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**‘To have no newes is good newes’: licensed newsbooks during the
early Commonwealth, 1649-1650**

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the three newsbooks that were initially approved under the Licensing Act introduced by the English Commonwealth in September 1649:

- *A briefe relation of some affaires and transactions, civill and military, both forraigne and domestique*, licensed by Gualter Frost.
- *Severall proceedings in Parliament*, licensed by Henry Scobell.
- *A perfect diurnall of some passages and proceedings of, and in relation to, the armies in England and Ireland*, licensed by John Rushworth.

These newsbooks have been well-used by historians as sources for reconstructing the politics of the Commonwealth. However, as texts for examining the regime's attempts to manage and control the news, and as material sources for understanding the news industry, they have been under-exploited. Historians have seen them as dull compared to the scurrilousness of the royalist newsbooks of the later 1640s or the literary sophistication of Marchamont Nedham's *Mercurius Politicus*. Nevertheless, the Licensing Act and the newsbooks which followed it are a significant case study: not only in how the Commonwealth tried to control and redefine the news market, but also about how the news industry itself operated in late 1640s London. The dissertation examines the newsbooks in their social, political and commercial context, tracing their origins and evolution over the course of 1649-1650. It reconstructs the political factions which sought to influence the newsbooks from their inception. It analyses the 'communication circuit' of licensers, authors, printers, booksellers and readers behind each publication. It concludes by linking the newsbooks to wider attempts by the Commonwealth to legitimate its authority through cultural and symbolic vocabularies.

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Last but not least, I would like to thank my wife Claire for her support while researching and writing this dissertation – and for never complaining about the evenings and weekends I have spent in the library or the increasing volume of books and pamphlets littering the house. I could not have finished the dissertation or the M.A. without her help.

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One of the arguments of this dissertation is that the physical form of newsbooks – the size and quality of paper they used, the size and type of font they were printed with – made a material difference to how they were received by readers. As a result, all quotations from primary sources are given as diplomatic transcriptions, retaining original spellings, capitalisations and italics. Although this still does not adequately reproduce the experience of reading that would have been available to contemporary readers, I have done so in order to retain at least some of the textual nuances of the early Commonwealth newsbooks. Where

necessary I have reproduced scanned pictures of the newsbooks. All dates are Old Style, except that the year is taken to begin on 1 January.

Abbreviations

BL	British Library
BM	British Museum
<i>Briefe Relation</i>	<i>A briefe relation of some affaires and transactions, civill and military, both forraigne and domestique</i> (London, 1649-1650)
<i>EHR</i>	<i>English Historical Review</i>
Frank, <i>Beginnings</i>	Joseph Frank, <i>The Beginnings of the English Newspaper, 1620-1660</i> (Cambridge, Mass., 1961)
<i>HJ</i>	<i>Historical Journal</i>
<i>HLQ</i>	<i>Huntington Library Quarterly</i>
<i>HMC De L'Isle</i>	Historical Manuscripts Commission, <i>Report on the Manuscripts of Lord De L'Isle & Dudley, Preserved at Penshurst Place</i> (London, 1935-1966), 6 vols.
<i>JBS</i>	<i>Journal of British Studies</i>
<i>N&S</i>	C. Nelson and M. Seccombe, <i>British Newspapers and Periodicals: A Short Title Catalogue</i> (New York, 1987)
Peacey, <i>Politicians</i>	Jason Peacey, <i>Politicians and Pamphleteers: Propaganda During the English Civil Wars and Interregnum</i> (Aldershot, 2004)
<i>Perfect Diurnall</i>	<i>A perfect diurnall of some passages and proceedings of, and in relation to, the armies in England and Ireland</i> (London, 1649-1655)
Raymond, <i>Invention</i>	Joad Raymond, <i>The Invention of the Newspaper: English Newsbooks 1641-1649</i> (Oxford, 1996)
Raymond, <i>Pamphlets</i>	Joad Raymond, <i>Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain</i> (Cambridge, 2003)
<i>Severall Proceedings</i>	<i>Severall proceedings in Parliament</i> (London, 1649-1655)
<i>SR</i>	<i>A transcript of the registers of the Worshipful Company of Stationers, from 1640-1708, A.D</i> (1913)
STC	A. W. Pollard and G. R. Redgrave, <i>A short-title catalogue of books printed in England, Scotland and Ireland, and of English</i>

books printed abroad, 1475-1640 (London, 1976-1991), second edition, 3 vols.

TT

Thomason Tracts

Williams, *History*

J. B. Williams, *A History of English Journalism to the Foundation of The Gazette* (London, 1908)

Wing

D. Wing, *Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales and British America and of English Books Printed in Other Countries 1641-1700* (New York, 1972-1974), 3 vols.

Chapter 1

Introduction

On 20 September 1649, the Rump Parliament published an Act against ‘Unlicensed and Scandalous Books and Pamphlets’.¹ For most types of book, the Act reasserted existing licensing arrangements from the printing ordinances of 1643 and 1647.² However, the Act also strengthened key provisions of previous legislation. It set new limits on the numbers of printers permitted; provided new powers for searches and confiscation of printing materials; and set sanctions for those involved in buying, selling or distributing illicit books that were far more punitive than any previous measures. The Act also established a new licensing system for newsbooks, under which only the Clerk to Parliament, the Secretary to the Army or a person nominated by the Council of State were allowed to license newsbooks before they were published.

The Licensing Act was the product of the fledgling republic which had been established in the aftermath of the trial and execution of Charles I. Within weeks of the king’s death, the monarchy, the House of Lords and the Privy Council were all abolished. In their place was left the remainder of the purged House of Commons, together with a newly established executive Council of State. England was declared a Commonwealth. Although the Licensing Act was only passed in September, it had been in preparation since at least May, suggesting control of the press was one of the regime’s earliest priorities.

¹ *An act against unlicensed and scandalous books and pamphlets, and for better regulating of printing* (London, 1649), Wing / E971.

² ‘June 1643: An Ordinance for the Regulating of Printing’, *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642-1660* (1911), pp. 184-186. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=55829> Date accessed: 23 May 2009; ‘September 1647: An Ordinance against unlicensed or scandalous Pamphlets, and for the better Regulating of Printing’, *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642-1660* (1911), pp. 1021-1023. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=56218> Date accessed: 23 May 2009.

Implementation of the Act was just as much of a priority. Most unlicensed newsbooks were quickly shut down, with only a few surviving into 1650.³ Three officially licensed newsbooks emerged to take their place. The first, *A Briefe Relation of Some Affaires and Transactions, Civill and Military, Both Forraigne and Domestique*, appeared on 2 October.⁴ Despite its title, it focused almost exclusively on news outside England. The second, *Severall Proceedings in Parliament*, started on 9 October.⁵ It focused primarily on activity within the Rump Parliament, although it also covered news from outside England. In December a third newsbook appeared, called *A Perfect Diurnall of Some Passages and Proceedings of, and in Relation to the Armies*.⁶ While much of its content was about the New Model Army, it also included material on parliamentary politics and foreign affairs.

The relative scarcity of manuscript sources for the Commonwealth period means that the three newsbooks have been well-mined by historians for information about the early Commonwealth.⁷ S. R. Gardiner thought that they ‘were among our most valuable sources of information’ on the politics of the period.⁸ And yet they are not just sources for reconstructing parliamentary politics in the aftermath of the regicide. They are also texts situated in a historical context, which were read by contemporaries and which had an impact on how they understood their experiences.⁹ The newsbooks are thus just as much events as the occurrences they describe: events which can provide us with an understanding of the

³ Jason McElligott, *Royalism, Print and Censorship in Revolutionary England* (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 172-183; Raymond, *Invention*, pp. 75-79.

⁴ *N&S* 27.

⁵ *N&S* 599.

⁶ *N&S* 503.

⁷ See for example Worden, *Rump Parliament*, pp. 82, 112, 167, 192, 201, 231, 239, 293, 300, 318; Patrick Little, *Lord Broghill and the Cromwellian union with Ireland and Scotland* (Woodbridge, 2004), pp. 62, 223; Kelsey, *Inventing a Republic*, pp. 64, 81-84, 113, 192-194, 196.

⁸ S. R. Gardiner, *History of the Commonwealth and Protectorate 1649-1660* (London, 1984), vol. 1, pp. 194-195.

⁹ For an example of distinguishing between books as sources and books as texts, see Ann Hughes, ‘Approaches to Presbyterian print culture: Thomas Edwards’s *Gangraena* as source and text’, in Jennifer Andersen & Elizabeth Sauer (eds.), *Books and readers in early modern England: material studies* (Philadelphia, PA, 2002), pp. 97-116; Ann Hughes, *Gangraena and the struggle for the English Revolution* (Oxford, 2004).

nature of the news market during the late 1640s. They can illuminate how the Commonwealth tried to control news, and how readers responded. Finally, the newsbooks are also material objects in their own right, and constitute rich sources for analysing the news industry itself: for examining the different editors, licensers, printers and booksellers who brought them to print. However, historians have under-exploited the newsbooks' possibilities as texts and material sources. They have tended to see them as dull or unsuccessful, particularly compared to the lively, combative nature of the news market during the 1640s. J. G. Muddiman (writing under his pseudonym of J. B. Williams) thought that *A Briefe Relation* did 'not inspire confidence'.¹⁰ Henry Brailsford called the newsbooks 'as meagre as they were dreary'.¹¹ Joseph Frank described *A Briefe Relation* as having 'many of the characteristics of zombies', derided all three newsbooks as 'docile, limited, and semi-official', and argued that after 1649 'the early newspaper never regained that smell of health it had briefly acquired in the later 1640s'.¹² For Blair Worden, 'there is no point in pretending' that the Commonwealth's first newsbooks 'make stimulating reading'.¹³

1.1 Historiography

This tendency to overlook the Commonwealth's early newsbooks can be traced back to the first historians of newspapers. From the 1830s onwards, historians began to rediscover seventeenth-century newsbooks.¹⁴ They took it for granted that newspapers exercised 'a mighty moral influence over the minds of men', and that the task of historians of newsbooks

¹⁰ Williams, *History*, p. 124. I use Muddiman's pseudonym when quoting works he originally published under it.

¹¹ H. N. Brailsford, *The Levellers and the English Revolution* (London, 1961), p. 569.

¹² Frank, *Beginnings*, pp. 200, 198; Joseph Frank, *Cromwell's Press Agent: a Critical Biography of Marchamont Nedham, 1620-1678* (Lanham, MD., 1980), p. 87.

¹³ Blair Worden, *The Rump Parliament 1648-1653* (Cambridge, 1974), p. 402.

¹⁴ Joad Raymond, 'Introduction: Newspapers, forgeries, and histories', in Joad Raymond (ed.), *News, Newspapers and Society in Early Modern Britain* (London, 1999), pp. 1-3.

was to assess their growth in ‘dignity and influence’.¹⁵ The Commonwealth’s early newsbooks sat awkwardly within this narrative. For J. G. Muddiman, for example, reacting against S. R. Gardiner’s sympathetic portrait of Oliver Cromwell, the Licensing Act was a repressive attempt to cover up Parliamentary massacres in Ireland.¹⁶ The newsbooks that emerged in its wake were inevitably tarred with the same brush, and thus dismissed.¹⁷ For other Victorian and Edwardian historians, the most interesting titles were those, like *Mercurius Civicus* with its illustrations, which could be seen as forerunners of modern newspapers.¹⁸ The Commonwealth’s first experiments with licensed newsbooks – which tried to control the news rather than spread it – did not fulfil this requirement.

More recently, seventeenth-century newsbooks have undergone a critical reassessment. A growing literature has established them as an important medium not just for expressing ideological divisions, but also for helping to create them. Joad Raymond’s study of 1640s newsbooks was a particular milestone in this historiographical rehabilitation.¹⁹ Before this, however, there had already been a growing interest amongst historians in how political information and other forms of news spread across England, and in the extent to which the crown and political grandees attempted to intervene in the news market.²⁰ Since then, historians have also begun to examine individual editors of newsbooks, analysing the

¹⁵ J. Grant, *The Newspaper Press: Its Origin-Progress-and Present Position* (London, 1871), vol. 1, pp. 1-52; H. R. F. Bourne, *English Newspapers: Chapters in the History of Journalism* (London, 1887), vol. 1, pp. 1-26; F. K. Hunt, *The Fourth Estate: contributions towards a history of newspapers, and of the liberty of the press* (1850); A. Andrews, *The History of British Journalism: From the Foundation of the Newspaper Press in England, to the Repeal of the Stamp Act in 1855* (1859).

¹⁶ Blair Worden, *Roundhead Reputations: The English Civil Wars and the Passions of Posterity* (London, 2001), pp. 215-263.

¹⁷ J. G. Muddiman, ‘S. R. Gardiner’s Historical Method’, *Notes and Queries*, 13, 1 (1923), pp. 23-25, 45-48, 69-70, 86-88, 107-108, 127-129, 149-150, 169-171, 185-8; J. G. Muddiman, ‘The Licensed Newsbooks, 1649 and 1650’, *Notes and Queries*, 13, 166 (1934), pp. 113-116.

¹⁸ H. R. Plomer, ‘An analysis of the Civil War newspaper the *Mercurius civicus*’, *The Library*, New Series, 6 (1905), pp. 184-207.

¹⁹ Raymond, *Invention*.

²⁰ F. J. Levy, ‘How Information Spread Among the Gentry, 1550-1640’, *JBS*, 21 (1982), pp. 11-34; Richard Cust, ‘News and politics in early seventeenth-century England’, *Past & Present*, 112 (1986), pp. 60-90; Thomas Cogswell, ‘The politics of propaganda: Charles I and the people in the 1620s’, *JBS*, 29, 3 (1990), pp. 187-215; C. J. Sommerville, *The News Revolution in England: Cultural Dynamics of Daily Information* (Oxford, 1996).

extent to which they pushed their own views or were controlled by political grandees.²¹ They have also started to investigate particular titles in more depth.²² Others have shed light on aspects of news culture such as newsbooks' style and the topics they covered.²³ As a result of this expanding literature, newsbooks have been established as a significant factor in reflecting and shaping political and religious allegiances.

The existence of a public that could be engaged with through print has been a wider focus of research on seventeenth-century print culture. Recent work has uncovered the extent to which cheap print enjoyed a wide circulation and readership beyond London.²⁴ There has been a significant re-evaluation of genres and forms of cheap print, seeing them as sophisticated work capable of bearing ideological messages.²⁵ A new picture is forming of a

²¹ A. N. B. Cotton, 'John Dillingham, journalist of the middle group', *EHR*, 93 (1978), pp. 817-34; Frank, *Cromwell's press agent*; Blair Worden, 'Marchamont Nedham and the beginnings of English republicanism, 1649-1656', in David Wootton (ed.), *Republicanism, liberty, and commercial society, 1649-1776* (Stanford, 1994), pp. 45-81; Blair Worden, 'Milton and Marchamont Nedham', in David Armitage, Armand Himy & Quentin Skinner (eds.), *Milton and republicanism* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 156-80; Blair Worden, "'Wit in a Roundhead": the dilemma of Marchamont Nedham', in Susan Amussen & Mark Kishlansky (eds.), *Political culture and cultural politics in early modern England: essays presented to David Underdown* (Manchester & New York, 1995), pp. 301-37; Joad Raymond, "'A Mercury with a winged conscience": Marchamont Nedham, monopoly and censorship', *Media History*, 4, 1 (1998), pp. 7-18; Blair Worden, *Literature and Politics in Cromwellian England* (Oxford, 2007).

²² David Underdown, 'The Man in the Moon: loyalty and libel in popular politics, 1640-1660', in David Underdown, *A freeborn people: politics and the nation in seventeenth-century England* (Oxford, 1996), ch. 5; Marcus Nevitt, 'Women in the business of revolutionary news: Elizabeth Alkin, "Parliament Joan", and the Commonwealth newsbook', in Raymond, *News, newspapers and society in early modern Britain*, pp. 84-108; Jason Peacey, "'The counterfeit silly curr": Money, Politics, and the Forging of Royalist Newspapers during the English Civil War', *HLQ*, 67, 1 (2004), pp. 27-57; Amos Tubb, 'Mixed Messages: Royalist Newsbook Reports of Charles I's Execution and of the Leveller Uprising', *HLQ*, 67, 1 (2004), pp. 59-74; Jason Peacey, 'The Struggle for *Mercurius Britannicus*: Factional Politics and the Parliamentary Press, 1643-1646', *HLQ*, 68, 3 (2005), pp. 517-44; Joyce Macadam, 'Mercurius Britannicus: journalism and politics in the English civil war' (Unpublished D.Phil dissertation, University of Sussex, 2006); McElligott, *Royalism, Print and Censorship*; Joyce Macadam, 'Soldiers, statesmen and scribblers: London newsbook reporting of the Marston Moor campaign, 1644', *Historical Research*, 82, 215 (2009), pp. 93-113.

²³ Jason Peacey, 'Reporting a revolution: a failed propaganda campaign', in Jason Peacey (ed.), *The regicides and the execution of Charles I* (Basingstoke and New York, 2001), pp. 161-80; Nicholas Brownlees, 'Polemic and Propaganda in Civil War News Discourse', in Nicholas Brownlees (ed.), *News Discourse in Early Modern Britain: Selected Papers of CHINED 2004* (Bern, 2006), pp. 17-40; David O'Hara, *English Newsbooks and Irish Rebellion* (Dublin, 2006).

²⁴ Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety 1550-1640* (Cambridge, 1991); Raymond, *Invention*.

