

Review Articles

Perfect Diurnalls

Clarence S. Brigham, who knows more about early American newspapers than anybody else, once declared—it was in the preamble to his monumental *History and Bibliography of American Newspapers 1690-1820*—that he had never lost faith in the value of newspapers as tools of research. There are two good reasons why historians have been reluctant to accept newspapers as significant sources. One of those reasons is that the substance of these ephemeral papers, no matter in what language, no matter when or where printed, comes invariably from the pens of men who write in a hurry and often seem more concerned to print the “novel” than the truthful. News is not always the product of a newsmonger’s skill in concocting sensational accounts or in varnishing the truth, but with rare exceptions a newswriter pens his lines with less personal involvement than the authors of letters and diaries, with less sense of writing the irrevocable than the drawer-up of papal bulls, international treaties, and records of the courts. Such documents as these the historian prefers; newspapers he looks on with disdain because they are transitory, evanescent sheets, here today, gone tomorrow. There are those who quote the byword, *vox populi, vox dei*, and suggest that there is no kind of publication that more obviously speaks with the voice of the people than the newspapers which, for more than three centuries now, have been read by Englishmen. In fairness to historians who read newspapers but do not value them as “sources” for their scholarly writing, it will be admitted that a bulletin of very mundane news—much of it foreign—usually has little of divine communication in it; and it must also be admitted that hastily scribbled accounts of exciting events may be inaccurate. Too often rumour serves instead of well-attested statements, though it is now widely recognized that domestic newspapers—especially those of bygone days—reflect, as nothing else can, the current of interests and the sequence of events as they came before readers who could not be expected to wait until sober historians sorted out the facts from the conjectures and gave them textbook dignity and dullness.

Distrust of newspapers as records, however, has not been the only deterrent to their acceptance as useful documents. Historians dealing with man’s activities in modern

Europe and America have left the daily and weekly papers of former times unread for another and a better reason: the papers themselves have been inaccessible and to a considerable extent unknown. Until a century ago, indeed, practically no one, except Charles Burney and John Nichols, felt that there was any reason to concern himself with the history of newspapers, and it was not until the present century that scholarly studies were written and finding-lists compiled. It was well known in England and America, of course, that anyone interested in consulting early issues of the *London Gazette* or some other newspaper could find an extensive collection in the Bodleian Library, that the British Museum had many newspapers besides those in the Burney volumes and the Thomason pamphlets, and that scattered issues or reasonably good files might be seen in newspaper offices and in a few private libraries. American scholars were aware that odd volumes or odd issues of English and Scottish newspapers—as well as papers printed in the United States—were in the Library of Congress, at Harvard and Yale, and in a few other places; but on both sides of the Atlantic there was little disposition to search for crudely printed early newspapers or later papers printed in cruelly fine type, particularly when the harvest might prove to be all chaff and no wheat. Then just over half a century ago, J. G. Muddiman published his *History of English Journalism to the Foundation of the Gazette* (London: Longmans, Green, 1908) and contributed "The Beginning of English Journalism" to the *Cambridge History of English Literature* (VII, pp. 389-415). It was no longer necessary to depend on the general accounts of Alexander Andrews, H. R. Fox Bourne, and James Grant, particularly after the publication of the *Tercentenary Handlist of English & Welsh Newspapers, Magazines, & Reviews* (London: *The Times*, 1920).

