government and opposition in the age of Walpole could have lent themselves to comment serials of the sort that had existed in the age of Anne. Instead, the serial component of these later political battles was fought more in newspapers, most famously the *Craftsman* (1726-50), *Common Sense* (1737-43?) and *Champion* (1739-43?). Each era of party conflict had a paper war with distinct characteristics: pamphlets and newsbooks in the civil wars; pamphlets and newspapers in the Succession Crisis; pamphlets and comment serials in the age of Anne; pamphlets and newspapers in the age of Walpole. Although pamphlets and newspapers were the main forms of topical cheap print for the rest of the eighteenth century, comment serials experienced a modest revival after 1750, following the publication of Samuel Johnson’s *Rambler* (1750-52).

So far, the discussion in this thesis has focused on the *supply* of comment: the nature of the comment that was in circulation. To fully assess the significance of comment, the *demand* side also needs consideration. Who consumed comment, how did they react to
comment, and why did this matter for bigger questions about political culture? These questions are the subject of the final chapter.
CHAPTER 4. Consuming comment serials and political culture

This chapter addresses the consumption of comment – specifically, of comment serials, as the most intensive form of comment in circulation in early modern Britain. Comment serials were widely known to the British public, and their consumption contributed to the development of political awareness and partisan culture: key themes in the political culture of late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth-century Britain.¹

A broader public encountered comment serials than raw print-run figures, typically running to hundreds or thousands, would suggest, for three reasons: because per-issue print-runs need to be multiplied by the number of issues of a serial; because multiple people could directly encounter each copy; and because people could encounter comment serials indirectly by consuming discussions of them in conversations, letters and other printed publications. Comment serials also had a geographical and social reach that extended significantly beyond London and the elite. Through this substantial physical footprint, comment serials – and, by extension, comment more generally – contributed to the broadening and deepening of public political awareness in early modern Britain, by exposing people to more arguments and opinions.

Comment serial consumption tended to fall into patterns of partisan reading: reading in ways that reflected either political support for or opposition to a publication, often from a position of pre-judgement, based on the reader’s own political allegiances. Despite the hopes – or anxieties – of many contemporaries, partisan reading tended less to involve persuasion than the affirmation and development of existing partisan identities: shaping individual partisan identity through furnishing the mind with arguments or building attachment to the party, nurturing partisan communities through real, virtual or imagined collective reading experiences, and encouraging partisan actions such as oral debate, letter-writing, composing printed responses or taking to the streets. These patterns shaped the experience of partisanship at a quotidian, ‘micro’ level. It is difficult to make ‘macro’ observations about partisan culture with any certainty, but the aggregated experiences of partisan reading, in comment serials and elsewhere, must have contributed to the deepening of a national partisan culture.

Comment serial consumption also contributed to partisan culture in another way, because comment serials came to function in public as pre-eminent voices for parties.

¹ A broader discussion of comment and political culture is found in the overall conclusion of this thesis.
Partly, this was because comment serials induced dense paper wars that were more elaborate than exchanges between one-off publications, as comment serials answered and were answered by various pamphlets and other serials. This created webs of public dialogues, centred on comment serials, that represented partisan debate in public. In addition, and more directly, comment serials became the principal public mouthpieces of parties because reactions to them represented them in this way, irrespective of whether comment serials were actually sponsored by politicians.

This chapter is divided into four sections. It begins with historiographical and methodological comments about how to approach comment serial consumption, set into the wider context of the ‘history of reading’. Secondly, it outlines the breadth of public encounters with comment serials, which transcended the limitations of print-runs. The third section examines patterns of partisan reading of comment serials, taking a grassroots, particularising approach as far as possible to build a picture of reading habits, and connects this to the development of a national partisan culture. The final section considers how the reception of comment serials led them to function as partisan voices in public, following the experience of civil war newsbooks, their most important predecessors as partisan serials.

**Approaching comment serial consumption**

Questions around early modern consumption are invariably hampered by patchy sources. Fortunately, however, the sources available for the consumption of comment serials are more substantial than for the consumption of, say, pamphlets, because each issue could provoke new reactions (creating a greater volume of reactions overall) and because they were themselves able to discuss the reception of earlier issues. Evidence about consumption can be found in many places, including pamphlet and serial reactions, readers’ letters printed in comment serials, advertisements, personal diaries and correspondence, and comment serials’ discussions of their own reception.

Various techniques can be deployed on these sources. Some are more indirect, for instance examining represented or implied readers within texts, using adverts to deduce the audiences reached, or reconstructing distribution networks. Other techniques, which

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have become common in the ‘history of reading’, move closer to actual readers and moments of reading. Based on the insights of scholars such as Wolfgang Iser and Stanley Fish that readers have a range of responses to texts, and construct their own meanings from them, this approach builds case studies of individual reading experiences – what Roger Chartier described as ‘microhistories’ of reading – worked up around the richest seams of direct or near-direct evidence of reading that happen to have survived. For early modern Britain, this typically involves analysing marginalia, compilation practices, commonplace books, inventories, catalogues and financial accounts. This approach recognises that reading experiences are limitless and particular: not only are the same texts read in different ways by different readers, but the same readers might read the same texts differently in different contexts. However, there are practical limitations when using a microhistory-based methodology for comment serials. These techniques were developed primarily for analysing book-reading, especially active and humanistic reading, which was more likely to leave abundant traces in marginalia and commonplace book entries. These kinds of sources are rarer for cheap print, including comment serials.

There are several ways to mitigate the paucity of more direct sources for comment serial consumption, all of which are used in this chapter. One is to take a broader substantive definition of ‘reading’, looking outwards to ‘encounters’ with texts more generally. People did not just consume texts through reading (or listening) directly, but were also consumers when they encountered them second-hand, for instance through conversations with those who had read them. Moreover, a broader temporal definition of

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4 The classic study is Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, “‘Studied for Action”: How Gabriel Harvey Read His Livy’, Past & Present, 129 (1990), pp. 30-78.

5 Jason Peacey has helpfully conceptualised the ‘accessibility’ of print, as a broad category to include all of those who come into contact with print: Jason Peacey, Print and Public Politics in the English Revolution (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), ch. 2. My use of ‘encounters’ goes beyond this by including indirect consumption.
'reading’ can be used, examining the reactions that reading induced, not just the moments of reading themselves. This is particularly fruitful for comment serials, which induced many strong and well-attested responses in consumers. Thirdly, a more inclusive approach to sources can be adopted, including, for instance, literary representations of reading as well as evidence of actual readers. Specific, albeit fictionalised, depictions of consumption, such as scenes set in coffeehouses, carry details and assumptions that provide clues about the mechanics of consumption.\(^6\)

Several existing historiographical models of early modern reading are relevant to this discussion. One of the most prominent is heterogeneous/active reading, which is useful for the consumption of news, but cannot straightforwardly be applied to the consumption of comment. It has been explicated most effectively by Joad Raymond, who posited the growth of active, topically-minded readers sifting through more and increasingly miscellaneous sources of news in the seventeenth century, judging their credibility.\(^7\) This model builds on Jürgen Habermas’s ‘public sphere’, based on the emergence of ‘rational-critical discourse’ in public spaces such as coffeehouses, and complements current scholarly trends emphasising the development of a sophisticated news culture, grounded on a dense, heterogeneous landscape of news media. It may be represented by the famous figure of the upholsterer in the Tatler, who neglects his business to spend his time in coffeehouses, obsessively consuming news and trying to ascertain the truth about foreign wars.\(^8\)

A second model, linked to the first, is passive/uncritical reading. This contrasts active engagement with news with a supposed subsequent growth of passive reading, as readers increasingly absorbed texts without a critical eye, as mere entertainment. Habermas considered the ‘passive consumption of artificial and manipulated debate’ as part of the corruption of the public sphere from its original ideals, and this theme was taken up by C. John Sommerville, who argued that ‘bourgeois society would move from debating culture to consuming culture... when (if not because) periodicals began to provide discussions as well as information, so that discussion has become another of our

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\(^6\) Throughout this chapter, ‘reading’ is defined broadly, including listeners and indirect ‘encounterers’ as well as direct readers, and considering reactions as well as the immediate moment of encountering the serial.


\(^8\) Tatler, 155 (6 April 1710); 178 (30 May 1710). Cf. the figure of the ‘quidnunc’, a character-type who obsessively seeks out the latest news, discussed in Uriel Heyd, Reading Newspapers: Press and Public in Eighteenth-Century Britain and America (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2012), ch. 5.
professionalized, spectator sports’. Sommerville placed this development in the eighteenth century, and associated it with the growth of published comment, which supposedly substituted oral comment by readers of news. However, partisan and comment-filled publications were already widespread in the 1640s, so any shift from active news reading to passive comment reading in the eighteenth century seems unlikely. In addition, there is no reason to assume that consuming comment is inherently passive: readers could engage with comment as actively as with news.

One limitation of both models is that they do not take account of the partisan identities of many readers, which would have shaped their reading patterns. Indeed, partisanship was probably the key influence on what comment people chose to read, and how they read it. Therefore, the discussion in this chapter is centred on an alternative model, which may be described as partisan reading: reading in ways that reflected either political support for or opposition to a text, often from a position of pre-judgement, based on the reader’s own political allegiances.

Partisan reading has been deployed by some scholars, but has not been systematically developed and applied. Kevin Sharpe and Steven Zwicker made broad claims for the prevalence of modes of political and partisan reading in early modern Britain. Writing about the civil wars, Zwicker argued that ‘it was not only the production of texts but as well their consumption that was driven by partisanship; with the raising of arms, reading was commandeered by parties and faction and the apprehending of books was shaped by political urgencies and religious passions’. Sharpe extended this backwards chronologically, claiming that ‘[t]he Civil War may have rendered the act of reading as overtly partisan, but even before... [t]hey all read for action in the public realm; they all read politically’. Sharpe and Zwicker together argued that partisanship was ‘the fundamental condition and indeed mode of reading’ after the Restoration.¹⁰

Scholars have also explored what partisan reading could mean in practice. Tim Harris, building on the theory of Jacques Ellul, argued that ‘propaganda’ in the 1640s and 1680s worked by appealing to those who were already pre-disposed to agree with an argument rather than (as might be assumed) by trying to convert opponents. In an important study of newspaper reading in London between 1695 and 1742, Matthew Green similarly argued that people read newspapers of their own political hue, demonstrated especially through the case of Dudley Ryder, a Whig diarist of George I’s reign. Green also considered forms that partisan reading could take, arguing that newspaper reading was ‘highly influential in fuelling, sharpening, and redefining readers’ pre-existing political outlooks, and assimilating recent developments into a particular partisan viewpoint… [and] provid[ing] Londoners with arguments to deploy in political discussions and debates’. In addition, scholars have noted that people read publications they already disagreed with, specifically to disagree with them. For instance, Zwicker identified hostile, oppositional reading as a theme in later-seventeenth-century reading, attested through marginalia. These insights are useful, but they need to be brought together to form a holistic perspective of partisan reading, including both supportive and hostile modes.

Before moving to the main discussion, two further models that interact with partisan reading require brief comment: rational reading and emotional reading. The locus classicus of early modern reading, as explored by the pioneers of reading historiography, Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, is of the active, scholarly reading of books, involving extensive marginalia, note-taking and commonplacing. This was a rational, methodical process, associated with Renaissance humanism. However, reading might also be emotional. Raymond’s work on mid-seventeenth-century news-reading contrasts emotional, unfocused modes of reading cheap print with structured book-reading, concluding that ‘[c]heap print was read for sub-utilitarian purposes, not for profit or for the augmentation of reason or even, perhaps, of knowledge; it was approached without
purpose, through a sense of compulsion or for pleasure’. Both approaches – and, of course, they are not a neat dichotomy – are useful here. The reading of comment serials could be methodical, could induce feeling, or could do something in between.

Having considered key methodological and historiographical issues, the discussion will now turn to the most fundamental question about comment serial consumption: how widely were they encountered by the British public?

**Encounters with comment serials**

When judging the scale of consumption of comment serials – and of early modern cheap print more widely – there is an evidential paradox. On the one hand, contemporaries commonly referenced the broad reach of comment serials and their wide impact on society, whether to laud their successes in persuading the people or to express anxiety about their encouragement of sedition and social breakdown. On the other, work on reconstructing print-runs has indicated that, until well into the eighteenth century, an issue of a serial would normally only reach hundreds of copies, or the low thousands at most. How can the lofty claims of contemporary rhetoric be reconciled with the physical constraints of production? Could a comment serial be truly ‘public’ if it appeared in only 500 or 1000 copies?

I argue here that the reach of comment serials extended vastly beyond print-runs, in three ways. The first is that that they could run to many hundreds of issues – or, in two cases, over a thousand – and therefore the number of physical copies of a serial in circulation could be a large multiplier of the print-run figure for a single issue. Secondly, a familiar reason to scholars of early modern print: a single item could have multiple consumers, most famously by being consumed in public spaces such as coffeehouses. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, those who directly encountered publications through reading or listening must be supplemented by those who encountered them indirectly, without interacting with a physical copy, but by reading or hearing about them in

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13 The two comment serials with over a thousand issues are Tutchin and Ridpath’s *Observator* and Defoe’s *Review*. 

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conversations, letters, pamphlets and so on. Through these three mechanisms, it becomes possible to see how the reach of comment serials could have been very substantial. This in itself indicates that comment serials, and by extension published comment more widely, played a significant role in increasing and shaping political awareness among a broad public, cutting across social and geographical boundaries.\textsuperscript{14}

Comment serials were commonly regarded as being aimed at and reaching out to a universal audience: the people, the nation, the kingdom, the world. These representations of audience were made by both supporters of serials, who boasted about their reach, and opponents, who feared this. In the 1680s, for example, it was said of L’Estrange’s \textit{Observator} that it was ‘a Paper that is commonly spread about’, that ‘the World [was] so intolerably pester’d with his loose Half-sheets’, and that L’Estrange ‘did fill/ The World with Observators ill’. A Whig comment serial, \textit{Democritus Ridens} (1681), referred to ‘Nuts, such as \textit{Heraclitus [Ridens]} his Squirrils, \textit{Jest} and \textit{Earnest}, are weekly cracking in the ears of the People’. Aphra Behn, a Tory, lamented that Henry Care’s Whig \textit{Weekly Pacquet} ‘clogs the Nation’. In 1681, another minor Whig comment serial referenced the dominance of the \textit{Observator} and \textit{Heraclitus Ridens} as voices in the public sphere: ‘the barking Towzers and the chattering \textit{Heraclitus}’s made such a confused din, that no body could be heard but themselves’.\textsuperscript{15}

The rhetoric of universal audiences can also be found in connection with comment serials in the reign of Anne. A 1709 Tory pamphlet spoke disapprovingly of ‘the Weekly Papers of \textit{Observators} and \textit{Reviews} which go thro’ the Nation’, claiming that ‘\textit{Observators} and \textit{Reviews} had been in Possession of the Kingdom some Years before [the Tory \textit{Rehearsal} Began’’. Conversely, Gilbert Burnet, a Whig, lamented that ‘By the time [Queen Anne] was on the Throne, or soon after[,] the \textit{Rehearsal} began to be spread over the Nation, two of them a Week, which continu’d for several Years together, to be Publish’d without Check or Controul’ – to which a Tory pamphlet responded, ‘You say, it was Spread

\textsuperscript{14} This part of the discussion refers specifically to \textit{reach} – how widely publications were encountered, through physical circulation or coming into people’s knowledge – rather than the thornier questions of how people read or reacted to them, let alone ‘macro’ questions of influence or impact. Although the focus here is on comment serials, wider evidence about the reach of other serials and pamphlets is included where relevant.

over the Nation. Well. If it was Good, it was the Better’. The character ‘Earnest’ in Pittis’s Heraclitus Ridens (1703-04) complained that Tutchin’s Observator ‘does not talk to his Countryman, but the whole Nation, and is a Pedagogue to every one of us’. Speaking of the Observator, Review and Rehearsal, Swift lamented in the Examiner, ‘If the generality of the People know not how to Talk or Think, ’till they have read their Lesson in the Papers of the Week, what a Misfortune it is that their Duty shou’d be convey’d to them thro’ such Vehicles as those?’. A high-church Tory pamphlet of 1710 complained that, ‘amongst the numerous Sorts of Pamphlets, which in this Age are so plentifully scatter’d about, and almost every-where to be met with, none, I humbly conceive, will be found more destructive, more pernicious to the Welfare and Happiness of this Nation, than those Two, REVIEW and OBSERVATOR’. Although all of these examples are representations, the ubiquity and persistence of this rhetoric is striking.

Contemporaries also claimed that comment serials or their authors were public figures: perhaps even political ‘celebrities’, or at least famous – or notorious – individuals. Roger L’Estrange was well-known among politically-aware sorts in the 1680s. One 1684 pamphlet began with ‘An epistle to the loyal observator’ that observed, ‘I find Men widely differ in your Character, some count you as a Plague, and others take you for a Prodegie’; this assumed that L’Estrange was a widely-discussed figure. A Satyrick Poem was published in 1682 ‘against Those Mercenary Wretches, and Troublers of Englands Tranquility, the authors of Heraclitus and Observator’, who were ‘Infamous for their Scribling throughout England’. In a similar way, it appears that John Tutchin was one of the best-known figures of his own day. One Tory pamphlet of 1705 asked readers to search for Tutchin’s honesty, ‘it being neither Just nor Reasonable, that a Man, especially so publick, and well known as he is, should live without it’. The ‘Countryman’ character in the serial reported to the ‘Observator’ character that people in London ‘talk most of Persons, and I think they talk more of you than any body else’, and that ‘I have been at abundance of Coffee-houses at

17 Admittedly not just for his Observator. See, e.g. Pierce, ‘L’Estrange Caricatured’, for examples of L’Estrange in visual satire that predated the Observator.
London, and have crowded my self into all Companies; I have heard what all sorts of People say of you; some say you are a very Honest Gentleman; others say you are a meer Rogue, a Seditious, Pestilent Fellow’. A juror at Tutchin’s trial in 1704, when asked if he knew the identity of the *Observator*’s author, said, ‘I know nothing of it but what is commonly reported. I know not Mr. Tutchin if I see him; I have read his Writings’.\(^{19}\) Around the same time, ‘Mr Tutchin Author of the Observator’ was depicted on a playing card (Fig. 18).\(^{20}\)

![Figure 18. Playing card featuring John Tutchin (c.1704-05).](image)

Are such claims about the reach of comment serials plausible? To test this, we should begin by considering the scale of physical production, by examining print-runs.\(^{21}\) For the most successful comment serials, print-runs would likely have reached the hundreds or low thousands: around the level of a middling newspaper, although the most successful newspapers exceeded this. To begin surveying the available figures, there are some individual estimates: Addison claimed that 3,000 copies of the *Spectator* were printed per issue, and Defoe claimed that there were 5,000 copies of a special 1705 election issue of the *Review*, which he suggested was unusually high.\(^{22}\) Both of these figures were boasts, so presumably overstate typical print-runs. Fortunately, they can be compared against other

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\(^{19}\) *A Hue and Cry, After the Observators Honesty* (London, 1705?); *Observator*, 2.97 (11 March 1704), r; *Observator*, 2.80 (12 January 1704), r; *A Complete Collection of State-Trials, and Proceedings for High-Treason, and Other Crimes and Misdemeanours* (London, 1730 edn), vol. 5, p. 534.