²⁵ Tamsyn Williams, "'Magnetic figures': polemical prints of the English revolution', in Lucy Gent and Nigel Llewellyn (eds.), *Renaissance bodies: the human figure in English culture c. 1540-1660* (London, 1990), pp. 86-110; James Holstun (ed.), *Pamphlet Wars: Prose in the English Revolution* (London, 1992); Smith, *Literature and Revolution in England, 1640-1660* (New Haven and London, 1994); Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1999); David Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic: Poetry,*

market for print populated by a diverse range of independent, creative writers and printers and dynamic, well-informed readers.²⁶ Whether or not this re-evaluation meets the criteria for the existence of a Habermasian public sphere in England during the mid-seventeenth century, it is clear that a significant proportion of England's population inhabited and was able to participate in this world of print culture.²⁷ Alongside this, there has been a reassessment of the extent to which printed literature was subject to censorship during the first half of the seventeenth century. Arguments that the early Stuart monarchs exercised tight controls over the press have been challenged, with historians arguing to various degrees that the state and the Stationers' Company either lacked the means to enforce rigorous censorship or lacked the will to censor every publication.²⁸ Most recently, both Jason McElligott and Cyndia Clegg have proposed syntheses of these two positions, arguing that while censorship in mid-seventeenth century England was not all pervasive, the state nevertheless possessed organised and efficient tools for intervening with the press and was determined to do so.²⁹ Historians

Rhetoric and Politics, 1627-1660 (Cambridge, 2000); Helen Pierce, 'Anti-episcopacy and Graphic Satire in England, 1640-1645', *HJ*, 47, 4 (2004), pp. 809-848; Helen Pierce, *Unseemly Pictures: Graphic Satire and Politics in Early Modern England* (New Haven and London, 2008).

²⁶ Sharon Achinstein, 'The Politics of Babel in the English Revolution', in Holstun (ed.), *Pamphlet Wars*, pp. 14-45; Sharon Achinstein, *Milton and the Revolutionary Reader* (Princeton, 1994); David Zaret, *Origins of Democratic Culture: Printing, Petitions, and the Public Sphere in Early-Modern England* (Princeton, 2000).

²⁷ For discussions of the application of Habermas's work to mid-seventeenth century England, see Joad Raymond, Raymond, Joad. 'The newspaper, public opinion, and the public sphere in the seventeenth century', in Joad Raymond (ed.), *News, newspapers and society in early modern Britain* (London, 1999), pp. 109-140; Joad Raymond, 'Describing Publicity in Early Modern England', *HLQ*, 67 (2004), pp. 101-129.

²⁸ F. S. Siebert, *Freedom of the Press in England, 1476-1776* (Urbana, Illinois, 1952); Christopher Hill, in 'Censorship and English literature', in *The Collected Essays of Christopher Hill* (Brighton, 1984), vol. 1, pp. 32-71; Blair Worden, 'Licensing and political censorship in early modern England', in A. C. Duke & C. A. Tamse (eds.), *Too Mighty to be Free: Censorship and the Press in Britain and the Netherlands* (Zutphen, 1987), pp. 45-62; Sheila Lambert, 'Richard Montagu, Arminianism and Censorship', *Past and Present*, 124 (1989), pp. 36-68; Sheila Lambert, 'State control of the press in theory and in practice: the role of the Stationers' Company before 1640', in Robin Myers & Michael Harris (eds.), *Censorship and the Control of Print in England and France, 1600-1900* (Winchester, 1992), pp. 1-32; Anthony Milton, 'Licensing, Censorship, and Religious Orthodoxy in Early Stuart England', *HJ*, 41, 3 (1998), pp. 625-651.

²⁹ Cyndia Clegg, *Press Censorship in Jacobean England* (Cambridge, 2001), ch.1; Jason McElligott, "'A Couple of Hundred Squabbling Small Tradesmen"? Censorship, the Stationers' Company, and the state in early modern England', *Media History*, 11, 1/2 (2005), pp. 87-104; McElligott, *Royalism, Print and Censorship*, ch. 7; Cyndia Clegg, *Press censorship in Caroline England* (Cambridge, 2008).

have also examined specific attempts to influence or control public opinion through print by political and religious factions.³⁰

The political context in which the early newsbooks were produced has also been the subject of revision. In the traditional Whig historiography of the period, the Commonwealth has been seen as a period in which the ideals of the Long Parliament were betrayed. S. R. Gardiner described members of the Rump as ‘no more than instruments in the hands of the men of the sword’.³¹ In the 1970s, first David Underdown and then Blair Worden challenged Gardiner’s verdict, in studies of the Rump which revealed the extent of its members’ ambitions, and which challenged its reputation as a corrupt, ineffective body.³² There is growing agreement that the establishment of a republic was an unintended consequence of the political manoeuvring around the king’s trial.³³ Nevertheless, a number of scholars have argued that the Commonwealth developed an innovative and effective political culture through which it sought to legitimise its claim to authority.³⁴

³⁰ Michael Mendle, ‘News and the pamphlet culture of mid-seventeenth century England’, in B. M. Dooley & S. A. Alcorn (eds.), *The Politics of Information in Early Modern Europe* (London and New York, 2001), pp. 57-79; Jason Peacey, ‘Politics, accounts and propaganda in the Long Parliament’, in Christopher Kyle & Jason Peacey (eds.), *Parliament at work: parliamentary committees, political power, and public access in early modern England* (Woodbridge, 2002), pp. 59-78; Peacey, *Politicians*; Jason Peacey, ‘The hunting of the Leveller: the sophistication of parliamentary propaganda, 1647-53’, *Historical Research*, 78, 199 (2005), pp. 15-42; Jason Peacey, ‘Cromwellian England: a Propaganda State?’, *History*, 91, 302 (2006), pp. 176-199; David Como, ‘Secret Printing, the Crisis of 1640, and the Origins of Civil War Radicalism’, *Past & Present*, 196, 1 (2007), pp. 37-82.

³¹ Gardiner, *History of the Commonwealth*, vol. 1, p. 1.

³² David Underdown, *Pride’s Purge: Politics in the Puritan Revolution* (Oxford, 1971); Worden, *Rump Parliament*.

³³ J. S. A. Adamson, ‘The frightened junto: perceptions of Ireland, and the last attempts at settlement with Charles I’, in Jason Peacey (ed.), *The regicides and the execution of Charles I*, pp. 36-70; Sean Kelsey, ‘The death of Charles I’, *HJ*, 45, 4 (2002), pp. 727-754; Sean Kelsey, ‘The trial of Charles I’, *EHR*, 118, 477 (2003), pp. 583-616.

³⁴ Nigel Smith, *Literature and Revolution in England, 1640-1660* (New Haven and London, 1994); Sarah Barber, *Regicide and republicanism: politics and ethics in the English revolution, 1646-1659* (Edinburgh, 1996); Sean Kelsey, *Inventing a Republic: the Political Culture of the English Commonwealth, 1649-1653* (Manchester, 1997); David Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric and Politics, 1627-1660* (Cambridge, 1999); Worden, *Literature and Politics in Cromwellian England*.

The dissertation seeks to contribute to these historiographical trends in three key ways. First, it aims to fill a gap in our understanding of the news industry during the Commonwealth. The news industry of the 1650s has been less well-examined than that of the 1640s. Historians have focused mainly on *Mercurius Politicus*, the newsbook edited by Marchamont Nedham, which enjoyed a monopoly of the licensed market for much of the decade – passing over the number of other newsbooks (both licensed and unlicensed) which existed during this period.³⁵ The dissertation uses the newsbooks as material sources to examine the different ways in which they were written, licensed, printed and sold. While the communication circuit behind the royalist newsbooks of this period has been expertly reconstructed, the chain of production behind newsbooks which conformed to the Licensing Act has not yet been studied.³⁶ The dissertation thus contributes to our understanding of how the London book trade reacted to the increase in regulation and control that the Licensing Act put in place.

Secondly, the dissertation also seeks to understand the market for news during the late 1640s and early 1650s, and how the Commonwealth tried to control it. Newsbooks inspired conflicting responses amongst contemporaries: they were seen as one of the causes of England's political and religious divisions, and yet at the same time the continued engagement of politicians in editing and licensing them speaks to their usefulness in attempting to forge political unity. Newsbooks could suppress or modify information just as much as they could spread it. The early Commonwealth newsbooks thus provide a case study in how political grandees conceived of news and sought to influence it, and of the extent to which they were able to succeed. The dissertation analyses the drafting and passage of the Licensing Act, to

³⁵ Worden, 'Marchamont Nedham and the beginnings of English republicanism'; Worden, 'Milton and Marchamont Nedham'; Worden, "'Wit in a Roundhead': the dilemma of Marchamont Nedham"; Raymond, "'A Mercury with a winged conscience'".

³⁶ McElligott, *Royalism, Print and Censorship*, pp. 127-149.

understand the intentions behind the new licensing arrangements it established. It reconstructs the factional manoeuvring behind the establishment of the newsbooks, and how different factions sought to influence their content. It examines the type of reader the Council envisaged reading the newsbooks, and compares this with the responses of actual readers, to assess the extent to which the Commonwealth was able to redefine and control the news market.

Finally, the dissertation also seeks to contribute to our understanding of how the early Commonwealth was ruled. A growing literature has seen the social order in early modern England as both materially and culturally constructed. With limited physical means of enforcing its will, the English monarchy and in turn its representatives in the localities relied on popular acceptance of its authority in order to exercise power.³⁷ It also relied on a system of civic participation by social ranks below the level of the gentry in order for parish and county politics to function effectively.³⁸ Just as important as economic status to the smooth-running of this system were symbolic, normative vocabularies. These vocabularies could be deployed and potentially subverted by subordinates as well as by elites, making control over them vital for any figure of authority seeking legitimacy.³⁹ The importance that the Council of State placed on managing and controlling news is suggestive about the role of newsbooks in legitimising the Commonwealth's authority in the wake of military and constitutional crisis. Equally, the extent to which the regime succeeded in doing so can provide an insight into how successfully the Commonwealth managed to establish itself. The dissertation argues

³⁷ John Walter, 'The English People and the English Revolution Revisited', *History Workshop Journal*, 61, 1 (2006), pp. 171-182.

³⁸ Keith Wrightson, 'The Politics of the Parish in Early Modern England', in Paul Griffiths, Adam Fox and Steve Hindle (eds.), *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England* (London, 1996), pp. 10-46; Steve Hindle, *The State and Social Change in Early Modern England, c.1550-1640* (London, 2000).

³⁹ Michael Braddick and John Walter, 'Grids of Power: Order, Hierarchy and Subordination in Early Modern Society', in Braddick and Walter (eds.), *Negotiating Power in Early Modern Society: Order, Hierarchy and Subordination in Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 1-42.

that although the early newsbooks ultimately failed in their attempt to engage readers with an alternative type of news the intention and energy put into creating them are still evidence of a lively, confident regime.

Chapter 2

The Licensing Act and its origins

The Licensing Act and the licensed newsbooks that followed it need to be understood in the context of the invention and continued reinvention of newsbooks from 1641 onwards. Newsbooks were born of political conflict, and continued to be a politicised genre throughout the 1640s. Their origin lies in the steps taken from 1640 onwards by members of the Long Parliament to secure popular backing for their grievances.¹ As existing censorship mechanisms broke down, Parliament produced legislation to fill the gap, but MPs and peers breached it in order to publish their own speeches or commission sympathetic works.² Scriveners also responded to the demand. By the start of 1641, professionally produced manuscript newsletters – under the title of *Diurnal Occurrences, or the heads of the proceedings in Parliament* – had also begun to circulate with accounts of parliamentary proceedings.

Parliament's desire to address and engage with the political nation was expressed most clearly in the Grand Remonstrance of November 1641, which the king's party identified very clearly as a popular document. Sir Edward Dering famously objected that 'I did not dream that we should remonstrate downward, tell stories to the people, and talke of the King as of a third person'.³ This was the context in which John Thomas – a publisher and bookseller linked to John Pym – published in printed form the manuscript of *Diurnal Occurrences* for the week of 22-29 November. He produced a subsequent edition the

¹ J. S. A. Adamson, *The Noble Revolt: the Overthrow of Charles I* (London, 2007), pp. 67-70, 265-266.

² Allan Cromartie, 'The Printing of Parliamentary Speeches November 1640-July 1642', *HJ*, 33 (1990), pp. 23-44; Raymond, *Invention*, pp. 101-102, 114-115; Michael Mendle, 'De facto freedom, de facto authority: press and parliament, 1640-1643', *HJ*, 38, 2 (1995), pp. 307-32.

³ Edward Dering, *A collection of speeches made by Sir Edward Dering Knight and Baronet, in matter of religion* (London, 1642), BL, TT, E.197[1], p. 109.

following week, and quickly developed a number of competitors.⁴ These first newsbooks were written in a plain narrative style, but editors nevertheless quickly broadened their focus, and their range of sources, from Parliament to the wider nation. Many also began to display particular political allegiances. The start of 1643 saw them quickly become factionalised and used to further particular political agendas. As this chapter will argue, this early politicisation of newsbooks cast a long shadow over the Commonwealth regime's attitude to news.

2.1 Challenges facing the Commonwealth

At the start of 1649, the Commonwealth faced challenges both within and outside England. Its army of 47,000 troops required significant taxation and the continuation of unpopular free quarter if they were to be maintained.⁵ Leveller petitions and mutinies were still occurring within regiments. Royalist exiles in Holland were contemplating the prospect of an invasion, with Prince Rupert launching periodic raids on shipping in the Irish Sea.⁶ In Scotland, Charles Stuart had been proclaimed Charles II, meaning Scotland could be used as a base for a royalist invasion of England. In Ireland, the alliance between the Marquis of Ormond and the Confederate Catholics had also declared Charles king, meaning another possible invasion force lay to the west.⁷

What made these challenges doubly threatening was that the regime's enemies sought to influence popular opinion against it. Leveller leaders mobilised popular support both through collecting signatures to petitions and through targeted writing of pamphlets. On 26

⁴ Raymond, *Invention*, pp. 80-126.

⁵ C. H. Firth, *Cromwell's army: a history of the English soldier during the civil wars, the Commonwealth and the Protectorate* (London, 1962), pp. 35-35.

⁶ Gardiner, *History of the Commonwealth*, vol. 1, pp. 13-14.

⁷ Micheál Ó Siochrú, *God's Executioner: Oliver Cromwell and the Conquest of Ireland* (London, 2008), pp. 52-54.

February, for example, John Lilburne and a number of his comrades presented to Parliament a petition criticising army grandees.⁸ The petition was subsequently published as *Englands New Chains*, stating explicitly that it was aimed at a popular audience, ‘for the timely information and benefit of all that adhere unto the common interest of the people’.⁹ In March, eight cashiered troopers presented their side of the story to a wider public in *The Hunting of the Foxes*.¹⁰ This too was ‘directed to all the Free-Commons of England’.¹¹ Meanwhile royalist newsbooks kept up a barrage of criticism of the new regime, applauding the Scots’ ‘noncompliance with the abortive State of White-hall’.¹² Other royalist publications continued the process which the *Eikon Basilike* had started of turning Charles I into a glorious martyr.¹³ The Scottish Parliament also commissioned a relatively short, three-sheet pamphlet to be printed in London, lamenting that their Protestant brethren ‘[go] down unto the gates of death, as tending to overturn Religion, destroy the League and Covenant, and to raze the foundations of Government’.¹⁴

The immediate origins of the Licensing Act lie in this context. On 17 February 1649, a Council of State chaired by John Bradshaw was appointed by the Rump to replace the Derby House Committee, the executive body which had evolved out of the Committee of Both Kingdoms.¹⁵ One of the Council’s key objectives was ‘preventing, resisting and

⁸ Ian Gentles, *The New Model Army in England, Ireland and Scotland* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 316-317.

⁹ John Lilburne, *Englands new chains discovered* (London, 1649), BL, TT, E.545[27], sig. 9r.

¹⁰ Gentles, *The New Model Army*, p. 319.

¹¹ [Richard Overton?], *The hunting of the foxes from New-Market and Triploe-Heaths to White-Hall, by five small beagles (late of the Armie.)* (London, 1649), BL, TT, E.548[7], title page.

¹² *Mercurius pragmaticus (for King Charles II)* (3-10 July 1649), BL, TT, E.563[12], sig. L3r.

¹³ See for example *A hand-kirchife for loyall mourners or A cordiall for drooping spirits* (London, 1649), BL, TT, E.541[6]; *The Royall Legacies or Charles the First* (London, 1649), BL, TT, E.557[1]; *The Life and Death of King Charls the Martyr* (London, 1649), BL, TT, E.571[2].

¹⁴ *A necessary and seasonable testimony against toleration and the present proceedings of sectaries* (London, 1649), BL, TT, E.541[3], p. 2.

¹⁵ ‘House of Commons Journal Volume 6: 17 February 1649’, *Journal of the House of Commons: volume 6: 1648-1651* (1802), pp. 144-145. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=25598> Date accessed: 26 May 2009; Sean Kelsey, ‘The foundation of the Council of State’, in Christopher Kyle and Jason Peacey (eds.), *Parliament at work*, pp. 129-48; ‘February 1649: An Act of this Present Parliament for Constituting a Counsell of State for the Comonwealth of England’, *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum*,

suppressing all tumults and insurrections that shall happen to rise... or any invasions... from abroad', by directing 'all the Militias and forces both by Sea and Land of England, and Ireland'.¹⁶ In practice, however, as much of the Council's task was carried out through control of the press. Early in 1649, a proof copy of *Eikon Basilike* was confiscated, and by March daily searches for copies of it were being carried out at printers and book-sellers.¹⁷ In April, warrants were issued for the arrest of Samuel Sheppard and William Wright (writer and printer of *Mercurius Elencticus*), and the writers and printers of *The Man in the Moon* and *Mercurius Pragmaticus*.¹⁸ In June, a warrant was issued for the arrest of Marchamont Nedham.¹⁹ Leveller publications received similar attention from the Council. In March the Rump referred the Leveller pamphlet *The Second Part of Englands new chains discovered* to the Council as an 'Obnoxious Publication'.²⁰ In May, the Council asked the Rump to dismiss Gilbert Mabbott from his post as licenser, because of his track record in licensing 'divers dangerous books' such as the Leveller newsbook *The Moderate*.²¹ Hostile pamphlets were 'highly seditious and destructive to the government', and were seen to be causing 'Division and Mutiny in the Army'.²² For the Council of State, it was vital to 'apprehend... [those] who had endeavoured or should endeavour to spread those and similar papers'.²³ A royalist

1642-1660 (1911), pp. 2-4. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=56310> Date accessed: 26 May 2009.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶ 'House of Commons Journal Volume 6: 17 February 1649', *Journal of the House of Commons: volume 6: 1648-1651* (1802), pp. 144-145. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=25598> Date accessed: 26 May 2009.