The past thirty-five years have witnessed a phenomenal development in the English-speaking world's knowledge of its own newspapers, especially those of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Since the publication in 1927 of *A Census of British Newspapers and Periodicals 1620-1800*, prepared by R. S. Crane and F. B. Kaye, there have been notable studies of early newspapers and several indispensable bibliographical works. This is not the place to list such publications, but in order to establish the point reference should be made to Stanley Morison's sumptuously illustrated volume, *The English Newspaper—Some Account of the Physical Development of Journals Printed in London between 1622 and the Present Day* (Cambridge: University Press, 1932), to the astonishingly bulky volume, *Studies of British Newspapers and Periodicals from Their Beginning to 1800: A Bibliography*, compiled by Katherine Kirtley Weed and Richmond Pugh Bond (1946), and Dr. Brigham's very thoroughgoing work on American newspapers, mentioned above. From these and subsequent studies it is clear that the sheer number and bulk of early newspapers might well discourage all scholars except those primarily interested in the history of the press itself. What social or economic or political historian could be expected to look at the more than two thousand separate periodical publications

that were printed in the British Isles between the first news bulletins of 1620 and the end of the eighteenth century?

Before those early newspapers could be properly assessed as useful or useless documents from the historian's point of view there had to be much solid research by scholars whose primary intention would be to make the papers accessible and their inter-relations intelligible. Some valuable contributions have been made in recent years. Much more remains to be done, for there are many influential early newspapers that deserve the sort of careful and detailed study which Professor Robert L. Haig made recently of the eighteenth-century London paper, the *Gazetteer*; and some patient scholar will be doing a great service to historians if he investigates the authorship, circulation, and influence of those numerous written newsletters so widely quoted in provincial newspapers in the eighteenth century. It is symptomatic of the increased interest in early newspapers that two completely independent studies of English provincial journalism are soon to be published.

A notable demonstration that solid research has gone into the history of newspapers is to be seen in a book recently completed by Professor Joseph Frank of the University of Rochester.* In a work which adds significantly to what is known of the early phases of English journalism, Mr. Frank deals with the most complex and in many ways the most important part of the story. The subject had already received attention from Elbert N. S. Thompson, Matthias A. Shaaber, James Westfall Thompson, Laurence Hanson, and especially Folke Dahl, whose *Bibliography of English Corantos and Periodical News-books, 1620-1642* (London: Bibliographical Society, 1952) remains the fundamental list for the period covered. There have also been special studies of particular papers and particular journalists of the seventeenth century: Henry R. Plomer's analysis of *Mercurius Civicus* (*The Library*, 2nd ser., VI [1905], pp. 184-207); J. G. Muddiman's "Henry Walker, Journalist of the Commonwealth" (*Nineteenth Century and After*, LXIII [1908], 454-464); G. E. Manwaring's article, "Journalism in the Days of the Commonwealth" (*Edinburgh Review*, CCXLIV [1926], pp. 105-120); Elmer A. Beller's "Milton and 'Mercurius Politicus'" (*Huntington Library Quarterly*, V. [1941-42], pp. 479-487); J. Milton French's further consideration of *Mecurius Politicus* (*Studies in Philology*, XXXIII [1936], pp. 236-252); and Frederick J. Varley's account of *Mercurius Aulicus* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1948). And there have been many treatises on particular aspects of seventeenth-century politics and economics, the Post Office, printing, the Stationers' Company, and the freedom of the press.

It cannot be said, therefore, that Professor Frank is the pioneer in this area of research, and readers unaware of the extreme complexity of the matter may question

* *The Beginnings of the English Newspaper, 1620-1660*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press [Toronto: S. J. Reginald Saunders], 1961. Pp. x, 384. \$7.75.

whether his book is necessary. Is he merely revising the work of predecessors or merely bringing together their several bits and pieces?

It must be said at once that the writing of this book was inevitable. What needed doing was a comprehensive study of the beginnings of English journalism, a book making use of every possible bibliographical aid provided by others, but based on first-hand examination of the papers themselves—all of them which are still extant. Mr. Frank's earlier work on the Levellers required him to consult some of the London newspapers printed in the sixth decade of the seventeenth century, and he found that there was, as he says in the Preface of the present volume, "no short cut by way of a good book on the beginnings of English journalism". He has now written that book, and it is a good one.

