



History and Literature in the Age of Defoe and Swift

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Abstract

This article explores the political and literary culture of the first age of party. The article takes two key themes that arise from recent work on this period: first, the emergence of new roles for the public and second, challenges to the manner in which public debate and discourse operated. It argues both that the public was a fiction and that there was also an ingrained fictional impulse in the nature of partisanship. These phenomena combined to produce expectations of, and anxieties about, partisan fictions, deceptions and misrepresentations. In this context, canonical authors such as Defoe and Swift appear as brilliant representatives of a wider political culture that is rooted in partisanship.

The late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries have always been a period of fascination for literary scholars preoccupied with the emergence of the novel. But, perhaps because Whigs and Tories have seemed ‘old hat’, the political context in which canonical figures such as Defoe and Swift worked has tended to be overshadowed either by that of the mid-seventeenth century revolution or of the eighteenth century. There are signs that this is changing. The recent publication of the *History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1690–1715*, which runs to five volumes of in-depth analysis of MPs and parliament in the period, offers us a wealth of detail to mine.¹ More generally, work on later Stuart politics, religion, print culture and gender has been particularly fruitful in recent years and challenged a number of previously held assumptions.² The Whig assault on the political doctrine of patriarchalism has been shown to have had complex consequences in terms of social and political attitudes to women, while the periodical press that flourished in the immediate aftermath of the lapse of the licensing act in 1695 has been identified as a platform for a vibrant discussion about gender.³ There has also been a stress on the politics of religion and hence also on the way in which religion shaped public discourse, but also a recognition of the increasingly valuable discourse of trade, interest and money.⁴ All this builds on older and in some ways problematic work by John Pocock on the variety of political languages, and of whiggery in particular.⁵ The nature of party

politics has also been re-interpreted. What has emerged is a more ideologically and religiously driven set of allegiances, and a model of the state in which local and national issues become entwined.⁶

Indeed, it is timely to revisit the nature of Whig and Tory with the benefit of these different perspectives and to integrate them with the pre-occupations of literary scholarship. 'Politics' is no longer seen as just concerned with the in-fighting between political elites but is now more commonly related to a wider political audience that was also a participant in the construction of power, part of a larger 'political culture' for which communicative practices are often of central importance. For all these reasons we should add to our review of the nature of partisanship an agenda set by the sociologist Jürgen Habermas, who argued for a powerful connection between the political culture of the later Stuart period and the emergence of 'the public sphere', a concept that he explicitly used to tie literary and political debate together.⁷ Habermas argued that in the very late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries there emerged a discursive site, which he called the public sphere, which acted as an interface between society and the state. It was to be found, especially, in the coffee-houses and periodical press, and it was distinguished by an open, rational-critical debate. And it was explicitly related to the emergent capitalistic economy and interests of the bourgeoisie.

The Habermasian model has been much criticized by historians working on the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, who suggest that the timing of Habermas's emergent public sphere in the later Stuart period is too late or that he neglected the capacity of religious debate to open up public discourse.⁸ But the model has been far more readily taken up by literary scholars, both for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Sharon Achinstein, for example, has argued that the mid-seventeenth century witnessed the birth of a new type of revolutionary reader, active and engaged, and a degree of public discussion about the state that fits Habermas's model.⁹ For the eighteenth century, too, the notion of a bourgeois public sphere has seemed to accommodate the rise of the novel and the periodical as well as the rhetoric of politeness.

The usefulness of Habermas's model has nevertheless recently been questioned, on the literary section of the Compass site, by J. A. Downie.¹⁰ His article seeks to explain to literary scholars how Habermas got his history wrong, both in terms of chronology and analysis of the position of the bourgeois. The claim, put bluntly, is that Habermas 'misunderstands the nature of English society'.¹¹ To be sure, this criticism recognizes that Habermas idealized later Stuart Britain.¹² But Downie's own analysis of society is at times questionable and it may be, as this article will suggest, that the Habermasian ideal was one shared in part by many contemporaries.¹³ That is to say, a stress on an enlarged role for the public, on an ideal rational discourse, and on the interplay between commerce, literature and politics was articulated by many of those living in the first age of party.¹⁴

As what follows also points out, there are aspects of the public sphere that were not considered either by Habermas or, in any depth, by Downie, which offer fertile ground to explore the idea of public politics and its fictions. The most obvious area is that of party and the process of electioneering.

This debate demonstrates the continuing importance of exploring the interplay between history and literature and there are many reasons why this is now both more possible and likely. The 'historicism' of many literary scholars has brought a renewed interest in the rhetoric and literary strategies of polemic, and hence brought the two disciplines potentially very close together.¹⁵ Historians, too, have become interested in rhetoric, reading, tropes and genres.¹⁶ So, armed with new questions about political culture and the discourse it produced, and with new information as well as new approaches, this article attempts to review the partisanship of the later Stuart period by highlighting methodological and contextual reasons why history and literature should converge and how such convergence can help both disciplines.¹⁷ It outlines some arguments that are developed at greater length in my monograph, *Representation and Misrepresentation in Later Stuart Britain: Partisanship and Political Culture* (2005).

Examining 'writing' (as opposed to 'literature') in the later Stuart period helps to show that the preoccupations of canonical writers were shared by many, less well-known, authors and hence that, for all their individual genius, they were also products of their times. More than that, however, we can show that party politics itself contained fictional impulses that may help us to understand a fascination with the boundaries of what was 'true' and what was either invented, disguised, or the product of pure deception. In other words, partisanship can help us to explain a political culture that necessarily impacted on writing and the literary world.