¹⁷ McElligott, *Royalism, Print and Censorship*, p. 165-166; *Mercurius pragmaticus* (27 February-5 March 1649), BL, TT, E.546[4] (unpaginated).

¹⁸ 'Warrants', *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Interregnum, 1649-50* (1875), pp. 526-570. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=54038> Date accessed: 3 June 2009.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ 'House of Commons Journal Volume 6: 27 March 1649', *Journal of the House of Commons: volume 6: 1648-1651* (1802), pp. 174-175. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=25622> Date accessed: 23 May 2009.

²¹ 'Volume 1: May 1649', *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Interregnum, 1649-50* (1875), pp. 117-169. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=54023> Date accessed: 23 May 2009.

²² 'House of Commons Journal Volume 6: 27 March 1649', *Journal of the House of Commons: volume 6: 1648-1651* (1802), pp. 174-175. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=25622> Date accessed: 23 May 2009.

²³ 'Volume 1: May 1649', *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Interregnum, 1649-50* (1875), p. 145. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=54023> Date accessed: 3 June 2009.

newsbook vocalised the Council's probable fears when it argued that critical pamphlets 'tell the People, they are no Parliament, but Rebels and Traitors, who have Murthered the King'.²⁴ Bradshaw was rumoured to have started work on a new framework for managing the press as early as April 1649:

'The order against *unlicensed bookes* is suspended for the present, thinking thereby to catch the authors but hould a blow, some are wiser then some. That *Scarlet Cutthroat*, and *Scelestick Regicid Bradshaw*, I here hath desired to have the managing of that businesse and will take some such new course as was never taken yet.'²⁵

No other sources from April 1649 support this rumour, but it was to be confirmed a month later. On 12 May, the Council agreed that Bradshaw should 'prepare and bring in an Act prohibiting the printing of invective and scandalous pamphlets against the commonwealth'.²⁶ On 22 May, Sir Henry Mildmay reported back from the Council of State to the Rump that they would be preparing such an act.²⁷ Why it was Bradshaw who ended up leading on drafting the act remains unclear. It is possible that his background as a lawyer meant he was felt to be best qualified to do so.²⁸ It may also relate to the increasing vitriol with which the royalist press had attacked Bradshaw since his role as Lord President of the High Court of Justice that had tried Charles I. Newsbooks compared him to Pontius Pilate presiding over the trial of Jesus, an attack which have may have stung him into taking a leading role.²⁹ It is possible that Thomas Scot supported Bradshaw in drafting the Act, given his subsequent role in the Commonwealth's intelligence system and his close links with

²⁴ *Mercurius pragmaticus (for King Charles II)* (9-16 October 1649), BL, TT, E.575[20], sig Bbv.

²⁵ *Mercurius pragmaticus* (3-10 April 1649), BL, TT, E.550[13] (unpaginated).

²⁶ 'Volume 1: May 1649', *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Interregnum, 1649-50* (1875), pp. 117-169. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=54023> Date accessed: 20 May 2009.

²⁷ 'House of Commons Journal Volume 6: 22 May 1649', *Journal of the House of Commons: volume 6: 1648-1651* (1802), pp. 213-214. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=25666> Date accessed: 20 May 2009.

²⁸ Sean Kelsey, 'Bradshaw, John, Lord Bradshaw (*bap.* 1602, *d.* 1659)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004); online edn, Jan 2008. URL: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3201> Date accessed: 26 May 2009.

²⁹ *Mercurius pragmaticus (for King Charles II)* (29 May-5 June 1649), BL, TT, E.558[20], sig. 1r; *The man in the moon* (12-19 September 1649), BL, TT, E.574[9], p. 180.

Bradshaw.³⁰ John Milton may also have been involved in its drafting. It is true that the licensing arrangements established and confirmed by the Licensing Act are somewhat different from Milton's arguments against pre-publication censorship five years earlier in *Areopagitica*.³¹ As a result, some scholars have argued that Milton's participation in licensing was done perfunctorily, or with a radical reinterpretation of the Act.³² And yet in February 1649 Milton had accepted a position working for the Council of State, in which the pragmatic needs of the role often overrode principles. In June, for example, the Council of State ordered 'Mr. Milton to examine the papers of Pragmaticus', to assist its pursuit of Marchamont Nedham.³³ There are a number of similar examples where Milton helped to prosecute authors and printers in a manner far removed from the open, laissez-faire market for print he had argued for in *Areopagitica*.³⁴ Nevertheless, as he himself had argued, 'I deny not, but that it is of greatest concernment in the Church and Commonwealth, to have a vigilant eye how Bookes demeane themselves as well as men; and thereafter to confine, imprison, and do sharpest justice on them as malefactors'.³⁵ If we accept that there is no reason why Milton necessarily have remained consistent to his arguments five years previously, it increases the possibility that he was connected to the Act. Certainly he was a friend and perhaps also relative of Bradshaw, who had acted as Milton's attorney in 1647.³⁶ It seems likely that Bradshaw would have at least discussed the substance of the Act with Milton, given his strong connections to the book trade.

³⁰ C. H. Firth, 'Thomas Scot's Account of his Actions as Intelligencer During the Commonwealth', *EHR*, 12, 45 (1897), pp. 116-126.

³¹ John Milton, *Areopagitica; a speech of Mr. John Milton for the liberty of unlicens'd printing, to the Parliament of England* (London, 1644), BL, TT, E.18[9].

³² Sabrina Baron, 'Licensing readers, licensing authorities in seventeenth-century England', in Jennifer Andersen & Elizabeth Sauer (eds.), *Books and readers in early modern England: material studies* (Philadelphia, PA, 2002), pp. 234-235; Randy Robinson, *Censorship and Conflict in Seventeenth-Century England: The Subtle Art of Division* (Pennsylvania, 2009), pp. 125-129.

³³ 'Volume 2: June 1649', *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Interregnum, 1649-50* (1875), pp. 169-216. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=54024> Date accessed: 23 May 2009.

³⁴ Stephen B. Dobranski, *Milton, authorship, and the book trade* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 125-153.

³⁵ Milton, *Areopagitica*, p. 4.

³⁶ Worden, *Literature and Politics in Cromwellian England*, p. 45.

Thereafter, the Council continued to press the Rump on the Act's importance. On 22 June, Henry Marten included it in a list of business that the Council considered it vital the Rump consider before the end of the summer.³⁷ By the start of August, Bradshaw appears to have finalised two separate bills: one to regulate printing, and one specifically designed to crack down on scandalous pamphlets.³⁸ These were laid before the Commons on 6 August, with a single committee appointed to consider both.³⁹ Meanwhile Bradshaw was rumoured to be making overtures to London printers, to get their support in suppressing unwelcome pamphlets. Apparently on the advice of the Independent minister Philip Nye, Bradshaw met at Whitehall with a delegation of printers including Matthew Simmons, Robert White, Thomas Brudenell and a number of others.⁴⁰

2.2 The substance of the Licensing Act

The 'Act against unlicensed and scandalous Books and Pamphlets; and for better Regulating of Printing' was finally agreed by the Commons on 14 September.⁴¹ Anyone found involved in unlicensed printing could be fined, or imprisoned if they could not pay the fine: £10 for authors, £5 for printers and £2 for booksellers. Buyers caught in possession of unlicensed books faced a fine of £1. Printers could also face confiscation of their presses, and had to enter a bond of £300 and print the name of the relevant licenser on all of their

³⁷ 'House of Commons Journal Volume 6: 22 June 1649', *Journal of the House of Commons: volume 6: 1648-1651* (1802), pp. 239-241. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=25692> Date accessed: 20 May 2009.

³⁸ 'Volume 2: August 1649', *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Interregnum, 1649-50* (1875), pp. 258-296. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=54026> Date accessed: 23 May 2009.

³⁹ 'House of Commons Journal Volume 6: 6 August 1649', *Journal of the House of Commons: volume 6: 1648-1651* (1802), pp. 275-276. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=25729> Date accessed: 20 May 2009.

⁴⁰ *Mercurius pragmaticus (for King Charles II)* (14-21 August 1649), BL, TT, E.571[9], sig. S2v.

⁴¹ 'House of Commons Journal Volume 6: 14 September 1649', *Journal of the House of Commons: volume 6: 1648-1651* (1802), pp. 295-296. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=25752> Date accessed: 20 May 2009.

publications. Licensers previously involved in regulating the book trade had their licenses stripped away, to be replaced by three licensers: the clerk to Parliament, the Secretary to the army, and anyone else appointed by the Council of State.

The wider rationale behind the Act can be deduced from editorials in the first issues of the *Briefe Relation*, which make clear that freedom of the press is ‘wild and irregular’.⁴² ‘Swarmes and crouds’ of libels and pamphlets have a devastating impact due to their multiplicity of voices.⁴³ The babel of voices caused by competing pamphlets was not the only concern. The witty and sarcastic exchanges of royalist newsbooks are deemed to be ‘ridiculous and nauseous fopperies and vanities’ – humour is not seen as an appropriate genre for coverage of political issues. Nor too are other techniques deployed by newsbook writers, such as tergiversation (changing views or allegiance repeatedly) and amphibology (using misleading words to deceive). News – in the sense of what it had become by the late 1640s – was destructive: ‘to have no Newes is good Newes, it is a symptome of a placid and quiet state of affaires’. News was about ‘Wars, Commotions, and Troubles’, and could only be harmful. Nevertheless, it was still necessary that the people should be ‘informed of those passage of Providence in which God is pleased to manifest and dispense himselfe’, and so a small number of officially-approved newsbooks were permitted.⁴⁴

In their use of language, these editorials draw strongly on linguistic tropes from the early 1640s, a period when cheap, often combative pamphlets saw a sudden explosion in numbers. Critiques of news were not new, dating back at least as far 1620s and Ben Jonson’s *The Staple of News*, which satirised the dangers of journalists undermining politics.⁴⁵

⁴² *Briefe Relation* (2 October 1649), BL, TT, E.575[6], p. 1.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 1

⁴⁴ *Briefe Relation* (2-9 October 1649), BL, TT, E.575[15], p. 9.

⁴⁵ Ben Jonson, *The Staple of News*, in *The workes of Benjamin Ionson* (London, 1640), STC (2nd ed.) / 14754.

However, the language used to criticise them developed a particular turn during the early 1640s. The imagery of ‘swarmes and crouds’ of libels and pamphlets was a particular theme of critiques of cheap print from 1641 and 1642.⁴⁶ Such critiques often described the market for newsbooks and other pamphlets in terms drawn from the story of the Tower of Babel.⁴⁷ Common, too was the comparison of pamphlets to a ‘disease’ which, with political intervention, ‘will weare out and the humours will be altered’.⁴⁸ A sense of the similarities can be seen by comparing the *Briefe Relation*’s editorials to critiques of pamphlets published in 1642. *A Presse Full of Pamphlets* argued that there was ‘nothing more congruent to the nourishment of division’ than a ‘diversity of Rumours mixt with Falsity and Scandalisme’.⁴⁹ Newsbooks inappropriately exposed false accounts of parliamentary proceedings of Parliament to public view. If the truth were exposed, the pamphlet argues, ‘it would gain great Admiration & Renown’.⁵⁰ *A Paradox Useful for the Times* bemoaned ‘your lying Diurnals, your absurd Passages, your diabolical Newes from Heaven’ and the fact that ‘lying and scandalous Pamphlets fly about the City in every corner’.⁵¹ The similar language deployed in the *Briefe Relation*’s editorials suggests that the aim of the Licensing Act was to return the meaning of news to an idealised pre-1640s definition. The extent to which it was able to do so will be the subject of the rest of this dissertation.

⁴⁶ Kristen Poole, *Radical Religion from Shakespeare to Milton: Figures of Nonconformity in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 105-107.

⁴⁷ Achinstein, ‘The Politics of Babel in the English Revolution’, pp. 17-18. See for example *The World Is Ruled & Governed By Opinion* (London, 1641), BL, BM Satires 272.

⁴⁸ *Briefe Relation* (2-9 October 1649), BL, TT, E.575[15], p. 9.

⁴⁹ *A Presse Full of Pamphlets* (London, 1642), BL, TT, E.142[9], sig. A2r.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, sig. A2v.

⁵¹ Edward Browne, *A paradox usefull for the times* (London, 1642), BL, TT, E.126[21], sigs. Ar, A3v.

Chapter 3

Politics

Newsbooks were not just a product of political conflict. Throughout the 1640s, they continued to be a vehicle for political manoeuvring, actively influencing the conflicts between political factions. The royalist newsbook *Mercurius Aulicus* was one of the first newsbooks to be firmly controlled by a political grouping. The licensing of its competitor, *Mercurius Britannicus*, was overseen by a succession of politicians, changes in whom were reflected in differing editorial lines on key political issues.¹ Later in the 1640s, *The Moderate* became a vehicle for views sympathetic to the cause of the Levellers.² Early in 1649, Henry Walker worked with army grandees to produce news reports of the regicide sympathetic to their views.³ On the royalist side, counterfeits of well-known newsbook titles that emerged in the late 1640s were less a reflection of commercial piracy than of political disagreements amongst royalists.⁴ The Licensing Act was intended to stop pamphlets from stirring up such divisions. In practice, however, newsbooks continued to be a politicised genre that was subject to influence and manipulation by politicians and authors alike. This chapter attempts to trace the extent to which the Commonwealth's early newsbooks may have reflected or shaped the evolving political groupings within Parliament, the army and the Council of State.

3.1 Conflict over licensing

The Licensing Act specified that one of the three licensers allowed to sanction the publication of pamphlets was to be the 'Secretary of the Army'. On 26 September, Richard

¹ Peacey, 'The Struggle for *Mercurius Britannicus*', pp. 517-44; Macadam, '*Mercurius Britannicus*', chs. 5-6.

² Roger Howell & D. E. Brewster, 'Reconsidering the Levellers: The Evidence of *The Moderate*', *Past & Present*, 46 (1970), pp. 68-86.

³ Peacey, 'Reporting a revolution', pp. 161-80.

⁴ Peacey, "'The counterfeit silly curr'", pp. 27-57.

Hatter began entering publications into the Stationers' Register in this capacity.⁵ On 1 October, he licensed two editions of the *Perfect Diurnall*.⁶ On 3 October, he licensed *Perfect Occurrences*; between 6 and 11 October he licensed several other newsbooks.⁷ Hatter was part of the army secretariat, but was clearly not the 'Secretary of the Army' the Council of State had envisaged. On 2 October, the Council of State wrote to Sir John Wollaston (one of the aldermen of the City of London) asking for action to be taken against unnamed publishers – who must have been those behind the *Perfect Diurnall*, given that this was the only newsbook licensed by Hatter at this point – 'notwithstanding any pretence of being licensed by one Hatter, whom we do not know to be secretary to the army; and if he were, he has no power to license anything but those of the army'.⁸ Hatter entered his last publication in the Stationers' Register on 11 October. On 30 October, John Rushworth – secretary to Fairfax and also to the Council of Officers – began entering books in the Stationers' Register and henceforth took up position as the third of the Commonwealth's licensers after Frost and Scobell.⁹

Hatter's dismissal has often been seen as evidence of the Council of State trying to suppress news of the massacre of the garrison at Drogheda.¹⁰ Hatter licensed a series of publications – so the argument runs – which revealed unwanted details of the siege, which the Council of State acted to silence. It is true that the newsbooks licensed by Hatter did contain details of the slaughter at Drogheda.¹¹ However, there are issues with chronology and motive

⁵ *SR*, p. 326.

⁶ *Ibid.* The issues were for 17-24 September and 24 September-1 October 1649.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ 'Volume 3: October 1649', *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Interregnum, 1649-50* (1875), pp. 326-373. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=54028> Date accessed: 22 June 2009.

⁹ *SR*, p. 329.

¹⁰ Williams, *History of English Journalism*, pp. 125-126; Muddiman, 'S.R. Gardiner's Historical Method', pp. 24-25; Muddiman, 'The Licensed Newsbooks, 1649 and 1650', pp. 113-116; Peacey, *Politicians*, p. 158; Peacey, 'Management of civil war newspapers', p. 114.

¹¹ *Perfect Diurnall* (24 September-1 October 1649), BL, TT, E.533[13], p. 2809-2810; *Perfect Occurrences* (28 September-4 October 1649), BL, TT, E.533[15], pp. 1274-1284; *Perfect Occurrences* (28 September-4 October

which render it implausible. The *Perfect Diurnall* was not the first newsbook the Council of State attempted to suppress at this time. An undated entry survives in the Council of State papers that is placed with material from February 1650, but which has clearly been misdated. It gives a warrant for the arrest of John Clowes and Robert Ibbitson, printers of *Perfect Occurrences*, and its author, ordering that they be fined under the terms of the Licensing Act.¹² It cannot therefore date to before 20 September 1649, or after 12 October 1649 (when the final edition of the title was published). It probably relates to the edition for 28 September, which closed by saying that it had not yet been decided who would take up the licensing appointments under the Act, and apologised for publishing under the old licence.¹³ These licences had been repealed by the Licensing Act, so Walker and his printers were in direct contravention of the new legislation. It is probably this which explains the Council's decision to pursue the paper's editor and publishers. The same reason is likely to lie behind their pursuit of the *Perfect Diurnall*'s publishers, as a reconstruction of which newsbooks and pamphlets broke the news makes clear. While Williams suggests that the editions of *Perfect Occurrences* and the *Perfect Diurnall* licensed by Hatter were the only ones that revealed the massacre both of the garrison and civilians, in fact a number of other publications, official and otherwise, revealed these details. Peters's original letter of 15 September, saying 'none spared', was read in the Commons on 28 September and ordered to be printed by Scobell.¹⁴ It was then reprinted in the *Moderate Intelligencer* on 4 October.¹⁵ Cromwell's two letters to Lenthall, giving details of the extensive casualties suffered by Drogheda's garrison including the clubbing to death of priests and the killing of 'many inhabitants', were printed at the order

1649), BL, TT, E.533[15], pp. 1274-1284; *The kingdomes faithfull and impartiall scout* (28 September-5 October), BL, TT, E.533[16], pp. 258-259; *Perfect Diurnall* (1-8 October 1649), BL, TT, E.533[17], p. 2695.