Thanks to the compiler of the Thomason catalogue and to the painstaking work of Laurence Hanson and Folke Dahl, Mr. Frank had little difficulty in finding out precisely what news-books—the word "newspaper" was not used until later—had been published in the first forty years of English journalism and which of them were represented by surviving copies. He had simply to go where the papers were, or to bring them to his own desk by means of the miracle of microfilm. As Huntington Fellow in 1955-56 and as holder of a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation fellowship in 1958-59, he spent many months at certain American libraries in which there are collections of seventeenth-century news-books. Other libraries in the United States, and all those in the United Kingdom, were visited by proxy; the microfilm camera brought to Mr. Frank many thousands of pages not directly accessible to him so long as he remained in North America. On first thought, this failure to visit Britain in order to make a personal search for collections and single issues might have prevented his writing a satisfactory book, but no one can charge Mr. Frank with not having read the primary sources—the news-books themselves.

Now, what has Mr. Frank done to make this mass of material intelligible to scholars whose acquaintance with early news-books is limited, if not bewildering? Using an image not strictly accurate yet apt enough, he gives the "biography" of an organism which first emerged as a recognizable offspring of England in November, 1641, twenty-one years (though it was not full-grown) after Pieter van den Keere had published at Amsterdam the earliest newspaper in the English language. (Mr. Frank includes in his illustrations a photograph of the two small folio pages comprising van den Keere's paper, which, curiously, had no title.) The made-in-England newspaper grew through "childhood" (January to September, 1643), "adolescence" (September, 1643, to September, 1647), came of age during the following months, achieved maturity in the second half of 1648, and came to an end in 1649, to be followed by lineal descendants, the Commonwealth and the Protectorate papers. The story here told stops in June, 1660.

It is an involved story, for there are in Mr. Frank's "Index of Seventeenth-Century Newspapers" over four hundred titles, each representing a separate publication, though many of them never continued beyond "Number 1". With Mr. Frank's help one may

distinguish one *Perfect Diurnall* from the other papers so called; may separate as well as can be done each paper called *Diurnall Occurrences* from the thirteen others with these two words at the beginning of their titles; may follow with a minimum of confusion the varied titles of the eighty-two papers called *Mercurius*, from *Mercurius &c* to *Mercurius Zeteticus*.

In the fourteen chapters which follow his brief account of "the Un-English English Newspaper: 1620-1642" Mr. Frank discusses the attempts made by scores of eager journalists to provide in their small-page pamphlets week-by-week accounts of the events that were subsequently recorded as history—some of it highly significant history, for it was a time of momentous disturbances and controversies. In the author's view the twenty years from 1641 to 1660 saw some really interesting developments in the modes of reporting news, the printed bulletins of news exhibiting "many characteristics of modern mass journalism". He has little to say about the written newsletters, though he recognizes that they comprise "a rich vein for the historian well into the eighteenth century". By 1660 journalism had become, as he puts it, "a business and a job, not a hobby".

The detailed account which Mr. Frank gives of this complex matter is worth reading, for the beginnings of so important a medium of communication as the modern newspaper are, beyond question, significant, and not solely to sociologists or historians of journalism. It is worth reading, moreover, because Mr. Frank writes with enthusiasm and without prejudice. It would have been comparatively easy to prepare a dull, if informative, book on the beginnings of the English newspaper. Mr. Frank's book is not dull. He has a firm command of his complex material, and he never allows his sense of proportion to waver. His enthusiasm is contagious, partly because his quotations from the papers are good but not too numerous, partly because his own observations are succinct and illuminating. At one point, for instance, in discussing the irregular career of *A Continuation Of certaine Speciall and Remarkable Passages*, Mr. Frank suggests that the paper may have been edited by Samuel Pecke, but he admits in a note that his conjecture is dubious, the editor of the paper having casually mentioned in one of his columns in November, 1645, that he had been born in Buckingham, not in Leicester.