\(^{20}\) BM, 1896,0501.921, three of spades. I would like to thank Tim Somers for this reference.

\(^{21}\) The evidence here is patchy, so it is necessary to consider work relating to print-runs for a wider group of publications than comment serials.

\(^{22}\) *Spectator*, 10 (12 March 1711), r; *Review*, 5.104 (25 November 1708), p. 414.
figures. A government document, compiled to explore the revenue-raising possibilities of taxing serials in 1704, estimated a print-run of 1,000 for the *Observator* and 400 for the *Review*. These comment serials compare with newspapers as follows: 6,000 for the *London Gazette*, 3,800-4,000 for the *Post Man*, 3,000 for the *Post Boy*, 800 for the *Daily Courant*, 400 for the *Flying Post*, 400 for the *English Post* and 400 for the *London Post*. Stamp duty records from 1712-14 suggest average print-runs of 2,000-2,200 for the *Spectator*, 850 for the *Guardian*, 850 for the *Englishman*, 425-500 for the *Review*, 1,600 for the *Mercator*, 1,200 for the *British Merchant* and 1,600 for the *Examiner*, in addition to single-week estimates of 200 for the *Britain* and 1,000 for the *Patriot*, although no averages can be deduced for these last titles. These compare to newspapers in a similar way to the 1704 figures: the highest newspaper print-runs in the 1712-14 figures (except the *Gazette*) were 900-1,000 for the *Daily Courant* (declining to 600 in 1713), 1,400-1,650 for the *Flying Post*, 3,000 for the *Post Boy*, 3,800-4,450 for the *Post Man*, 3,500-4,000 for the *Evening Post* and 900-1,000 for the *Night Post* (declining to 300 in 1713). In addition, records relating to the *London Gazette* suggest unusually high print-runs for the official newspaper: 10,000 in 1704-08, and as high as 22,750 in the 1690s. There are also estimates for the *Craftsman*: printer’s accounts suggest a print-run of 300-800 in 1726-27 (when it was a comment serial), although a list of profits suggests 5,000 in 1727, rising to over 10,000 by the early 1730s, when it had become a newspaper. For comparison, similar figures have been estimated for other cheap topical print: scholars have suggested average print-runs of around 250-1,000 for civil war newsbooks; of 1,000-2,000 for London newspapers between the 1720s and 1740s; and of 250-1,500 for seventeenth-century pamphlets. In addition, it

should be noted that serials faced particular constraints on production because, unlike some books and pamphlets, they had to appear on short time schedules, and had no real prospect of a second edition. However, this does not appear to have been a limiting factor for producers of comment serials, as there is little evidence that more than one press was employed to expand print-runs, suggesting that the print-runs possible on a single press were considered sufficient.\textsuperscript{28}

Even if these figures are not entirely accurate, print-runs alone cannot make sense of contemporary claims about comment serials saturating the nation. However, three factors suggest that the reach of comment serials was far more substantial. First, it must be remembered that these print-runs were \textit{per issue}. This might be obvious, but it is an important point: if a serial lasted hundreds or thousands or issues, hundreds of thousands or even millions of physical copies of a particular comment serial would have been in physical circulation over the course of its run. People did not need to encounter a copy of every issue to be a ‘reader’ of the serial. Seeing one was enough – and especially for many comment serials, which notoriously had repetitive content. The thousand or so issues of L’Estrange’s \textit{Observator}, Tutchin and Ridpath’s \textit{Observator} and Defoe’s \textit{Review} must have created a large physical footprint, impressed onto the nation over several years.

The second factor is that each physical copy could have been encountered by multiple people. This idea is most commonly associated with Addison’s ‘modest computation’ that twenty people encountered each copy of the \textit{Spectator}.\textsuperscript{29} Even if this is not taken literally, distribution patterns indicate that multiple consumption was a common occurrence – arguably, indeed, the default mode of consumption – whether through multiple people reading the same copy of a comment serial, or through a copy being read aloud to others present. Before exploring this in more detail, it would be helpful to outline the chief features of comment serials’ distribution patterns. There were two main purchasing outlets in the formal distribution network organised by publishers: booksellers’ stalls and shops, in both London and (increasingly) the provinces, and itinerant sellers, usually known as hawkers in London and as pedlars or chapmen in the provinces.\textsuperscript{30}

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\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Spectator}, 10 (12 March 1711), r. For discussion of this, see Sutherland, ‘Circulation’, p. 120; Downie, ‘Periodicals, the Book Trade’, p. 267.

carried publications in a pouch or basket, and bawled them around public spaces for sale – ‘the *Observator*, the *Observer*’. Serials were also lodged by publishers in public houses, such as coffeehouses, to be read by their clientele. Another important structure was the posts: services available to paying customers to carry items from one place to another, through which serials were distributed both as part of the formal distribution network and informally by their initial purchasers. Weekly posts from London to the provinces were established in the 1630s and expanded to thrice-weekly by the 1650s; London acquired an internal ‘Penny Post’ in 1680. Within these distribution mechanisms, the place of *individual* consumption should not be downplayed: individuals buying serials from booksellers or hawkers and reading them personally. However, various parts of this system allowed for, or encouraged, multiple consumption.

The most important pattern of multiple consumption was *public reading*: collective contemporaneous reading of a copy in a public space (including reading the copy aloud to those present), or the successive reading by various individuals of the same copy lodged in a public space. This was most likely to centre on copies of a comment serial placed by publishers in public houses, which created a formal architecture for multiple consumption. In this context, the most important kind of public house was that historiographical staple, the coffeehouse.

Coffeehouses were a new feature of late-seventeenth-century urban life. Beginning in Oxford in 1650, they spread around London, where they numbered in the hundreds or thousands by 1700, and provincial towns. Coffeehouses were quickly established as centres for the production, discussion and consumption of news and current affairs. Reading manuscript and print publications was an important part of the coffeehouse-visiting experience from at least the 1660s, and certainly during the Succession Crisis and the age of Anne, and beyond.

Coffeehouses induced multiple reading of comment serials in several ways. Multiple reading was inherent to the core experiences of visiting coffeehouses: reading items that were laid out on the tables, or calling up items that would later be returned. One

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31 *Observer*, 2.94 (1 March 1704), v.


1682 pamphlet described a coffeehouse scene: ‘You may go into a Coffee-house and see a Table of an Acre long covered with nothing but Tobacco-pipes and Pamphlets, and all the seats full of Mortals leaning upon their Elbowes, licking in Tobacco, Lyes, and Lac’d Coffee, and studying for Arguments to revile one another’. This was virtually repeated in a pamphlet of 1711, suggesting that this culture remained recognisable three decades later. One continuation of the Tatler included a coffeehouse scene in which the persona ‘called for the Tatler--- A pert Boy looked in my Face, and told me, They did not take it in since it had left off lashing the Party; I might have the Review, Observator, or the Spectator, if I pleas’d’. Tutchin’s ‘Countryman’ reported on the reading of the Observator in coffeehouses: in one case, ‘presently in[to a coffeehouse] comes a Slovenly Sort of a Fellow, and Seating himself with a bundance of Gravity by some of his Acquaintance, he call’d for the Observator’; in another, a man sits down in a coffeehouse ‘and very Reverently calls for the Observator’. In addition, sometimes a publication might be read aloud to other visitors to the coffeehouse: a 1710 pamphlet referred to a coffeehouse goer who ‘to a Grave attentive Croud/ Reads the Post-man with all his Art aloud’, while a 1704 vignette had a man in a coffeehouse ‘Beg you to Read over the London’s Gazette, to save him the Trouble of Fumbling for his Spectacles’. One twist was that marginal notes could be left on the coffeehouse copy to be consumed by other readers. Thomas Hearne saw a copy of a minor comment serial called the Surprize in an Oxford coffeehouse in 1711, with manuscript alterations. In 1681, someone in ‘a publick Coffee House… wrote upon their Votes [i.e. the printed Votes of the House of Commons], That they were a pack of Villains’. Tutchin’s ‘Countryman’ reported, ‘Master Observator, I have brought you one of your own Papers, that of Number 87, with some Marginal Notes, written upon it by some Jacobites at Jacobs Coffee-house’.

These are not marginal themes: reading in coffeehouses was the default, assumed primary context for consuming comment serials in contemporary accounts. In 1692, Charles Leslie referred to ‘the common News Letters, and Observators, and such small Intelligencers’ as ‘Coffee-house Papers’. Pittis’s Heraclitus Ridens imagined an individual

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34 John Phillips, A Pleasant Conference upon the Observator, and Heraclitus (London, 1682), pp. 4-5; The Conference; Or Gregg’s Ghost (London, 1711), p. 11; Tatler (continuation, ESTC P6573), 304 (20 March 1711), r; Observator, 1.48 (7 October 1702), v; Observer, 4.51 (26 September 1705), r.
35 Edward Ward, Nuptial Dialogues and Debates (London, 1710), vol. 1, p. 284; Comical Observer, 3 (17 November 1704), r.
36 Hearne, vol. 3, p. 218; Democritus Ridens, 9 (16 May 1681), v; Observer, 2.97 (11 March 1704), r. It is uncertain how commonly coffeehouse goers would have scribbled on copies of comment serials, because surviving copies tend to be pristine ones collected by individuals. Coffeehouse copies would most likely have been reused or thrown away.
who ‘reads our Dialogue over a Dish of Coffee’. In 1704, the *London Post* claimed that Leslie ‘does give away [the *Rehearsal*] to* Coffee-houses gratis, in Propogation [sic] of Sedition*. One observer in 1705 commented that the *Observer* and *Review* were the ‘entertainment of most coffee-houses in town’. At the closure of the *Rehearsal* in 1709, Leslie’s ‘Countryman’ said that the ‘Coffee-house [was] now a Dull Place, since the *Rehearsal* lies upon the Table no more’. In 1709, the papers of the ‘weekly Libellers’ were said to have become ‘a necessary part in Coffee-house Furniture’. The *Examiner* gave an anecdote in 1710 that began, ‘some Days ago in a Cofee-House [sic], looking into one of the Politick Weekly Papers’. A 1713 pamphlet described the *Guardian* as ‘a Peny-paper to be read in Coffee-houses’. Until recently, coffeehouses have had near-mythical status in accounts of later-Stuart political culture, being regarded as the archetypal institution of the Habermasian ‘public sphere’, in which people met to read and discuss the news as politically-engaged citizens. Perhaps inevitably, there has been a historiographical correction, as scholars have given increasing attention to a broader topography of public spaces, including other kinds of ‘public houses’ such as alehouses, taverns, inns and chocolate houses, as well as marketplaces and the streets. 37 Publications such as comment serials were lodged in other public houses, and not just coffeehouses. The *City Mercury* (1692-94?), a serial advertiser, was placed in inns. The final iteration of the *Examiner* (1714-16) was claimed to be ‘spread in Coffee-Houses, and other Places of Resort’. Similarly, the author of the final *Heraclitus Ridens* (1718) complained about the ‘Unwillingness of such as keep Coffee-Houses, and other *Publick Places of Resort*, to add to their former Charge’ by taking in his paper. 38 However, what is striking about the public consumption of comment serials is that the evidence is overwhelmingly centred on coffeehouses in particular, not public houses in general. Multiple consumption of comment serials also occurred in other public and private contexts. Comment serials were sometimes read by clerics to their congregations. In 1710, a parson in Scarborough carried the *Examiner* with him ‘to read to such of his parishioners as are weak in the faith’, and after services he would invite ‘a good number of his friends to his house, where he first reads over the paper, and then comments upon the text’. In a famous passage from the *Rehearsal*, Leslie claimed that people gathered in the streets to

38 *City Mercury*, 16 (4 July 1692), r; *A Letter to the Examiner* (London, 1715), p. 28; *Heraclitus Ridens* (1718), [sheet prefacing issue 3 in Nichols download].
listen to a copy of the *Observator* or the *Review*. Tutchin claimed that his *Observator* could be borrowed from hawkers, which presumably allowed for subsequent readers of the same copy. Items were purchased in London and then sent on through the posts; some copies of serials – mostly newspapers, but also including Tutchin’s *Observator* – were printed with a blank page to allow the initial purchaser to add a handwritten letter, before the item was sent on to a provincial acquaintance. Overall, although the scale of multiple consumption is impossible to judge, it must have been considerable, bringing comment serials before more people than the raw print-run figures.

The third factor that extends the reach of comment serials beyond print-runs is the most elusive, but perhaps the most important: that encounters with serials need not have been direct, but could have been *indirect*. L’Estrange observed that ‘the Fame of my *Levity*, and *Hypocrisy*, Pass’d... from *hand to hand*, in a *News-Letter*, by *Word of Mouth*, or upon *Common Hearsay*’. People did not need to read or hear comment serials directly to know about them, or to form opinions on them. They could have heard about them in conversations with or letters from direct consumers, or by reading the myriad published reactions that comment serials provoked. A few scattered examples will suffice to illustrate the vast potential scope of indirect consumption. In 1681, Richard Sterne wrote about comment serials in a letter to Richard Legh, commenting approvingly that *Heraclitus Ridens* and the *Observator* were making ‘good sport with Smith & Harris the 2 protestant Intelligencers’. Thomas Hearne wrote to an acquaintance about Tutchin’s *Observator*: ‘I never yet read the story in the Observator conc. Dr. Charlett; but remember it made a great Noise in Town’. ‘Heraclitus’ and ‘Observator’ (i.e. Tutchin) appeared as characters on a London stage in 1703, as part of a prologue to a play. Some public spectacles, such as processions and public burnings, also referenced comment serials. The full extent of indirect consumption is unknowable, but indicates that the fame of comment serials reached well beyond those who encountered physical copies.

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39 These quotes are discussed elsewhere. See above, p. 171; below, pp. 222-4. Cf. Peacey, *Public Politics*, pp. 78-9, for the distribution of print through streets and pulpits during the civil wars.
40 *Observator*, 6.17 (30 April 1707), v.
41 Ibid, 1.8 (20 May 1702), v.
Before turning to the nature and impact of this substantial consumption of comment serials, another question should be addressed: what was the profile of these consumers? There is considerable evidence that the geographical and social reach of comment serials went beyond Londoners and elites, although it is less clear how far they reached women as well as men.

The weight of evidence about comment serial consumption undoubtedly falls in London, but they were also distributed elsewhere. The thrice-weekly posts provided one mechanism for this, and Jason Peacey has shown how pedlars, chapmen and provincial booksellers distributed topical print nationally as early as the civil wars.\textsuperscript{44} In addition, provincial coffeehouses would have provided infrastructure for reading comment serials outside London. Provincial distribution is well-known for newspapers, especially after 1695, but also occurred among some comment serials: the \textit{Review} had a thrice-weekly publication schedule to match the posts, and a brief \textit{Observer Reformed} (1704-05) amended one of its publication days from Wednesday to Thursday for the same reason.\textsuperscript{45} Advertisements suggest that comment serials were intended to have a national audience.\textsuperscript{46}

In 1709, Defoe claimed that the \textit{Review} reached Northumberland, Westmorland, Belfast, Carrickfergus and Londonderry; it was also distributed in Norwich.\textsuperscript{47} Readers’ letters indicate a wide geographical reach; for Tutchin’s \textit{Observer}, these included individuals in Berkshire, Devon, Hertfordshire, the Isle of Wight and Suffolk.\textsuperscript{48} There were Scottish reprints or editions of \textit{Mercurius Politicus} (1705), \textit{Heraclitus Ridens} (1681-82), the \textit{Test Paper} (1688), \textit{Mercurius Reformatus} (1689-94?) and the \textit{Review}. There was a Scottish \textit{Tatler} (1711) and a Scottish \textit{Observer} (1705-06). L’Estrange’s \textit{Observer} had some Dublin reprints, and the \textit{Examiner} had an Irish edition.\textsuperscript{49}

On the social profile of consumers, the most direct evidence comes, inevitably, from the higher reaches of society, for which diaries and letters reveal extensive encounters with comment serials. This extended into the aristocracy – the Duke of Marlborough, for example, received copies of Tutchin’s \textit{Observer} while on campaign in

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Peacey, \textit{Public Politics}, pp. 58-66.
\item \textit{Observer Reformed}, 4 (12 October 1704), v.
\item E.g. \textit{Observer}, 4.1 (4 April 1705), v, advertises an elixir available in ‘most Cities and great Towns in England, and some in Scotland and Ireland’.
\item \textit{Observer}, 3.87 (14 February 1705), 4.9 (2 May 1705), 4.16 (26 May 1705), 4.17 (30 May 1705), 4.34 (28 July 1705).
\item See also above, p. 118.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Europe. The target audience of advertisements suggests middling readers, for instance educated youths, merchants, and parents seeking boarding schools for their children. It is harder to judge how far comment serials reached down society. Certainly, there were representations that they did. Some were ostensibly aimed at poorer sorts: the *Weekly Pacquet*, for instance, was aimed at ‘the younger or more Mechanick sort’, those of ‘meainer Capacities’ and ‘vulgar hands’. Tories argued, disparagingly, that the Whig *Review* and *Observator* reached the poor: to Leslie’s oft-quoted claim that the illiterate heard these serials in the streets can be added Ned Ward’s that they were ‘Read most by Coblers and by Porters’, and Swift’s that they had a style ‘of a level with great numbers among the lowest part of Mankind’. It is perhaps easier to believe that a broader social spectrum could have encountered comment serials in London, where literacy and access were greater, than in the country at large, but a wider body of consumers should not be ruled out. Joad Raymond, Jason Peacey and Mark Knights, writing variously about the civil wars and Succession Crisis, have concluded that the reading of print was more demotic than the elite-centred direct evidence suggests, and it seems likely that the same was true for comment serials.

Evidence is particularly wanting for the gender profile of consumption. This is in itself striking, given the extensive contemporary and historiographical discussion of female readership of some serials in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, such as question-and-answer serials on the model of the *Athenian Mercury* (1691-97), and moral comment serials on the model of the *Tatler* and *Spectator*. Wherever gender is explicitly indicated, the case studies and anecdotes of (political) comment serial consumption quoted in this chapter relate to men. One example of a woman who did read comment serials is Sarah Cowper, who quoted from the *Tatler*, *Spectator* and *Medley* in her diary, although in connection with their moral rather than their political content. It is plausible that comment serials were largely a male preserve – albeit among a reasonably broad geographical and social range of men – given the prominence of public reading as a mode

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51 *Observator*, 2.1 (10 April 1703), 2.3 (17 April 1703), 4.2 (7 April 1705).
53 *Rehearsal*, vol. 1 (1704-07), preface, p. [i]; Edward Ward, *Vulgus Britannicus: Or the British Hudibras* (London, 1710), p. 120; *Examiner*, 16 (16 November 1710), r.
55 On female readership and serials, see esp. Berry, *Gender*.
of comment serial consumption. However, the possibility of a substantial, hidden female readership cannot be discounted.

Encounters with comment serials – through reading or hearing them, or reading or hearing about them – were widespread. Comment serials were a significant feature of late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century society. The next section considers how they were consumed.