¹² 'Volume 8: February 16-28, 1650', *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Interregnum, 1650* (1876), pp. 1-16. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=54358> Date accessed: 22 June 2009. Although the powers of arrest the source quotes are from the September 1647 printing ordinance, these had been maintained by the Licensing Act. The level of fines cited is from the Licensing Act, and makes clear the source must post-date it.

¹³ *Perfect Occurrences* (21-28 September 1649), BL, TT, E.533[12], p. 1324.

¹⁴ Hugh Peters, *A letter from Ireland* (London, 1649), BL, TT, E.574[28].

¹⁵ *Moderate Intelligencer* (27 September-4 October 1649), BL, TT, E.575[10], p. 2287.

of Parliament.¹⁶ The first issue of the *Briefe Relation* on 2 October stated that the ‘whole Garrison was put to the Sword’, while the first issue of *Severall Proceedings* on 9 October missed the phrase ‘many inhabitants’ off the list of casualties, but still dwelt on the fact that nearly all the defenders had been killed. These are not the actions of a regime trying to suppress news of a massacre. Most of the regime’s leaders, and the public they were communicating with, would probably have agreed with Cromwell’s judgement that this was a ‘righteous judgement’ on a garrison implicated in the exaggerated tales of massacres that had reached England in the wake of the Irish rebellion in 1641.¹⁷ The *Kingdomes Weekly Intelligencer* for 2 October summed up the Council’s likely motives by stating cautiously that ‘I have for the most part waved the Parliament news, and shall so continue until I am better satisfied with what safety (in relation to their Counsailes) this Pen may walk upon this Paper’.¹⁸ Williams took this newsbook’s refusal to print Hugh Peters’s letter as evidence of the editor’s horror at the slaughter at Drogheda, but the editor goes on to make clear the real reason for his fear: the risk of printing official material linked to Parliament without permission, saying that even if he had access to the Commons journal he would not reprint it.

The motive behind Hatter’s dismissal appears to lie in the factional politics within the army in 1649. Hatter seems to have been associated particularly with the army’s Council of War. A printed declaration by Fairfax after the putting down of the mutiny at Burford in May 1649 was issued by Hatter.¹⁹ The Council of War was Fairfax’s personal advisory body,

¹⁶ *Letters from Ireland, relating the several great successes it hath pleased God to give unto the Parliaments forces there, in the taking of Drogheda, Trym, Dundalk, Carlingford, and the Nury* (London, 1649), BL, TT, E.575[7].

¹⁷ For Cromwell’s phrase, see his letter to Lenthall of 17 September 1649, reprinted in *Letters from Ireland*, p. 9. For exaggerated accounts of massacres of English settlers in the Irish rebellion, see Ethan H. Shagan, ‘Constructing discord: ideology, propaganda, and English responses to the Irish Rebellion of 1641’, *JBS*, 36 (1997), pp. 4-34.

¹⁸ *Kingdomes Weekly Intelligencer* (25 September-2 October 1649), BL, TT, E.575[5], p. 1518.

¹⁹ *A declaration of the proceedings of His Excellency the Lord General Fairfax, in the reducing of the revolted troops* (London, 1649), BL, TT, E.556[1], title page.

made up of around thirty to forty officers of the rank of captain or above.²⁰ Rushworth, by contrast, seems to have acted as secretary to the Council of Officers.²¹ This was a wider body drawing on officers from all levels of the army, which had evolved from the General Council of the Army established in July 1647 as part of radical agitation within the army. By late 1648, the Council of Officers was the body driving events at Westminster, initiating the purge of Parliament on 6 December. Although Fairfax had remained as Lord General Army throughout the king's trial and into 1649, there was a clear political divide between him and the Council of Officers. Pride's purge thrust him into events that he had not initiated, having been opposed to political intervention by the army.²² After the purge, secluded MPs attempting to see him were rebuffed by a written statement by John Rushworth given to them by Edward Whalley (one of the members of the Council of Officers).²³ Nor did Fairfax participate in the king's trial, withdrawing from his position as one of the trial's commissioners.²⁴ Although Rushworth was also secretary to Fairfax, he too was strongly associated with this faction. Orders to the army that were ostensibly from Fairfax were issued in Rushworth's name during the build-up to the regicide, probably as a result of intervention from Ireton and other radicals on the Council of Officers. Hatter's decision to start licensing publications at the end of September 1649 may thus represent an attempt by moderates on the Council of War to influence printed publications in their favour. In turn, the attendance list for the Council of State's meeting on 2 October, when the order to suppress the *Perfect Diurnall* was made, is revealing. Of the nine men present, seven were prominent in what

²⁰ Austin Woolrych, *Soldiers and Statesmen: the General Council of the Army and its Debates, 1647-1648* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 122-123.

²¹ For pamphlets from 1649 which were ordered to be published by the Council of Officers and executed by Rushworth, see *An Agreement prepared for the people of England* (London, 1649), Wing / A783; *The humble answer of the General Council of officers of the Army* (London, 1649), BL, TT, E.537[14]; *A petition from His Excellency Thomas Lord Fairfax and the General Council of officers of the Army* (London, 1649), BL, TT, E.539[2]; *The petition of the General Council of officers under the command of His Excellency Thomas Lord Fairfax* (London, 1649), BL, TT, E.545[30].

²² Andrew Hopper, *Black Tom: Sir Thomas Fairfax and the English Revolution* (Manchester, 2007), p. 94.

²³ Gentles, *New Model Army*, p. 282.

²⁴ Hooper, *Black Tom*, p. 102.

Bulstrode Whitelocke called the ‘juncto’ that drove Commonwealth policy and which had evolved from the grandees driving the purge and the regicide.²⁵ The Council’s attempt to crack down on unlicensed publications may thus be an example of the juncto restructuring the news market in its favour.

3.2 Factional tensions

The *Briefe Relation* was licensed by Gualter Frost, who received a substantial salary of £730 a year for his duties as secretary to the Council of State.²⁶ Since the early 1640s, he had had links with the ‘middle group’ centred around Pym and Viscount Saye and Sele that had evolved into the Independent alliance. He first acted as a courier for secret messages between the Scottish Covenanters and key English peers, before working for the Committee of Safety and then becoming clerk successively to the Committee of Both Kingdoms and the Derby House Committee.²⁷ His links to Cromwell and other members of the remains of the war party were thus substantial. Some issues of the *Briefe Relation* reflect this line, going further than dispassionate accounts of foreign news to praise the Commonwealth’s successes. The sixth issue, for example, was a ‘very full and particular Relation of the great progresse and happy proceedings of the Army of the Common-wealth of *England towards the reducing of Ireland*’.²⁸ This ‘special edition’ of the newsbook, which was printed a day after the previous edition had been published as a one-off special outside the weekly run, gave an extended account of Cromwell’s capture of Wexford. It drew on letters from ‘two worthy

²⁵ ‘Tables of the Daily Attendances of the Members of the Council of State’, *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Interregnum, 1649-50* (1875), pp. xlviiii-lxxv. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=54019> Date accessed: 28 June 2009. The members present associated with the ‘juncto’ were John Bradshaw, Sir John Danvers, Cornelius Holland, Sir William Masham, Luke Robinson, Thomas Scot, and Sir Henry Vane the younger. Also present were John Jones and John Lisle, a religious and political radical respectively. For Whitelocke’s reference to the ‘juncto’, see Worden, *Rump Parliament*, p. 183.

²⁶ Aylmer, *State’s Servants*, p. 255.

²⁷ Aylmer, ‘Frost, Gualter (*bap.* 1598, *d.* 1652)’.

²⁸ *Briefe Relation* (31 October 1649), BL, TT, E. 576[6].

persons', both of which were full of providential explanations of how God's favour had blessed the army's victory. One commented that 'therefore God so ordered it, as to make them vomit up again their stolne riches in one houre, and pay dearly for the innocent blood here spilt', and described the siege as 'righteous judgements upon the adversaries of [God's] peace and glory'.²⁹ The other rejoiced that 'the time is now come, or neare at hand, which the soules of the Saints have so long cryed out for from under the Altar, and that God is now rousing himself to returne unto *Babylon*'.³⁰ These letters, with their providential, millenarian language, were a long way from the normally dry, secular letters published in the *Briefe Relation*. It may be that the special edition originated from radical interests within the army keen to publicise its successes in Ireland in the face of a concerted effort by royalist and Scottish writers to play down the success of the campaign.

And yet the *Briefe Relation* appears, in some cases, to have pushed a line that was more republican than Cromwellian. Its fourth issue, for example, contained an extensive editorial analysing the Commonwealth's position in Europe. It began by stating the importance for an island nation of a navy, particularly given England's natural excellence in trade and industry. It went on to sing the praises of the captains and sailors of the fleet for their efforts in repelling foreign invasion and in protecting England's merchant shipping. This was followed by a list of all the ships in the winter fleet and the names of their captains. The twin focus of this editorial on the navy and merchant fleets is reminiscent of the interest paid to both topics by a number of prominent republicans who were members both of the Rump and the Council of State. In March 1649, the Earl of Warwick had been dismissed from his position as Lord High Admiral, with responsibility for the navy brought under the Council of State instead. Robert Blake, Edward Popham and Richard Deane were appointed Generals-at-

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 55, 56.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

Sea in Warwick's place. A number of members of the Council of State seem to have led this attempt to redevelop England's naval power. Thomas Chaloner, for example, pushed for a return to the period of 'worthy *Hawkins* and famous *Drake*', with English control of the seas maintaining profits from trade.³¹ Thomas Scot had close kinship connections to the city merchant Owen Rowe, and worked with London merchants in 1650 to secure a more effective source of funding for the navy.³² Henry Marten was another leading influence behind the Commonwealth's naval and commercial policies.³³ The *Briefe Relation*'s hymn to the Commonwealth's naval success may reflect the influence of these three figures within the Council of State.

The licenser behind *Severall Proceedings* was Henry Scobell. By 1643 he had become an under-clerk to the Commons, before being appointed clerk early in 1649 to succeed Henry Elsing.³⁴ He would later go on to be firmly associated with the Cromwellian faction, especially during the Protectorate. Scobell also had personal connections to Miles Corbet, another key player in the Council's 'juncto'. As such, it is perhaps not surprising that he engaged Henry Walker as editor of *Severall Proceedings*. As editor of *Perfect Occurrences*, Walker had become linked with Independent grandees in the army and in Parliament.³⁵ Throughout 1649 and 1650, he engaged in a close correspondence with Hugh Peters – chaplain to the army, confidante of Cromwell, and closely involved in the political manoeuvring surrounding the regicide.³⁶

³¹ Thomas Gage, *The English-American, his travail by sea and land, or, A new survey of the West-India's* (London, 1648), Wing / 69:11, sig. 3r.

³² Worden, *Rump Parliament*, p. 256.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 256, 301-302.

³⁴ Sean Kelsey, 'Scobell, Henry (bap. 1610, d. 1660)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004); online edn, Jan 2008. URL: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/24845> Date accessed: 29 May 2009.

³⁵ Peacey, 'Reporting a Revolution', p. 163.

³⁶ Letters from Peters about the progress of the Irish campaign appeared in various issues of *Severall Proceedings*: see for example *Severall Proceedings* (19-26 October 1649), BL, TT, E.533[20], pp. 26-27.

There are several examples of *Severall Proceedings* pushing a Cromwellian line. One relates to Cromwell's attempt to build religious bridges between Independents and Presbyterians from 1649 onwards. In a speech on 23 March 1649, he commented that "I think there is more cause of danger from disunion amongst ourselves than by any thing from our enemies".³⁷ In April 1649, Cromwell appears to have launched a bridge-building exercise to reunite disaffected Independents and Presbyterians. In the Commons, he moved that 'the Presbyterian Government might be settled, promising his endeavors thereto... he likewise moved, that the secure and secluded members might again be invited into the House'. A group of clergymen were also sent to the City of London to persuade Presbyterians to support the new regime.³⁸ These attempts continued in Cromwell's absence.³⁹ Throughout late 1649 and early 1650, *Severall Proceedings* gave extensive coverage to bills about the propagation of the gospel, against incest, and against swearing – all subjects which the Rump had settled on less from a commitment to the Word or puritan morality than from a desire to placate the established ministry. Acts for the propagation of the gospel in Wales and Bristol were printed in full, as were acts for keeping the Sabbath and suppressing incest. This coverage may reflect Walker's support for Cromwell's attempts to bring disaffected Presbyterians into the fold, by publishing the Rump's various measures to do so.

The *Perfect Diurnall* was licensed by John Rushworth. His links to some of the major players behind the purge and the regicide have already been established. He remained as secretary to Fairfax until he resigned his command in June 1650, and in general the content of the newsbooks steered a path between being too radical or too moderate. It printed a number of letters complaining of disaffection in the localities and urging a tough line on royalists,

³⁷ W. C. Abbott, *Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell* (1937-47), vol. 2, pp. 38.

³⁸ Clement Walker, *Anarchia Anglicana: or The history of independency* (1661), BL, TT, E.1052[2], vol. 2, p. 57.

³⁹ Worden, *Rump Parliament*, p. 191.

alongside disapproving material on John Lilburne's election to the corporation of London.⁴⁰ However, there are a number of instances where the *Perfect Diurnall's* content took a line that was more akin to that of the 'juncto' than anything of which Fairfax would have approved.

The *Perfect Diurnall's* coverage of the Engagement oath is one such instance. In February 1649, the remains of the war party, led by Scot, had pushed members to take an oath of engagement swearing loyalty to the new regime, and approving of the High Court of Justice's verdict on the king and the abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords. Fairfax and other members refused to sign, and also refused to sign a modified version recognising the Commonwealth for the future.⁴¹ On 11 October, the Rump passed an act requiring all servants of the state – including officers and soldiers in the army – to sign a slightly milder version of the Engagement too. Although a letter from William Clarke to the Council in around November suggested Fairfax had signed this version, the Council of State continued to press Fairfax to publish his subscription.⁴² On 28 January 1650, a committee of the Council of State – consisting of the hardliners Sir William Armine, Henry Vane, Denis Bond and Thomas Scot – was appointed to pursue Fairfax publicising his subscription.⁴³ On 19 February, Fairfax was sent a peremptory summons by the Council asking him to discuss important matters.⁴⁴ Fairfax seems to have responded by letter rather than in person, confirming that he had signed the version of the Engagement for members of the Council of

⁴⁰ *Perfect Diurnall* (28 January-4 February 1650), BL, TT, E.534[6], p. 68; *Perfect Diurnall* (4-11 February 1650), BL, TT, E.534[8], pp. 74, 77; *Perfect Diurnall* (4-11 March 1650), BL, TT, E.534[16], pp. 109, 111; *Perfect Diurnall* (24-31 December 1649), BL, TT, E.533[33], p. 28.

⁴¹ Gardiner, *History of the Commonwealth*, vol. 1, p. 4-6; Gentles, *New Model Army*, pp. 313-314.

⁴² Sarah Barber, 'The Engagement for the Council of State and the Establishment of the Commonwealth Government', *Historical Research*, 63, 150 (1990), pp. 54-55.

⁴³ 'Volume 5: January 1650', *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Interregnum, 1649-50* (1875), pp. 464-500. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=54032> Date accessed: 4 July 2009.

⁴⁴ 'Volume 8: February 16-28, 1650', *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Interregnum, 1650* (1876), pp. 1-16. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=54358> Date accessed: 4 July 2009.

State – a fact then published by order of Parliament on 20 February.⁴⁵ His eventual signature was clearly taken under pressure, and suggests a reluctant and grudging compliance with the Engagement in the face of factional disagreement with hardliners in the Council of State. By contrast, the *Perfect Diurnall* waxed lyrical about the Engagement. Early issues published lists of which regiments and officers had subscribed to the Engagement as they were returned to army headquarters.⁴⁶ The December act requiring every adult male in the country to take it was also published, as were enthusiastic letters from regiments that had subscribed.⁴⁷ Finally, the newsbook highlighted Fairfax’s eventual subscription to the Engagement and the ‘hearty thanks’ from Parliament in which this had resulted.⁴⁸ The paper’s coverage of the Engagement may reflect the influence of Rushworth’s allies within the army and the Council of State.

6

This chapter has revealed that the licensing arrangement for the early newsbooks sparked factional conflict even before they were written. Despite the Council of State’s vision of a news market free from political discord, the compromise in the Licensing Act’s choice of licensers actually guaranteed that the newsbooks would be subject to factional tensions. While the newsbooks were not used for outright attacks on other factions, they did push particular party lines. Even individual titles, in the case of the *Briefe Relation*, could push different messages from issue to issue as different political groups brought their influence to bear. The origins of newsbooks in the political tensions of the early 1640s had made them an

⁴⁵ *Resolves of Parliament, touching the Lord Generals taking and subscribing the engagement* (London, 1650), Wing (2nd ed., 1994) / E2278.

⁴⁶ *Perfect Diurnall* (10-17 December 1649), BL, TT, E.53[29], pp. 1-2; *Perfect Diurnall* (17-24 December 1649), BL, TT, E.533[31], pp. 18-19; *Perfect Diurnall* (31 December 1649-7 January 1650), BL, TT, E.533[35], pp. 31-32; *Perfect Diurnall* (14-21 January 1650), BL, TT, E.534[41], p. 46; *Perfect Diurnall* (21-28 January 1650), BL, TT, E.534[3], p. 61; *Perfect Diurnall* (4-11 February 1650), BL, TT, E.534[8], pp. 75-76.