. . . *A Continuation*, though not quite so orderly or complete as *A Perfect Diurnall*, was at least average in its accuracy and comprehensiveness, and above average in its political tightrope-walking. The editor gave equal space and approval to Presbyterians and Independents; and none of his views was overly partisan enough to explain why *A Continuation* was put out of business. In any case, the paper was around long enough to bequeath an interesting letter to posterity. In February 1646 the editor claimed that the Royalist cause had grown so desperate that he seconded the advice given to a cavalier to leave England and start a plantation in the West Indies. *A Continuation* then printed a letter from there telling the fugitive what to bring. The list included a small frying pan, two pairs of linen drawers, £500, and, if possible, three of four "labouring men".

Any man who was in London at the time this letter was published could have

purchased his paper from a field of sixteen weeklies. Indeed, in terms of the total number of separate newspapers 1645 was the most prolific year in the history of pre-Restoration journalism; and between the beginning of that year and March 1646 the average week saw fourteen newspapers for sale. When this number was temporarily reduced, it may have been a relief not only to the printers and publishers allowed to stay in business, but to the buyer tempted by competing yet similar papers and accosted by their noisy hawkers.

These two paragraphs are a fair sample of Mr. Frank's writing.

On the value of the papers themselves as "sources" Mr. Frank is refreshingly unprejudiced. Knowing more about Commonwealth and pre-Commonwealth newspapers than anyone else, he might have been expected to insist on their unique value as first-hand documents. They are, of course, first-hand documents for the history of early journalism, and obviously they bear weekly testimony to the progress of events in their time; but Mr. Frank makes no claim that they are indispensable for the writing of history.

Enough records of battles exist so that the military historians could skip the weekly press without much loss, while the scholar interested in continental affairs could also find fuller and more accurate sources. Even many of the sensational human-interest and prodigy stories were duplicated in ballads and broadsides. Further, there are certain lively problems in English history to which the press contributes no final solution.

Mr. Frank sees two facets of Interregnum history on which, he says, the press collectively casts new light. He finds convincing evidence in the pre-Restoration newspapers that London was at the centre of all things English. "The early weeklies give the overwhelming impression that the role of the metropolis was closer to that of Paris in eighteenth-century France than most historians have assumed." Mr. Frank's reading of the seventeenth-century newspapers convinces him, moreover, that the "Puritan Revolution" was much more secular in its principles than many scholars have supposed. Almost every weekly newspaper, he says, "gave some space to pious asides and exhortations, and God was often actively in the news"; but this show of piety had more of convention than of conviction: "most Interregnum publicists used the deity as a slogan rather than a mystery"

Editorial predilections and prejudices, in other words, are clearly detectable in the Commonwealth journals; journalism did not long remain a perfunctory printing of second-hand foreign dispatches. And there is more that can be said in praise of early journalists. It is pleasant to find, in a book which is itself written with admirable clarity, the observation that seventeenth-century journalists wrote good prose. Such men as Richard Collings, John Dillingham, and Marchmont Nedham wrote in vigorous and telling style. Whether their editorial competence and their trustworthiness as to fact or opinion were such as to justify the attention of twentieth-century historians may still be

questioned; but Mr. Frank's concentrated effort has made it much easier for students of Commonwealth affairs in England to turn to the contemporary newspapers with some hope of perceiving the *vox populi*. The voice of God is another matter.

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The Intricacies of Political Commitment in Literature

At a time when it became common for certain writers to express their socialistic leanings through their works of fiction, some left-wing intellectuals began to apply Marxist principles to literary criticism. The majority of non-committed readers, writers, and critics responded with violent protestation: literature, painting, and music—so they asserted—cease to be art when they cease to be free; cease to be a higher form of human expression as they become a means for political propaganda. Thereupon the Marxists retorted that there never was such a thing as freedom in art: always in history creative men had to conform, or to compromise with the tastes and preferences of their imperial, royal, clerical, aristocratic, or bourgeois commissioners. The controversy, temporarily interrupted by World War II, flared up even more violently as peace bells rang in the cold war, which gave to the debate a new and more universal meaning; in 1945 Jean-Paul Sartre, the *maître à penser* of a European generation approaching today the age of thirty-five, set the problem of political commitment in literature with his customary imperative precision, obliging thus the most indifferent of his readers to take a stand on the issue. Soon afterwards the case of Shostakovich and more recently that of Pasternak were considered with passionate interest the world over.