Fictions and uncertainties

We might begin by identifying some characteristics of the partisan struggle that helped to define the political culture of the period. There is a danger in doing so, however, that we divorce the late seventeenth century from the changes apparent far earlier in the century, and hence underplay the accelerated change and innovations induced by civil war. Uncertainty about the nature of truth, the stability of meaning, the sincerity of public words and how to discern lies were, as I shall argue, key to the later Stuart period; but they were not new then. They were issues that had long affected religious debate, 'science', rhetoric and the impact of print.¹⁸ And once civil war had broken out, rival truth claims in the political sphere had focused on the duality of meaning, insincerity, lies and misrepresentation.¹⁹ The uncertainties of the post 1660 period were thus not unknown in early modern England. Nor were uncertainty, invention and deception merely the creations of party politics. John

Spurr's suggestive analysis of the 1670s highlights the importance of disguise and dissimulation in the restoration political and literary culture.²⁰ It is thus important to remember that in many ways the later Stuart period witnessed the development of innovations apparent earlier and the intensification of anxieties that can also be traced at least as far back as the Reformation. Even so, party politics was a new phenomenon and it is well worth exploring its nature to explain why it had a significant impact on political and literary culture.²¹

There are two chief areas on which we might want to focus. The first is the appeal to the public. The 'public' was a loose concept, defined in many (sometimes mutually exclusive) ways during the period, depending on ideological and partisan dictates. The 'public' raised questions about the identity of the 'people' and thus inevitably became part of the contest over notions of popular sovereignty. Rejecting notions of 'divine right', the Whigs offered a version of the constitution that included the people as authors of power, a notion that Tories found hard to swallow unless it was wrapped in the concept of the 'king-in-parliament'. But it was also contested more widely, in terms of the legitimate role accorded to women, children, the poor and others who were traditionally 'represented' by others.²² Yet for all its ambiguity the 'public' acquired a new significance, invoked as both participant and judge in the new political culture. The public was an actor and a spectator, a fictional collective as well as a set of idealized, imagined voters and investors. The public had a new role and influence on the state, though the definition and extent of such instrumental power was contested.²³

A second set of problems that needs exploring relates to public discourse. The freeing of the press from pre-publication licensing and the routine use of print as a political tool ensured that partisan paper battles exacerbated long-standing fears about the effects of print on language and argument. In particular, partisan polemic, together (and often intimately associated) with a rash of perceived 'plots' against authority, heightened anxieties about the prevalence of political lying and deception;²⁴ about misrepresentation and dissimulation; and about partisan meanings given to certain words and phrases. This article will examine each of these two key areas, the public and public debate, and illustrate them with reference to the works of both literary 'greats' and the product of what was increasingly becoming known as Grub Street.²⁵ Throughout, the aim will be to highlight ways in which later Stuart partisanship was concerned with what was imagined, invented, fictionalized and how it played with the instability of interpretation and meaning.

The fiction of the public

In the later Stuart period, the 'public' increasingly competed with more traditional authorities, such as the monarchy and the church, as a legitimizing

discourse and power. The reasons for this development were numerous. One was that the public was frequently requested to vote in general elections. On average, an election was held every two and a half years between 1679 and 1716.²⁶ This led to a state of almost continuous electioneering at the local level. Moreover, the size of the electorate was expanding – by the accession of George I in 1714, more men could vote, as a percentage of the adult male population, than at any time before the second Reform Act of 1867.²⁷ Both the frequency of election and the size of the electorate was unprecedented, with the result that the public had a type of unprecedented civil power.

The vigour and importance of the public was enhanced in other ways too. One was the emergence of notions of ‘public credit’. Another was the repeated attempt to give other voices to the public besides that gained in electioneering. Let us briefly examine these in a little more detail, since both concern our canonical and Grub Street authors.

Public credit was the result of the fiscal innovation necessary for England to fight large-scale war against France, the most powerful European power of the century.²⁸ Before 1689, debt was a royal problem; after the revolution, it became a public one. The interest payments for a national debt were financed out of public taxation.²⁹ The Bank of England was established in 1694, providing the government with loans funded by private subscription. Paper money in the form of exchequer bonds became currency. And public investment ensured the rise of the stock companies, some of which (such as the East India Company) had interests bound up with the development of the state and empire. The significance of all this for the concept of the public was twofold: public credit was inevitably politicized and it was a fiction vulnerable to political attack. Defoe, Swift and Addison all contributed to the politicized debate over this new public fiction. Addison famously allegorised public credit as a beautiful virgin who swooned when frightened by phantoms representing tyranny, anarchy, atheism, bigotry, republicanism and the pretender, but recovered in the presence of liberty, moderation, religion and Hanover.³⁰ Swift feared the rise of the monied men at the expense of the landed interest, and peppered his writings in Anne’s reign with such anxieties. Defoe, who experienced bankruptcy, saw an intimate connection between finance and writing that has been ably explored in several recent literary works.³¹ For Defoe credit was ‘the essential shadow of something that is not’.³² Public credit was a fiction hanging on opinion, reputation and representation.³³

Besides public credit, the public also gained a representational voice through a mass of published petitions and addresses. Over the period 1679–1716, more than 5000 such subscriptional texts were produced, most of them published either singly or more usually in pamphlets and periodicals. At first sight, many of these appeared not to be very partisan, since they were often presented to the monarch to give thanks for military

victories or to offer condolences or thanks on the death or succession of a royal. Yet the potential for the expression of partisanship in the texts was great, particularly since many of the floods of addresses combined with election campaigns. Moreover, some could be bitterly divisive. In 1710, for example, rival Whig and Tory addresses sought, respectively, to persuade Queen Anne that the Whig administration should be left in place or to put pressure on the monarch for a dissolution and change of government. The culture of petitioning and addressing for this period has been little studied and yet it preoccupied Defoe, who not only wrote several tracts about it but was also involved in one of the most controversial addresses of the age. He was the reputed author of the 'Legion Memorial', a text presented to the Speaker of the House of Commons in 1701 warning MPs that they were only the servants of the people.³⁴ Defoe recognized a bitter ideological struggle over who could claim to represent the public, and he saw petitions and addresses as an important part of the case that the public had a direct voice rather than one mediated by parliament. Ironically, of course, as author of the text Defoe was both allowing the public to speak directly and mediating their voice through his pen. He was both 'of' and 'above' the public he represented.