**Partisan reading**

During John Tutchin’s trial for seditious libel in 1704, one juror asked to be excused from service on the grounds he had previously criticised the *Observator*. The attorney-general, however, dismissed this request, on the grounds that ‘I believe no Man... has read [the *Observator*], but has given his Opinion of [it] one way or other’. 57 This anecdote encapsulates the central feature of comment serial consumption: that they were widely consumed through patterns of partisan reading, both supportive reading by supporters, and hostile reading by opponents. These patterns can be divided into three sorts. First, there was reading that served to affirm or shape an individual’s partisan identity. Reading does not appear primarily to have resulted in persuasion, but instead in furnishing an existing party identity, whether by taking positive content or affirmation from a comment serial, or by allowing definition against an opposition comment serial. Secondly, there was reading that nurtured partisan communities through real, virtual or imagined collective reading: in coffeehouses or congregations, in letter-writing networks or in imagined communities of allied partisan readers. Thirdly, there was reading that encouraged partisan actions, including quotidian actions such as oral debate and letter-writing, and more substantial actions such as publishing print responses and action on the streets.

1) **Shaping individual partisan identity**

How did the reading of comment serials shape individual partisan identity? It might be assumed that the main form this took was persuasion: inducing a reader to adopt, say, a Tory or Whig political identity. Indeed, contemporaries often claimed that comment serials

57 *Complete Collection of State-Trials*, vol. 5, p. 534.
successfully persuaded audiences, whether by casting this in positive terms, as ‘undeceiving’ people from the notions with which their opponents had misled them, or in negative terms, as ‘manipulating’ people with lies and seductive words. For example, an opponent of L’Estrange’s Observator lamented ‘how much they are Cryed up, and greedily swallow’d by many half-witted people, that esteem every thing he writes as Authentick, as Sacred Oracles’. However, there is little evidence of comment serials actually persuading readers in this way. This is not to say that this did not occur, but the primary pattern of reading that emerges from miscellaneous consumption evidence is of people reading comment serials in line with their pre-existing partisan identity, whether supportive of or hostile to the serial being read. This suggests that the impact of comment serial consumption on individual partisan identity was primarily to affirm and elaborate it, not to induce it.

Comment serials were read supportively by people who already shared a serial’s partisan allegiance. The Tory clergy read L’Estrange’s Observator, the Rehearsal and the Examiner. Whigs read Tutchin’s Observator: one Tory pamphlet claimed that ‘there is no Book or Paper comes out, that is so much a Party-Book... it being Hugg’d and Cherish’d by them All’. The Whig Narcissus Luttrell read the Whig Mercurius Reformatus (1689-94?); the Tory Henry Dodwell read the Tory Rehearsal (1704-09); the Whig Dudley Ryder read the Whig Englishman (1713-15) and Free-Holder (1715-16). In addition, comment serials were read – or at least encountered – by political opponents. On at least one occasion, Dudley Ryder read the last iteration of the Tory Examiner (1714-16). Comment serials induced many hostile letter-writers, including some who physically threatened authors, printers and publishers.

How did partisans read comment serials? Readers appear to have prejudged what they read, based on their own partisan identity and their perception of the comment serial’s partisan identity. ‘Whatever I Write is fore-Judg’d by some Persons before it is Written’, Tutchin lamented. Steele’s short-lived Observator (1715) observed, ‘There are Multitudes of Men in this City of such bigoted Principles, so tyed to their own Infirmities, as to deny an Author the small Boon or perusing... till they know his Principles, and can fix the
Stamp of a Party on him’. A coffeehouse anecdote from Tutchin’s *Observator* provides a stark manifestation of this attitude:

‘Twas but t’other day, a Gentleman, in a Coffee-House, was reading the Queens *Proclamation* for putting in Execution *An Act of Parliament for the Encouragement and Encrease of Seamen*... the Gentleman lik’d the Method very well; but when he was told, *That the same Thing had been Printed on the Observer long before the Passing of that Act*, he said, *That the Observer was a Rascal, and wonder’d that the Parliament, or any Body else, would hearken to what such a Fellow said.*

This may be a fictionalised representation, but it nonetheless indicates a plausible reading pattern.64

Party supporters read comment serials to furnish their minds with the latest arguments and discourse of their side. Whigs alleged that Rawlins’s *Heraclitus Ridens* ‘fill[s] the Tory’s [sic] mouths with some plausible chat’, and that L’Estrange’s *Observator* ‘furnish’d the Traytors themselves with words at least, if not with Arguments, to defend and justifie their Treasons’. Tories in Anne’s reign observed that Whigs ‘every day, every where, affirm what [Tutchin’s *Observator*] asserts’, and used the *Observer* and *Review* to ‘fortifie themselves with Arguments that are the occasion of these Heats’. A letter addressed to the *Examiner* claimed that it was ‘very full of that your usual kind of Argumentation which fills the Mouths of those who are for you, with more Words to vent their Passions and Prejudices, but affords no Reasons to Convince those who are against you’.65 Turning to more individualised evidence, Luttrell used arguments from *Mercurius Reformatus* in his commonplace books, to support particular political propositions, and a Tory, Dr T. Smith, cited Tory comment serial arguments in a letter: ‘The Whiggs are rampant, & thinke to carry all before them. The Author of [the two Tory comment serials] the Rehearsal revived & the general Postscript, one Mr. Stacy, has layd their villainous designes against the Monarchy & Church open’.66

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64 *Observer*, 5.10 (20 April 1706), v; *Observer*, 1 (25 February 1715), r; *Observer*, 5.6 (6 April 1706), r.
Reading for arguments also occurred in the context of hostile partisan reading. Opponents read comment serials to equip themselves with topical arguments specifically in order to disagree with them. According to Tutchin’s ‘Countryman’, ‘all the Papists, the Perkinites and High-Flyers... Read the Observators on purpose to find Faults’. In some cases, the publication of pamphlets or serials indicates reading of this sort, for instance Charles Leslie reading Tutchin’s Observer in order to write his animadversions in Cassandra and the Rehearsal. In other cases, the comment serial was read as a basis for negative oral comment. Tutchin’s ‘Countryman’ reported, ‘I am told at London, that a certain Person in a black Gown comes often into a Coffee-House in Queens-Street; where he Reads the Observator, and rails at it abominably’. Dudley Ryder read the Examiner – after taking himself to the unfamiliar environment of a Tory coffeehouse – to understand a Tory worldview with which he was never going to agree with. A Tory said of a Whig speech in the Sacheverell trial, ‘The Rest of his Speech I had before read in the Observator, and it was nauseous to me to swallow the same indigested Crudities, that had given me Qualms every Wednesday and Saturday for some Years’.

Moreover, partisan reading was not just methodical and rational. Comment serials seem to have been used as a badge of partisan identity, irrespective of the detail of their arguments. If we can believe a Whig pamphlet, L’Estrange’s Observator inspired an emotional Toryism in its readers:

Why I’le tell you what, I heard a fellow say, that he had rather hear the Observator read once, than Baxter Preach 16 times; and another of my acquainted was so far transported with the spirit of Toryism, that he said, he never desired any more than 3 Books in his Family; the Bible, Whole Duty of Man, and the Observator.

One observer suggested that ‘Commend[ing] the Rehearsal’ was part of the garb of being a Jacobite. There was no dichotomy here: reading comment serials could involve thinking and feeling. A Whig pamphlet suggested that the Examiner ‘had the Mouth, the Ear, the Heart of them all [i.e. the Tories]; and he it was In whom they plac’d a Confidence and Trust, and

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67 Observator, 3.24 (14 June 1704), r.
68 Observator, 1.37 (29 August 1702), v; Green, ‘Londoners and the News’, pp. 113-4, 278-9; George Smalridge, The Thoughts of a Country Gentleman upon Reading Dr. Sacheverell’s Tryal (London, 1710), pp. 11-12.
great Repose... this is the Man on whom they lay so great a stress, this is him from whom they pick their Argument, whom they quote, whom they refer to'.

To conclude this section, I will take a case study of a reader who encountered serials of different partisan persuasions. Thomas Hearne was an Oxford academic who kept a journal of ‘remarks and collections’ between 1706 and 1735, in which he recorded miscellaneous academic, topical and personal notes. He was a high-church Tory, and recorded encounters with comment serials that were in line with, and perhaps fed into, his Tory identity. In particular, he appears to have been a supportive reader of the prominent Tory comment serial, the Rehearsal. In the spring of 1706, when a controversy was underway over The Memorial of the Church of England, an anonymous Tory pamphlet that argued the Church was in danger under the present Whig ministry, Hearne cited the Rehearsal approvingly for its (incorrect) claim that the Memorial was a Whig satire rather than a true Tory production. He wrote, ‘Mr. Lesley in his Rehearsal has an Observation or two shewing that the Memorial of the Church of England was written by the Whiggish Party, & father’d upon the Honest men on purpose to bring an odium upon them’. He later added, ‘The Author of the Memorial of the C. of Engl. is for the independent State of Nature, & for all Government to have it’s Original from the People, as Mr. Lesley shews in his Rehearsal. Which is an evident token th[a]t ’twas writ by some Low-Church man or Whigg’. Two years later, Hearne was similarly approving of the Rehearsal’s defence of a book by a fellow Tory, Henry Dodwell, commenting that ‘Mr. Lesley in one of his last Rehearsals has very handsomly and clearly vindicated Mr. Dodwell’s Ep. Discourse conc. the Soul from the Attacks of his pert, ignorant answerers’. Although these quotations are not wholly clear, it seems likely that Hearne was a direct reader of the Rehearsal. They demonstrate Hearne’s awareness and use of the Rehearsal specifically for its content, which he treated with authority as ‘shewing’ particular points, and cited in his journal as relevant comments.

Hearne was also a hostile consumer of the two main Whig comment serials of the period, the Review and Observator. His encounters with these serials may have been on a more indirect basis, although, either way, they were certainly within his purview. He criticised the ‘Review of the 1st Instant in w[hi]ch he [‘Mr. Foe’] scurrilously & Impudently

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70 Hearne, vol. 1, pp. 234-5 (26 April 1706); vol. 1, p. 238 (30 April 1706); vol. 2, p. 95 (17 February 1708).
treats the L[or]d Chief Justice Holt, on Account of his Speech last Assizes as if his L[or]dship had reflected on the Scot[l]and union’, and elsewhere lambasted the Review:

Whereas the scandalous, abominable, Author of the Paper call’d the Review has most maliciously asserted and publish’d in Print that Dr. Sacheverell should speak words in the Reign of the late King William, signifying that he the said King W[jilla]m ought to be dewitted, and that he hop’d he should live to see it don.

The Review and Defoe were points of reference for Hearne as scurrilous, malicious, scandalous – Whig – forces. Hearne had a similar attitude to Tutchin and the Observator. Hearne attacked Tutchin as a ‘pitiful Fellow’ and the ‘Author of a scandalous Libell call’d ye Observator’, and as a man associated with ‘his Brother Libeller Dan. de Foe’. He criticised ‘an Insinuation in one of the Observators written by Tutchin who was lately in Devonshire, & other western Parts, on purpose to rake up all the Scandal he could against the stan[c]h members of the Church of England’, and noted that ‘In the Observator Vol. vi. Number 15. the Author is very abusive of Sr. Wm. Whitlock and Mr. Bromley. the former he makes to be the Picture of 41, &c.’. Hearne’s facts are garbled: he alleged that Tutchin wrote a paper called the Rehearsal of the Review (of whose existence there is no other evidence), and that he may have written the Whig pamphlet A Cat May Look on a Queen (1705). However, these attributions indicate that Hearne considered Tutchin as a key public representative of the Whig cause. Overall, Hearne’s encounters with the Rehearsal, Review and Observator – whether direct or indirect, supportive or hostile, engaging with their content or treating them as symbols of their parties – exemplify how the partisan reading of comment serials could feed into individual party identity.

ii) Nurturing partisan communities

Comment serials also nurtured partisan communities through acts of collective partisan reading that built bonds among partisans. This could occur in real settings such as coffeehouses and congregations, in virtual settings such as among groups of letter-writers,

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71 For Hearne on the Review, see Hearne, vol. 1, p. 297 (21 October 1706); vol. 2, p. 371 (10 April 1710).
72 For Hearne on Tutchin and the Observator, see Hearne, vol. 1, p. 35 (24 August 1705); vol. 1, p. 35 (26 August 1705); vol. 1, p. 40 (4 September 1705); vol. 2, p. 11 (4 May 1707); vol. 2, p. 53 (27 September 1707). A Cat May Look on a Queen was actually written by John Dunton.
and in the context of ‘imagined communities’ of readers with individual awareness that they were part of a larger body of unknown, supportive readers of the serial.\(^73\) As with individual partisan reading, partisan reading communities could be both supportive and hostile.

First, it is necessary to return to the coffeehouse. Collective coffeehouse reading of comment serials was the basis for conversations that affirmed partisan support for or opposition to the item being read. On the hostile side, Rawlins’s *Heraclitus Ridens* referred to ‘the rest of my Neighbour Woodcocks, who run me down at the Coffee-houses, and the six-penny Clubs, as if I were an Owl, I give ’em a Query, and they call me scurvy names, Jesuit, Papish, Tory’. Tutchin’s ‘Countryman’ described similar patterns, for instance an anecdote of an oral reader and his acquaintance sharing a hostile reading of the *Observator*:

> presently in comes a Slovenly Sort of a Fellow, and Seating himself with... some of his Acquaintance, he call’d for the *Observator*, which being brought him... he lifted up his Voice and Read to the whole Audience, at every three or four Lines he would stop, and looking on his Company, says he, *This Fellow is a Blockhead*; then a little further, *This Fellow is a Fool*; then *He’s a Rascal, a Rogue, a Villain*; so that by the time he had Read the Paper through, he had given you a Hundred fine Titles.

In 1709, a hawker brought a copy of the Tory *General Postscript* into a coffeehouse, and someone picked it up,

> and before he had read half the first Paragraph throws it down again in great Indignation; Here’s a High-flying Son of a Whore for you, says he, that’s a going to set the Nation together by the Ears! Damn the Bloody Jacobite Dog, if I had him here I’d kick out his Guts.

According to Tory account in 1713, addressing Richard Steele, a Tory went into a Winchester coffeehouse and took ‘your [Whig] *Guardian* off the Table, and handled... [it], our self, and the whole Party, so very Severely’.\(^74\)

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\(^73\) Stanley Fish’s concept of ‘interpretive communities’, which posits clusters of readers as the key factor determining textual meaning, is useful here. See Sharpe and Zwicker, ‘Introduction’, pp. 8-9.

\(^74\) *Heraclitus Ridens*, 3 (15 February 1681), r; *Observator*, 1.48 (7 October 1702), v; *General Postscript*, 3 (4 October 1709), r; *Another Letter from a Country-Whig to Richard Steele, Esq* (London, 1713), p. 11.
There was also supportive collective reading in coffeehouses. Tutchin’s ‘Countryman’ reported, ‘I went to a Coffee-House in London, where some Gentlemen were Reading your Paper... I believe ’em to be all True Englishmen that were in the Company, for all of ’em heartily wish’d you might prove a true Prophet’. Reading communities of this sort are also suggested by the fact that some coffeehouses stocked papers of a particular partisan hue. One Tory coffeehouse keeper kept ‘her Coffee-House Table covered by Dyers News Letter, the Rehearsall, and Papers of that Sortment’ – all Tory publications.

The Spectator commented,

The Coffee-houses have ever since been my chief Places of Resort, where I have made the greatest Improvements; in order to which I have taken a particular Care never to be of the same Opinion with the Man I conversed with. I was a Tory at Button’s and a Whig at Childe’s; a Friend to the Englishman; or an Advocate for the Examiner, as it best served my Turn.

In 1709, the Observator’s ‘Countryman’ reported that the Rehearsal is ‘hugg’d by Jacobites, and other Enemies to the Government, who are encourag’d by it; tear the Addresses of the Lords in Publick Houses, and spread Rehearsals in their Stead’.

A second setting in which partisan reading nurtured partisan communities was via the clergy to their congregations. Tory comment serials were alleged to have been used by clergymen for sermons; although this derives suspiciously from Whig accounts, clergymen were certainly readers of Tory comment serials, and some of their arguments would plausibly have found their way into sermons, given that sermons often had a topical, political edge. In the 1680s, Whigs alleged that the Tory clergy read and used Rawlins’s Heraclitus Ridens and, especially, L’Estrange’s Observator. One Whig pamphlet of 1682, adopting a satirical clerical persona, gushed the clergy would not want to lose the sweet and charming Society of our Admired GUIDE [i.e. L’Estrange]. O That Man, my Beloved, That Man, That Man! He is the Man; Ho Anthropos... If you will chuse me to be your Parson, I will undertake to read to you one of This Man’s Observators every Sunday, and Expound upon it.

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75 Observator, 1.56 (4 November 1702), r.
77 Observator, 4.11 (9 May 1705), v.
78 Spectator, 556 (18 June 1714), (1715 collected edn, vol. 8, p. 3).
79 Observator, 8.1 (2 February 1709), r.
A clerical character in another pamphlet addressed the *Observator* and *Heraclitus Ridens* in a similar way: ‘Good Gentlemen, be not discourag’d, for I can assure you, your Works are in great esteem amongst us: We should not know what course to Steer, if we were not guided by you’. The pamphlet’s preface explained that ‘the *Observator’s*... Echo my Clergy-man is’, and that ‘the Clergy of the complexion of our Dialogizer, do rather glory in such conversation’ with ‘infamous Libellers’, the *Observator* and *Heraclitus Ridens*. The *Weekly Pacquet* said of *Heraclitus Ridens*, ‘some Country Parsons... send for it duly, and ’tis thought, study it more by half than the Bible’. Another pamphlet claimed, ‘Oh Tantivies – blush at your *Observator*, do not hereafter (ye Reading Don’s of the Pulpit!) do not hereafter take matter out of his *Weekly Pamphlets* for your Reading Lectures in a *Country-Church*’. Gilbert Burnet, the Whig Bishop of Salisbury, claimed that ‘the greater part of the Clergy, who were already much prejudiced against that party [i.e. the Whigs], being now both sharpened and furnished by these papers [i.e. the *Observator*], delivered themselves up to much heat and indiscretion, which was vented both in their pulpits and common conversation’. A 1695 Whig pamphlet referred to the habit of ‘the Clergy of our Author’s [Leslie’s] Party to quote L’Estrange’s [Observator] from their Pulpits in the days of Yore’.80

Similar claims of the clerical use of comment serials were made for the two principal Tory comment serials of Queen Anne’s reign, the *Rehearsal* and the *Examiner*. After Burnet alleged that the clergy read the *Rehearsal* in coffeehouses on Saturdays, Leslie spelled out Burnet’s implication: ‘What! Do you think it was to make their *Sermons* out of them the next Day?’81 The *Examiner* was allegedly ‘distributed... gratis to the poorer Vicars and Curates’,82 and one anecdote survives of a cleric in Scarborough reading the *Examiner* to his parishioners in order to counteract the effects of Whig comment serials. This is worth quoting in full:


that paper [the Examinier] has done excellent service in these, as I doubt not it has in other parts, and proves... a weekly antidote to that weekly poison so industriously scattered through the nation by those two public libellers and incendiaries ‘The Observator,’ ‘The Review,’ and others. The honest parson... takes abundance of pains to apply the remedy where it is wanted. Mr. Hungerford [the Tory MP for Scarborough] sends him the ‘Examinier’ down every Thursday: it comes hither on Sunday and after evening service the parson usually invites a good number of his friends to his house, where he first reads over the paper, and then comments upon the text; and all the week after carries it about with him to read to such of his parishioners as are weak in the faith, and have not yet the eyes of their understanding opened[.]