Recent discussions of the political attitudes of the Frenchman Andre Gide (e.g. *Dalhousie Review*, Spring, 1962, pp. 113-115) prompt an appraisal of another author, often ardently discussed by booklovers and friends of the theatre, the German Bertolt Brecht. This grandson of Bavarian peasants was more daring and outspoken in his rebellion against bourgeois society than the wealthy and over-civilized Gide. In 1917 Brecht had to interrupt his studies in order to serve in the medical corps of the German Imperial Army, where he was asked to help amputate the limbs of hundreds of his wounded compatriots. Honourably discharged in 1918, he had become an aggressive pacifist, a moral and emotional anarchist, accepting no traditional order in any sphere, exteriorizing for

the time being his latent subversiveness in ways that have since become "conventional" for young rebels of his kind: he wore a black leather jacket and a workman's cap over a hair-style borrowed from the busts of Roman emperors; managed mysteriously to have always a two-day-old beard; cultivated what was then the new jazz; frightened honourable Munich pedestrians with a ramshackle hot-rod; and was occasionally heard singing street ballads in the poor wards of the town. His singing, by the way, is said to have been quite fascinating, and not only for the poor: "95 per cent of all his women he entranced by his warbling", said one of his contemporaries, whose prosaic matter-of-fact precision we cannot help admiring. But there is also, and above all, rebellion in the field of art and literature: Brecht simply loathed Goethe and Beethoven, the two mighty ghosts that literally dominated the minds of most educated Germans, and his first theatre audiences were greeted by notices advising them to "Quit goggling like a bunch of Romantics!" Bohemian mannerisms and anarchistic deportment hardly camouflaged, however, an intellectual development whose originality was soon apparent to many of Brecht's faithfully and lifelong devoted friends. And when the success came with the *Threepenny Opera*, *The Rise and Fall of Mahagonny*, the *Baden-Baden Cantata of Acquiescence*, and *St. Joan of the Stockyards*, the poison clouds of fascism were already threateningly darkening the German skies. In 1933 Brecht had to flee the country.

To many of his readers Brecht's years of exile are known from various biographies. After his departure from Germany he found asylum in Austria, France, Denmark, Sweden, and Finland. As the Nazi pestilence spread farther and farther and no European country seemed to be safe any longer for an author whose name held a place at the very top of Himmler's proscription list, Brecht took his family to Siberia, and from there to the United States of America. Much has been said and written about this choice, quite astonishing on the part of an ardent anti-capitalist; about the even stranger interrogations he had to undergo on the part of the House Committee for un-American activities; about his stay in Hollywood—where he exchanged his leather jacket for a Hawaiian shirt and steadfastly maintained his beard, hair-style, cap, and street-ballads; about his unceasing creative efforts, his not entirely unsuccessful attempts to make himself accepted by the American theatre-going public; and about his return to East Germany, in 1948, after more than fourteen years of exile.

As early as 1930, Brecht's anarchistic attitude had given way to a full acceptance of the Marxist doctrine. This adoption of the Communist cause is not to be confused, however, with intellectual subordination or even orthodox adherence: like Gide, Brecht could not tolerate censorship or tutelage. This independence, and a sort of instinctive distrust of Stalin and his sphere of power, explains his decision not to remain in Soviet Russia, but to emigrate to the United States, like a number of other German writers—Thomas and Heinrich Mann, for instance—who shared some of his political views.