Partly because the public always had a mediated or represented voice, the very notion of a 'public' became important ideologically. According to a contractarian Whig view, men formed a society and then mutually agreed to erect a government, placing limited and revocable trust in an executive power. This allowed for a public to which the executive was responsible and which could, collectively, remove the executive when it breached public trust and no longer acted for the public good. But even in its less radical form, the Whigs offered the idea of a historically organic ancient constitution which had grown to bind the executive to work for the public good. Both versions offered the 'public' the power to resist tyranny, even if the 'public' was increasingly equated with its representative assembly. On different grounds, but with some similar effect, the Tories increasingly invoked the public, either as represented in parliament or as an electorate misled by their opponents, and Jacobites invoked ideas about an oppressed public and a public whose pro-Stuart sympathies were being suppressed by a tyrannous political elite.

As all this suggests, there were a number of factors combining at the end of the seventeenth century and early eighteenth century to create an expanded role for the public and each of these focused on the representation of that public. Whether it was through parliament, or less formally through petitions and addresses, or more fictionally still through stocks and credit, the representation of the public was the key issue. This was important because the public was a fiction that was constructed, through literary as well as political means – a fiction whose identity was an imagined one, sometimes idealized positively but also sometimes (as in 1716 to justify the repeal of frequent elections) depicted as something

dark and frightening. The fiction was thus one that rival polemicists sought to shape but was also one determined by those who read their work or who participated in any politicized act. In this process, there were literary conventions within which political constructs were expected to operate and which therefore shaped the way in which political debate could be conducted. For example, petitions and addresses adhered to, or broke, rhetorical conventions for supplicating texts. Railing and abusive tracts broke codes of civility and politeness.³⁵ Alternatively, public discourse could invent and shape the fictions at stake. Public credit could be manipulated by rumours and written news, so that 'stock-jobbing' was a term applied to politicians, rumour-mongers and those who worked the financial markets.³⁶ In other words, the new power and authority of the public was a fiction that required art as well as imagination; and the means of its construction in part shaped its political character. Indeed, the word public ceased to be used merely as an adjective but took on its additional meaning of a collective generality, first defined in a dictionary as such in 1696.³⁷ But if the public was fictional, and therefore subject to competing rhetorics for its identity and opinion, so too were the parties who fought over its representation. Whig and Tory did, of course, have an organizational base – partisan MPs met in certain clubs and co-ordinated tactics. But the parties also had a representational existence. Through polemic that both attacked and defended the parties, their identities were shaped and disseminated throughout the country. Just as the Levellers and Quakers exploited print in order to create communities of readers, so Whigs and Tories derived a good deal of their identity and universality through print.

To illustrate these points, we might glance at the electioneering material produced by both sides and which, at one time or another, engaged the pens of Defoe, Swift, Addison and Steele. Huge amounts of pamphleteering – and increasingly of periodical journalism – was dedicated to influencing and advising voters.³⁸ Such print helped to construct the images of the parties. Whigs and Tories constructed notions of themselves and each other through electioneering polemical attacks that often inverted their own set of ideal virtues. As Swift observed, a 'Whig forms an image of a Tory, just after the thing he most abhors, and that image serves to represent the whole body'.³⁹ But electoral advice literature also constructed other representations, of a participatory public, actively engaged with, and a determinant of, the political world around it. Printed electoral advice thus contributed to the creation of the important notion of an active, discerning public. It idealized that public as potentially rational, capable of judging between right and wrong, good and bad, policies and politicians. As one pamphleteer put it, 'he's a free and disinterested elector, that mov'd by no private principle, elects according to the best of his judgment'.⁴⁰ Voters, it was urged, should choose with 'all the care, caution, deliberation and circumspection imaginable'.⁴¹ They should take

care their votes were 'free, without present, gifts or future promises of reward'.⁴² *The Best Choice of Parliament-Men* (1701) reminded electors 'you have the balance of power in your hands and may turn the scales to which side you please'.⁴³ The idealized public was thus an able and active judge. And yet, of course, a good deal of this advice literature, ostensibly appealing to impartial voters, was written by partisans who depicted each other as intent on deceiving the public. For example, the Whig journalist (and literary critic) John Oldmixon published a refutation of Francis Atterbury's High Church *English Advice to the Freeholders of England* (1715), claiming 'there are almost as many false things as words said ... [it was] the most abominable medley of lies and impudence that ever came from the press'.⁴⁴ The independent, rational voter had to be addressed as though advice was appealing to his independent reason; the trick was to use impartiality to bolster a conclusion that only one choice made sense but also to try to claim that an opponent's impartiality was mere hypocrisy. So the ideal of how politics should operated was, it was often lamented, undermined by how it worked in practice.

The fictions of partisan polemic

It will be becoming apparent that not only was there a struggle over the representation of the public, but also huge potential for instability of meaning and fiction in the way in which the parties represented both each other and the political state of the nation. Each side represented the other through a set of imagined characteristics but also through different representational prisms that created very different, often conflicting, claims about what was 'fact' and 'true'. And it is in this representational struggle between the parties that much of the literary importance of partisanship lies. One party's fact was another party's fiction. For a start, partisanship necessarily involved viewing the world in a certain way that was defined as the public good; deviation from that party line was castigated as erroneous and bad for the public. This loyalty to party could fundamentally distort how anything was seen. As Henry St John, later Viscount Bolingbroke, put it in 1709, 'no man looks on things as they really are, but sees them through that glass which party holds up to him'.⁴⁵ Addison noted that any public figure, to the partisans, was 'like an object seen in two different mediums' and thus had 'two contrary characters, as opposite to one another as light and darkness'.⁴⁶ Institutionalized partisanship thus by definition created a double vision.⁴⁷ The same person or event could be, had to be, seen in two different ways. What the Whig saw as a candidate of honesty and integrity, the Tory saw as a deceiving hypocrite who claimed to speak for the public good but who was really intent on pursuing his private, and sinister, interest. Partisanship made this inevitable. As the Marquis of Halifax recognized early on, party was at best but a conspiracy against the rest of the nation.⁴⁸ A part claiming to speak

for the whole was necessarily vulnerable to accusations of misrepresentation, deception, hypocrisy or worse.