⁴⁷ *Perfect Diurnall* (31 December 1649-7 January 1650), BL, TT, E.533[35], p. 37; *Perfect Diurnall* (24-31 December 1649), BL, TT, E.533[33], p. 27; *Perfect Diurnall* (31 December 1649-7 January 1650), BL, TT, E.533[35], pp. 31-32; *Perfect Diurnall* (21-28 January 1650), BL, TT, E.534[3], p. 59.

⁴⁸ *Perfect Diurnall* (18-25 February 1650), BL, TT, E.534[12], p. 93.

extremely politicised genre. The evidence of the Commonwealth's first experiments with licensed newsbooks suggests that reshaping this genre was not an easy task.

Chapter 4

Production

Although the early Commonwealth's newsbooks were the product of an immediate political context, they were also shaped by material and commercial circumstances. Like all pamphlets, they existed as part of a collaborative circuit of communication, involving authors, licensers, printers, distributors, booksellers, and readers.¹ This circuit left its mark on newsbooks: the text they contained was not the only way in which they produced meaning in the minds of those who read them. A number of early modern historians have argued that meaning could also be shaped by the physical form which pamphlets took, and by the circumstances in which they were produced.² Meaning could also be shaped by the individual reader. Early modern historians have become increasingly alive to the different ways in which texts could be read, and the impact this could have on their reception.³ In short, there is an increasing consensus amongst historians that a full understanding of printed texts in the early modern period cannot be achieved without mapping the circumstances of their production and consumption. This chapter builds on this literature to reconstruct the communication circuit within which the three newsbooks were written, licensed and produced.

¹ Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York, 1995), p. 182-189; Raymond, *Pamphlets*, pp. 53-97.

² Donald F. McKenzie, 'Typography and Meaning: The Case of William Congreve', in Peter D. McDonald & Michael Felix Suarez (eds.), *Making Meaning: "Printers of the Mind" and Other Essays* (Amherst, 2002), pp. 198-236; Donald F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 4; Raymond, *Invention*, pp. 2-3; Dobranski, *Milton, authorship, and the book trade*; Jason Peacey, 'The politics of British union in 1642 and the purpose of civil war pamphlets', *Historical Research*, 80, 210 (2007), pp. 491-517; Peter McCullough, 'Print, publication, and religious politics in Caroline England', *HJ*, 51, 2 (2008), pp. 285-313.

³ Influential works on this topic include Robert Darnton, 'First steps toward a history of reading', in *The kiss of Lamourette: reflections in cultural history* (London, 1990), pp. 154-87; Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, "'Studied for action": how Gabriel Harvey read his Livy', *Past and Present*, 129 (1990), pp. 30-78; Roger Chartier, 'Leisure and sociability: reading aloud in early modern Europe', in Susan Zimmerman and Ronald F. E. Weissman (eds.), *Urban life in the Renaissance* (London and Toronto, 1989), pp. 103-20.

4.1 Licensers and editors

The *Briefe Relation* was licensed by Gualter Frost, secretary to the Council of State.⁴ Its first issue stated merely that it was ‘*Published By Authority*’, but from the second issue Frost’s name featured prominently on the title page.⁵ His connections with the Long Parliament had begun in 1639, when he acted as courier for the Junto leaders in their secret correspondence with the Scots. It has commonly been assumed that Frost was editor as well as licenser of the *Briefe Relation*.⁶ Certainly some licensers did take on editing roles. John Rushworth, for example, edited *The Country Foot Post*, *The Kingdoms Weekly Post*, and *The London Post* during the mid-1640s.⁷ Gilbert Mabbott may have had some editorial involvement with *The Moderate*.⁸ Frost himself was commissioned to write pamphlets for the Commonwealth.⁹ However, Frost’s duties as secretary to the Council were extensive, supporting daily, often lengthy meetings of the Council and its sub-committees. To cope with this workload he had a staff of two clerks and several under-clerks, as well as writers employed on more ad-hoc terms for specific projects.¹⁰ Whether Frost would have had time amidst such duties to edit a weekly newsbook as well as license it is unclear. Certainly some other newsbooks of the 1640s appear to have been produced by teams of writers rather than one individual editor.¹¹

⁴ Gerald Aylmer, ‘Frost, Gualter (bap. 1598, d. 1652)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004). URL: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37436> Date accessed: 29 May 2009; Gerald Aylmer, *The state’s servants: the civil service of the English Republic, 1649-1660* (London, 1973), pp. 19, 254.

⁵ *Briefe Relation* (2 October 1649), BL, TT, E.576[6], p. 1.

⁶ Williams, *History*, p. 121; Frank, *Beginnings*, p. 201; Raymond, *Invention*, p. 75; Peacey, *Politicians*, p. 105.

⁷ Peacey, *Politicians*, p. 151.

⁸ Raymond, *Invention*, pp. 65-67.

⁹ See for example *A brief narrative of the great victorie, which it hath pleased God to give to the Armie of this Common-wealth against the Scots Armie* (London, 1650), BL, TT, E.612[7]; *Remarkable observations of Gods mercies towards England* (London, 1651), BL, TT, E.641[26]; ‘Volume 16: August 1651’, *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Interregnum, 1651* (1877), pp. 301-394. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=54402>. Date accessed: 28 May 2009.

¹⁰ Aylmer, *State’s Servants*, pp. 16-22; Peacey, *Politicians*, pp. 182-183.

¹¹ Peacey, ‘Management of Civil War Newspapers’, p. 102.

There is also evidence that Frost was not the only writer involved in the production of the *Briefe Relation*. Blair Worden has suggested that Marchamont Nedham may have been employed by Frost as a writer for it.¹² Both the *Briefe Relation* and *Mercurius Politicus* published letters from one of Thomas Scot's spies in Leiden.¹³ Nedham is known to have rewritten the letters for publication in *Politicus*. Worden has suggested that those published in the *Briefe Relation* have a similar tone. He has also suggested that John Milton may have had links to the *Briefe Relation*.¹⁴ On 7 February 1650, the newsbook warned readers that many royalists were still blind to the evidence of providence that the Commonwealth was chosen by God. Its opening line is phrased in a similar way to that of the *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, a response by John Milton to Salmasius's *Defensio Regia*.¹⁵ Worden argues that this may be evidence of Nedham rewriting material originally by Milton after his release from prison in November 1649. Whether or not Nedham was involved, the similarities to Milton's prose suggest that at the least, works written by the Council of State's team of writers may have been reused to provide copy for the *Briefe Relation*.

Severall Proceedings, too, seems to have had a separate licenser and editor. It was licensed by Henry Scobell, clerk to the Commons. Contemporaries appear to have been unsure about the extent of his role: the Earl of Leicester, for example, variously described *Severall Proceedings* as being both 'by Scobell' and 'licensed by Scobell'.¹⁶ However, as with Frost the extent of Scobell's daily duties – supporting a parliament which at the start of its life often met six days a week – mean it is unlikely that he was directly involved in writing

¹² Worden, *Literature and Politics in Cromwellian England*, pp. 210-211.

¹³ S. R. Gardiner (ed.), *Letters and Papers Illustrating the Relations between Charles the Second and Scotland* (1894), *passim*.

¹⁴ Worden, *Literature and Politics in Cromwellian England*, p. 211.

¹⁵ *Briefe Relation* (12-19 February 1650), BL, TT, E.593[14], p. 337; John Milton, *The tenure of kings and magistrates* (London, 1649), Wing / 155:12, sig. A2r.

¹⁶ R. W. Blencowe (ed.), *Sydney Papers: Consisting of a Journal of the Earl of Leicester, and Original Letters of Algernon Sydney* (London, 1825), p. 128.

Severall Proceedings.¹⁷ His editor was almost certainly Henry Walker, a former ironmonger turned pamphleteer and preacher, who in 1644 had moved into editing the newsbook *Perfect Occurrences*.¹⁸ Internal evidence that suggests Walker became involved in editing *Severall Proceedings* from at least November 1649 onwards. Successive issues from this period advertised lectures at Balthazar Gerbier's academy in Bethnal Green, including four in Hebrew on the creation of the world.¹⁹ The latter were delivered by Walker, who had a habit of self-promotion and evidently used *Severall Proceedings* to advertise them.²⁰ One November edition also contained a Bill of Mortality, a favourite item of Walker's when editing *Perfect Occurrences*.²¹ An issue of *Mercurius Pragmaticus* from February 1650 challenged the Commonwealth to 'set their Rusty *Nuncio Walker* to fly the newes againe through the Kingdome'.²² By May 1650, the newsbook was being described as '*Walkers-Proceedings*'.²³ There is no surviving evidence that Walker received a salary. It is more likely that he and the newsbook's printer took a cut from sales.

The *Perfect Diurnall*, similarly, seems to have had a separate licenser and editor. It was licensed by John Rushworth, who had been appointed clerk-assistant of the Commons in 1640. In 1644, he was appointed official licenser of pamphlets and newsbooks. He also became secretary to Sir Thomas Fairfax and hence to the general council of the New Model Army, a position he held until June 1650 when Fairfax resigned his commission.

¹⁷ Worden, *Rump Parliament*, p. 89.

¹⁸ Joad Raymond, 'Walker, Henry (fl. 1638–1660)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004). URL: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/40242> Date accessed: 5 June 2009; J. B. Williams, 'The Literary Frauds of Henry Walker the Ironmonger', *Notes and Queries*, 11th series, 10 (1914), pp. 62-63.

¹⁹ *Severall Proceedings* (9-16 November 1649), BL, TT, E.533[26], p. 68; *Severall Proceedings* (23-30 November 1649), BL, TT, E.533[26], p. 100; *Severall Proceedings* (30 November-7 December 1649), BL, TT, E.533[27], p. 122; *Severall Proceedings* (7-14 December 1649), BL, TT, E.533[28], p. 138; *Severall Proceedings* (14-21 December 1649), BL, TT, E.533[30], pp. 147-148; *Severall Proceedings* (28 December 1649-4 January 1650), BL, TT, E.533[34], p. 181. The lectures were subsequently published: Henry Walker, *Bereshit, the creation of the world being an exposition on the Hebrew in the first chapter of Genesis, as it was delivered at Sir Balthazar Gerbiers academy in White Fryers* (London, 1649), Wing / W374.

²⁰ Williams, *History*, pp. 162-164.

²¹ *Severall Proceedings* (21-28 December 1649), BL, TT, E.533[32], pp. 165-166.

²² *Mercurius pragmaticus* (for King Charles II) (5-12 February 1650), BL, TT, E.592[12], sig. Ss3r.

²³ *Mercurius pragmaticus* (for King Charles II) (30 April-7 May 1650), BL, TT, E.600[6], unpaginated.

Subsequently, Rushworth acted briefly as Oliver Cromwell's secretary before taking a post as intelligencer to the Council of State in 1651.²⁴ Rushworth was no stranger to writing political material: he ghost-wrote the accounts of battles that Fairfax sent to Parliament and which were subsequently published. Perhaps as a result, J. B. Williams assumed that Rushworth retained overall editorial control while the veteran newsbook writer Samuel Pecke acted as 'sub-author'.²⁵ Rushworth certainly had links with Pecke going back to the mid-1640s, and may have supplied him with news during 1647.²⁶ However, the first issue of the *Perfect Diurnall* declared that it was written 'by one who hath formerly served the Publique with his Pen, and otherwise expressed his affections to the Parliament'.²⁷ This description could equally fit both Rushworth and Pecke. The latter was a scrivener based in Westminster Hall, whose manuscript newsletter was probably the source for the first published newsbook of 1641. He then branched out into print journalism, becoming editor of the *Perfect Diurnall of Passages in Parliament*.²⁸ This title was shut down within weeks of the passage of the Licensing Act. If the editor was Rushworth, though, it seems odd that he would need to stress his good service to Parliament given his legal authority as licenser. Pecke, on the other hand, would plausibly have wanted to make clear his support for the Commonwealth, given the fact that his previous newsbook had been shut down and that authors of scandalous pamphlets could be fined £10 or face imprisonment under the new Act.²⁹ As with Walker, no evidence survives that Pecke received a salary for the role. Their involvement suggests that while

²⁴ Joad Raymond, 'Rushworth, John (c.1612–1690)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004). URL: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/24288> Date accessed: 3 June 2009.

²⁵ Williams, *History*, p. 120.

²⁶ Frank, *Beginnings*, pp. 118-120, 146-147; Woolrych, *Soldiers and Statesmen*, p. 185.

²⁷ *Perfect Diurnall* (10-17 December 1649), BL, TT, E.533[29], p. 1.

²⁸ C. Nelson and M. Seccombe, 'The creation of the periodical press 1620–1695', in J. Barnard and D. F. McKenzie (eds.), *Cambridge history of the book in Britain, vol. 4: 1557-1695* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 538; Williams, *History*, pp. 37-39.

²⁹ 'September 1649: An Act against Unlicensed and Scandalous Books and Pamphlets, and for better regulating of Printing', *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642-1660* (1911), pp. 245-254. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=56369> Date accessed: 13 June 2009.

licensing of newsbooks was becoming increasingly centralised, grandees still had to rely on partnerships with private, commercial interests for editing.

4.2 The editorial process

It is difficult to reconstruct the process through which the newsbooks were composed. We can never know for certain how much independence editors had in their writing: whether at one extreme their content was closely monitored by licensers and the political groups with which they were associated, or whether at the other editors knew what political lines to take and had their content rubber-stamped so long as they wrote within these boundaries. Walker's inclusion of adverts for his own lectures, for example, means it is probable Scobell gave him some free rein in putting together content.³⁰ What seems clear is that licensers would have had to negotiate fragile alliances with writers, printers and booksellers.³¹ Licensers did not necessarily have the upper hand. They could be removed or damaged by opponents, as Gilbert Mabbott had found to his cost earlier in 1649.³² In particular, the fact that the editors of *Severall Proceedings* and the *Perfect Diurnall* were independent rather than employed directly by the Commonwealth may have made it harder for their licensers to exert pressure on content. Similarly, the places in which the newsbooks were composed may have given some licensers less control. The *Briefe Relation* was probably composed at Whitehall. Early in 1649, Frost had moved along with the Council of State from Derby House to rooms in

³⁰ *Severall Proceedings* (9-16 November 1649), BL, TT, E.533[26], p. 68; *Severall Proceedings* (23-30 November 1649), BL, TT, E.533[26], p. 100; *Severall Proceedings* (30 November-7 December 1649), BL, TT, E.533[27], p. 122; *Severall Proceedings* (7-14 December 1649), BL, TT, E.533[28], p. 138; *Severall Proceedings* (14-21 December 1649), BL, TT, E.533[30], pp. 147-148; *Severall Proceedings* (28 December 1649-4 January 1650), BL, TT, E.533[34], p. 181.

³¹ Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago, IL, 1998), pp. 187-198; Baron, 'Licensing readers, licensing authorities', pp. 217-42.

³² 'Volume 1: May 1649', *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Interregnum, 1649-50* (1875), pp. 117-169. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=54023> Date accessed: 23 May 2009.

Whitehall.³³ Frost, along with the Council's members, was allocated an apartment in the palace.³⁴ Whitehall also served as a hub for many of the writers associated with the Council secretariat.³⁵ It thus seems likely that the *Briefe Relation* was both written and licensed there, giving the potential for greater oversight by Frost. In contrast, *Severall Proceedings* may have been written at the Fountain in King Street, where Walker had in the early summer of 1649 set up an 'office of Entries' advertising whatever paying customers wanted to publicise, and which seemed to have served as his headquarters.³⁶ The place of writing for the *Perfect Diurnall* is unclear – Pecke appears to have had a stall in Westminster Hall in 1641 when he was a scrivener, but may not have been based there by 1649 – but may well not have been at the army's headquarters.³⁷ In short, Scobell and Rushworth may have been less able physically to oversee their newsbooks' content than Frost.

A lack of robust oversight of the newsbooks also emerges in licensing patterns. In theory, licensers should then have entered each work in the Stationers' Register before printing could commence. In practice, the tight deadlines imposed by weekly editions and the heavy workloads all three licensers had in their 'day jobs' seem to have meant that entries were often infrequent or retrospective. Frost entered the first two issues of the *Briefe Relation* retrospectively on 15 October when entering the third issue (a day before its publication).³⁸ Seven issues were then registered at once on 22 November.³⁹ None of the other issues was ever registered. This perhaps reflects the fact that the writing was done by Council employees, reducing the risk that content would stray off-message. Scobell was more

³³ 'House of Commons Journal Volume 6: 17 February 1649', *Journal of the House of Commons: volume 6: 1648-1651* (1802), pp. 144-145. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=25598> Date accessed: 31 May 2009.

³⁴ Kelsey, *Inventing a Republic*, p. 42.

³⁵ Dobranski, *Milton, authorship, and the book trade*, p. 141

³⁶ *Perfect Occurrences* (10-17 August 1649), BL, TT, E.532[19], p. 1216.

³⁷ *Kingdomes Weekly Post* (28 November-6 Dec 1643), BL, TT, E.77[32], p. 9.

³⁸ *SR*, p. 328.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 331.

conscientious. Issues were often licensed *en masse* retrospectively, but there is a regular record of his signatures in the register.⁴⁰ Rushworth followed a similar track record, licensing regularly at first but then tailing off and registering batches of a month or two's issues at a time.⁴¹ Again, this suggests that placing responsibility for licensing with high-ranking but busy civil servants did not necessarily guarantee its effectiveness.