In sum, it is plausible that the clerical use and dissemination of L’Estrange’s Observator, Rawlins’s Heraclitus Ridens, the Rehearsal and the Examiner nurtured Tory reading communities among congregations, even if they were not used to construct sermons directly.

A third form of partisan reading community was groups of correspondents who discussed comment serials in letters. In 1681, a Tory recommended Heraclitus Ridens to Sir Francis Radclyffe, another Tory, in a letter: ‘I think Heraclitus may be worth your perusal. As often as I meet with it, I shall send it till forbidden’. During Anne’s reign, Thomas Hearne, Dr Smith and Henry Dodwell mentioned the Rehearsal in their correspondence, which represents a virtual reading community. In 1710, a Whig pamphlet recommended the Review, Observator and Daily Courant newspaper to a fellow Whig:

all these Matters are so well laid open in several late Reviews... I will take this occasion to recommend that Paper and the Courant, to the constant Perusal of all your Neighbours that wish well to our present Constitution; not forgetting your old Friend and Countryman the Observator, who deserves very well the Continuance of your Favour[.]

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84 Letter to Francis Radclyffe, 10 February 1681. CSPD (1680-81 vol.), p. 159.
85 This can be glimpsed through Hearne, vols 1-2.
86 Arthur Maynwaring, Four Letters to a Friend in North Britain, upon the Publishing the Tryal of Dr. Sacheverell (London, 1710), p. 27.
In each case, comment serials acted as lubricants for common partisan feeling among correspondents.

Finally, comment serials nurtured imagined partisan communities, based on individual readers knowing that they were part of a larger body of separate supportive readers. One way this was fostered was by authors of comment serials encouraging readers to submit letters, and then printing these letters within the serial. Letters submitted to Tutchin’s Observator indicate readers’ perception that they were part of a club of Tutchin’s friends and supporters, gathered against his political enemies. One reader wrote to Tutchin that ‘My self, with all other true Englishmen that Love their Country, give you Thanks for Exposing the Frauds of the Nation which comes within your Knowledge’. Another submitted information about the malicious actions of Devon Tories with the comment, ‘I know thy Zeal to make Good Use of all things; I send this in Love... Thy Friends Love thee, as much as thine Enemies Hate thee’. A letter from St Albans in 1705 claimed that ‘There are some of your Friends, and Well-wishers to the present Government, that desire you would make your Observations on the Mayor’. Comment serials thus contributed to the development of partisan communities by encouraging the association and mutual affirmation of partisans, both in physical and non-physical settings.

iii) Provoking partisan actions

Reading comment serials was not simply a passive affair. People were inspired by these serials to do things, to help or to hinder the serial or its party, such as conversations and debates, writing letters, writing pamphlets or serials to be printed and published, and gathering on the streets. These actions were mostly quotidian, but were arguably the lifeblood of public partisan culture.

First, and most obviously, comment serials helped to furnish partisan conversations and debates in settings such as coffeehouses, by providing arguments and content to

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87 This point was famously argued for newspaper-reading and national identity in Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London and New York: Verso, 1991 edn), p. 35.
88 Most letters to Tutchin are only known through his reprinting of them in the Observator, but at least one letter survives in manuscript: J. Smith to John ‘Hare’ [How], Lynn, 5 June 1704. Manuscripts of the Duke of Portland, vol. 4, p. 92.
89 Observator, 2.98 (15 March 1704), v.
90 Ibid, 4.9 (2 May 1705), r.
91 Ibid, 4.34 (28 July 1705), v.
repeat, or with which to engage. This goes beyond the classic model of people reading and discussing news: people did not just engage with current affairs through discussing the veracity of foreign news, but discussed the partisan comment that they were consuming.

Another form of partisan reaction is letter-writing. Consumers were provoked into writing letters both to acquaintances and to the authors or publishers of comment serials themselves, usually to laud or criticise the serials, or (specifically for letters to serials) to provide information or contributions. Writing letters to serials is well-known for serials like the Athenian Mercury, Tatler and Spectator, but also became common among political comment serials after 1700. In Tutchin’s Observator, the ‘Countryman’ reported to the ‘Observator’ that the printer ‘told me he had so many Foolish Nonsensical Letters sent you, that he took no notice of it’, and elsewhere that a ‘Hat-full’ of letters had been received. Pittis’s Heraclitus Ridens (1703-04) claimed, ‘no Man in his Senses, can imagine that Papers of this Nature can Establish themselves without Correspondence. You know very well that we frequently receive Letters from unknown Hands, and in ’em many Things that we do not think fit to Communicate’. Mercurius Politicus (1705) received more letters than it could publish.92

Written threats addressed to authors and publishers were a particularly dark feature of partisan culture. Roger L’Estrange received a letter from a Whig in 1683 in response to his Observator, threatening that

Providence has reserved thee for some exemplary end. Persuade not thyself these golden days will last long. Our party will be able shortly to pay your Tory... dogs off.
What will be thy reward thou mayst easily guess... Dark nights are coming. We have very convenient alleys in town to slit a man’s windpipe or to drub or hamstring him[.]

Daniel Defoe commented wryly in the Review in 1710 that he had ‘about 15 Letters, from Gentlemen of more Anger than Honour, who have faithfully promis’d me to come and kill me by such and such a Day’. One author who elicited a particularly hostile reaction from letter-writers was John Tutchin. One letter addressed ‘Mr. Observator, alias Cut-Throat’, and attacked him, the ‘Secretary’ of ‘the Calves-Head-Feast’ – supposedly a group of diehard republicans and regicides – for ‘endeavour[ing] to Seduce [people] to your own

92 Observator, 2.9 (8 May 1703), r; Observator, 3.2 (29 March 1704), r; Heraclitus Ridens, 1.24 (23 October 1703), r; Mercurius Politicus, 1.9 (10 July 1705), p. 36.
Wicked and Traiterous Opinion’. Another abusive letter criticised Tutchin for calling non-jurors ‘papists’, and warned him, ‘you may chance to have your Head broke’. A third letter made still more explicit threats against Tutchin: ‘And if... I should be so Fortunate as to meet you in any Publick Place, Coffee-House, or Tavern, I would Divert my self in breaking your Head’. As it turned out, these were not necessarily empty threats; Tutchin was beaten up in a public house in February 1707, and his death a few months later may have been connected to the injuries that he had sustained.

Another partisan action prompted by reading comment serials was writing responses to be printed and published. Although this was a minority reaction, it deserves mention because of its onward effects, which are discussed later in this chapter. Finally, there were occasional set-piece gatherings in the streets that resulted from encounters with comment serials. A pope-burning procession in 1681 included a figure representing L’Estrange’s Observator: ‘the Effigies of a monstrous Animal with his face reverst, making Observations upon the Horse-tail; or an amphibious Creature made up of Ribaldry, having a Paper pinn’d upon his Sleeve, to be the better known when he comes neer Sam’s Coffee-house, inscribed, I am an Observator’. An effigy of Henry Care, of the Weekly Pacquet (1678-83), was burned at Norwich in 1682 by a Tory crowd. Tutchin’s trial in 1704 attracted a large crowd that spilled out into the streets. Sometimes street action reflected a legal judgement: two issues of the Observator were ordered be burned by the Lords in Dublin in 1711.

Bringing together all of the arguments in this section: why do these patterns of partisan reading matter? Any attempts to shift from descriptions of reading patterns to wider claims about the influence and impact of comment serials are necessarily speculative. It is impossible to know specific effects, for instance whether reading L’Estrange’s Whig-bashing in the Observator helped to end the Succession Crisis, or whether reading Defoe’s Harleyite arguments in the Review had an impact on the 1705 election. However, the evidence presented does suggest that encounters with comment serials were an important point of contact between individuals and partisan culture. As a result, it seems reasonable

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93 Letter to Roger L’Estrange (20 August 1683). CSPD (second 1683 vol.), pp. 308-9; Review, vol. 6 (1709-10), preface, sig. A2v-A3r; Observator, 3.20 (31 May 1704), v; 2.35 (7 August 1703), r; 2.9 (8 May 1703), r.
94 For Tutchin, including his death, see above, pp. 156-9.
95 See below, pp. 228-32.
96 The Procession: Or, the Burning of the Pope in Effigie, at Temple-Bar, or in Smithfield, on the 17th of November 1681 (London, 1681), p. 2; Loyal Protestant, 165 (8 June 1682), v; The Tryal and Examination of Mr. John Tutchin, for Writing a Certain Libel, Call’d the Observer (London, 1704), v; Journals of the House of Lords (Dublin, 1779-80), vol. 2, p. 415. I would like to thank Suzanne Forbes for the latter reference.
to suggest that they helped to organise, consolidate and ossify wider processes of party polarisation, by affirming and building individual and collective partisan identity on both sides, and by encouraging a variety of partisan actions. Comment serials did not cause the ‘rage of party’, but they contributed to its nature and depth.

**Comment serials as the public voice of party**

The final section of this chapter considers how comment serials, through their reception, came to function in public as pre-eminent voices for their parties, irrespective of whether they had connections with party politicians. This occurred in two respects. First, comment serials became enveloped in elaborate paper wars, answering and being answered by pamphlets and other serials, on a continuous basis, and across a partisan divide. This created dense networks of public dialogues between publications that represented party divisions in print, with serials at their heart. Secondly, comment serials were represented directly by opponents as public party mouthpieces – as the ‘oracles’, ‘secretaries’, ‘champions’ or ‘mouths’ of their parties. For both themes, comment serials should be set into the context of partisan newsbooks of the civil wars, especially *Mercurius Aulicus* (1643-45) and *Mercurius Britanicus* (1643-46), when similar dynamics were at play.

*i) Paper wars and partisan dialogues*

The importance of public exchanges between printed items, and the way that these could encapsulate and represent partisan dialogues in public, have been explored by some scholars. Joad Raymond has examined ‘animadversions’, as pamphlets and books were published to ‘answer’ other publications, often themselves prompting answers in turn.97 David Zaret has considered animadversions as part of the practice of political communications before and during the civil wars, focusing on chains of printed petitions and counter-petitions in the 1640s.98 Individual serial-serial paper wars have also been identified: *Mercurius Aulicus* clashed with *Mercurius Britanicus* in the 1640s, Whig and Tory serials clashed in the Succession Crisis, the *Observator, Review* and *Rehearsal* clashed in the

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1700s, and the *Examiner* and *Medley* clashed after 1710. However, this does not capture the full nature and scale of early modern paper wars. Serials facilitated the development of complex paper wars that took the form of webs rather than chains: serials responding to serials and pamphlets, and being responded to by serials and pamphlets, rather than simply a line of pamphlets or an ongoing fight between two serials. These turbo-charged paper wars created public partisan dialogues on a significant scale, and elevated partisan newsbooks and comment serials into important representatives of parties in public. There were three major periods of serial-centred paper wars between the mid-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, each of increasing complexity and density than the last: during the civil wars, especially that of the first civil war centred on *Mercurius Aulicus*; during the Succession Crisis, centred on partisan newspapers and comment serials; and from the beginning of Queen Anne’s reign, centred on the proliferating comment serials.

The first major paper war involving serials was that centred on *Mercurius Aulicus* during the first civil war. This formed a major, dynamic representation of the political struggles of the civil wars in print. Although it is sometimes seen as a clash between *Mercurius Aulicus* and *Mercurius Britannicus*, in fact it is better interpreted as a multi-dimensional paper war, with *Aulicus* as its hub. This paper war was defined primarily by *Aulicus*’s responses to parliamentarian newsbooks, and the parliamentarian pamphlets and newsbooks (including, but not limited to, *Britanicus*) that responded to *Aulicus*, with a substantial but secondary cluster of royalist pamphlets that responded to *Britanicus*.

*Aulicus* was not, in fact, primarily concerned with *Britanicus*. It was established as an organ of royalist news to challenge, implicitly and explicitly, the news published in the parliamentarian-leaning London newsbooks, and mostly conducted its paper war with these newsbooks collectively. *Aulicus* was, in turn, attacked in print by many parliamentarians. In the vanguard of this was indeed *Britanicus*, whose substantial anti-*Aulicus* sections were constructed as alternating paragraphs of *Aulicus*’s report and *Britanicus*’s response, which represented their interaction on the page as a dialogue. Many other parliamentarian newsbooks also answered *Aulicus*, including the *Scotish Dove* (1643-46), the *Weekly Account* (1643-48) and the *Spie* (1644), and there were dozens of pamphlet responses. Of these parliamentarian answerers of *Aulicus*, *Britanicus* attracted the most printed responses itself from royalists, primarily in pamphlets rather than serials. *Britanicus* also answered other royalist texts, including the king’s private letters recovered on the

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99 A useful list of pamphlet and serial responses to *Mercurius Aulicus* is found in Thomas, *Berkenhead*, Appendix III.
battlefield at Naseby.\textsuperscript{100} In form, this paper war was primarily characterised by challenging news reports – accusing opponents of skewing news in a partisan direction – although this often spilled over into wider attacks on the opposite party. It did not especially engage in ‘controversy’, in the sense of debates over political principles, at least in the paper war around serials.\textsuperscript{101}

The second period with a significant paper war driven by serials was the Succession Crisis. This was initially centred, from 1679 onwards, on clashes between partisan newspapers over the accuracy of news, as opposition/Whig newspapers such as Benjamin Harris’s \textit{Protestant (Domestick) Intelligence} challenged the ‘false reports’ in loyalist/Tory newspapers such as the \textit{London Gazette}, and the latter – including the supposedly staid \textit{Gazette} – returned fire.\textsuperscript{102} However, these dialogues were less extensive than their 1640s equivalents. The paper war stepped up in 1681 with the emergence of comment serials. Comment serials quickly assumed prime position in the paper wars, and significantly expanded the scope of printed exchanges, including more direct attacks on the opposite party and debates around political principles. One pamphlet, \textit{A Pleasant Conference upon the Observator and Heraclitus} (1682), represented the paper war as a military war, with the comment serials at the forefront, claiming that ‘The great Generals of the Parties are, \textit{General Observator, General Heraclitus, General Advice from Rome} [i.e. the \textit{Weekly Pacquet}], with several Brigadeers of lesser fame, as \textit{Col. Fetterlanio} [i.e. Nathaniel Thompson of the \textit{Loyal Protestant} newspaper]’.\textsuperscript{103} Comment serials attacked newspapers and pamphlets, and begat comment serials and pamphlets in response. As we have seen, L’Estrange’s \textit{Observator} was developed as a vehicle for managing these complex paper wars, being designed as a mechanism for responding to the continuous flow of Whig newspapers and pamphlets. It also attracted a significant response in serials and pamphlets. A Tory character in a Whig dialogue serial, \textit{Democritus Flens}, lamented in late 1681, ‘it is beyond all bounds of Conscience, that the \textit{Observator} should be Baited at this Rate; What no less then twenty Pamphlets A Week! and so round the year – what \textit{Whiggish

\textsuperscript{100} The animadversions on the Naseby letters began in \textit{Mercurius Britanicus}, 90 (21 July 1645). These letters were published by the parliamentarians as a separate pamphlet in 1645, \textit{The Kings Cabinet Opened: Or, Certain Packets of Secret Letters & Papers, Written with the Kings Own Hand, and Taken in His Cabinet at Nasby-Field} (London, 1645).

\textsuperscript{101} The \textit{Aulicus}-centred paper war was succeeded by another phase in the late 1640s, centred on the royalist Mercuries, although this was more fragmented.


\textsuperscript{103} John Phillips, \textit{A Pleasant Conference upon the Observator, and Heraclitus} (London, 1682), p. 4.
Persecution is this?’. This is an exaggeration, but the printed reaction to the *Observator* was certainly substantial. This paper war was multi-nodal, lacking a core like the paper war around *Aulicus*, although comment serials were at the forefront. The paper war declined in 1682-83 after the cessation of most serials, although the *Observator* continued to attack one-off publications and to attract pamphlet responses until its own demise in 1687.

The third major paper war around serials, beginning soon after Anne’s accession in 1702, was more substantial and longer-lasting than its predecessors, and therefore came to represent partisan dialogues in public to an even greater extent. Again, the comment serials took the lead. Indeed, the 1682 pamphlet cited above was adapted to provide an up-to-date representation of the paper war in 1711, with comment serials at the forefront and newspapers playing a secondary role: ‘The Great Generals of the Party are, General *Examiner*, General *Medley*, General *Observator* and General *Review*, with several Party-Men of lesser Fame, such as the Colonels, *Post-Man*, *Post-Boy*, *Daily-Courant*, and *Flying-Post*. One observer in 1705, addressing the *Review*, wrote, ‘I cannot discover any War at Home, except it be a *Paper War*, or rather a *Goose-quill-Duel*, managed by your self and Master *Observator* on one side, and (it may be) as many on the other side’. The paper war was indeed led, on the Whig side, by the *Review* and *Observator*, later joined and/or replaced by, among others, the *Medley* and the *Englishman*. On the Tory side, it was led primarily by the *Rehearsal* and the *Examiner*. These paper wars attracted much anxiety among contemporaries. A pamphlet decrying partisan divisions, *Faults on Both Sides*, lamented in 1710, ‘Now again the Factions are blown up into a flame; the Danger of the Church cry’d out on one side, the Danger of High Church Persecution on the other; *Rehearsals*, *Reviews*, *Observators*, Pamphlets on both sides, all stuff’d with fit matter to keep up the ferment, and no care taken to suppress them’. Another pamphlet observed in 1711 that a ‘great Part of this Misery must be placed to the Account of those numerous [sic] Pamphlets, wherewith our Presses are so overcharged; On one side, the *Review*, *Observator* and *Medley*, on the other the *Examiner*, if they gain Belief with their Readers, are of themselves without their mercinary [sic] Auxiliaries enough to enflame the whole

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104 Democritus Flens, 8 (14 December 1681), r.
105 ESTC has 55 entries for ‘observator’ between 1681 and 1687, most of which are reactions to L’Estrange’s serial.
106 *The Conference; Or, Gregg’s Ghost* (London, 1711), p. 11.
107 *Reviewer Reviewed*, 3 (June 1705), p. 2.
ii) Serials as party mouthpieces

A second theme is the direct representation of comment serials, and their partisan newsbook predecessors, as the mouthpieces of parties. Printed reactions often represented serials as the public voice of a party, either as tools of party politicians or as oracles to which partisans listened above all others. Irrespective of any connections with party politicians, these representations would have shaped the impression serials made in public. Presenting serials as representatives of parties was often a rhetorical device to undermine their credit, by presenting them as voices for hire: writing for money, for nefarious people, or both. Sometimes, the party associated with the serial was cast in inaccurate terms, for instance treating certain royalist or Tory serials as mouthpieces of the Jesuits. Often, multiple writers or publications were presented as a collective ‘scribbling tribe’ that cooperated to advance a political cause, with serials as the primary public voices. These themes can be exemplified with three case studies, taking a prominent example from each of the three paper wars outlined above: Mercurius Aulicus as the mouthpiece of royalists in the 1640s, L’Estrange’s Observator as the mouthpiece of Tories in the 1680s, and Tutchin’s Observator as the mouthpiece of Whigs in the 1700s.