Partisanship therefore raised important questions for and about public discourse. As we have seen, some anxieties had to do with the integration of the press into public politics. In 1679 and then again in 1695, the act governing the press lapsed, removing the legal authority of pre-publication licensing. The result was a flood of print, at a level that matched and then superseded that of the mid-seventeenth-century crisis. 1695 was particularly important for the emergence of a stable and expanding periodical press – for which Defoe, Swift, Addison and Steele all wrote. But the freedom of the press in itself was not perhaps the key issue. It was the use to which that freedom was put that really caused concern. One reason for this was a belief that the parties created propaganda machines, deliberately employing able pens in order to use them as political tools.⁴⁹ It may well be the case that the perception of organized print campaigns was greater than reality, and certainly the market itself was quite capable of maximizing the amount of partisan polemic available to readers; but the idea of mercenary or party writers working together at a common target was a powerful one. The canonical authors were victims of this as much as hack writers. For example, a print called *Faction Display'd* (1709) depicted a hydra firing daggers at a clerical representative of the Church; among the writers depicted as its heads were Defoe and John Milton.

But the link between partisanship, the press and the corruption of public discourse seemed far more insidious than that because both the parties and the press engaged in systematic fictionalizing and distortion of the language. Let us take the latter point first. Partisanship endowed the same word with different meanings, even to the extent of creating a private language or 'cant' as it was called. Swift's anxiety about the prevalence of cant is well known and in part motivated his call for an academy to establish meanings, an idea that had also occurred to Defoe.⁵⁰ But cant was so prevalent, it was feared, that it seemed to threaten politics and shared meaning. There was a danger that words were being used, as Defoe put it, by 'dogmatic writers . . . to make their own fancy legitimate'. He insisted that words should be intelligible to readers, with common and shared senses, otherwise 'a man may speak in words, but [be] perfectly unintelligible as to meaning; he may talk a great deal but say nothing'.⁵¹ The view that political truth was dependent on a stable, commonly understood language was widely held. The world seemed upside down, claiming one tract sympathetic to dissent, when people misapplied meanings: 'behold on the one hand vertue termed vice, sobriety debauchery, religion faction, pious and peaceable assemblies riots and routs and punished as such'.⁵² In this vein, Defoe wrote *An Essay at a Plain Exposition of that Difficult Phrase a Good Peace* (1711), in which he noted that the 'various constructions' put on the phrase 'a good peace' varied 'as interest, party and opinion leads them'.⁵³ In turn, such cant helped to create party

allegiance. As one critic of a clerical address put it, talking to the people in 'a language in which the sense of words is perverted' and words understood in one sense nevertheless 'made to speak another sense and to signifie the direct contrary . . . serv'd not only to *distinguish* but even to *form* and *make* parties'.⁵⁴ With words not really meaning what they appeared to mean, texts such as petitions and addresses had to be carefully deconstructed for the public so that the 'real' meaning could be uncovered. Thus in 1710, rival dictionary-like definitions appeared of key words used in addresses.⁵⁵

The instability of meaning under the pressure of partisanship was particularly worrying when the definition of two key words – Whig and Tory – were themselves contested. In other words, the very labels of the parties had disputed and unstable meanings. Tories claimed that Whigs were quite other than what they pretended to be and vice versa, particularly as each claimed that over time their rivals had evolved away from their earlier identities. The ostensibly impartial *Faults on Both Sides* (1710) thus claimed that the original party labels were no longer accurate, for the Court Whigs had 'in their actions really turn'd Tories, though they still affected to be counted as good Whigs as ever', and many 'Tories themselves became Whigs in practice', joining with 'old staunch Whigs' who had never abandoned their principles.⁵⁶ And if party labels were a problem, so were other labels and slogans, which seemed increasingly to be used in order to manipulate the public rather than inform it. 'Liberty', 'The Church' and 'Moderation' were all slogans with fiercely contested meanings.⁵⁷ Rather than having access to information that would enable better judgement, contemporaries complained that the public was being fed an abused and degraded discourse that obscured or clouded the truth and hence imperilled the possibility that the public would judge rightly.

At the heart of the partisan political culture, therefore, lay anxieties (still current) about truth-claims and the fictions pedalled by opponents.⁵⁸ The accusation of political lying became a common one. In the *Art of Political Lying* (1712), John Arbuthnot (more famous as the creator of 'John Bull') referred to the common practice of 'spreading and propagating' lies.⁵⁹ He drew up a mock prospectus for a book, in which he depicted politics as 'an elaborate and endless glass-bead game of lies'.⁶⁰ Thomas Rawlins, a Norfolk parson, complained that 'never in any place or time did the spirit of lying become so daring and impudent, as it has of late among us; it appears openly, without veil or masque, and flies in the face of our superiors at noon-day, without fear or shame, at least without fear of punishment'.⁶¹ Another cleric, John Edwards, agreed.⁶² He saw a 'great deal of . . . trick and artifice', a world in which 'the chiefest art of state hath been generally to dissemble' and all this amounted to 'politic lying'. Indeed, he appealed to 'impartial minds, whether in such politicks there be any thing solid and certain, any thing to be depended upon'.⁶³ So Tory critics of Defoe's 'Legion Memorial' (1701) naturally saw it as a 'meer

piece of forgery', the outcome of a party dedicated not to 'honesty and truth', as Legion claimed, but to lying (Legion, after all, was the biblical devil who tried to 'misrepresent actions and be a false accuser').⁶⁴ The idea that contemporaries had become victims of delusions and deceptions is nicely summarized in the comment of one pamphleteer: 'now we have nothing but fictions instead of truth'.⁶⁵

What is particularly significant is that such charges were made not just by those who ostensibly disdained any party but also by the partisans themselves.⁶⁶ It was integral to the polemical combat to claim that a rival was distorting the truth, telling lies, misrepresenting things to the public. Thus partisanship itself helped to spread the perception that politicians and party writers were intent on misrepresentation rather than representation. We might call this a 'fictional impulse' inherent in partisanship: what was fact and true to one partisan was mere faction and fiction to his rival. Moreover, the destabilisation of meaning and the literary frameworks within which effective polemic could be couched, to an imagined public, all contributed to political writing that played with, and exploited ideas of, the fictional.