4.3 Printers

Once composed and approved by their licenser, the texts of newsbooks would have been passed to printers for typesetting and printing. Until late April 1650, the *Briefe Relation* was printed by Matthew Simmons. From then on, it was printed by Edward Husband and John Field.⁴² At the beginning of September it switched again, to William Dugard.⁴³ Simmons had strong Independent leanings, and published many of John Milton's works from 1643 onwards.⁴⁴ He also printed other officially-sanctioned works: in September 1649 he was paid for printing two ripostes to Leveller pamphlets.⁴⁵ Despite this immaculate political record, a clue to why Simmons lost this role may lie in a front-page apology for cutting an item about Colonel Michael Jones in the previous edition. The apology blamed the 'Printers Servant', who 'thought it too much, & therefore would needs leave out very neere the one half, which the change of letter into smaller Character, would have given him sufficient place

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 327-328, 330-332, 334-336, 339, 341-346, 348-353, 355-357, 359, 361, 366, 368, 370.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 333, 336, 338, 341, 342, 348, 349, 350, 359, 360, 361, 363, 366, 370.

⁴² *Briefe Relation* (16-22 April 1649), BL, TT, E.598[9], p. 500.

⁴³ *Briefe Relation* (20 August-10 September 1649), BL, TT, E.612[10], p. 818.

⁴⁴ H. R. Plomer, *A dictionary of the booksellers and printers who were at work in England, Scotland, and Ireland from 1641 to 1667* (1907), p. 164; I. Gadd, 'Simmons, Matthew (*b.* in or before 1608, *d.* 1654)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004); online edn, Jan 2008. URL: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/69230> Date accessed: 3 June 2009.

⁴⁵ 'Volume 2: September 1649', *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Interregnum, 1649-50* (1875), pp. 296-325. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=54027> Date accessed: 3 June 2009. The two works were J. Canne, *The Discoverer* (London, 1649), BL, TT, E.558[2]; J. Canne, *The Discoverer... the Second Part* (London, 1649), BL, TT, E.564[9].

for'.⁴⁶ Careless typesetting seems to have cost Simmons at least one other customer: the numerous typographical errors in the first edition of *Eikonoklastes* were probably what drove John Milton to switch printers from Simmons to Thomas Newcomb for the second edition in 1650.⁴⁷ Milton was secretary for foreign tongues to the Council of State, and as argued above may have had links with the writing of the *Briefe Relation*. It is possible that frustration within the Council's secretariat at the quality of Simmons's work is what led to printing being handed over to Field and Husband, both of whom had printed works for Parliament from the early 1640s onwards.⁴⁸ At first sight, the subsequent handover to Dugard also appears strange. Dugard was a royalist throughout the 1640s, and printed the *Eikon Basilike* at the start of 1649. In February 1650 he was imprisoned briefly in Newgate but released after intervention from John Milton, amongst others. From April 1650 he became a printer to the Council of State.⁴⁹ His appointment as printer of the *Briefe Relation* may also have been linked to an intervention by his friend Milton, and others linked to the Council of State. In September 1650, for example, John Bradshaw wrote to the Merchant Taylors Company asking that Dugard be reinstated to his position as headmaster of the Merchant Taylors' School.⁵⁰ Dugard's appointment may have been motivated both by a desire to bring printers of royalist printers inside the Commonwealth regime, and by personal connections to key members of the regime.

Personal connections also played a role in the printing of the other two early newsbooks. *Severall Proceedings* was printed by Robert Ibbitson. Earlier in the 1640s, he had

⁴⁶ *Briefe Relation* (8-15 January 1650), BL, TT, E. 589[13], p. 221.

⁴⁷ W. R. Parker, 'Milton, Rothwell and Simmons', *The Library*, 4th series, 18 (1937), pp. 89-103.

⁴⁸ Plomer, *Dictionary of Booksellers and Printers*, pp. 74-75, 104-105.

⁴⁹ W. R. Meyer, 'Dugard, William (1606-1662)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004); online edn, Jan 2008. URL: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8182> Date accessed: 3 June 2009; 'Volume 9: April 1650', *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Interregnum, 1650* (1876), pp. 72-135. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=54360> Date accessed: 3 June 2009.

⁵⁰ 'Volume 11: September 1650', *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Interregnum, 1650* (1876), pp. 320-365. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=54366> Date accessed: 5 June 2009.

printed anti-Leveller literature sympathetic to the army grandees.⁵¹ He had also previously been one of the printers of *Perfect Occurrences*, Henry Walker's newsbook which was shut down after the passage of the Licensing Act.⁵² Ibbitson was quick to submit a recognisance with the Council of State that he would comply with the Act's provisions, registering on 10 October.⁵³ It seems likely that Ibbitson's involvement in *Severall Proceedings* was due to his longstanding professional relationship with Walker, another argument in favour of Walker's early involvement with the newsbook. At around the same time, Ibbitson published Walker's Hebrew lectures.⁵⁴ On 8 January 1650 Scobell entered them into the Stationers' register at the same time as a number of issues of *Severall Proceedings*.⁵⁵ A similarly long-standing partnership between editor and printer lay behind the *Perfect Diurnall*, which was printed by Edward Griffin and Francis Leach. Griffin was the head of a longstanding printing house in the Old Bailey.⁵⁶ During the 1640s he printed a range of religious books as well as some parliamentary texts. Leach was a printer based at the Falcon in Shoe Lane off Fleet Street, who printed books from a wide range of political backgrounds.⁵⁷ The previous incarnation of the *Perfect Diurnall*, *A Perfect Diurnall of Passages in Parliament*, had also been printed by Edward Griffin and Francis Leach. As with Walker and Ibbitson, the *Perfect Diurnall* is an example of commercial interests both cutting across and reinforcing the political context within which the Commonwealth's early newsbooks were founded.

⁵¹ John Morrill and Philip Baker, 'The case of the armie truly re-stated', in Michael Mendle (ed.), *The Putney debates of 1647: the army, the levellers and the English state* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 110.

⁵² Plomer, *Dictionary of Booksellers and Printers*, p. 105.

⁵³ 'List of Recognizances to the Council of State', *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Interregnum, 1649-50* (1875), pp. 522-525. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=54037> Date accessed: 11 June 2009.

⁵⁴ Walker, *Bereshit, the creation of the world*, title page.

⁵⁵ *SR*, p. 334.

⁵⁶ H. R. Plomer, 'The Eliot's Court printing house, 1584-1674', *The Library*, 4th series, 2 (1921), pp. 175-184.

⁵⁷ Plomer, *Dictionary of Booksellers and Printers*, p. 114.

4.4 Adverts

None of the printers behind the newsbooks appear to have been salaried by the Commonwealth. The Council of State sometimes made ad-hoc payments to printers for the production of various one-off books and pamphlets.⁵⁸ However, no evidence survives of payments to printers or publishers for the newsbooks. Instead, the newsbooks are best conceived of as texts that were politically motivated but produced commercially. An insight into how the content of the newsbooks was affected by commercial processes can be found in the adverts they contained.⁵⁹ The *Briefe Relation* carried adverts for a range of books. An issue in late October 1649 warned against a pirated edition of *Merlini Anglicus*, pointing out that the real version by William Lilly would be available shortly.⁶⁰ Its inclusion would almost certainly have been at the behest of the Council of State, given Lilly's close links to the regime.⁶¹ In November, it advertised John Milton's *Eikonoklastes*.⁶² Although this was printed by Simmons, who would thus have had a financial interest in publicising it, it seems likely that the advert was placed by the Council of State. However, subsequent editions from December and January carried adverts for books with no immediate relation to Simmons and with no obvious link to the Council of State. Richard Elton's *Compleat body of the art military* – printed by Robert Leybourn – was a military manual dedicated to Lord Fairfax, but

⁵⁸ Volume 11: September 1650', *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Interregnum, 1650* (1876), pp. 320-365. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=54366> Date accessed: 13 June 2009.

⁵⁹ Michael Harris, 'Timely notices: the uses of advertising and its relationship to news during the late seventeenth century', in Joad Raymond (ed.), *News, newspapers and society in early modern Britain* (London, 1999), pp. 141-156; Christine Ferdinand, 'Constructing the frameworks of desire: how newspapers sold books in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries', in Joad Raymond (ed.), *News, newspapers and society in early modern Britain* (London, 1999), pp. 157-175; C. H. L. George, 'Topical portrait print advertising in London newspapers and The Term Catalogues, 1660-1714' (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Durham, 2006). URL: <http://newspaperadvertisements.wordpress.com/2009/04/30/download-the-phd/> Date accessed: 26 June 2009.

⁶⁰ *Briefe Relation* (23-30 October 1649), BL, TT, E.576[6], p. 48. The pirated edition was *An English ephemeris or generall and monethly predicions upon severall eclipses, and celestiall configurations, for the yeare of our Lord 1650. By W. Lele student in astrology* (London, 1649), Wing (2nd ed., 1994) / A1877.

⁶¹ Harry Rusche, 'Merlini Anglici: astrology and propaganda from 1644 to 1651', *EHR*, 80 (1965), pp. 329-333.

⁶² *Briefe Relation* (13-20 November 1649), BL, TT, E.581[4], p. 96; John Milton, *Eikonoklastes in answer to a book intitl'd Eikon basilike, the portrature of his Sacred Majesty in his solitudes and sufferings* (London, 1649), Wing (2nd ed.) / M2112.

with no obvious political overtones.⁶³ Thomas Browne's *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* – sold by Edward Dod and Nathaniel Ekins – was a work refuting contemporary superstitions.⁶⁴ There is no way to tell whether the inclusion of these titles represents other printers paying for advertising space, or whether it was simply Simmons doing friends in the trade a favour by advertising their wares – although one clue is that the advert for Browne's book was carried on the final page in large type, and was presumably a last-minute space-filler for an edition whose content had fallen short. By contrast, when responsibility for printing switched to Husband and Field, the sole advert carried was for John Godolphin's *The Holy Limbeck*, sold by Edmund Paxton but printed by Field.⁶⁵ After responsibility switched again to Dugard, self-promotion on his part seems to have become the key reason for the inclusion of book adverts. An issue from September 1650, for example, carried a long list of recently published books which – with one exception, a declaration by Parliament printed by Husband and Field – were all printed by Dugard.⁶⁶

⁶³ *Briefe Relation* (18-25 December 1649), BL, TT, E.587[2], p. 188; Richard Elton, *The compleat body of the art military* (London, 1650), Wing / E653.

⁶⁴ *Briefe Relation* (22-29 January 1650), BL, TT, E.590[7], pp. 247-248; Thomas Browne, *Pseudodoxia epidemica, or, Enquiries into very many received tenents and commonly presumed truths together with some marginal observations, and a table alphabeticall at the end* (London, 1650), Wing / B5160.

⁶⁵ *Briefe Relation* (30 April-7 May 1650), BL, TT, E.600[5], p. 540; John Godolphin, *The holy limbeck, or, A semicentury of spiritual extractions wherein the spirit is extracted from the letter of certain eminent places in the Holy Scripture* (London, 1650), Wing / G944.

⁶⁶ *A declaration of the army of England, upon their march into Scotland* (London, 1650), BL, TT, E.607[20]; *Briefe Relation* (10-17 September 1650), BL, TT, E.612[19], p. 834; *Briefe Relation* (17-24 September 1650), BL, TT, E.612[5], p. 845. The books printed by Dugard were: *Collonel Grey's portmanteau opened* (London, 1650), BL, TT, E.607[17]; *An examination of the Seasonable and necessarie warning concerning present dangers and duties, emitted from the commissioners of the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland, unto all the members of that Kirk. June 25 1650* (London, 1650), BL, TT, E.608[13]; Francis Glisson, *De rachitide, sive, Morbo puerili qui vulgo The rickets dicitur, tractatus* (London, 1650), Wing (2nd ed.) / G854; *Memorandums of the conferences held between the brethren scrupled at the Engagement; and others who were satisfied with it. On Feb. 15. and 22. and March 1. 1649.* (London, 1650), BL, TT, E.610[2]; *The King of Scotland's negotiations at Rome, for assistance against the Common-Wealth of England* (London, 1650), BL, TT, E.612[6]; Thomas Isaac, *Methodus cognoscendi caussas duobus libris explicata* (London, 1650), Wing (2nd ed.) / I1061C; Thomas Bedford, *Vindiciae gratiae sacramentalis, duobus tractatulis comprehensae* (London, 1650), Wing / B1670; John Clarke, *Phraseologia puerilis Anglo-Latina, in usum tirocinii scholastici* (London, 1650), Wing / C4473.

The adverts run by the *Perfect Diurnall* were in the main part for books, although several issues did advertise Balthazar Gerbier's lectures.⁶⁷ All of the adverts for books seem to have been placed by other stationers. They covered a range of topics: not just religion and politics but also treatises on professional subjects such as the *Young Clerks Guide* and a dissertation on tumours and ulcers.⁶⁸ Meanwhile, Henry Walker had been one of the earliest newsbook editors to carry adverts. An issue of *Perfect Occurrences* from April 1647 announced the publication of an Independent book, the *Divine Eight of the Church Government*, printed for a different stationer.⁶⁹ It is not clear whether this was printed in return for a fee or as a favour to a like-minded friend, but from August 1649 motives of profit clearly began to enter Walker's involvement with advertising. That month he set up an 'Office of Entries', staffed by a number of clerks, at the Fountain in King Street. It seems to have functioned as a mixture of financial agent, employment agency, and bulletin board. These services cost a flat fee of 4d.⁷⁰ Despite this other business venture, most adverts in *Severall Proceedings* were about forthcoming books and did not cover other topics. Occasionally notices did appear on lost horses – 'a Dapple grey Gelding' and a 'Flea-bitten

⁶⁷ *Perfect Diurnall* (11-18 February 1650), BL, TT, E.534[10], pp. 85-86; *Perfect Diurnall* (4-11 March), BL, TT, E.534[16], p. 109.

⁶⁸ *Perfect Diurnall* (24-31 December 1649), BL, TT, E.533[33], p. 28; *Rome ruin'd by White Hall, or, The papall crown demolisht* (London, 1649), BL, TT, E.586[2] (printed and sold by Thomas Paine); *Perfect Diurnall* (4-11 February 1650), BL, TT, E.534[8], pp. 76; Jean-François Senault, *Man become guilty, or, The corruption of nature by sinne, according to St. Augustines sense written originally in French by Iohn-Francis Senault ; and put into English by ... Henry, Earle of Monmouth* (London, 1650), Wing / S2500 (printed for William Leake); *Perfect Diurnall* (15-22 April), BL, TT, E.534[30], p. 208; Cuthbert Sydenham, *An English translation of the Scottish Declaration against James Graham alias Marquess of Montrosse* (London, 1650), BL, TT, E.597[10] (printed by John Macock for Francis Tyton); *Perfect Diurnall* (11-18 February 1650), BL, TT, E.534[10], pp. 86 (misprinted as 68).

Richard Hutton, *The young clerks guide: or, An exact collection of choice English presidents, according to the best forms now used For all sorts of indentures, letters of attorney, releases, conditions, &c.* (London, 1649), Wing (2nd ed., 1994) / H3847B (printed for Humphrey Tuckey); *Perfect Diurnall* (25 March-1 April 1650), BL, TT, E.543[23], p. 159; Alexander Read, *The workes of that famous physitian Dr. Alexander Read, Doctor of Physick, and one of the fellows of Physitians-Colledge, London* (London, 1650), Wing (2nd ed.) / R425 (sold by John Clarke).

⁶⁹ *Perfect Occurrences* (26 March-2 April 1647), BL, TT, E.383[13], p. 103.

⁷⁰ *Perfect Occurrences* (10-17 August 1649), BL, TT, E.532[19], pp. 1216-1217; *Perfect Occurrences* (31 August-7 September 1649), BL, TT, E.532[35], p. 1277.

grey Gelding’ – as well as lectures and sermons, but these were relatively rare.⁷¹ The proportion of books advertised that were Ibbitson’s products – and the fact that they mainly appeared on the last page of a given edition, after Scobell’s imprimatur – may mean that Ibbitson, rather than Walker, was the one commissioning them.

The range of adverts in all three newsbooks publicising printers’ and booksellers’ own stock indicates a decidedly commercial motivation in printing them. Adverts for other printers or for lost property seem also to have had financial advantages. In the context of a derisive remark about *Perfect Occurrences*, the *Man in the Moon* mentioned that adverts in the newsbook in October 1649 cost 6d.⁷² A similar remark about the *Perfect Diurnall* made in June 1650 suggests that this price had remained relatively constant during the early years of the Commonwealth.⁷³ By 1655, Marchamont Nedham seems to have been able to charge half a crown for adverts, but this was in the content of a complete monopoly of the press.⁷⁴ Even so, the advertisements in the early Commonwealth newsbooks would have been a source of profit for printers working within narrow margins, and indicate the limits of the regime’s control of them.

4.5 Going to print

The three newsbooks would probably not have been proof-read by their licensers or editors. The *Briefe Relation*’s front-page apology is an extreme example of mistakes happening during typesetting but not being corrected. Issues of the three newsbooks often had

⁷¹ *Severall Proceedings* (23-30 November 1649), BL, TT, E.553[26], p. 100; *Severall Proceedings* (7-14 February 1650), BL, TT, E.534[9], p. 278; *Severall Proceedings* (30 November-7 December 1649), BL, TT, E.533[27], p. 122; *Severall Proceedings* (7-14 December 1649), BL, TT, E.533[28], p. 138; *Severall Proceedings* (14-21 December 1649), BL, TT, E.533[32], pp. 163-164.

⁷² *The Man in the Moon* (26 September-10 October 1649), BL, TT, E.575[16], pp. 200-201.

⁷³ *The Man in the Moon* (29 May-5 June 1650), BL, TT, E.602[24], p. 427.