Mercurius Aulicus is perhaps the simplest case, as it was the product of the royalist court at Oxford, and therefore unsurprising that it was represented as such. A minor 1643 newsbook, the Scotch Mercury, told Aulicus that he had ‘Libelled long, and under the Broad-Seal, and no man reproved you, because you had your Commission from such Authority’. Another short-running serial, Anti-Aulicus (1644), claimed that ‘New poisons are every week vented from Oxford... amongst which, that which goes under the Name of Mercurius Aulicus is not the least dangerous for though the Man himself be but a Hireling in the businesse... yet... I deem the Court to furnish the materialls, and through him to distill what

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forgeries and errors they please, into the heads of the People’. The True Character of Mercurius Aulicus (1645) presented Aulicus as ‘A Scholer turn’d Courtier, and a man chosen, and payd by the Oxford Junto to lye for the promoting of the Spanish faction’.\textsuperscript{110} Opponents variously labelled Aulicus as a ‘Darling of the Court, a ‘lying Oracle’, the ‘Champion of the Cavaliers’, ‘his Majesties Liar in chiefe’ and the ‘Scribe to the Junto’.\textsuperscript{111}

Some of Aulicus’s opponents went further, treating Aulicus as a character who personified the royalists in general, making his vices and the growing intermittency and poorer quality of his news in 1644-45 reflect the wider nature of the royalist cause. A parliamentarian newsbook, the Spie (1644), stated, ‘In Aulicus his last weeks peniworth of slander, you may read the very condition of Oxford; for by the beating of his pulse you will alwayes finde the true state and temper of the whole malignant body, which at the present is as weak as his stile’. Parliamentarians targeted Aulicus because they considered it the chief organ of royalist print, such that striking down Aulicus would entail striking down the royalists more generally. Mercurius Aulico-Mastix (1644), a brief ‘Whipping Mercury’ that targeted its lashes on Aulicus, addressed its readers,

Would you then see Aulicus canvassed in a sprightly combat? Would you see Atheisme, Tyranny and Popery severely lashed? Would you have those Goblins of Religion, those Demi-Gorgons of Protestantisme, those whole and halfe Papists in the Junto, un-hooded, and unmasked?... Then read this New Mercury, and observe how he tutours, and disciplines Incorrigible Aulicus.

Mercurius Britanicus also elided Aulicus and royalism:

Has it not been my weekly designe to speak truth to ye, through scandalls abroad? and at home too? have I not unmasqued the forgeries of the other side, and put a candle into the hands of the Common people to see the Court-tricks, and Oxford-tricks, and Bishop-tricks, and Jesuit-tricks? have I not uncovered the Aulicus, the Pamphlet of Iniquity, and laid it open to the Kingdom, and all Posterity that read me?

\textsuperscript{111} A Recantation of Mercurius Aulicus, or Berkinheads Complaint (London?, 1644), p. 2; Mercurius Britanicus, 5 (26 September 1643), p. 33; Mercurius Britanicus, 22 (12 February 1644), p. 169.
Or, elsewhere: ‘Aulicus, it is not you, nor all your Jesuitical policies at Oxford can calumniate our Cause or Agents, we know you can paint Religion in the colours of Heresie, and Schisme; and the defence of our Lawes and Liberties, in the habit of Rebellion, and Traitorisme’.112

_Aulicus_ sometimes shared this role as the public face of royalism with others. One opponent observed,

There are three grand paper Conspirators well known by the Name of _Mercurius Aulicus, George Naworth_, and reverend Master _John Tayler_ the Water-tankerkerd, by whose sprinklings in this great dearth of Wit and Honesty, the University is cherished and kept in credit: These three are they which pumpe and _Pimpe_ about with their prostitute Noddles in the behalf of Popery, Murder and Rebellion against the State[.]113

George ‘Naworth’ was George Wharton, author of royalist almanacs and, later, royalist Mercuries such as _Mercurius Elencticus_ (1647-49); John Taylor, the ‘Water Poet’, was a comic pamphleteer who wrote for the royalists during the 1640s.114 _Aulicus_ was also conceived as the voice of papists or Jesuits rather than royalists _per se_: _Britanicus_ called _Aulicus_ ‘an underling pimpe to the whore of Babylon’, while the _Scotish Dove_ said it was ‘in covenant with English Papists, profane Atheists and Romish devils’.115

L’Estrange’s _Observator_ was treated even more explicitly than _Aulicus_ as the voice of a party. It probably was, in fact, a product of the court, but, regardless, it was widely represented as a mouthpiece of a cause – of ‘Tories’, the government, the Church, the ‘party’ or ‘faction’ in general, or papists or Jesuits.116 Thus, the _Observator_ was variously the ‘Noble Champion’ of the ‘Tories’, the ‘Champion for the _present_ Government’, ‘the mouth of our Party’, the ‘Churches Advocate’, the ‘Speaking Trumpet of a designing Jesuit’, ‘the hireling of the _Popish_ Faction in Masquerade’, the ‘Secretary to the _Popish Cabal_’ and ‘our Auspicious Guide,/ The Clergy’s Darling, and the States-men’s Pride’.117

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113 John Booker, _No Mercurius Aquaticus, but a Cable-Rope, Double Twisted for Iohn Tayler, the Water-Poet_ (London, 1644), p. 2.


116 See above, p. 146.

117 _New News from Bedlam: Or More Work for Towzer and His Brother Ravenscroft_ (London, 1682), p. 5; _The Charge of a Tory Plot Maintain’d, in a Dialogue Between the Observer, Heraclitus and an
L’Estrange’s *Observator* was often associated by contemporaries with *Heraclitus Ridens* and Nathaniel Thompson, compiler of the *Loyal Protestant* newspaper, as part of a trinity of Tory mouthpieces. One Whig pamphlet presented *Heraclitus* and the *Observator* as ‘two new Champions, who have set up Protestant English Colours in a *Popish Privateer*’.\(^{118}\) Similarly, Thompson and the *Observator* were ‘Popish Implements’ and ‘two Torical Hirelings’.\(^{119}\) Opponents referred to ‘those lying Oracles, the *Observator, Heraclitus* and *Thomson’*, to the *Observator* ‘and his Fellow-Mercenary, *Popish Scriblers*, the (Authors of *Heraclitus* and *Thompson’), and to ‘*The Observator, Heraclitus* and *Thompson’s Authors*, with the rest of their *Hellish Tory Popish Rout*’.\(^{120}\) After *Heraclitus Ridens* ceased in August 1682, a character in one version of the *Weekly Pacquet* observed that ‘the *Tories* begin to be frugal, and finding the *Whiggs Huzza’d off*, they think it now convenient to maintain but one *Cryer Journyman’, the *Observator*.\(^{121}\) A Whig pamphlet of 1682 featured a Jesuit drinking a health to ‘all the honest TORIES and TANTIVIES, to honest NAT, HERACLITUS and the OBSERVATOR, who do so MALL the WHIGS and DISSENTERS in their weekly and quotidian exercises’.\(^{122}\)

Tutchin’s *Observator* is a particularly instructive example, not least because it was not connected with Whig politicians, at least at the outset.\(^{123}\) This, however, did not prevent it from being represented as the pre-eminent mouthpiece for its party, variously presented as Whigs, dissenters, Presbyterians, republicans, the ‘good old cause’, the Kit Cat Club, the Calves Head Club, or generally the ‘party’, ‘faction’ or ‘tribe’. One Tory pamphlet claimed that Tutchin, mov’d by the Instigation of the Devil’s Children the Republicans, Did Villainously, Trayterously, Maliciously, Feloniously, Rascally, and Injudiciously, without Appearance of Reason on his Part, make his Endeavour by the Assistance of Pen, 

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\(^{118}\) *Several Weighty Quæries Concerning Heraclitus and the Observer*, in a Dialogue Betwixt Timothy the Corn-Cutter and Mr. Scruple* (London, 1681), p. 2.


\(^{120}\) *A Dialogue Between an Exchange, and Exchange-Alley; Or, a Court, and City Apprentice* (London, 1681), p. 2; *Protestant Courant*, 1 (24 April 1682), v; *Protestant Courant*, 4 (6 May 1682), v.

\(^{121}\) *Weekly Pacquet* (NS 478, Curtis version), 5.2 (1 September 1682), p. 15.

\(^{122}\) *New News from Bedlam: Or More Work for Towzer and His Brother Ravenscroft* (London, 1682), pp. 60-1.

\(^{123}\) See above, pp. 156-7.
Ink, and Paper, three Poisounous Weapons, to Stab the Church Establish’d and the Present Constitution, to the Heart... No sooner had Her Majesty been Possess’d of the Throne of Her Royal Ancestors, and given the Church of England... hopes of Reviving its wonted Honour and Glory, but a Party of Men, who were Restless till the Gates of Hell prevail’d against it, chose him for their Secretary; in order to write us into a Commonwealth.[,]

This pamphlet also featured Tutchin as a character, referring to ‘the Club I am the Mouth of’. Another pamphlet said of the Observator,

I... intend to Confront a Paper, which I think I may call the Mouth-Peice [sic] of a whole Party: being tacitly acknowledged as such, by their fondness thereof... And therefore, if not directly? Yet accidentally, the Speaker of the Faction.

Sackville Tufton’s The History of Faction (1705) described how a club of dissenters and republicans met in 1702, whereupon a ‘Weekly Paper was agreed to be Written, styl’d, The Observator; but whom to pitch upon for the Author remain’d undecided for a considerable while... at last a Fellow [i.e. Tutchin] was found... who had Impudence enough to carry on their Undertaking, and Ignorance enough to be led by the Nose by them’. Tutchin was then ‘entered into Pay’ and became their ‘Secretary’.124

Charles Leslie, author of the Rehearsal and many Tory pamphlets, was particularly prone to depict Tutchin as a Whig mouthpiece. In the second part of his pamphlet, Cassandra (1704), he wrote that ‘the Party... the Whigs and Dissenters... stand particularly Answerable for their Observator, who expressly maintains the Deposing Doctrine’, that the Observator was ‘set up as the Cryer and Trumpet of the Party’, and that ‘there is no Book of Paper comes out, that is so much a Party-Book, for which the whole Faction is so Answerable as this’.125 In the Rehearsal, Leslie treated Tutchin as the ‘Mouth and Pillar of the Whiggs and Dissenters’, having been ‘Employ’d as Trumpeter-General’ to ‘Renew the Republican Principles; And to Blacken and Asperse all of the Church Interest that were in the Ministry’.126 Another Tory comment serial, Pittis’s Heraclitus Ridens, said of Tutchin, using a Virgilian tag, ‘Crimine ab uno disce omnes – From this one Man know the Nature of his

125 Charles Leslie, Cassandra (London 1704), part 2, pp. 6, 12, 21-2.
126 Rehearsal, 1.2 (12 August 1704), r; 1.5 (2 September 1704), v.
Party’, and referred to him as ‘the Republican Scribe’ and the dissenters’ ‘Trusty and well
Beloved Secretary’. Other pamphlets described Tutchin as the ‘great Oratour’ of the
‘Presbyterians’, the dissenters’ ‘Impudent Advocate’, ‘that great Genius and Champion of
their Cause’, ‘the Dissenters Tool’, the ‘Most Zealous, Faithful, Humble Servant;/ The
Commonwealth-Men’s Observer’, ‘a Whiggish tool’, the ‘Factious Scribbler for the good
old cause’, the ‘Champion to the good old cause’, and ‘Dear Secretary and Observer’ of
the ‘Dissenters’.

Like Aulicus and L’Estrange’s Observer, Tutchin’s Observer was also linked to
other prominent Whig mouthpieces. The most important of these was Defoe’s Review. One
Tory pamphlet, A Character of a Turn-Coat (1707), referred to ‘A Rogue/ Or two, among the
Factious Tribe in Vogue’, namely ‘John Tutchin, and Daniel Foe, Scribblers of the Observer
and Review’, who were depicted visually as turncoats in the form of two faces that looked
correct whether they were viewed the right way up or upside-down (Fig. 19). Another Tory
pamphlet included an appendix of ‘some Scandalous Books and Libels, collected out of that
infinite Number of them, written lately against the Church of England by the Presbyterians’,
in which were listed twenty-six items, culminating in ‘All Tutchin’s Observators, and De
Foe’s Impudent Trumpery: the 2 Foul Mouths of the Party’. Another referred to the
Observer and Review as ‘a Pair of Republican Orators, Mercenary Hirelings, and Weekly
Scriblers of the Party’. Sir Thomas Double at Court (1710) had the title character, a satirical
Whig politician, saying that

the Observer and the Review have done the Whigs considerable Service. I furnish
Weekly these two brave Incendiaries, with Heads and Materials to work upon,
whereby they are become the proper Pulses of our Party... they are all we have
now to lean on; they are our only Advocates; they are to be cherished and
recommended as the Oracles to be consulted upon all Emergencies[.]

127 Heraclitus Ridens, 1.4 (14 August 1703), v; 1.30 (13 November 1703), r.
128 An Elegy on the Death of the Late Famous Observer, Mr. John Tutchin (London, 1707); Daniel
Defoe, The Shortest-Way with the Dissenters: Or Proposals for the Establishment of the Church
(London, 1702), p. 10; Delariviere Manley, The D. of M--h’s Vindication: In Answer to a Pamphlet
Lately Publish’d, Call’d (Bouchain, Or a Dialogue Between the Medley and the Examiner) (London,
1711), p. 4; Edward Ward, The Dissenting Hypocrite, or Occasional Conformist (London, 1703), sig.
a2v, pp. 46, 58; An Account of the Birth, Education, Life and Conversation of That Notorious and Bold
Scribller the Observer (London, 1705), pp. 5, 7; The Dissenters Address of Thanks to the Pious, the
Learned Council in the Law, for Their Dear Secretary and Observer, John Tutchin, Scribe, and No
Gentleman, at His Late Tryal (London, 1705?).
In *Secret Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Henry Sacheverell* (1710), it was claimed, ‘Even before Sacheverell was known to be an author, the Low Church scribblers very often disputed about his principles, especially Defoe the Review, Tutchin the Observator, and Ridpath the present Observator, these three champions having very scurrilously abused the Church, and from whose seditious works it was plainly proved by Sacheverell than the Church was in danger’. *The No-Church Catechism* (1710) referred to ‘Two Great Blunder-Busses… The Sweet’ning Review, and Sowering Observator, the Mouths of Couzen-age, this of Contradiction, that Generals of all Corrupt Principles, and Guardians of the *Good Old Cause*.\(^{129}\)

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The Observator was also linked to other Whig comment serials, including the Tatler, Medley, Spectator, Guardian and Englishman, and to Whig-leaning newspapers such as the Flying Post and Daily Courant. In all cases, the Observator was treated as the most important public voice of the Whigs, either individually or co-equal with others. A Letter to the Examiner (1710), by Henry St John, referred to 'that Weekly Poison, which by the President and Inferior Members of a Factious Cabal, is so profusely scatter’d thro’ the Nation’, meaning 'The Observator, the Review, the Censor of Great Britain’, i.e. the Tatler.
The *General Postscript* (1709), a Tory comment serial, was designed to include ‘Remarks upon the OBSERVATOR, REVIEW, TATLERS, and the rest of the SCRIBLERS’, while commenting that ‘The Modern Scriblers have the Protection and Encouragement of the prevailing Party’. Using a military metaphor, a 1711 pamphlet observed that ‘the Whiglanders stand Obstinately upon the Defensive, and by the Means of Velt Mareschal *Medly*, who is a Stanch *Marston-Moor-Officer*; the Generals, *Observator* and *Review*; the *Flying-Post*, *Spectator*, and *Daily-Courant*, that are accounted very Zealous assertors of what they call *Liberty* and *Property*. In *The Importance of the Guardian Considered* (1713), Jonathan Swift claimed that, through the *Guardian*, Steele ‘hopes to come into all the Perquisites of his Predecessor *RIDPATH*, and be the principal Writer of his Faction’. As we have seen, *John Tutchin’s Ghost to Richard St---le* (1714) linked Tutchin to Steele in his subsequent guise as the *Englishman*.\(^{130}\)

Indeed, the *Observer* was represented as a Whig mouthpiece, linked to others, in several Tory visual satires. Two have already been discussed: *The Three Champions* (c. 1710) (Fig. 16) and *The Funeral of Low Church* (1710) (Fig. 17), which both present the *Observer* in conjunction with the *Review* and the *Tatler*. In addition, *Faction Display’d* (1709) depicts the Whore of Babylon riding a monster with seven heads, including the *Review* and *Observer*, alongside Richard Baxter, John Toland, Benjamin Hoadly, Matthew Tindal and the Solemn League and Covenant (Fig. 20). *The Apparition, or Low-C—h Ghost* (1711) presents a ‘Low Church library’ containing books including the *Observer* and *Review*, presented alongside texts such as Hobbes’s *Leviathan* and the works of Milton (Fig. 21).\(^{131}\)

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\(^{131}\) *The Funeral of Low Church* (London, 1710); *The Three Champions* (London, c. 1710); *Faction Display’d* (London, 1709); *The Apparition, or Low-C—h Ghost* (London, 1711).
Figure 20. Faction Display’d (1709).
Figure 21. The Apparition, or Low-C—h Ghost (1711).
Conclusion

This chapter has made three arguments, each of which has implications for wider themes in early modern political culture. First, the reach of comment serials was significantly greater than print-run figures would suggest, because overall print-runs were a multiplier of per-issue print-runs, because there were myriad patterns of multiple consumption of individual copies, and because people could encounter comment serials indirectly. This suggests that comment serials, and published comment more widely, made a substantial impression on the developing public political awareness of late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century Britain. Secondly, comment serials were primarily read or encountered according to patterns that may be described as partisan reading, in ways that affirmed individual partisan identities, nurtured partisan communities and provoked partisan actions. The aggregate experience of partisan consumption of comment contributed to the intensification of a national partisan culture. Thirdly, the reception of comment serials and their partisan newsbook predecessors led them to function in public as pre-eminent voices of their parties, regardless of whether they were actually connected to party politicians, through the establishment of public partisan dialogues in complex serial-centric paper wars, and through representations of serials as party mouthpieces. This helped to give shape to how party divisions were constructed in public.

The circulation and consumption of published comment was therefore an important force shaping political culture in early modern Britain. The overall conclusion to this thesis will bring this together with the arguments made in other chapters to offer overall observations about the nature and relationship of commenting on the news, the serial press and political culture in early modern Britain.
CONCLUSION

This conclusion has three functions: to summarise the arguments of this thesis by characterising ‘comment’, the place of comment in serials and the wider ‘comment media landscape’ in early modern Britain; to make concluding observations about the styling of comment, which has received little direct attention in this thesis; and to return to the questions posed in the introduction about the implications of comment for our wider understanding of political culture.