The fictional impulse within partisanship extended to characterization and playing with authorial identity.⁶⁷ Michael Mascuch has suggested that that around 1700 'innovations in journalistic publishing and in social control . . . helped to establish in the popular imagination a new form of self-consciousness: the concept of an active, independent, and secular personality'.⁶⁸ But if a new consciousness was emerging, it was in part because self, self-identity and private interest were becoming play-things in polemical, partisan exchanges. Writers played with creating complex and entertaining personas that would please as well as inform the public. For example, the Whig Richard Steele wrote a fictional letter to the Stockbridge electors, impersonating an 'English Tory', to a fictional Nestor Ironside. This letter was then published in *The Guardian*. Swift had great fun with the resulting identity crises: 'to render this matter clear to the very meanest capacity, Mr English Tory, the very same person with Mr Steele, writes a letter to Nestor Ironside Esq; who is the same person with English Tory, who is the same person with Mr Steele; and Mr Ironside, who is the same person with English Tory, publishes the letter written by English Tory, who is the same person with Mr Steele, who is the same person with Mr Ironside'.⁶⁹ Such playfulness was possible because political personas were at least ambivalent if not deceptive. The 'double vision' of partisanship, explored earlier, created ambiguity of character. It is significant, for example, that Charles Davenant's representation of the new Whig, was named Tom Double (who also developed over time in a series of tracts). There was much in Tom of Charles Montagu, the chancellor of the exchequer who presided over the creation of the Bank of England but also a 'rapacious filcher' who stole other people's ideas (including, as poet, patron and politician, their literary and economic

projects) and lined his own pockets with public money. The modern Whig was a fraud who seemed one thing but was really another.⁷⁰ But it was not just the modern Whig who aped Tom Double. Davenant's literary patron, Robert Harley (who was of course also Defoe's patron) seemed to many to be a master of dissimulation and earned the nicknames 'Harlequin' and 'Robin the trickster'.

Finally, politics and literature were intertwined because criticisms of style became intrinsic to partisan polemic. Response and counter-response necessitated careful attention to text, form and style as well as content. Partisan authors thus engaged in extended exercises in textual appreciation. For example, a tract of 1710 reproduced a letter concerning an Essex election and then offered comments on it. Its first remark was about the bad English employed in the letter ['several gentlemen of the county of Essex HAS done . . .']: 'this is not true grammar and not fit for a candidate of so great and loyal a county as Essex is', it complained. It then went on to correct the letter's English. The claim that one candidate would be 'violently' opposed was ridiculed; 'vigorously', it was said, was more appropriate.⁷¹ Bad grammar and poor style, it was being suggested, implied bad or impolite politics. Political censure, then, often involved a process of extensive literary criticism, in which style and language were carefully scrutinized.⁷² This process was necessary because, as Defoe observed, men habitually wore masks that needed deconstructing.⁷³ Since men hid their motives, textual analysis was one way of trying to uncover their true designs. Literary style was scrutinized as a means of uncovering authenticity, veracity and intent. To be sure, textual analysis was not new but it was becoming routine. 'There have been always criticks', remarked the earl of Mulgrave, 'but I believe there was never such an age and nation for that humour as ours is at present'.⁷⁴

Partisan politics may thus have shaped readers not only to expect and be on the look out for fictions but also have habituated them to read with a sensitivity to style as a means of discerning authorial credit and skill. More generally, the polemical appeal to the public exacerbated a state of epistemological uncertainty, in which readers, voters, writers and representatives were disorientated by their inability to take things at face value. That sense of uncertainty has, in part, been recognized by literary scholars as a causal factor in the emergence of the novel, but it has not been fully related to the political culture around it or sufficiently related to the routine process of politics.⁷⁵ And if it is the case that the practice of partisan politics helped deepen a culture of fiction and epistemological uncertainty, then Defoe and Swift become more readily understandable (albeit unusually talented) practitioners of arts that surrounded them, and their readers emerge as well versed to expect and consume such material. This is a theme that would deserve a more extensive treatment than is available here: contextualising the writings of the famous with the anonymous would be a revealing task but this essay has only been able to

suggest the value of doing so, rather than spending much time demonstrating it.⁷⁶ It is hoped, however, that this might be a productive approach to adopt.

The close relationship between history and literature – or rather between forms of writing later categorized as politics or literature – that has been identified here functions wherever representation is a key issue, and so the issues raised in this discussion may also have a wider relevance for societies in which representation is a key concept. Representation in either political or linguistic form creates a fiction. It seeks or claims to make present what is not present, it offers to make an image, copy, or idea of something which is absent and then make it act or perform in some way.⁷⁷ Thomas Hobbes recognized as much when he talked in *Leviathan* (1651) about a representer as an actor on a stage. Thus political actors and representatives were, he said, authorized fictions.⁷⁸ Indeed, he believed that 'there are very few things that are incapable of being represented by fiction'. Hobbes's insight underlines the fusion of the political and the literary. Methodologically, then, a concern with representation and representational forms and genres, such as party and polemic, offers a means by which a more holistic view of a political culture and its cultural politics can be achieved – not just in this period, but in subsequent periods when parties and the press interacted in such productive ways. And that rounded view can be found in routine and apparently ephemeral polemics as much as in the literary canon.