Brecht's return to Eastern Germany has very justly been associated with two lines of one of his poems: "I do not like the place where I come from,/I do not like the place

where I go” In reality, his suspicion of the not yet “de-stalinized” Soviet bloc had hardly diminished during his stay in America. With the shrewdness of his peasant grandfathers, so often remarked by his biographers, he took a number of precautions designed to assure his personal independence and freedom of movement: he acquired Austrian citizenship and passport, opened a bank account in Switzerland, transferred his copyrights to a West-German publishing house. After having taken these measures with prudent foresight, Brecht went to live in East Berlin. This decision proved to be greatly rewarding: for the last eight years of his life, Brecht finally had his own theatre and many actors and followers to experiment with—a necessary and very satisfactory situation for this true empiricist of the stage. From their young and enthusiastic ranks he selected what was to become the fabulous *Berliner Ensemble* which carried his plays to innumerable European audiences east and west of the Iron Curtain, revolutionized the very concept of what theatre is or ought to be, and thus surpassed by far the impact of previous innovators such as Jacques Copeau or Max Reinhardt. Brecht’s influence was particularly strong in France, where Jean Vilar’s *Théâtre National Populaire* assimilated successfully some of the *Ensemble* traditions. Today French critical literature on Brecht is very rich, being equalled perhaps only by German scholarship, while Anglo-Saxon research holds the third place.

With respect to his political commitment, opinions on Brecht are passionately divided. Some admirers maintain that the German playwright, unlike Gide, was an artist not in spite of his socialism but because of it. Certain detractors ask to what extent, if at all, a man who wrote with the avowed intention of persuading his audience to share his beliefs can be considered to be a true artist: is not its unforeseeableness (the first sketch and vision being always different from the final work) an integral part of the very essence of art? Other critics assert that the conscious beliefs and intentions of Brecht are irrelevant: can’t we enjoy his plays just as we can appreciate Chinese or romanesque art without being Buddhists or Christian mystics? Did Zola not write ingenious and powerful fiction based on a simplistic and untenable theory? Whereupon commentators, mostly Marxist-oriented, retort that without the energy of the initial conviction, its penetration of the author’s mind, Buddhist and Christian art would never have come into being, nor would Zola’s novels or Brecht’s plays.

If we follow the trend of this debate, if we search analytically for the motivation of creative art, we step on very thin ice. The works of a writer can of course be examined and dissected from a psychoanalytical, an aesthetic, or a political point of view, and essential elements can be discovered and interpreted. It is much more arduous and challenging, however, for a critic to discover the connection between the writer’s motivation and drive, and its sublimation, exteriorization, and transposition into “art”. Criticism that is primarily interested in the issue of commitments tends indeed to oversimplify things, since loyalty to a political doctrine is usually only one among several motivations in an author. Instead of decreeing *a priori* that because of his commitment he is necessarily

“good” or “bad”, that with it he is “better off” or “worse off” than without it, it is really much more rewarding to examine his literary value first and to establish afterwards to what extent his political beliefs are responsible for the quality of his writing.

In his book on Brecht,* Ronald Gray chose this method; and this explains perhaps why his comments are so refreshing. Professor Gray is particularly concerned with Brecht's achievements in drama, and his knowledge of the German language permits him to seize the finest nuances in the playwright's language. This is important because Brecht's idiom—with its vernacular, anglicisms, and a host of other overtones and undertones—cannot be integrally translated into another tongue. It is also important that Professor Gray was himself present at a number of *Ensemble* performances which permitted him to furnish his reader with otherwise inaccessible details of productions prepared under Brecht's personal direction.

Professor Gray rejects on critical grounds a number of Brechtian plays which are becoming accepted as masterpieces, and he thus clears the ground for a more objective appreciation of the German playwright's best work. There is energy and tonus in Mr. Gray's concentrated, unselfconscious and un-pedantic style (if we disregard his initial quibbling over the findings of other Brecht scholars), something simultaneously young and mature, vigorous and judicious, which makes the reading of his book a profitable pleasure.

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* *Brecht*. By Ronald Gray. Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd [Toronto: Clarke, Irwin], 1961. Pp. 120. \$.80.