⁷⁴ Williams, *History*, p. 167.

misprinted page numbers and dates, with some even duplicating entire pages.⁷⁵ The speed with which weekly editions of a sheet or two would need to be set would have meant little time for checking assembled formes. Licensers and editors may also have held back as long as possible from finalising editions. At least two issues of the *Briefe Relation* apologised for not including news that been expected but had somehow been delayed, one stating that it had only been received when ‘the Relation was almost all set and ready to presse off’, but promising to include it in the next edition.⁷⁶ On the other hand, it was still possible to fit in last-minute news. One issue of the *Briefe Relation* included an extra page after the printer’s details that usually marked the end of the edition, implying perhaps that copy had been added at the last minute.⁷⁷ Many issues of all three newsbooks ended with much smaller type than they started, as typesetters attempted to cram as much content onto the page as possible without starting another sheet.

The newsbooks themselves were printed on quarto, varying between using one and two sheets to give between eight and sixteen pages. The size of print runs is impossible to tell for certain: it would have varied depending on factors such as the availability of raw materials, the time allowed to the printers to set the type, and the size of the text. Anthony Cotton has suggested that 250 copies would have been a minimum, with 850 or perhaps 1,000 as a maximum.⁷⁸ Joad Raymond has qualified these figures and suggests in particular that 1,000 may be a conservative estimate for the maximum size of print runs.⁷⁹ It is possible that the three licensed newsbooks had print runs at the higher end of this spectrum, because

⁷⁵ *Perfect Diurnall* (4-11 February 1650), BL, TT, E.534[8], p. 80; *Perfect Diurnall* (8-15 April 1650), BL, TT, E.534[28], pp. 185-192, 185-192 (repeated); *Severall Proceedings* (25-31 January 1650), BL, TT, E.534[4], pp. 234-237; *Severall Proceedings* (31 January-7 February 1650), BL, TT, E.534[7], pp. 244-245.

⁷⁶ *Briefe Relation* (9-16 October 1649), BL, TT, E.575[22], pp. 30-31; *Briefe Relation* (27 November-4 December 1649), BL, TT, E.584[11], p. 117.

⁷⁷ *Briefe Relation* (16-22 April 1650), BL, TT, E.598[9], pp. 501-503.

⁷⁸ A. N. B. Cotton, ‘London newsbooks in the Civil War: their political attitudes and sources of information’ (Unpublished D.Phil. dissertation, University of Oxford, 1971), pp. 8-13, quoted in Raymond, *Invention*, pp. 233-234.

⁷⁹ Raymond, *Invention*, pp. 233-238.

they did not need to be produced at haste in secrecy – but on the other hand, editors and licensers missing deadlines could easily have eaten into the time available for printing.

With many royalist newsbooks of the same period, the paper is sufficiently thin to be able to see print on the side of the page. Others bear evidence of cracked and worn type: printing in conditions of secrecy meant having to make do with what was available.⁸⁰ The *Briefe Relation*, by contrast, generally seems to have been printed on good quality paper. The *Perfect Diurnall* and *Severall Proceedings*, on the other hand, seem to have made use of lesser-quality paper, with ink often leaching through to other side of the paper. The type used in all three was of variable quality, but was often complemented by an ornamental woodcut initial for the first letter of the first page (figure 1). Under Matthew Simmons, the *Briefe Relation* drew on a variety of high-quality initials, suggesting Simmons may have seen it as particularly important job. When responsibility switched to Husband and Field, then to Dugard, the only initials used were plain large letters – perhaps an indication that more ornamental woodcuts were tied up with other jobs. From its second issue onwards, the *Perfect Diurnall* used the same formula of words to start each issue, with an ornamental letter T to match. Retaining the same starting words for each issue may have helped speed up the type-setting process. Similarly, *Severall Proceedings* used a modifiable woodcut with a blank space allowing a piece of type to be inserted. Again this may suggest steps to speed up type-setting, or indicate that more ornamental letters were tied up with other jobs. It also perhaps suggests that *Severall Proceedings* and the *Perfect Diurnall* may have had narrower profit margins than the *Briefe Relation*, forcing their printers to economise however possible.

⁸⁰ McElligott, *Royalism, Print and Censorship*, p. 28.

Figure 1



Woodcut initials from the *Briefe Relation* under Matthew Simmons.



Initials from the *Briefe Relation* under Edward Husband, John Field, and William Dugard.



Woodcut initials from *Severall Proceedings*.



Woodcut initials from the *Perfect Diurnall*.

This analysis of the men involved in licensing, writing and printing the early newsbooks illustrates the growing role of ‘information professionals’ in the conduct of politics in mid-seventeenth century England.⁸¹ Their roles reflect the gradual transition during seventeenth century from men-of-business serving aristocrats to salaried officials serving the state.⁸² Frost, Scobell and Rushworth all had roles spanning a wide range of propaganda functions: commissioning and writing books and pamphlets, gathering intelligence, providing secretariats to committees, and other administrative duties. And yet, with the exception of the writers of the *Briefe Relation*, this centralisation did not extend to the editors and printers who produced the newsbooks. The early newsbooks demonstrate the dependence of information professionals on a network of people and professions within the book trade. The pressures of office meant little time to scrutinise newsbooks’ content. Instead, licensers had to rely on appointing editors with similar political sympathies, whose commercial interest could put them at odds with their employers. Printers, too, could influence content, and the restrictions of the printing process also placed limits on licensers’ control of publications. As a result, personal friendships and professional relationships within the book trade could count just as highly as political affiliations in this complicated communication circuit, resulting in a

⁸¹ Filippo de Vivo, *Information and communication in Venice: rethinking early modern politics* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 74-85.

⁸² Michael Graves, ‘The management of the Elizabethan House of Commons: the council’s men-of-business’, *Parliamentary History*, 2 (1983), pp. 11-38; Patrick Collinson, ‘Puritans, men of business and Elizabethan parliaments’, *Parliamentary History*, 7 (1988), pp. 187-211; John Morrill, ‘The unweariableness of Mr Pym: influence and eloquence in the Long Parliament’, in Susan Amussen & Mark Kishlansky (eds.), *Political Culture and Cultural Politics in Early Modern England: Essays Presented to David Underdown* (Manchester & New York, 1995), pp. 19-54; J. S. A. Adamson, ‘Of armies and architecture: the employments of Robert Scawen’, in Ian Gentles, John Morrill & Blair Worden (eds.), *Soldiers, writers, and statesmen of the English Revolution* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 36-67; Gerald Aylmer, *The crown’s servants: government and civil service under Charles II, 1660-1685* (Cambridge, 2002).

back-and-forth process of negotiation between all concerned.⁸³ The next chapter goes on to trace the final link in this circuit: the newsbooks' readers.

⁸³ Johns, *The Nature of the Book*, pp. 187-198.

Chapter 5

Readers

The practices of reading – how, what, where and why early modern readers read – are increasingly being seen as essential to understanding early modern culture and politics. The history of reading is not just relevant to social history or bibliography. If reality is, in Roger Chartier’s words, ‘fashioned by means of discourses that apprehend and structure experience’, then it follows that those who perceive such discourses may play just as important a role in constructing them as those who create them.¹ Critics from a range of theoretical and disciplinary backgrounds have argued to various degrees for the importance of the reader in constructing a text’s meaning.² Drawing on these influences, historians have examined readers as a means of achieving a better understanding of the performance and reception of politics in early modern Europe. Scholars have reconstructed different types and methods of reading.³ There has also been increasing focus on the politics of reading and on how particular genres were read.⁴ This chapter draws on this growing literature on early modern readers to examine – as far as can be reconstructed – who read the Commonwealth’s early newsbooks and how they did so, in order to examine the extent to which they imposed their own meaning on these texts.

¹ Roger Chartier, *Cultural History: Between Practices and Representations* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 11.

² Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: a Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore, 1978); Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France* (Princeton, 1978), pp. 3-12; Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge, 1997); John Pocock, *Virtue, commerce, and history: essays on political thought and history, chiefly in the eighteenth century* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 13-17.

³ David Hall, ‘The Uses of Literacy in New England, 1600-1850’, in David Hall, *Cultures of print: essays in the history of the book* (Massachusetts, 1996), pp. 36-78; Daniel Woolf, *Reading History in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 79-131; Roger Chartier, ‘Leisure and Sociability: Reading Aloud in Early Modern Europe’, Elspeth Jajdelska, ‘Pepys in the History of Reading’, *HJ*, 50, 3 (2007), pp. 549-569.

⁴ Kevin Sharpe, *Reading revolutions: the politics of reading in early modern England* (New Haven and London, 2000); Kevin Sharpe, ‘Reading revelations: prophecy, hermeneutics and politics in early modern Britain’, in Kevin Sharpe & Stephen Zwicker (eds.), *Reading, Society and Politics in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 122-163; Joad Raymond, ‘Irrational, impractical and unprofitable: reading the news in seventeenth-century Britain’, in Sharpe & Zwicker (eds.), *Reading, Society and Politics*, pp. 185-212; Jason Peacey, ‘Sir Thomas Cotton’s Consumption of News in 1650s England’, *The Library*, 7th series, 7,1 (2006), pp. 3-24.

5.1 Implied readers

All texts are addressed, implicitly or explicitly, to an ‘implied reader’.⁵ Mid-seventeenth century authors were particularly conscious of their readership: written in a polemical context, contemporary pamphlet genres constructed particular textual identities and allegiances which they expected their readers to share.⁶ Sharon Achinstein, in particular, has traced the idealised ‘revolutionary reader’ addressed by Milton and other Parliamentarian authors, a reader with the interpretative freedom to engage with texts and draw their own conclusions about them.⁷ Similarly, Jerome de Groot has reconstructed a much less revolutionary ‘Royalist reader’, engaging passively with texts that consciously limited the interpretative space permitted to readers.⁸

The Council of State also addressed an idealised audience: what might be termed the ‘Commonwealth reader’. Such readers were a far cry from the engaged, interpretative community addressed by Milton. The idealised readers envisaged by the Council of State ‘*want a judgement to discern in matters of opinion or means to inform themselves in matter of fact*’.⁹ They were seen as children with ‘Plums, or Rattles at a Bartholomew Faire’, not equipped to deal with a wide variety of printed news.¹⁰ The danger in particular lay in those who ‘onely studied the strongest side’.¹¹ Instead, the ideal Commonwealth reader was male, and a godly Christian. They would spurn the sniping dialectic of typical newsbooks, and content themselves instead with news only of ‘materiall Passages... *necessary* for their

⁵ The phrase is drawn from Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore, 1990).

⁶ Lois Potter, *Secret Rites and Secret Writing: Royalist Literature, 1641-1660* (Cambridge, 1989); Smith, *Literature and Revolution*; Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic*.

⁷ Achinstein, *Milton and the Revolutionary Reader*.

⁸ Jerome de Groot, ‘The Royalist Reader in the English Revolution’ (Unpublished D.Phil dissertation, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, 2000).

⁹ *Briefe Relation* (2 October 1649), BL, TT, E.575[6], p. 1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

notice'. This would result in them being 'the better able to governe their Councils and actions'. Exposing the actions of those malignants who opposed the Commonwealth would enable readers to stick to a godly path.¹² A little knowledge, but not too much, was what they should be provided: 'yet least any should be offended that while we give account of other places we should be wholly ignorant of what is at home, we shall give you two particulars'.¹³ The Commonwealth reader was not a passionate seeker after truth. Instead, they were expected meekly to have a limited amount of the truth handed to them on a plate.

The newsbooks' style and content confirms this analysis. The early newsbooks of the 1640s were written in a plain, detached style. They did not editorialise, tending instead to present original or modified versions of letters and other sources. As they evolved, however, their style changed, in a process which Joad Raymond has described as 'newbook editing' becoming 'newsbook writing'.¹⁴ As newsbooks became factionalised, so their prose became more combative and personalised. Titles vied with titles and editors railed against editors in increasingly elaborate and sophisticated literary attempts to outdo each other.¹⁵ By contrast, the early Commonwealth newsbooks reverted to the plain and sober style of their early counterparts. Editorial voices seldom intervened. The *Briefe Relation* began its first four issues with opening editorials addressed to the reader, and deployed a style of direct address to the reader with summaries of sources rather than direct reprints.¹⁶ After a few issues, however, it stopped the practice – perhaps reflecting the initial involvement of an author who then dropped out or was employed elsewhere. Instead, its issues began to be laid out in the chronological order of their sources, reprinting letters from foreign correspondents. It

¹² *Briefe Relation* (2-9 October 1649), BL, TT, E.575[15], p. 10.

¹³ *Briefe Relation* (9-16 October 1649), BL, TT, E.575[22], pp. 17-18.

¹⁴ Raymond, *Invention*, pp. 130-141.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 148-158; Brownlees, 'Polemic and Propaganda in Civil War News Discourse'.

¹⁶ *Briefe Relation* (2 October 1649), BL, TT, E.575[6], p. 1; *Briefe Relation* (2-9 October 1649), BL, TT, E.575[15], pp. 9-14; *Briefe Relation* (9-16 October 1649), BL, TT, E.575[22], pp. 17-20; *Briefe Relation* (16-23 October 1649), BL, TT, E.575[29], pp. 33-35.

followed a standard format of introducing news from its foreign correspondents by stating the country of city of origin and the date it had been written. *The Perfect Diurnall* recommenced its run with an explanation to the reader about its editor's loyalty to Parliament, but then reverted to reproducing news from original sources.¹⁷ It drew on a mixture of content, using letters from army garrisons alongside accounts of decisions taken at headquarters and acts and other materials ordered to be printed by Parliament. Typical of how its content was laid out and presented is this example from an issue in February 1650 (figure 2).¹⁸ The layout is economic, with little white space or distinction between the different news items. The content itself is varied, but a far cry from the railing mercuries of the 1640s.

The way in which type was set could also emphasise the soberness of its content. *Severall Proceedings*, for example, reprinted extracts from Parliament's journal in a format that hinted at the original (figure 3).¹⁹ Though this account is only a summary of the Commons journal, it is laid out as if it was a direct transcript, and is given extra realism by anchoring content under dates and drawing attention to when the House was not sitting. It presents an authoritative account of parliamentary proceedings that stresses its status as factual information rather than entertainment. Only occasionally did the newsbooks experiment with a livelier, more popular style. An edition of the *Briefe Relation* in mid-February 1650, for example, carried a report of a comet which had appeared over Warsaw in Poland. It was 'in the shape of a great rod or besome [broom]; appearing first in white beames'.²⁰ The report was accompanied by a woodcut of a broom; the only illustration that ever appeared in the early Commonwealth's newsbooks (figure 4). In its subject, style and use of illustration, this report was a direct descendant of the sensational quarto pamphlets on

¹⁷ *Perfect Diurnall* (10-17 December 1649), BL, TT, E.533[29], p. 1.

¹⁸ *Perfect Diurnall* (4-11 February 1650), BL, TT, E.534[8], p. 80.

¹⁹ *Severall Proceedings* (9-16 November 1649), BL, TT, E.533[24], pp. 61-62.

²⁰ *Briefe Relation* (12-15 February 1650), BL, TT, E.593[9], p. 353.

Figure 2

Newark, Feb. 4. Yesterday about five of the clock in the afternoon there was one Nathaniel Hinderfon proclaimed in severall streets of this Town these words following, I pronounce Charles the second of England, Scotland, France, and Ireland, Defender of the faith, &c. as King of England; although his Father suffered wrongfully, yet you cannot be governed without a head; but now you are governed by a stinking lousie Committee, whereupon he was apprehended by the Constables of the Town, and brought before the Major and some Justices of the peace, and the words being proved against him, the Major promised to send him to Nottingham castle.

This day a petition was presented to his Excellency and the Councell of Officers in the behalfe of 3000 maymed souldiers and Widdows whose husbands were slain in the service of the Parliament, desiring that the Order of Parliament concerning Potters List might be taken off, and that they might receive the same benefit with others, which was recommended to Col. Rich to move the house therein.

The last night about eight of the clocke three Messengers being sent from the Councell of State to apprehend one Mercer, alias Marston, for some offences against the State, and coming to his lodging over against the Golden Lyon in Aldersgate street, he came down to them, and meeting one of them (one Ricks) at the staires foot, who told him that he had a Warrant for him he stabd him with a Dagger first on the left, and then on the right pappe. After him he stabd a second (one Evans) on each side of the heart; (these two died immediately) and afterwards running through the entry he stabd the third (one Vllt) in the neck and in the back. This Mercer was formerly a Trooper in Col. Seraps Regiment, and in both the mutinies at Burford and Oxford, and now proves for his resolute cruelty, a second Tempson.

On Thursday next the 14. instant. The Officers of the Army at the Head quarters, have set apart to keepe as a day of humiliation, in which they desire the conjunction of their fellow Souldiers in other parts.

Feb 13 1649.

Imprimatur

J. RUSHWORTH. Secr.

Extract from the *Perfect Diurnall*, 4-11 February 1650.

Figure 3

may be subscribed by all the people of this Nation, and a Committee was named accordingly.

The House gave some directions touching the tryall of the Pix monies, and for making new Standards for the Coynes of this Common-wealth of the same alloy with the former, to be presented to the House for approbation.

The House adjourned till Tuesday next.

Saturday 10. Novemb.

This day the Parliament sat not.

Sunday 12. Novemb.

This day the Parliament sat not.

Extract from *Severall Proceedings*, 9-16 November 1649.

Figure 4

(353)

From Dantzick.

ON the 11. of *December* last, about 11. a clock, at night, there appeared a Comet or blazing Star over the Citie of *Warszha*, (where now the Diet or Parliament of *Poland* is held) in the the shape of a great rod or be-some; appearing first in white beames, and growing more and more conspicuous, and exactly representing the shape aforesaid, untill two a clock in the morning, when it began to wane and decay againe by degrees.