There is thus a good deal more in the Habermasian model than has perhaps now become fashionable to discern. Habermas may not always have got all his history right (though that can easily be exaggerated) and perhaps he glossed too quickly over important changes in political culture induced by parties, electioneering and petitioning. But he was surely correct to point to rather interesting change occurring in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries to do with the literary and political public spheres and with the creation of powerful ideals – particularly an idealized public and idealized ways of talking. Focusing on what his model might enable us to do in terms of reconciling historical and literary publics, in the ways outlined above, might thus reinstate useful elements of his model. I have stressed the importance of thinking of the public as a construct and hence about the ways in which it was constructed, both consciously and sub-consciously. Analysing political discourse in this light highlights the significance of forms of writing and the different receptions accorded to texts by partisans. Whilst not wishing to suggest too marked a break with the remarkable shifts apparent in the mid-seventeenth century, later Stuart political culture was markedly one obsessed with problems of veracity, credibility and the way in which texts and politicized public discourse could shape the reading public as well as vice versa. We thus have in the literature of party thousand upon thousand of prose fictions and these are of interest to both the historian and the literary scholar.

Notes

¹ E. Cruickshanks, D. Hayton and S. Handley (eds.), *The History of Parliament. The House of Commons, 1690–1715*, 5 vols. (Cambridge, 2002).

² For overviews of the politics of the period, see G. Holmes, *The Making of a Great Power. Late Stuart and Early Georgian Britain, 1660–1722* (Harlow, 1993).

³ For excellent explorations of the links between print culture and gender, see R. Weil, *Political Passions. Gender, the Family and Political Argument in England, 1680–1714* (Manchester, 1999); H. Berry, *Gender, Society and Print Culture in Late Stuart England: The Cultural World of the Athenian Mercury* (London, 2003); P. McDowell, *The Women of Grub Street. Press, Politics and Gender in the London Literary Marketplace 1678–1730* (Oxford, 1998); H. Smith, 'English "feminist" writings and Judith Drake's *An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* (1696)', *Historical Journal*, 44 (3), 2001, pp. 727–47; M. Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, ed. P. Springborg (London, 1997).

⁴ T. Harris, P. Seaward and M. Goldie (eds.), *The Politics of Religion in Restoration England*, (Oxford, 1990); J. Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: The Church of England and Its Enemies, 1660–1730* (Cambridge, 1992); J. Champion, *Republican Learning: John Toland and the Crisis of Christian Culture, 1696–1722* (Manchester, 2003); C. Rose, *England in the 1690s. Revolution, Religion and War* (Oxford, 1999); T. Claydon, *William III and the Godly Revolution* (Cambridge, 1996); D. Hayton, 'Moral reform and country politics in the late seventeenth-century House of Commons', *Past and Present*, 128, 1990, pp. 48–91; J. C. D. Clark, *English Society, 1660–1832*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 2000); J. Brewer, *The Sinews of Power. War, Money and the English State, 1688–1783* (Cambridge, MA., 1988); P. Gauci, *The Politics of Trade: The Overseas Merchant in State and Society, 1660–1720* (Oxford, 2001); J. Hoppit, *A Land of Liberty?* (Oxford, 2000).

⁵ J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, 1975) and *Virtue, Commerce and History. Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1985) offer a methodology and paradigm that have influenced historians and literary scholars.

⁶ T. Harris, *Politics under the Later Stuarts: Party Conflict in a Divided Society, 1660–1715* (London, 1993); T. Harris, *London Crowds in the Reign of Charles II: Propaganda and Politics from the Restoration until the Exclusion Crisis* (Cambridge, 1987); J. Scott, *Algernon Sidney and the Restoration Crisis, 1677–1683* (Cambridge, 1991); M. Knights, *Politics and Opinion in Crisis, 1678–1681* (Cambridge, 1994); J. Montano, *Courting the Moderates: Ideology, Propaganda and the Emergence of Party, 1660–1678* (Delaware, 2002); P. Halliday, *Dismembering the Body Politic: Partisan Politics in England's Towns, 1650–1730* (Cambridge, 1998).

⁷ J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. T. Burger and F. Lawrence (Cambridge, 1989). The book was first written in German in 1962.

⁸ See also T. Claydon, 'The sermon, the "public sphere" and the political culture of late seventeenth-century England' in *The English Sermon Revised: Religion, Literature and History 1600–1750*, ed. L. A. Ferrell and P. McCullough (Manchester, 2001).

⁹ S. Achinstein, *Milton and the Revolutionary Reader* (Princeton, 1994).

¹⁰ J. A. Downie, 'How useful to eighteenth-century English studies is the paradigm of the "bourgeois public sphere"', *Literature Compass*, 1, 2003, pp. 1–18, <http://www.literature-compass.com/images/store/LICO/viewpoints/356.pdf>.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹² This point is best explored by H. Mah, 'Phantasies of the public sphere: Rethinking the Habermas of historians', *JMH*, 72 (1), 2000, pp. 153–82.

¹³ Downie's analysis of the press and financial revolution are both problematic and his commentary on the 'bourgeois' ignores the work of Steve Hindle, Mike Braddick, Phil Withington, Jonathan Barry and others on the 'middling sort'. See <http://www.literature-compass.com/images/store/LICO/viewpoints/356.pdf>. Despite his own earlier work, *Robert Harley and the Press: Propaganda and Public Opinion in the Age of Swift and Defoe* (Cambridge, 1979), Downie also ignores the possibility that party and frequent electioneering might have changed the political culture along Habermasian lines.

¹⁴ These points are enlarged in my *Representation and Misrepresentation in Later Stuart Britain: Partisanship and Political Culture* (Oxford, 2005) and 'How rational was the later Stuart public

sphere?' in *The Public Sphere in Early Modern England*, ed. P. Lake and S. Pincus (Manchester, forthcoming).

¹⁵ The best recent example of this is J. Raymond, *The Pamphlet and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge, 2002), though his analysis stops at 1688. For some of the potential in such an approach, see also P. Lake, with M. Questier, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat. Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven, 2002).

¹⁶ Q. Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge, 1996); J. Spurr, *England in the 1670s: 'This Masquerading Age'* (Oxford, 2000); W. Speck, *Literature and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (Harlow, 1998).