Commenting on current affairs was a tangible and prominent concept and practice in early modern Britain. This has not been sufficiently recognised in a historiography that is organised around the concept of ‘news’. When early modern Britons wanted to comment on the news, they had access to a rich lexicon that they could use to conceive and present their comment as comment. Where news was denoted by terms such as ‘relation’, ‘occurrences’ and ‘passages’, comment was expressed through terms like ‘observations’, ‘reflections’ and ‘remarks’. Contemporaries placed these comment keywords prominently in the titles of publications, and, as a result, readers understood that they were consuming comment rather than news. The lexicon of comment was complex and multi-faceted. Two key terms were ‘observations’ and ‘reflections’, which emerged as keywords of current affairs commentary between the 1640s and 1680s, and were ubiquitous by the early-eighteenth century. Taken from external contexts such as scholarly textual commentary and morality, they were designed to bring objectivity and respectability to current affairs commentary, even when it was in fact partisan or scurrilous. Other comment keywords were drawn from fields such as controversy, for instance ‘vindication’ and ‘confuted’, or genre, for instance ‘dialogue’ or ‘satyr’. Through this development of a lexicon of comment, and through practical experimentation with form such as the delineation of comment sections in newspapers and of dedicated serials of comment, a concept of ‘comment’ that was distinct from ‘news’ was crystallising by the early-eighteenth century. Although beyond the scope of this thesis, this may have been part of a broader ‘culture of comment’ that complemented the crystallisation of a ‘culture of fact’ across news, science, history, law and other fields, as identified by Barbara Shapiro.

A key feature of early modern comment is that it was widely published: presented and circulated to broad, public audiences. The resulting ‘comment media landscape’ was complex, taking a range of oral, manuscript, printed and hybrid forms, including ballads, libels, plays, sermons, pamphlets and serials. At the heart of the comment media landscape were printed pamphlets. Comment pamphlets ranged from short pieces, forming a single
paper or a four-page booklet, to lengthy ninety-six-page discussions, and took a wide range of forms, including satirical dialogues, answers to other publications, panegyrical verse and character portraits of individuals or groups. In addition, an innovative and increasingly important form of published comment was the printed serial, which was effectively a regular pamphlet. Serialising comment carried various advantages, such as enabling audiences to be established and sustained over time, allowing major themes to be pressed home through repetition, and maximising its impact with broad audiences by dividing it into smaller components. Common subjects of comment that appeared in serials included the veracity of news reports, context and analysis for foreign news, rolling animadversions on opposition press output, negative characterisations of an opposing party and segmented political theory and history.

Regular comment mostly appeared in two broad categories of serial: printed news serials, or ‘newspapers’, and dedicated serials of comment, or ‘comment serials’. Newspapers can be defined as a heterogeneous group of publications that shared a core function or structure of publishing reports of recent events. Comment held an ambiguous place in newspapers, because many news-writers held to ideals of pure, comment-free news, while others indulged various political and commercial impulses to include comment. When they did include comment, news-writers managed the relationship between news and comment in three ways: comment within news, comment alongside news, and comment in place of news. Many newspapers included comment within the news, through phrases or sentences interpolated into the structure of news reports, or by quoting documents such as proclamations and petitions that themselves contained comment. This was a particularly prominent feature of partisan newspapers, especially in many civil war newsbooks, Succession Crisis newspapers and newspapers in the 1710s and 1720s. There was also a development of comment alongside news – comment sections – which appeared in newspapers in two waves. The first was in the 1640s and 1650s, when newsbooks adapted forms of comment from pamphlets, such as prefaces, animadversions, queries and ballads, as vehicles for including comment. Charles I’s official newsbook, *Mercurius Aulicus* (1643-45), included a semi-regular section that countered parliamentarian news; the *Scotish Dove* (1643-46) contained parliamentarian and Presbyterian prefaces; and there were prefaces containing republican political theory in *Mercurius Politicus* (1650-60), the official newsbook of the Commonwealth. The second wave was from the 1710s onwards. In the vanguard of this wave were six-page weekly newspapers, such as the weekly journals *Mist’s*, *Applebee’s* and *Read’s*, and the primary form of comment section was the introductory essay, drawn from the comment serial tradition. By the 1730s, this had
become an established feature of newspapers more widely. Besides comment within news and comment alongside news, a third form of news-comment relationship was comment in place of news, by which some newspapers substituted comment for news while still presenting the content as news. All three of these forms were present in the most comment-heavy newspapers of the entire seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century period, the ‘Mercuries’ of 1647-50. These were a loose group of publications, mostly royalist, that pushed the possibilities of newspapers to their limits as vehicles for comment. Although the Mercuries were an effective means for publishing a large amount of regular comment, their generic instability meant that they did not prove a sustainable model.

As a result, a second type of printed serial was developed for circulating comment to the public in the late-seventeenth century: comment serials, whose overt purpose was to publish comment rather than news, signified by comment keywords such as ‘observations’, ‘reflections’ and ‘remarks’, and genres such as the dialogue and the essay. The identification and delineation of comment serials is one of the chief contributions of this thesis. They have not been properly recognised in the existing scholarship, not least because they fall between the main historiographical divide between the history of ‘newspapers’ and ‘journalism’ and the history of ‘literary periodicals’ and ‘periodical essays’, but they were a key phenomenon in the press and politics of late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth century Britain. Comment serials were primarily devoted to discussion of domestic politics, religion, foreign affairs and the press, usually from a partisan perspective. They first emerged out of the pamphlet and newspaper traditions during the Succession Crisis, as a more powerful form of print weapon with which to fire ‘paper bullets’ into the nascent Tory-Whig party conflict. The chief comment serials in this first phase were Henry Care’s Whig *Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Rome* (1678-83), Edward Rawlins’s Tory *Heraclitus Ridens* (1681-82) and Roger L’Estrange’s Tory *Observator* (1681-87). They were different in form from contemporary newspapers and pamphlets, although they shared much of their content and function. A comment serial tradition consolidated and became more distinct over the following years, especially through the publication of ‘Observators’, or serials of ‘observations’, led by James Welwood’s Williamite/Whig *Mercurius Reformatus, or the New Observer* (1689-94?) and John Tutchin and George Ridpath’s Whig *Observer* (1702-12). The heyday of comment serials was in the 1700s and 1710s, with this latter *Observer* joined by prominent titles such as Daniel Defoe’s Whig/moderate *Review* (1704-13), Charles Leslie’s Tory *Rehearsal* (1704-09), Jonathan Swift and William Oldisworth’s *Examiner* (1710-14), Arthur Maynwaring and John Oldmixon’s *Medley* (1710-12), Richard Steele’s *Englishman* (1713-15) and Joseph Addison’s *Free-Holder*
(1715-16). In this period, unlike the Succession Crisis, they were different from newspapers in content and function as well as form. A new trend of moral comment serials emerged in the 1710s, led by the *Tatler* (1709-11) and *Spectator* (1711-12, 1714), which commented on morals and manners rather than (overtly) on politics, but bore strong resemblances to the established political comment serials. By the 1720s, a broad tradition of comment serials, ranging across political and moral comment, was well-established. However, they were in decline by the 1730s, after their essay form became common as an opening section in newspapers.

An attempt will now be made to characterise the shape and development of the comment media landscape in Britain between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Before the late-sixteenth century, published comment was limited to oral traditions such as sermons and ballad-singing, and minor traditions of manuscript and printed comment: a few printed comment pamphlets and manuscript poems, with a largely elite circulation. The comment media landscape grew significantly and expanded its social reach in the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries, with a substantial growth of manuscript libels (scurrilous satirical verse), printed ballads, manuscript pamphlets and printed pamphlets that commented on current affairs. At this time, manuscript was probably more important than print as a medium for publishing comment. This reversed with the ‘explosion of print’ in the 1640s. During the civil wars, printed pamphlets and, to a lesser extent, newsbooks became the chief vehicles for publishing comment, within a comment media landscape that was truly national for the first time. Although there was less published comment after the Restoration, it again became widespread during the Succession Crisis, when its most prominent forms were pamphlets and, for the first time, comment serials, although newspapers and manuscript newsletters also conveyed comment. Between the mid-1680s and the turn of the century, published comment was again dominated by the pamphlet. Comment serials returned to the heart of the comment media landscape after 1700, to be joined by newspapers in the 1710s and 1720s, and largely superseded by them in the 1730s. Pamphlets also remained prominent in these decades, and shared with newspapers the central place within the comment media landscape for the rest of the eighteenth century. The overall reach of published comment, which had fluctuated in the second half of the seventeenth century, consolidated and expanded during the eighteenth century.

The second part of this conclusion will make some general observations about the style of comment. This has not received much direct attention in this thesis, but two themes that have been noted throughout deserve some concluding comment: humour and personas. Early modern comment was commonly conveyed using humour, based partly on
classical traditions such as joco-seriousness, satire and rhetoric, which treated a witty or humorous style as a vehicle for serious or persuasive ends. This was a feature of an astonishingly large number of the serials encountered in this thesis. The flagship partisan newsbooks of the first civil war, the royalist *Mercurius Aulicus* and the parliamentarian *Mercurius Britanicus* (1643-46), both used humour to galvanise their supporters and render their opponents ridiculous, such that the Presbyterian Robert Baillie regarded them as being ‘for jests only, and not worth the reading’. In the second civil war, Marchamont Nedham claimed in his royalist newsbook, *Mercurius Pragmaticus* (1647-49), that ‘in the midst of jest I am much in earnest’, while he argued that his republican newsbook, *Mercurius Politicus*, ‘must bee written in a Jocular way, or else it will never bee cryed vp’.

During the Succession Crisis, *Heraclitus Ridens* tried to ‘speak truth with a laugh’, with the character ‘Jest’ bringing humorous queries and ballads to the dialogue presented to readers, while the *Weekly Pacquet* included the jocular ‘Popish Courant’ to entice readers and attack Catholics, and L’Estrange’s *Observator* was ‘Half-Jocular, Half-Earnest’, seeking to ‘Fool’ people back into their ‘Senses, and Duties’. Under Anne, the *Rehearsal* used ‘Pleasantry or Fooling’ to win people over to Tory principles, while the *Review* contained the diverting ‘Scandalous Club’ section to attract readers to read Defoe’s principles.1 Examples could be multiplied. Serials of all sorts leaned heavily on wit, humour, diversion and entertainment, and deserve a more prominent place in the burgeoning scholarship about early modern humour.2

Comment was commonly expressed through a persona: the voice of an individual, whether real or fictional, whether sketchy or developed. Personas were used to give comment unity, authority (positive or negative), readability and/or ambiguity. In serials, personas are associated especially with Steele and Addison’s *Tatler* and *Spectator*, which used *eidola* (‘masks’): fully-fictionalised characters through which comment was to be ‘seen and seen through’. *Eidola* were particularly designed to encourage readers to consider the limitations of the perspectives being presented through those voices. In this precise sense, this was a new stylistic feature of these serials. However, this thesis has demonstrated that personas were a far broader phenomenon in serials. There were earlier personas that

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2 I intend to return to this theme elsewhere.
represented authors, such as ‘Mr Observator’ as a character representing John Tutchin in his Observator, which shared with eidola the functions of unifying the voice of comment and giving it authority, although were less fictionalised, and were not designed to make readers question their views. Also relevant is the dialogue form, in which different personas were juxtaposed, some being designed to be ‘seen and seen through’ like eidola, as voices of political opponents or (more subtly) as voices with the ‘correct’ politics but who needed to be finessed, as with the crude but honest figure of Roger the Countryman in Tutchin’s Observator. Personas also featured in the Mercuries of the civil wars, which were inflected through the figure of a Roman god who bore qualities such as cunning, playfulness and deceit as well as news-bringing, and qualified with adjectives such as ‘Melancholicus’ and ‘Bellicus’ that shaped the narratorial voice. Beyond serials, personas can be taken back to at least Martin Marprelate, the railing Puritan character whose voice was the vehicle for the anticlerical comment of the eponymous pamphlets of 1588-89. The relationship between comment and personas deserves further attention.

The final part of this conclusion addresses the place of comment in wider questions of political culture. Let us return to the three big themes raised in the introduction. First, the growth of public political awareness. The development of commenting on current affairs as a concept, and the expansion of the comment media landscape in practice, indicate that people encountered discussions and arguments as well as news. As has been argued with respect to comment serials, but in a way that can be applied to comment more generally, people were widely exposed to comment that was published and in circulation. ‘Political awareness’ was not just related to people’s growing exposure to current affairs discourse in quantitative terms, but to a complex and changing diet of current affairs consumption, including comment as well as news, especially from the civil war period onwards. In this passive sense, even before considering how people interacted with comment, there was a ‘public sphere’ from at least the 1640s, as people encountered substantial published comment.

In addition, people encountered an increasingly wide range of comment, especially by the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries. The evidence presented in this thesis indicates that serial comment, in both newspapers or comment serials, was centred on political and religious subjects in civil war newsbooks and Succession Crisis newspapers and comment serials, before expanding to include more analytical, economic and moral comment between the 1690s and 1710s, most obviously in serials such as the New State of Europe (1701), Mercator (1713-14) and Tatler respectively. This reflects wider trends in the comment media landscape, such as David Zaret’s claim that a pre-1640 dominance of
religious issues in public discussion expanded into greater political debate in the 1640s, and Peter Lake and Steven Pincus’s claim that a wider group of issues beyond politics and religion entered the ‘public sphere’ in the later-seventeenth century, including political economy.³

Turning to the second theme: comment also illuminates the development of a national partisan culture between the 1640s and 1720s. Much, perhaps most, published comment was partisan. Voluminous evidence has been presented about this in relation to serials, from the civil wars to the age of Walpole. From royalist newsbooks such as *Mercurius Aulicus* and *Mercurius Pragmaticus*, to parliamentarian/pro-Commonwealth newsbooks such as *Mercurius Britannicus* and *Mercurius Politicus*, and from Tory comment serials such as L’Estrange’s *Observator*, the *Rehearsal* and the *Examiner*, to Whig comment serials such as the *Weekly Pacquet*, Tutchin’s *Observator* and the *Medley*, regular comment was usually published to advance a partisan cause. This reflected the wider comment media landscape, which had concentrations of partisan comment in pamphlets at similar moments: the civil wars, the Succession Crisis, the reign of Anne.

Partly, this indicates the importance of publishing comment as a partisan practice, including – but by no means exclusively – by prominent politicians. For serials, the evidence for political connections is clearest in the 1640s-1650s (including *Mercurius Aulicus* and *Mercurius Britannicus*) and 1710s-1720s (including the *Examiner* and the *Medley*), although there are also strong hints for the Succession Crisis. Again, this reflects the broader picture: governments, parties and politicians were commissioning and sponsoring publications, including print, in the sixteenth century, and stepped this up during the civil wars and rage of party.⁴ The evidence is weakest for the comment serials of the early part of Anne’s reign, apart from the *Review*, which had well-documented links to Harley and Godolphin. Where evidence is lacking, this does not mean that no political connections existed, not least because authors of serials usually sought to boost their own credit by asserting their independence. Equally, however, political connections should not be assumed to have been

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present in all cases. Publishing comment was a more widespread and amorphous partisan practice.

Published comment was also key to the very construction of party. The linguistic construction of an enemy ‘party’ and ‘faction’ was prominent throughout the period from the civil wars to the early-eighteenth century. In serials, we have seen much evidence of efforts to define and tarnish political opponents – Aulicus defining the parliamentarian ‘rebels’, L’Estrange’s Observator defining a Whig ‘faction’, Tutchin’s Observator defining a Tory ‘faction’. Less obviously, supportive comment also defined parties in a positive sense, albeit not usually in terms of ‘party’. Tutchin, for instance, presented his political positions as national, natural and reasonable, contrasted with a nefarious, minority Tory faction. The fact that many partisan writers defined political divisions in terms of the (good) nation against a single (bad) party provides an important nuance to any simplistic idea of ‘two-party politics’ in this period.

In addition, serials played a particular role in these ongoing processes of party definition, because some serials became the de facto chief public voices for parties. Serials were regarded as party ‘mouthpieces’, regardless of whether they had connections with party politicians. This was especially true of major comment serials such as L’Estrange’s Observator, Tutchin’s Observator and the Examiner. Serials also represented their parties in paper wars, where party battle lines were drawn through the widespread practice of print animadversions, which for serials produced dense and complex webs of responses.

Comment was also frequently consumed along partisan lines, by those who were pre-disposed to agree or disagree with its contents. Such partisan reading, whether supportive or hostile, consolidated and developed individual partisan identities, nurtured partisan communities and induced partisan actions such as debates and letter-writing, and occasionally publishing or street action. The aggregate effect of these myriad, small moments of partisan consumption was to contribute to the deepening of partisan identities and actions across British society.

The third theme provides a good place to conclude this thesis. Between the 1640s and 1720s, Britain evolved from a political culture based on secrecy and privilege to a culture built on public discussion. The explosion of published comment on current affairs lay at the heart of this development. The publication and circulation of comment epitomised the breakdown of the restricted world of arcana imperii, despite repeated efforts by regimes, royalists and Tories to halt the slide. Arguably, this shift was represented especially by the circulation of comment, not just that of news. People were no longer just exchanging whispered words about current affairs in alehouses or at home, but a
substantial culture of public discussion had developed that had concrete expression through the irrepressible products of the press. This process did not begin with, but was accelerated by, the civil wars, and became regularised and normalised during the rage of party. Commenting on current affairs had become an established part of British political culture.
Appendix A: Comment serials, 1678-1730

This appendix lists British comment serials between 1678 and 1730. It is divided into four sections. A full explanation of this division can be found in chapter 3.¹

- A) Major comment serials, 1678-1708. This contains comment serials with 11+ issues, all political in subject.
- B) Minor comment serials, 1678-1708. Ditto, 1-10 issues.
- C) Major comment serials, 1709-1730. This contains comment serials with 11+ issues, on any subject: mostly political, moral or a political-moral hybrid.
- D) Minor comment serials, 1709-1730. Ditto, 1-10 issues.

Given that comment serials did not form a discrete press category, some decisions about which serials to include and not to include could undoubtedly be challenged. History serials such as the *Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Germany* (1679-80) and the *Weekly Discovery* (1681) are included. Edinburgh and Dublin reprints are excluded.

In general, bibliographical information is taken from NS, CK, McLeod and ESTC. Details will only be referenced in these notes where they differ from these sources, or where a particular decision has been made that requires comment.

The more descriptive parts of the data – especially party, form and subject – are primarily designed to illustrate the general nature of comment serials, and are necessarily simplified in many cases. Where necessary, details about these simplifications are provided in these notes.

Physical or digital copies of serials have been consulted in most cases, but it has sometimes been necessary to rely on second-hand accounts. These are indicated if they are other than NS, CK, McLeod and ESTC.

Uncertainties in the data are indicated in the tables, and explained in these notes where necessary.

Given that some minor serials are only known from a single surviving copy, it is likely that other minor serials have disappeared without trace. Given that major serials made a more substantial impression in contemporary sources, for instance in adverts or in pamphlet reactions, it is unlikely that any of these have been completely lost, even if complete runs of issues do not survive.