¹⁷ This article summarizes some themes explored in more detail in my *Representation and Misrepresentation*.

¹⁸ B. Vickers, 'The Royal Society and English prose style: A reassessment' in *Rhetoric and the Pursuit of Truth: Language Change in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries. Papers Read at a Clark Library Seminar*, ed. B. Vickers and N. Streuver (Los Angeles, 1985); P. Zagorin, *Ways of Lying: Dissimulation, Persecution and Conformity in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA., 1990).

¹⁹ J. Raymond, *The Invention of the Newspaper: English Newsbooks, 1641–1649* (Oxford, 1996); S. Achinstein, 'The uses of deception: From Cromwell to Milton' in *The Witness of Time. Manifestations of Ideology in Seventeenth Century England*, ed. K. Z. Keller and G. J. Schiffhorst (Pittsburgh, 1993); Achinstein, 'The politics of Babel in the English revolution' in *Pamphlet Wars: Prose in the English Revolution*, ed. J. Holstun (London, 1992); N. Smith, *Literature and Revolution in England, 1640–1660* (New Haven, 1994).

²⁰ Spurr, *England in the 1670s*.

²¹ Under 'politics', I include religious controversy that centred on the relationship between church and state – a definition which therefore incorporates the disputes over toleration, occasional conformity and the infamous trial of Dr Henry Sacheverell. Politics thus becomes a short-hand for politico-religious debate.

²² Berry, *Gender, Society and Print Culture*; McDowell, *The Women of Grub Street*; E. Morgan, *Inventing the People. The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (New York/London, 1988).

²³ For interesting discussions of the evolution of the concept of the public, see G. Baldwin, 'The "public" as a rhetorical community in early modern England' in *Communities in Early Modern England*, ed. A. Shepard and P. Withington (Manchester, 2000), chapter 11, pp. 199–215; J. A. W. Gunn, *Beyond Liberty and Property*, ed. W. Gunn (Kingston, 1983); Gunn, 'Public opinion' in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, ed. T. Ball, J. Farr and R. Hanson (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 247–65, quote at p. 250.

²⁴ For an application of plots to the theatre, see R. Braverman, *Plots and Counterplots: Sexual Politics and the Body Politic in English Literature, 1660–1730* (Cambridge, 1993). For plots, deception and the rise of the novel, see K. Loveman, 'Shamming readers: Deception in English literary and political culture, c.1640–1740' (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2003).

²⁵ McDowell, *Women of Grub Street*; P. Rogers, *Grub Street: Studies in a Subculture* (London, 1972); B. Hammond, *Professional Imaginative Writing in England, 1670–1740* (Oxford, 1997).

²⁶ The most readable account of electioneering remains W. Speck, *Tory & Whig: The Struggle in the Constituencies, 1701–1715* (London, 1970).

²⁷ F. O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons and Parties: The Unreformed Electoral System of Hanoverian England, 1734–1832* (Oxford, 1989), tables 4.2 and 4.3.

²⁸ Brewer, *Sineus of Power*; B. Carruthers, *City of Capital: Politics and Markets in the English Financial Revolution* (Princeton, 1996); P. G. M. Dickson, *The Financial Revolution in England: A Study in the Development of Public Credit, 1688–1756* (London, 1967).

²⁹ National debt stood at about £1m at the time of the revolution; by 1697 it stood at £16.7m and though it fell briefly during the peacetime years of 1697–1702, it reached £21.4m by 1710 and £54m by 1720. See B. Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge, 1988), ch. 11, table 7.

³⁰ *Spectator*, 3, 3 March, 1711.

³¹ S. Sherman, *Finance and Fictionality in the Early Eighteenth Century: Accounting for Defoe* (Cambridge, 1996); C. Nicholson, *Writing and the Rise of Finance: Capital Satires of the Early Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1994); J. Thompson, *Models of Value: Eighteenth-Century Political Economy*

and the Novel (Durham NC., 1996). Their work owes much to Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History*.

³² *An Essay Upon Public Credit* (1710), p. 6; *Review*, vol. 3, p. 126 (22 October, 1706).

³³ Sir C. Whitworth (ed.), *The Political and Commercial Works of that Celebrated Writer Charles D'Avenant*, 5 vols. (Farnborough, 1771 [1968]), vol. 1, p. 151; B. Hoadly, 'The fears and sentiments of all true Britains' in *A Collection of Several Papers Printed in the Year 1710* (London, 1718), p. 95.

³⁴ Mr. S-r. *The enclosed memorial you are charg'd with, in the behalf of many thousands of the good people of England* (London, 1701).

³⁵ For politeness and civility, see L. Klein, 'The political significance of "politeness" in early eighteenth century Britain' in *Politics, Politeness and Patriotism*, ed. G. Schochet (Folger Institute Center for the History of British Political Thought Proceedings Washington, 1993), vol. 5; Klein, 'Coffee-house civility, 1660–1714: An aspect of post-courtly culture in England', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 59 (1), 1997, pp. 30–51; P. Withington, *The Politics of the Commonwealth* (Cambridge, 2005).

³⁶ T. Baston, *Thoughts on Trade and a Publick Spirit* (London, 1716), p. 7.

³⁷ Baldwin, 'The "public"', p. 209.

³⁸ The only sustained analysis is J. Richards, *Party Propaganda Under Queen Anne: The General Elections of 1702–13* (Athens, GA., 1972).

³⁹ *Examiner*, 34 (29 March, 1711). Cf. the Tory was 'in many ways the reverse of' the Whig [*A Letter to the Gentlemen and Freeholders of the County of Dorset* (London, 1713), p. 29].

⁴⁰ *An Enquiry into the Inconveniences of Public and the Advantages of Private Elections. With the Method of a Ballot* (London, 1701), p. 9.

⁴¹ *The Subjects Case* (London, 1701), p. 1.

⁴² *The Best Choice of Parliament-Men Considered* (London, 1701), p. 1.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁴⁴ J. Oldmixon, *Remarks on a Late Libel Privately Dispers'd by the Tories* (London, 1715), pp. 2, 10.

⁴⁵ *Candem Miscellany*, 26 ['Letters of Henry St. John', ed. H. T. Dickinson], *Cam. Soc.*, 4th series, vol. 14 (Cambridge, 1975), p. 147.

⁴⁶ *Spectator*, 125 (24 July 1711).

⁴⁷ The idea owes much to Howard Erskine-Hill, 'Two-Fold Vision in C18th Writing', *English Literary History*, 64 (4), 1997, pp. 903–24, which discusses Jacobite writing.

⁴⁸ This theme is pursued in my 'Faults on both sides: The conspiracies of party politics under the later Stuarts' in *Conspiracies and Conspiracy Theory in Early Modern Europe*, ed. J. Swann and B. Coward (Aldershot, 2004); and my 'Politics after the Glorious Revolution' in *A Companion to Stuart Britain*, ed. B. Coward (Oxford, 2003).

⁴⁹ Downie, *Robert Harley and the Press*.

⁵⁰ D. Eilon, *Faction's Fictions: Ideological Closure in Swift's Satire* (Newark, 1991); *Examiner*, 16 (23 November, 1710); J. Swift, *A Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue* (London, 1712); J. Oldmixon, *The British Academy: Being a New-Erected Society for the Advancement of Wit and Learning: With Some Few Observations Upon it* (London, 1712); D. Defoe, 'Of Academies' in *Essay upon Projects* (London, 1697), p. 237.

⁵¹ D. Defoe, *Essays Upon Several Projects* (London, 1702), p. 37.

⁵² *The Second Part of the People's Ancient and Just Liberties Asserted* ([London], 1670), p. 4. The difference over the word 'riot' was particularly important, since it was the basis for legal prosecution of religious conventicles in the 1680s. See T. Ellwood, *A Discourse Concerning Riots* (London, 1683).

⁵³ *Essay at a Plain Exposition* (London, 1711), p. 12.

⁵⁴ J. Swynfen, *The Objections of the Non-Subscribing London Clergy against the Address* (London, 1710), pp. 3–4, 10.

⁵⁵ [J. Trapp], *The True Genuine Modern Whigg-Address* (London, 1710); [B. Hoadly], *The True Genuine Tory-Address* (London, 1710). *The True Genuine Tory-Address and the True Genuine Whig-Address, Set One against the Other* (London, 1710) set out definitions in dictionary format.

⁵⁶ *A Collection of Scarce and Valuable Tracts . . . Selected from . . . Private Libraries; particularly that of the late Lord Somers*, 4th collection (London, 1752), vol. 3, pp. 304–5.

⁵⁷ I explore the contest over 'moderation' and other terms in 'Occasional conformity and the representation of dissent: Hypocrisy, sincerity, moderation and zeal' in *Parliament and Dissent*, ed. S. Taylor and D. L. Wykes (Edinburgh, 2005).

- ⁵⁸ I also explore this in 'Read my lips', *History Today*, 54 (1), November 2004, pp. 20–1.
- ⁵⁹ C. Condren, *Satire, Lies and Politics: The Case of Dr. Arbuthnot* (Basingstoke, 1997), p. 179.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 123.
- ⁶¹ T. Rawlins, *Truth and Sincerity Recommended in a Sermon against Lying* (London, 1713), pp. 18–19.
- ⁶² J. Edwards, *Some New Discoveries of the Uncertainty, Deficiency and Corruptions of Human Knowledge and Learning* (London, 1714), pp. 66, cf. 150–2.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 64.
- ⁶⁴ *England's Enemies Expos'd* (London, 1701), pp. 26, 28–30.
- ⁶⁵ *The History of Associations* (London, 1716), pp. 1–2.
- ⁶⁶ Swift considered the problem of Whig lies in *Examiner*, 15 (16 November, 1710); but he was himself accused of lying by the Whig *Medley*. F. H. Ellis (ed.), *The Examiner and The Medley* (Oxford, 1985), pp. xlii–xliii.
- ⁶⁷ Greenblatt has argued that the Renaissance witnessed a period of 'increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable artful process', see *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (Chicago, 1980), p. 2; see also C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, 1989); E. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 225–46 for the importance of print and identity.
- ⁶⁸ M. Mascuch, *Origins of the Individualist Self: Autobiography and Self-Identity in England, 1591–1791* (Stanford, 1996), p. 136.
- ⁶⁹ J. Swift, *Prose Works*, ed. H. Davis & I. Ehrenpreis (Oxford, 1953), vol. 8, p. 8.
- ⁷⁰ C. Nicholson, *Writing and the Rise of Finance*, pp. 235, 244–5. Defoe wanted to make it 'as criminal to coin words as money'.
- ⁷¹ [I. Sharpe], *This is the Time or Serious Advice to a Country Friend Concerning the Election of Members of Parliament* (London, 1710), p. 1.
- ⁷² *Some Critical and Politick Remarks on a Late Virulent Lampoon Call'd Faction Display'd* (London, 1704).
- ⁷³ D. Defoe, *A Letter to Mr Bisset Eldest Brother of the Collegiate Church* (London, 1710), pp. 9–10.
- ⁷⁴ *Works of John Sheffield* (London, 1723), vol. 2, p. 259.
- ⁷⁵ M. McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740* (Baltimore, 1987); J. P. Hunter, *Before Novels: The Contexts of Eighteenth Century Fiction* (New York, 1990); L. Davis, *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* (New York, 1983); Eilon, *Faction's Fictions*.
- ⁷⁶ For more extensive discussion of Defoe and Addison in particular, see my *Representation and Misrepresentation*.
- ⁷⁷ The type of representative fiction varies, from an exact likeness, to a depiction of an 'essence', an agent, or a symbolic depiction. See H. Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (London, 1967), pp. 61, 86, 92, 113.
- ⁷⁸ T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. R. Tuck (Cambridge, 1996), p. 113.

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