¹ ‘Major’ and ‘minor’ are used here solely to refer to numbers of issues, not to make any claims about the relative influence of these serials.
In some cases, what constitutes a single serial could be disputed. The main decisions made here are as follows. The two series of the Medley in 1710-11 and 1712 have been said to constitute a single serial, although its 1715 revivals are treated as separate. The two series of the Englishman in 1713-14 and 1715 have been said to constitute a single serial. The Examiner has been said to constitute two serials, one in 1710-14 and one in 1714-16, although ESTC places these together. The Spectator is treated as a single serial covering its 1711-12 and 1714 runs, with separate revivals in 1715 and 1716. Imitators that formed distinct runs have been separated, for instance William Salmon’s Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Rome (1682-83), a separate Female Tatler (1709), and the separate 1712 Medley.

The categories of data included in the appendix are as follows:

- **Reference.** Reference numbers are taken from NS (for 1678-1702) or CK (for 1702-1730) wherever possible, and McLeod wherever necessary. Sometimes a reference number only refers to part of a serial, or refers to more than one serial as listed here.

- **ESTC.** Where possible, reference number(s) are also given from ESTC.

- **Title.** Titles are given in their most convenient or recognisable form, regardless of changes during a serial’s run.

- **Main author(s).** The most important individual or individuals involving in writing a comment serial, where known.

- **Party.** Where possible, comment serials are labelled according to any political leanings they displayed. Given the complexity of party politics in this period, this is necessarily simplified. These labels are not intended to indicate formal links with politicians, although these did exist in some cases (as discussed in chapter 3). Party leanings are sometimes determined silently from my reading of the content. The main labelling conventions used here, broken down by sub-period, are as follows (exceptions are explained in the detailed breakdown of serials later in these notes):
  - 1678-1683. Most are given as ‘Whig’ or ‘Tory’, indicating support for either the opposition/Whig or the loyalist/Tory side of the Succession Crisis.
  - 1688. Two comment serials are deemed ‘pro-James II’, in the context of James’s push for religious toleration towards the end of his reign, because ‘Whig’ and ‘Jacobite’ would both be misleading in this context.
1689-1700. A number of serials are labelled ‘Williamite/Whig’ because they were primarily designed to defend William III’s regime against the deposed James II in the aftermath of the Glorious Revolution. On the other side, only one ‘Jacobite’ comment serial has been identified.

1701-1717. Most are given simply as ‘Whig’ and ‘Tory’, as this most effectively captures the main divide during this period. High-church, non-juror and Jacobite-leaning serials are labelled as ‘Tory’, while low-church and Hanoverian-leaning serials are labelled as ‘Whig’. ‘Whig’ includes serials tending both to the Junto/Court and Old/Country Whig positions, because these did not find distinct expression in comment serials in this period.

1717-1720. During the Whig split of the late 1710s, ‘Opposition Whig’ is occasionally used to refer to those advocating position associated with the Walpole-Townshend group, especially opposition to the Peerage Bill and the actions of the South Sea Company.

1720-1726. ‘Whig’ and ‘Tory’ is again used as the main divide for this period.

1727-1730. Most comment serials in this period are labelled as ‘Whig/Walpolian’ or ‘Opposition’, in line with the realignment of politics in the late 1720s around Walpole and his medley of Tory and Whig opponents.

- **Form.** Most are either ‘dialogue’ or ‘prose/essay’, in line with the two main forms of comment serials. For reasons explained in chapter 3, ‘prose’ is consistently used for the pre-1709 period and ‘essay’ thereafter, for convenience. ‘Essay’ is used fairly loosely to embrace letters, essays proper (undirected discourse on a subject), and any other kind of discursive prose. Forms given indicate the main generic framework of a publication, and should not be taken as a claim for homogeneity. Major serials could, of course, contain a mixture of forms across their run.

- **Format.** Given either as ‘HSF’ (half-sheet folio, i.e. a single half-sheet printed on both sides, like the London Gazette) or as ‘folio’, ‘4o’ (quarto) or ‘8o’ (octavo). Format information is usually taken from ESTC. Numbers of pages per issue are also given where relevant. These are for illustration only: for longer publications, in particular, numbers of pages may have varied in practice. Sometimes information is given for an illustrative issue only.
- **Subject.** This category is designed to manifest the distinction between ‘political’ and ‘moral’ comment serials that was discussed in chapter 3. ‘Political’ is defined broadly as comment about the constitution, press, parties, domestic political situation, economy and Church, while ‘moral’ refers to comment that primarily focused on morals and manners, virtues, vices and follies, or more generally was a direct imitation of the *Tatler* or *Spectator*. However, the labels given here are only intended as a guide. Comment serials in practice often contained political and moral content, so the label should not be taken as the exclusive subject of the serial. Some serials are deemed ‘hybrid’ if they appear to have drawn particularly heavily on both traditions. Subject is not given in lists A and B, because all comment serials in these lists were ‘political’.

- **Place of publication.** Self-explanatory.

- **Start/end.** Given in ‘year/month’ format where possible, and just the year where not. In some cases, runs may have continued beyond the end date given, if there is no positive evidence that the last-known issue was actually the final issue, but this is not indicated in the data unless there is any particular reason to think that the serial did indeed continue.

- **Frequency.** Self-explanatory. Given in the form, e.g., ‘1x w’ = ‘1 time a week’.

- **Issues.** Where issues have not survived but are likely to have existed, they are included in the numbering. Where there are variants of an issue, these are suppressed in the numbering. I have endeavoured to make these totals as accurate as possible, by counting issues in NS and McLeod as well as relying on ESTC figures. Nevertheless, minor errors are possible, not least due to occasional inaccuracies in numbering within the serials themselves. As above, the possibility that runs extended beyond the stated figure is only indicated if there is any particular reason to think that the serial did indeed continue beyond the last-known issue.

- An asterisk indicates that I have not seen either a physical or a digital copy of this serial.

Serial-specific notes relating to the data in the appendix, where not already discussed in the main body of the thesis, are given below. These notes are intended neither to provide fuller accounts of particular serials’ origins and content, nor to provide references to general historiography about these serials, but simply to clarify points in the bibliographical data.
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<td>Dialogue</td>
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Notes for List A

- **Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Germany** (1679-80)
  - A Protestant-leaning history of the Reformation. It was part of the opposition/Whig political tradition, but is labelled here as ‘Protestant’, partly because it dates from the period before ‘Whig’ came into use, and partly because it is a purely historical account.

- **Mercurius Reformatus** (1689-94?)
  - A continuous run of 149 issues survives, up to vol. 5, issue 29 (23 July 1692; henceforth cited in the form ‘5.29’). A stray 7.11 (17 March 1694) also survives (although NS erroneously has this as 1693). A pamphlet refers to a 7.24 (30 June 1694). According to Nelson and Seccombe, the sixth and seventh volumes were destroyed during the Second World War. Based on the two volume 7 dates attested here, it appears that this volume began at the start of 1694. It is possible that volume 6 ran for the course of 1693, with volume 5 continuing from 5.29 in July 1692 down to the end of that year. This would mark a change of practice from previous volumes, which all ran to thirty issues, but does not make it impossible, especially because the bulk of volumes 5-7 were written by a different author from volumes 1-4. Whatever the precise bibliographical history of this serial, there were certainly far more than 149 issues.
  - Welwood stopped writing *Mercurius Reformatus* in December 1691, apart from an appendix in early 1692. His replacement as author is uncertain, but a stray reference suggests that Samuel Johnson may have assumed the brief.

- **Weekly Lampoon** (1690-91)
  - Early issues are undated, but I have estimated the start date of this serial by extrapolating from later issues.

- **New Observator** (1701)
  - This is labelled ‘Whig’ for its advocacy of war against France, which was part of a wider Whig campaign in 1701.

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4 See above, p. 155
• *Poetical Observator* (1702-03)
  o A complete run of this serial can be found in Lambeth Palace Library. The 30 issues counted consist of 20 issues in volume 1 and 9 in volume 2 (between October 1702 and January 1703), and then a single issue of the *Poetical Observator Reviv’d* in April 1703.

• *Truth and Honesty* (1704)
  o See McLeod for the details, or rather lack of, about this lost comment serial.⁵

• *Observator Reviv’d* (1707)
  o My reading of this serial suggests it was straightforwardly Whig, although McLeod describes it as dissenting but moderating in tone.⁶
  o The possible attribution to John Pierce is not suggested in McLeod or ESTC, but in a contemporary pamphlet.⁷

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⁵ McLeod, p. 11.
⁶ McLeod, p. 39.
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Notes for List B

- *News from the Land of Chivalry* (1681)
  - This is a satirical biography of the Tory Roger L’Estrange (as ‘Don Rugero de Strangemento’), and therefore had a Whig purpose.

- *Weekly Visions of the Late Popish Plot* (1681)
  - This comprises dream narratives expressing fear about the Popish Plot, and is therefore Whig.

- *Popish Mass Display’d* (1681)
  - This anti-Catholic serial is compatible with Whig politics, but the link is too tenuous to label this ‘Whig’.

- *Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Geneva* (1681)
  - Unlike other *Weekly Pacquet* serials, this is not history but prose discussion. Its anti-dissenter content and its having been printed by Nathaniel Thompson – the proprietor of the *Loyal Protestant* newspaper – mark this out as Tory.

- *Postscript of Advice from Geneva* (1681)
  - Part history, part prose discussion. This is an anti-Calvinist response to Care’s Whig *Weekly Pacquet*, and therefore can be labelled Tory.

- *Englands Monitor* (1682)
  - Anti-dissenter prose discussion, and therefore Tory.

- *Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Geneva* (1683)
  - Its full title suggests that this is anti-Calvinist history, and therefore Tory.

- *Scots Memoirs* (1683)
  - Dialogues between a Whig and a Tory, but the subtitle of the first issue indicates that was aligned with the Tory cause: ‘For Rebellion is as the Sin of Witchcraft’.

- *Friendly Debate* (1688)
  - Dialogues between a ‘city elector’ who defends James II and a ‘country elector’ who opposes his policies. ESTC has this as opposed to James II, but it actually appears to be pro-James, as it was printed ‘with allowance’, and the second issue appears to have the country elector’s objections being successfully answered by the city elector.

- *Dilucidator* (1689)
  - Later issues are undated, so it is unclear when this finished.
• **Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Rome** (1689)
  - Lois Schwoerer attributes this to Slingsby Bethel, as a brief continuation of Henry Care’s original *Weekly Pacquet* after the Glorious Revolution.\(^8\)

• **Dialogue between Father Gifford** (1689)
  - Title suggests that this is Williamite/Whig in alignment.

• **Abhorrence/Observator** (1690)
  - Only the first issue of *Abhorrence* is found on ESTC. However, contemporary and near-contemporary references suggest that there may have been multiple issues of the *Abhorrence*, and that it was subsequently renamed the *Observer*.\(^9\)

• **English Spy, or the Critical Observer** (1693)
  - Not in ESTC. Only in Library of Congress. Catalogue entry indicates that this was a dialogue.

• **Pegasus** (1696)
  - This began as a newspaper, but its final ten issues were a comment serial, on which basis *Pegasus* has been included in the list.

• **Politick Spy** (1701)
  - This is labelled ‘Whig’ for its advocacy of war against France, which was part of a wider Whig campaign in 1701.

• **Observer** (1704)
  - A rival to Tutchin’s *Observer* in the period after Tutchin’s trial.\(^10\)

• **Dialogue between Church and No-Church** (1706)
  - Only the first issue is found on ESTC. All seven issues are included in Joseph Browne’s *State Tracts*.\(^11\)

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\(^10\) A sham that continued Tutchin’s numbering, at a point when Tutchin temporarily ceased his *Observer* in the aftermath of his trial. (There was no official issue between 3.66, on 4 November 1704, and 367, on 6 December 1704.) This sham is referred to in *Rehearsal*, 1.15, 1.17-19, 1.21 (10 November-16 December 1704).

• *Observator* (1706)
  
  John How, the first printer of Tutchin’s *Observator*, placed a notice in the *Daily Courant* on 7 November 1706 that he was now publishing a separate *Observator*, ‘Now written by a Gentleman of Oxford, and not by Mr. TUTCHIN’, with continuous numbering.
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Notes for List C

- **Moderator** (1710)
  - One contemporary reference suggests this was written by Charles Leslie, formerly of the *Rehearsal*. \(^{12}\)

- **Rhapsody** (1712)
  - Discussions of history and literature.

- **Reconciler** (1713)
  - The political leanings of this serial are somewhat unclear, but McLeod suggests that, through its language of moderation, it leaned in a Whig direction. \(^{13}\)

- **Monitor** (1714)
  - Furbank and Owens regard this as probably by Defoe. \(^{14}\)

- **Examiner** (1714-16)
  - The number of issues has been estimated by interpolation from surviving issues, between 1.1 (3 November 1714) and 3.52 (10 March 1716).

- **Freeholder Extraordinary** (1718)
  - The first issue of this serial is numbered as issue 2, because it explicitly continues a single-issue 1716 *Free-Holder Extraordinary* (see below, List D). Hence, although the final issue is numbered as issue 20, there were in fact only 19 issues of this 1718 serial.

- **Manufacturer** (1719-21)
  - *Contra* ESTC, there are 86 issues of this serial. \(^{15}\)

- **Independent Whig** (1720-21)
  - Anti-clerical essays by John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, who later wrote the Opposition Whig essays known as ‘Cato’s Letters’, so the labelling of this serial as ‘political’ and ‘Whig’ is somewhat loose.

- **Director** (1720-21)
  - Furbank and Owens have Defoe as ‘probable’ author. \(^{16}\)

- **Terrae Filius** (1721)
  - Essays attacking the University of Oxford.

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\(^{12}\) See above, p. 173.

\(^{13}\) McLeod, p. 46.


\(^{15}\) Ibid, pp. 253-4.

\(^{16}\) Furbank and Owens, *Critical Bibliography*, pp. 256-7.
• *Knight-Errant* (1729)
  
  Iona Italia indicates that this was *Tatler*-esque, and ESTC describes it as ‘satirical essays’.\(^\text{17}\)

• *Plain Dealer* (1729-30)
  
  Not to be confused with ‘Plain Dealer’s Intelligencer’, which is found in the same collected edition (ESTC T205672), and was an essay section within a newspaper.

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Notes for List D

- *Tea-Table* (1716)
  - A lost serial of Richard Steele.\(^\text{18}\)

- *Free-Holder Extraordinary* (1716)
  - ESTC erroneously presents this as a supplement of Addison’s Whig *Free-Holder*, but it was in fact in a Tory rival. See List C, *Freeholder Extraordinary*, for a later continuation.

- *Monitor* (1724)
  - CK suggests that it may in fact have lasted until 1726, based on a single surviving issue from that year.

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Appendix B. Observators, 1681-1735

This appendix lists all serials containing the term ‘Observator’ in their title or subtitle, in order to illustrate the discussion of the ‘Observator’ tradition in chapter 3. It uses the same categories as Appendix A. A few serials that technically bore the name ‘Observator’ have been excluded for various common-sense reasons:

- *Mercurius Deformatus* (1692). Not regarded as a serial here, despite being included in NS.
- *Post Angel* (1701-02). Contains a ‘spiritual observator’ as one of many sections.
- *Poetical Observator Reviv’d* (1703). Treated here as part of the *Poetical Observer*.
- *General Postscript* (1709). Its title references Tutchin’s *Observer*, to which it responds.
- Any Edinburgh and Dublin reprints.
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The True Character of Mercurius Aulicus (London, 1645)
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Observator (London, 1704)
The Way to Heaven in a String. Or, Mr. A--’s Argument Burlesqu’d. A Poem. Canto I (London,
1700)
The Whigs Speak Truth: Or, Reasons Why We Shall Have No Peace at Last (London, 1713)
The World is Ruled & Governed by Opinion (London, 1642) (BM Satires 272)
Trenchard, John, and Thomas Gordon, Cato’s Letters (London, 1723-24), 4 vols (ESTC
T111010)
Tufton, Sackville, The History of Faction (London, 1705)
Two Letters, the One from the Lord Digby, to the Queens Majestie: The Other from Mr.
Thomas Elliot, to the Lord Digby, with Observations upon the Same Letters (London,
1642)
Verstegan, Richard, Observations Concerning the Present Affaires of Holland and the United
Provinces (London, 1621)
Vox Patriae (London, 1681)
Vox Populi: Or the Peoples Claim to Their Parliaments Sitting, to Redress Grievances, and
Provide for the Common Safety; By the Known Laws and Constitutions of the Nation
(London, 1681)
Ward, Edward, The Dissenting Hypocrite, or Occasional Conformist (London, 1703)
Ward, Edward, The Dissenter (London, 1704)
Ward, Edward, The Secret History of the Calves-Head Club, or the Republican Unmasq’d
(London, 1704) (ESTC T172380)
Ward, Edward, Nuptial Dialogues and Debates (London, 1710)
Ward, Edward, Vulgus Britannicus: Or the British Hudibras (London, 1710) (ESTC T175779)
Welcome, Most Welcome Newes. Mercurius Retrogradus (London, 1647)
Welwood, James, An Appendix to Mercurius Reformatus (London, 1692)
Whigs Defended: Or, the High-Church Saint Detected and Expos’d (London, 1713)
Williams, Gryffith, *An Examination of Such Particulars in the Solemne League and Covenant* (Oxford, 1644)

Williams, John, *A Defence of the Arch-Bishop’s Sermon on the Death of Her Late Majesty* (London, 1695)

Williams, Roger, *A Key into the Language of America* (London, 1643)

Wilson, Thomas, *A Sermon on the Martyrdom of King Charles I* (London, 1682)


Wither, George, *The Great Assises Holden in Parnassus* (London, 1645)


Woodward, Ezekias, *Inquiries, into the Causes of Our Miseries, Whence They Issue-Forth upon Us: And Reasons Wherefore They Have Born-Us Down so Low, and Are Like to Carry Us Yet Lower* (London 1644)

Woodward, John, *An Essay Toward a Natural History of the Earth* (London, 1695)

**Newspapers**

*Anti-Aulicus* (1644) (NS 14)

*Applebee’s Original Weekly Journal* (1714-37?) (CK 662)

*Britanicus Vapulans* (Oxford, 1643) (NS 29)

*British Journal* (1722-31?) (CK 62)

*British Mercury* (1710-16) (CK 73)

*British Observer* (1733-35) (CK 1079)

*Champion* (1739-43?) (CK 101)

*City Mercury* (?-1692-95-?) (NS 44)

*Common Sense* (1737-43?) (CK 114)

*Compleate Intelligencer and Resolver* (1643) (NS 52)

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1 In this bibliography, serials are divided into three categories: ‘newspapers’, ‘comment serials’ and ‘miscellaneous serials’. ‘Newspapers’ broadly covers the varieties of news serial as outlined in chapter 2, although for convenience all serials printed before the early 1660s are included in this section, including the few minor serials that are identified above, pp. 135-6, as having been explicitly centred on comment. I cite them here using the short form of title used throughout this thesis; full bibliographical information can be found by pursuing the given references to NS, CK, ESTC and elsewhere. All of these serials were printed in London, unless otherwise stated.
Craftsman (1726-50) (CK 152)
Current Intelligence (1681) (NS 85)
Daily Courant (1702-35) (CK 164)
Daily Gazetteer (1735-1800+) (CK 165)
Daily Journal (1721-37) (CK 166)
Daily Post (1719-46) (CK 167)
Diurnall Occurrences (1641-42) (NS 97)
Diutinus Britanicus (1646-47) (NS 111)
English Post (1700-09?) (NS 135)
Evening Post (1709-32) (CK 222)
Faithfull Scout (1651-55) (NS 150)
Faithfull Scout (1659-60) (NS 151)
Flying Post (1695-1733) (NS 156)
Flying Post and Medley (1714) (CK 1322a)
Freeholders Journal (1722-23) (CK 250)
General Post (1711) (CK 1354)
Hermes Stratjcus (1648) (NS 185)
Historical Register (1716-38) (CK 310)
Impartial Protestant Mercury (1681-82) (NS 637)
Intelligencer/Newes (1663-66) (NS 201)
Jesuite (1719) (CK 1468)
Kingdomes Weekly Intelligencer (1643-49) (NS 214)
Kingdomes Weekly Post (1643-44) (NS 217)
London Gazette (1665-present) (NS 471)
London Journal (1719-44) (CK 396)
London Mercury (1682) (NS 227)
London Post (1699-1705) (NS 235)
London Post (1644-45) (NS 233)
Loyal London Mercury (1682) (NS 242)
Loyal Observator Reviv’d (1722-23) (CK 1548)
Loyal Protestant (1681-83) (NS 245)
Man in the Moon (1649-50) (NS 248)
Martin Nonsense (1648) (NS 252)

2 This began as a comment serial.
Master Mercury (1704) (ESTC P6523)
Memoirs of the Present State of Europe (1692-93) (NS 256)
Mercurius Academicus (Oxford, 1645-46) (NS 260)
Mercurius Aulico-Mastix (1644) (NS 272)
Mercurius Aulicus (Oxford, 1643-45) (NS 275)
Mercurius Aulicus (1660) (NS 278)
Mercurius Bellicus (1647-48) (NS 279)
Mercurius Bellonius (1652) (NS 280)
Mercurius Bifrons (1681) (NS 281)
Mercurius Britannicus (1643-46) (NS 286)
Mercurius Britannicus (1648) (NS 282)
Mercurius Britannicus (1652) (NS 283)
Mercurius Britannicus (1653) (NS 287)
Mercurius Brittanicus (1649) (NS 285)
Mercurius Censorius (1648) (NS 296)
Mercurius Civicus (1643-46) (NS 298)
Mercurius Clericus (1647) (NS 301)
Mercurius Democritus (1652-54) (NS 307)
Mercurius Dogmaticus (1648) (NS 309)
Mercurius Elencticus (1647-49) (NS 312)
Mercurius Elencticus (1649) (NS 316)
Mercurius Elencticus [sic] (1650) (NS 318)
Mercurius Fumigosus (1654-55) (NS 322)
Mercurius Heraclitus (1652) (NS 328)
Mercurius Honestus (1648) (NS 331)
Mercurius Honestus (1660) (NS 332)
Mercurius Melancholicus (1647-48) (NS 344)
Mercurius Militaris (1649) (NS 349)
Mercurius Morbicus (1647) (NS 350)
Mercurius Nullus (1654) (NS 352)
Mercurius Phanaticus (1660) (NS 354)
Mercurius Phreneticus (1652) (NS 356)
Mercurius Phreneticus (1652) (NS 357)
Mercurius Poeticus (1654) (NS 359)
Mercurius Politicus/Publick Intelligencer (1650/55-60) (NS 361/575)
Mercurius Pragmaticus (1647-49) (NS 369)
Mercurius Pragmaticus (1649-50) (NS 370)
Mercurius Pragmaticus (1651) (NS 373)
Mercurius Pragmaticus (1653) (NS 374)
Mercurius Psitacus (1648) (NS 375)
Mercurius Publicus (1648) (NS 377)
Mercurius Rusticus (Oxford, 1643-44) (NS 384)
Mercurius Veridicus (1648) (NS 391)
Mist’s Weekly Journal (1716-37) (CK 928)
Moderate (1648-49) (NS 413)
Moderate Intelligencer (1645-49) (NS 419)
Modern History (1687-89) (NS 429)
Monthly Register (1703-07) (CK 579)
New Christian Uses (1643) (NS 439)
New State of Europe (1701) (NS 4438)
News from Parnassus (1681) (NS 445)
Nouvelles Ordinaires (1650-63?) (NS 454)
Observations Historical, Political, and Philosophical (1654) (NS 455)
Observator (1654) (NS 461)
Occurrences (1659) (NS 463)
Old Post-Master (1696) (NS 467)
Original London Post (1717-38?) (CK 1824)
Orphan Reviv’d (1718-20) (CK 663)
Orphan (1716) (CK 1825)
Parliament-Kite (1648) (NS 483)
Parliament Scout (1643-45) (NS 485)
Parliamentary Intelligencer/Mercurius Publicus (1659/60-63) (NS 486/378)
Parliaments Scrich-Owle (1648) (NS 489)
Parliaments Vulture (1648) (NS 490)
Pegasus (1696) (NS 495)3
Perfect Diurnall (1642-55) (NS 507/509/513/504/503)
Perfect Occurrences (1644-49) (NS 465)
Perfect Passages (1650-53) (NS 524)

3 This became a comment serial.
Perfect Summary (1649) (NS 530)
Politick Commentary on the Life of Caius July Cæsar (1654) (NS 542)
Poor Robin’s Intelligence (1676-77) (NS 548)
Post Boy (1695-1736?) (NS 554)
Post Man (1695-1730) (NS 555)
Present State of Europe (1690-1738) (NS 557)
Protestant (Domestick) Intelligence (1679-81) (NS 112)
Protestant Courant (1682) (NS 568)
Protestant Post Boy (1711-12) (CK 759)
Publick Occurrences Truely Stated (1688) (NS 577)
Read’s Weekly Journal (1715-61) (CK 927)
Robin’s Last Shift (1716) (CK 789)
Royall Diurnall (1648) (NS 588)
Royall Diurnall (1650) (NS 587)
Scotch Mercury (1643) (NS 591)
Scotish Dove (1643-46) (NS 594)
Shift Shifted (1716-17) (ESTC P1450)
Shift’s Last Shift (1717) (ESTC P6414)
Smith’s Protestant Intelligence (1681) (NS 602)
Some Speciall Passages (1642) (NS 606)
Spie (1644) (NS 609)
St James’s Journal (1722-23) (ESTC P1734)
St James’s Weekly Journal (1719-20) (CK 1968)
True Informer (1643-45) (NS 629)
True Protestant Mercury (1680-82) (NS 636)
Universal Journal (1723-24) (CK 2082)
Universal Spectator (1728-46) (CK 908)
Weekly Intelligencer (1650-55) (NS 688)
Weekly Medley (1718-20) (CK 933)
Weekly Remarks and Political Reflections (1715-16) (CK 946)
Welch Mercury (1643-44) (NS 708)
Comment serials

*Abhorrence/Observator* (Dublin, 1690) (ESTC P2239: issue 1)

*Advocate* (1720-21) (CK 6)

*Advocate* (1725) (CK 1012)

*Answers to the Objections* (1697) (NS 13)

*Anti-Theatre* (1720) (CK 21)

*Auditor* (1733) (CK 34)

*Balm of Gilead* (1714) (CK 1041)

*Bibliotheca Politica* (1692-94) (NS 24)

*Britain* (1713) (CK 58)

*British Merchant* (1713-14) (CK 72)

*British Merchant* (1719-20) (CK 1075)

*Briton* (1723-24) (CK 80)

*Casuist* (1719-20) (CK 1098)

*Censor* (1717) (CK 95)

*Censor* (1726) (CK 1100)

*Censura Temporum* (1708-10) (CK 96)

*Chit-Chat* (1716) (CK 1109)

*Christian Priest* (1720) (CK 1111)

*Citizen* (1716) (CK 1117)

*Citizen* (1727) (CK 152)

*Coffee-House Mercury* (1690) (NS 47)

*Commentator* (1720) (CK 1133)

*Controller* (1714-15) (CK 1150)

*Country Gentleman* (1726) (CK 1165)

*Critick* (1718) (CK 157)

*Cry from the Wilderness* (1712) (CK 1177)

*Daily Benefactor* (1715) (CK 1183)

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*Comment serials* are defined here as in chapter 3. This list is essentially an alphabetised version of Appendix A (where further bibliographical detail can be found), with a few exceptions: a few post-1730 comment serials are included here (the *Auditor, Monitor, Prompter* and *Rambler*, plus a minor 1746 *Observator* of sorts), and two newspapers that became comment serials, *Pegasus* and the *Craftsman*, are excluded from this list, because they are listed under ‘newspapers’. This list also excludes a few minor serials of the civil war period that were explicitly defined in terms of comment, which are listed under ‘newspapers’ for convenience.
Democritus Ridens (1681) (NS 91)
Dialogue Between Church and No-Church (1706) (ESTC N9835: issue 1)
Dialogue Between Father Gifford (1689) (NS 91A)
Dialogue Between Two Friends (1689) (NS 92)
Dilucidator (1689) (NS 95)
Director (1720-21) (CK 1201)
Doctor (1718) (CK 1205)
Dunton’s Ghost (1714) (ESTC P2745)
Englands Monitor (1682) (NS 125)
English Examiner (1715) (CK 1264)
English Spy (1693) (NS 136)
English Spy (1699) (NS 137)
Englishman (1713-15) (CK 212)
Entertainer (1717-18) (CK 215)
Europes Transactions (1689) (NS 141)
Examiner (1710-14) (CK 226)
Examiner (1714-16) (CK 1293)
Female Tatler (1709) (ESTC P1872)
Female Tatler (1709-10) (CK 236)
Free Briton (1727) (CK 246)
Free Briton (1729-35) (CK 245)
Free-Holder (1715-16) (CK 248)
Free-Holder Extraordinary (1716) (ESTC P2082)
Freeholder Extraordinary (1718) (CK 249)
Free-Thinker (1711) (CK 253)
Free-Thinker (1718-21) (CK 254)
Free-Thinker Extraordinary (1718-19) (CK 255)
Friendly Debate (1688) (NS 162)
Gazette a-la-Mode (1709) (CK 1342)
General History of Trade (1713) (CK 263)
General Postscript (1709) (CK 1358)
Grouler (1711) (CK 1392)
Grumbler (1715) (CK 1393)
Guardian (1713) (CK 292)
Heraclitus Ridens (1681-82) (NS 183)
Heraclitus Ridens (1703-04) (CK 1407)
Heraclitus Ridens (1718) (CK 1406)
Hermit (1711-12) (CK 300)
High-German Doctor (1714-15) (CK 303)
History of Reformation (1681) (NS 190)
Honest Gentleman (1718-19) (CK 320)
Honest True Briton (1724) (CK 1425)
Hyp Doctor (1730-41) (CK 324)
Idler (1714) (CK 1435A)
Independent Whig (1720-21) (CK 329)
Inquisitor (1711) (CK 1446)
Inquisitor (1724) (CK 1446)
Instructor (1715) (CK 1449)
Instructor (1724) (CK 1450)
Intelligrencer (Dublin, 1728-29) (CK 333)
Knight-Errant (1729) (CK 1729)
Lay-Monk (1713-14) (CK 364)
Lover (1714) (CK 416)
Loyal Observator (1704) (CK 1547)
Manufacturer (1719-21) (CK 1570)
Medley (1710-12) (CK 442)
Medley (1712) (ESTC P479138)
Medley (1715) (CK 1582)
Medley (1715) (CK 1585)
Mercator (1713-14) (CK 449)
Mercurius Politicus (1705) (CK 514)
Mercurius Reformatus (1691) (NS 381)
Mercurius Reformatus, or the New Observator (1689-94?) (NS 379)
Mercury (Edinburgh, 1717) (CK 1665)
Merry Observator (1691) (NS 400)
Mirrour (1719) (CK 1677)
Miscellany (1711) (CK 1682)
Moderator (1692) (NS 428)
Moderator (1705) (CK 1702)
Moderator (1710) (CK 558)
Moderator (1719) (CK 559)
Moderator (1721) (CK 1703)
Monitor (1714) (CK 564)
Monitor (1724) (CK 565)
Monitor (1727) (ESTC P6049)
Monitor (1755-65) (CK 566)
Muscovite (1714) (CK 1736)
New Dialogue (1681) (NS 440)
New Heraclitus Ridens (1689) (NS 441)
New Observer (1701) (NS 443A)
New Observer (1704) (CK 1758)
News from the Fairy Island (1726) (ESTC P2236)
News from the Land of Chivalry (1681) (NS 448)
North Tatler (Edinburgh, 1710) (CK 1784)
Observations upon the Most Remarkable Occurrences (1693) (NS 457)
Observer (1681-87) (NS 458)
Observer (1688) (NS 460)
Observer (1702-12) (CK 634)
Observer (1704) (n/a)\(^5\)
Observer (1706?) (n/a)\(^6\)
Observer (1715) (CK 1798)
Observer (1718) (CK 1796)
 Observer (1724-25) (CK 1798)
Observer (Edinburgh, 1705-06) (CK 1799)
Observer Observ’d (1681) (NS 459)
Observer Reformed (1704-05) (CK 1800)
Observer Reviv’d (1707) (CK 638)
Observer; or Remarks on the Impartial Examiner (Dublin, 1746) (ESTC P6101)
Occasional Courant (1716-17) (CK 1804)
Occasional Historian (1730-32) (CK 1805)
Occasional Paper (1697-98) (NS 462)
Occasional Paper (1716-19) (CK 642)

\(^5\) See Appendix A, List B.
\(^6\) See Appendix A, List B.
Occasional Writer (1727) (CK 643)
Old Whig (1719) (CK 650)
Pacquet of Advice from France (1691) (NS 476)
Parrot (1728) (CK 1837)
Pasquin (1722-24) (CK 688)
Patrician (1719) (CK 689)
Patriot (1714-15) (CK 690)
Patriot (1721) (CK 1841)
Pilgrim (1711) (CK 1874)
Plain Dealer (1712) (CK 719)
Plain Dealer (1717) (CK 1876)
Plain Dealer (1724-25) (CK 720)
Plain Dealer (Dublin, 1729-30) (ESTC P6122)
Plebeian (1719) (CK 723)
Poetical Observer (1702-03) (CK 1885, CK 1885A)
Political Tatler (1716) (CK 1890)
Politick Spy (1701) (NS 544A)
Popish Mass Display’d (1681) (NS 553)
Postscript of Advice from Geneva (1681) (NS 556)
Projector (1721) (CK 1905)
Prompter (1734-36) (CK 752)
Protestant Advocate (1724) (CK 1906)
Protestant Observer/Democritus Flens (1681) (NS 570)
Rambler (1712) (CK 1926)
Rambler (1750-52) (CK 771)
Reader (1714) (CK 774)
Reconciler (1713) (CK 1929)
Rehearsal (1704-09) (CK 635)
Rehearsal Rehears’d (1706) (CK 1935)
Rehearsal Reviv’d (1709) (McLeod, p. 47)
Reprisal (1717) (CK 1947)
Restorer (1711) (CK 1948)
Review (1704-13) (CK 947)
Reviewer Reviewed (1705) (ESTC N64816 et al)
Rhyspody (1712) (CK 1953)
Scots Memoirs (1683) (NS 593)
Scots Observator (1708) (CK 1984)
Scourge (1717) (CK 819)
Seasonable Writer (1727) (CK 1992)
Senator (1728) (CK 1996)
Serious Thoughts (1710) (CK 1997)
Silent Monitor (1711) (CK 2001)
Some Seasonable Queries (1696-97?) (NS 604)
Spectator (1711-12, 1714) (CK 832)
Spectator (1715) (CK 2010)
Spectator (1716) (ESTC P3131)
Spinster (1719) (CK 837)
Spy (1720-21) (CK 2016)
Surprize (1711) (CK 2027)
Tatler (1709-11) (CK 850)
Tatler (1711) (ESTC P6573)
Tatler (Edinburgh, 1711) (CK 851)
Tatler Revived (1727-28) (CK 2030)
Tatling Harlot (1709) (CK 2032)
Tea-Table (1716) (CK 2033)
Tea-Table (1724) (CK 2034)
Terrae-Filius (1721) (CK 855)
Test-Paper (1688) (NS 610)
Theatre (1720) (CK 858)
Titt for Tatt (1710) (CK 2046)
Tory Tatler (1710-11) (CK 2050)
Town Talk (1715-16) (CK 876)
Tribune (Dublin, 1729) (CK 878)
True Briton (1723-24) (CK 884)
True Protestant Mercury (1689-90) (NS 635)
Truth and Honesty (1704?) (McLeod, p. 11)
Visions of Sir Heister Ryley (1710-11) (CK 912)
Visiter (1723-24) (CK 2099)
Wanderer (1717) (CK 915)
Weaver (1719-20) (CK 2110)
Weekly Discoverer Strip’d Naked (1681) (NS 680)
Weekly Discovery (1681) (NS 681)
Weekly Lampoon/Momus Ridens (1690-91) (NS 691)
Weekly Memorial (1692) (NS 692)
Weekly Observator (1716) (CK 2141)
Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Geneva (1681) (NS 700)
Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Geneva (1683) (NS 699)
Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Germany (1679-80) (NS 701)
Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Ireland (1690) (NS 702)
Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Rome (1678-83) (NS 477)
Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Rome (1682-83) (NS 478)
Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Rome (1689) (NS 703)
Weekly Remarks (1691) (NS 705)
Weekly Visions of the Late Popish Plot (1681) (NS 707)
When All Is Done (1689) (NS 711)
Whig Examiner (1710) (CK 955)
Whigg (1718) (CK 2160A)
Whipping Post (1705) (CK 2162)
Whisperer (1709) (CK 2163)

Miscellaneous serials

Account of the Proceedings (1683+) (NS 9)
Athenian Mercury (1691-97) (NS 21)
Collection for Improvement of Husbandry and Trade (1692-1703) (NS 49)
Collection of Letters for the Improvement of Husbandry & Trade (1681-84) (NS 50)
Comical Observator (1704) (CK 1131)
Diverting Post (1704-06) (CK 177)
Gentleman’s Journal (1692-94) (NS 170)
Gentleman’s Journal for the War (1693-96) (NS 169)
Hippocrates Ridens (1686) (NS 186)
History of the Works of the Learned (1699-1712) (NS 191)

7 This includes any serials not listed as ‘newspapers’ or ‘comment serials’, and all non-British serials.
Journal des Scavans (Paris, 1665+)
London Spy (1698-1700) (NS 236)
Mercure Galant (Paris, 1672+)
Mercure Historique et Politique (The Hague, 1686+)
Mercurius Gallobelgicus (Cologne, 1594+)
Infallible Astrologer (1700-01) (NS 197)
Observations on the Weekly Bill (1686) (NS 456)
Philosophical Observer (1695) (NS 538)
Philosophical Transactions (1665-present) (NS 539)
Poetical Courant (1706) (CK 725)
Supplementary Journal, to the Advice from the Scandal. Club (1704-05) (ESTC P1865)
Votes of the House of Commons (1680-81) (NS 647)
Wandering Spy (1705) (CK 2106)
Weekly Remembrancer (1702-03) (CK 2148)

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