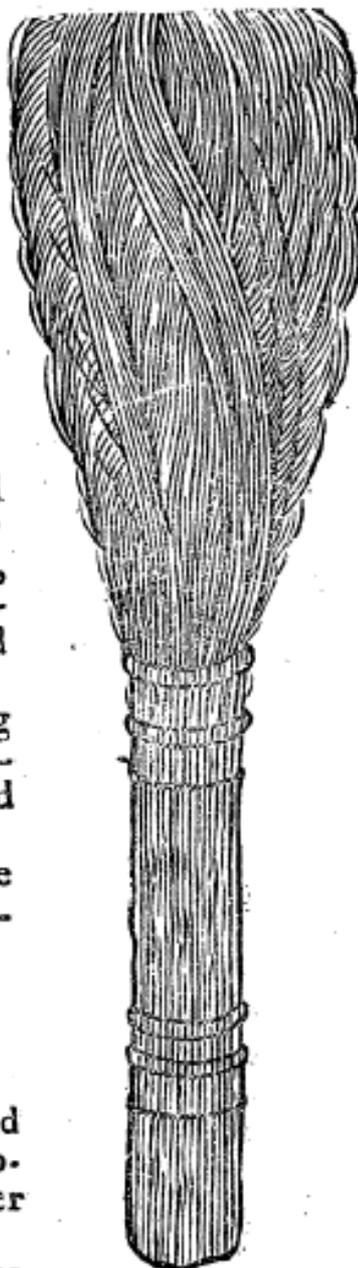
The length to ones thinking was about eight yards, the handle standing in the North, and rod extending Southwards.

At the same instant there happened a great Fire at *Warszka*, five Miles from *Warszaw*.

From the same place, Jan. 14.

The Diet here, which should have ended the third of this month, is prorogued to a further terme.

It was already resolved, the present



Extract from the *Briefe Relation*, 12-15 February 1650.

prodigies and wonders that began to rise in popularity from the 1590s onwards.²¹ However, it was an experiment that was not subsequently repeated. In short, the early Commonwealth newsbooks attempted to switch to a much plainer and less controversial style and content than readers had become used to during the 1640s.

5.2 Actual readers

The paucity of surviving evidence about reading practices means that the extent to which the Council of State succeeded in creating the ‘Commonwealth reader’ can only ever be partially recovered. Nevertheless, the newsbooks’ possible readership can be reconstructed, albeit obliquely, by analysing how far newsbooks could have been distributed and who could have afforded to buy them. The Commonwealth’s early newsbooks were probably distributed well beyond the London market. Even illicit material was able to spread across the country: in December 1649, for example, a package of royalist pamphlets was intercepted at Coventry which included *The Character of King Cromwell*, *The Woodstock Scuffle*, and an edition of *The Man in the Moon*.²² Newsbooks were not necessarily read once and thrown away; they were often read and passed on to family or friends by hand or by inclusion with a letter. Carriers would have been a second means of distributing them to the provinces for sale or for reading. Although it is difficult to gauge the state of the carrier networks in 1649, in 1637 the poet and waterman John Taylor published a reference book listing carrier times and destinations that shows extensive links to all parts of England and

²¹ Peter Lake, ‘Deeds Against Nature: Cheap Print, Protestantism and Murder in Early Seventeenth Century England’, in Kevin Sharpe & Peter Lake (eds.), *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England* (London & New York, 1994), pp. 257-84; Jerome Friedman, *Miracles and the Pulp Press during the English Revolution: The Battle of the Frogs and Fairford ‘s Flies* (New York, 1994); Alexandra Walsham, ‘Vox Piscis: or The Book-Fish: providence and the uses of the reformation past in Caroline Cambridge’, *EHR*, 114, 457 (1999), pp. 574-606; Raymond, *Pamphlets*, pp. 108-122.

²² *Perfect Diurnall*, (17-24 December 1649), BL, TT, E.533[31], p. 15; *The Woodstock scuffle* (London, 1650), BL, TT, E.587[5]; *The Man in the Moon*, N&S 248. *The Character of King Cromwell* does not appear to have survived.

Wales.²³ The postal service would have provided a third means of circulating newsbooks. Post left London on Tuesdays and, from March 1649, Saturdays too.²⁴ This means that the *Briefe Relation* (published on Tuesdays) and the *Perfect Diurnall* (published on Mondays) would both have been able to be sent out by Tuesday's post. *Severall Proceedings*, which settled onto being published on Thursdays, would have been able to be sent in Saturday's post.

Direct evidence for the price of the Commonwealth's early newsbooks does not survive. However, given what is known about contemporary prices for eight- or sixteen-page quarto pamphlets, they probably retailed at about 1*d.* or 2*d.*²⁵ As a result, they would have been affordable to many members of the middling sort. The average day wage of a building craftsman in London in 1641, for example, was 30*d.*, while that of a building labourer was 17*d.*²⁶ At the same time, the cost of a 4lb loaf of bread was roughly 6*d.*²⁷ So while wage labourers may not have been able to afford them, middling-sort craftsmen and artisans would have been able to purchase newsbooks at this price. Many would have had the skills to read them: shopkeepers and, to a less extent, artisans were often able to read print. The London wood turner Nehemiah Wallington, for example, battled an addiction to newsbooks, calling them 'so many theeves that had stole away my mony'.²⁸ Although there is no evidence that Wallington read any of the Commonwealth newsbooks, it is not implausible to imagine an audience of readers like him doing so. Those who could not read might still have been able to access newsbooks, through membership of workplace or religious communities that allowed

²³ John Taylor, *The carriers cosmographie* (London, 1637), STC / 1036:09.

²⁴ Raymond, *Invention*, pp. 239-240.

²⁵ Francis R. Johnson, 'Notes on English Retail Book-Prices, 1550-1640', *The Library*, 5th series (1950), pp. 83-112.

²⁶ Jeremy Boulton, 'Wage labour in seventeenth-century London', *Economic History Review*, 49, 2 (1996), pp. 268-290.

²⁷ Jeremy Boulton, 'Food Prices and the Standard of Living in London in the 'Century of Revolution', 1580-1700', *Economic History Review*, 53, 3 (2000), pp. 455-492.

²⁸ Paul S. Seaver, *Wallington's World: A Puritan Artisan in Seventeenth-Century London* (Stanford, 1985), p. 174; David Booy, *The notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington, 1618-1654: a selection* (Aldershot, 2007), p. 6.

them to hear texts being read.²⁹ At least one officer in the army, for example, is known to have read pamphlets to several of his officers then ‘had it read to the souldiers’.³⁰ With this mixture of written and oral networks for distribution, both geographically and socially the Commonwealth’s early newsbooks are likely to have circulated to a wide range of readers.

Some limited evidence of who those readers were survives from contemporary letters and diaries. The Earl of Leicester seems to have mixed both intensive and extensive reading. He read *Severall Proceedings* intensively for news of parliamentary politics, noting down the details of events of interest carefully and with full references. In February 1650, for example, he recorded the approval of a commission for the maintenance of ministers, with a footnote that ‘of this see Severall Proceedings in Parlement &c printed and licensed by H Scobel Clerke of the Parlement from the 14th to the 21st February 1649’.³¹ Leicester seems to have scanned the contents in some detail, noting that the commission used the wording ‘we command’, whereas Charles I’s commissions had usually started with ‘we will and require’. However, wherever possible he also read extensively, trying to check the veracity of news reports. In August 1651 he noted a report in *Mercurius Politicus* that Colonel Popham had died of a fever at Dover, and provided a reference to *Severall Proceedings* to confirm it. Ironically, given Leicester’s eye for detail and accuracy with news reports themselves, he misquoted *Severall Proceedings* in this diary entry as *Generall Proceedings*.³² This perhaps suggests that, for Leicester, it was not the editorial identity or character of newsbooks that was of interest, but the news itself.

²⁹ Raymond, *Pamphlets*, pp. 89-91.

³⁰ C. H. Firth (ed.), *The Clarke Papers* (London, 1901), vol. 4, p. 231

³¹ Blencowe, *Sydney Papers*, pp. 96-99.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 115.

This was not the case for a royalist reader, who complained in a letter at the beginning of 1650 that the newsbooks had ‘grown so dull of late, and [do] so timorously... intermeddle with the public concernments of the infant Commonwealth, that they hardly deserve the expense of so much time as to read them’.³³ And yet other readers did find useful information in the newsbooks, particularly in relation to foreign news. Lord Lisle, Leicester’s son and seemingly his supplier of newsbooks, recommended an early edition of the *Briefe Relation* as a source of news to him: ‘my time is slipt and I doubt not whether I shall not loose this opportunity of sending to your Lordship. Therefore for newes I referre your Lordship to Mr. Frosts Gazette’.³⁴ A month later, he recommended the *Briefe Relation* as a good source of news on the Parlement of Bordeaux.³⁵ As well as passing on newsbooks to his father, he also read their content himself and summarised it. In January 1650, for example, he wrote to Leicester with news of the ducs de Condé, Longueville, and Conti being seized, with a comment that the duc de Beaufort had had ridden through the streets encouraging the people to sing ‘vive le roi’.³⁶ The source of this story is almost certainly the edition of the *Perfect Diurnall* for 7 January.³⁷ For at least one reader, then, the early newsbooks were seen as authoritative.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, some of the most eager readers of the Commonwealth’s first forays into news were the writers and editors of royalist competitors. They quickly established a system of rapid rebuttals to any unhelpfully positive reports of Parliament’s successes. News from the Irish campaign, for example, was quickly read and refuted.³⁸

³³ Newsletter from the letterbook of John Fitzjames, 12 Jan 1650, quoted in Worden, *Literature and Politics*, p. 21.

³⁴ Letter from Lord Lisle to the Earl of Leicester, 17 October 1649: *HMC De L’Isle*, vol. 6, p. 461.

³⁵ Letter from Lord Lisle to the Earl of Leicester, 27 November 1649: *HMC De L’Isle*, vol. 6, p. 464; *Briefe Relation* (20-27 November 1649), BL, TT, E.583[1].

³⁶ Letter from Lord Lisle to the Earl of Leicester, 15 January 1650: *HMC De L’Isle*, 6 vols, London, 1935-66), vol. 6, p. 468.

³⁷ *Perfect Diurnall* (31 December 1649-7 January 1650), BL, TT, E.533[35].

³⁸ *Mercurius pragmaticus (for King Charles II)* (2-9 April 1650), BL, TT, E.597[15], sig. Bbb2v.

Similar attempts were made to refute reports of Charles Stuart's location, or of royalist losses.³⁹ Sometimes, as with reports of a case of an incident involving Alexander Leslie's men, these appear to have been genuine refutations of incorrect reports.⁴⁰ Others, however, seem to have been more formulaic attempts to deny news that reflected badly on the royalist cause.⁴¹ More commonly, however, the royalist newsbooks forwent close reading of their rivals' copy in favour of an attempt to revive the personified editorial conflicts of the mid-1640s. Newsbooks became 'Lyurnalls' and '*Legend[s] of lies*', and their licensers and editors '*State neues Gablers*', deliberately deceiving the people of England.⁴² They drew on Gualter Frost's surname to create a Jack Frost-like alter-ego who had frozen the political nation into silence.⁴³ Frost's adoption of a Latinised first name and the title of Esquire, and his previous career as an almanac writer, were also mocked.⁴⁴ The royalist newsbooks were already well used to attacking Henry Walker, and quickly revived their old insults: '*Beelzebubbs brindled Ban-dogge*', '*Sirrah saffron-chapps*', '*Athiestical liar*', '*Parliaments News-Monger*', '*Rusty Nuncio*'.⁴⁵ An incident from 1641, in which Walker had thrown a seditious pamphlet called *To Your Tents, O Israel* into Charles I's carriage was recounted at length to try to embarrass him in his new role as responsible representative of the state.⁴⁶

³⁹ *Mercurius elenticus (for King Charles the II)* (29 April-6 May 1650), BL, TT, E.600[3], sig. A3r; *The man in the moon* (27 February-6 March 1650), BL, TT, E.594[21], p. 356; *The man in the moon* (13-20 February 1650), BL, TT, E.593[17], p. 339.

⁴⁰ *Mercurius pragmaticus (for King Charles II)* (7-14 May 1650), BL, TT, E.601[2], sig. Ggg2r.

⁴¹ *Mercurius pragmaticus (for King Charles II)* (5-12 February 1650), BL, TT, E.592[12], sig. Ss3r.

⁴² *Mercurius elenticus (for King Charles the II)* (29 April-6 May 1650), BL, TT, E.600[3], sig. Cr; *The man in the moon* (7-14 November 1649), BL, TT, E.579[11], p. 233; *Mercurius pragmaticus (for King Charles II)* (23-30 April 1650), BL, TT, E.599[5], sig. Ee2r.

⁴³ *The man in the moon* (31 October-7 November 1649), BL, TT, E.578[9], p. 234.

⁴⁴ *Mercurius pragmaticus (for King Charles II)* (23-30 April 1650), BL, TT, E.599[5], sigs. Ee2r, Ee3r.

⁴⁵ *The man in the moon* (26 September-10 October 1649), BL, TT, E.575[16], p. 201; *The man in the moon* (10-17 October 1649), BL, TT, E.575[24], p. 205; *The man in the moon* (9-16 January 1650), BL, TT, E.589[15], p. 298; *The man in the moon* (9-16 January 1650), BL, TT, E.589[15], p. 303; *Mercurius pragmaticus (for King Charles II)* (5-12 February 1650), BL, TT, E.592[12], sig. Ss3r.

⁴⁶ *The man in the moon* (16-23 January 1650), BL, TT, E.590[3], p. 311; Ernest Sirluck, 'To Your Tents, O Israel: a lost pamphlet', *HLQ*, 19, 3 (1956), pp. 301-5.

The limited evidence that survives, then, suggests that the early newsbooks would have been read by many amongst the aristocracy, gentry and middling sorts. This was exactly the sort of audience the Commonwealth needed to influence if it were to swing popular opinion behind it. Local government in mid-seventeenth century England required the participation of thousands of private individuals who assumed public responsibility. Modest property-holders and gentry alike actively participated in the political process as office-holders, constables, witnesses and jurors.⁴⁷ Securing the support of these groups was to be an overriding objective for the Commonwealth throughout its life.⁴⁸ However, few members of these national and local political classes appear to have conformed to the blueprint of the Commonwealth reader envisaged by the Council of State. For some, perhaps, a wide-ranging but bland diet of news without editorials and controversy would have sufficed. For others like the Earl of Leicester, though, even licensed newsbooks could not necessarily be trusted to tell the truth without checking them against other evidence. For still others, like those royalist readers whose reactions to the newsbooks survive, they were either to be ignored or criticised for failing to provide what they saw as the proper definition of news.

⁴⁷ Hindle, *The State and Social Change in Early Modern England*; Wrightson, 'The Politics of the Parish in Early Modern England'.

⁴⁸ Anthony Fletcher, 'Oliver Cromwell and the Localities: the problem of consent', in Colin Jones, Malyn Newitt & Stephen K. Roberts (eds.), *Politics and People in Revolutionary England: essays in honour of Ivan Roots* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 187-204; Christopher Durston, *Cromwell's major-generals: godly government during the English Revolution* (Manchester, 2001).

Chapter 6

Conclusion

On 24 May 1650, the Council of State voted a pension of £100 to Marchamont Nedham, who had recently been released from custody on Bradshaw's intervention.⁴⁹ In June, Nedham submitted a proposal to the Council for a new newsbook, to be written 'in defence of the Commonwealth, and for the Information of the People'. In this, its objectives were identical to the three existing licensed newsbooks. The key difference was in how Nedham proposed to edit it: it should be 'written in a jocular way', because 'fancy... ever sways the Sceptre in Vulgar Judgement, much more than Reason'.⁵⁰ On 13 June, the first issue of *Mercurius Politicus* appeared.⁵¹ Several other titles also emerged over the course of the year.⁵² On 22 October, the fifty-seventh and last edition of *Briefe Relation* was published. The *Perfect Diurnall* continued until 1654. *Severall Proceedings* carried on until September 1655.

On one level, the emergence of *Mercurius Politicus* represents the failure of the Commonwealth's attempts to return the newsbook market to an idealised pre-1640s state. Despite its greatly increased central control of the newsbooks, the Commonwealth was unable to extricate them entirely from the communication circuit which underpinned them. The newsbooks were still created by publishers with an eye to the market, and the Commonwealth's early newsbooks thus remained dependent on a delicately negotiated relationship with commercial interests. Licensers could influence or determine content, but so

⁴⁹ 'Volume 9: May 1650', *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Interregnum, 1650* (1876), pp. 135-185. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=54361> Date accessed: 4 July 2009.

⁵⁰ J. M. French (ed.), *The Life Records of John Milton* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1949), vol. 2, p. 310.

⁵¹ *Mercurius Politicus* (6-13 June 1650), BL, TT, E.603[6].

⁵² Frank, *Beginnings*, pp. 210-213.

could editors, writers and printers. In writing and composing the early newsbooks, the book trade shaped their content and sought to make them serve their own interests. The Commonwealth's early experience of newsbooks reveals the often delicate processes which grandees and information professionals had to undertake in order to control or influence printed texts. Readers were a particularly important part of this circuit. As Nedham identified, the newsbooks of the civil war period had changed the reading public's tastes: they wanted not just information but also controversy and entertainment. While some readers found the early newsbooks useful as a source of information, it seems clear that the reason others disliked them was because they lacked the aggressive vigour of their predecessors. Genre conventions for newsbooks were strongly shaped and set during the early 1640s.⁵³ Newsbooks quickly became associated with political discord, and licensers and editors of the Commonwealth newsbooks found it extremely difficult to reshape the genre. As a result, the Council of State's vision of depoliticising them was more easily achieved in theory than in practice. Despite reverting to a plain, apolitical style, the content of the early Commonwealth newsbooks could still reflect political factionalism. Even their creation was marked by political disagreement over who should license them.

As a result of readers' tastes being shaped by the events of the 1640s, the Council of State's desire to transform the 'revolutionary reader' into a 'Commonwealth reader' was too ambitious to be achieved overnight. The dissertation thus underlines the importance of readers, and their ability to reconstitute the meaning of texts, to understanding the politics of the mid-seventeenth century. Bradshaw and his colleagues on the Council of State were very clear about the role readers could play, for good or for ill, in healing and settling the nation. No news was thus good news for the Council grandees, but it was not good news for readers,

⁵³ Smith, *Literature and Revolution in England, 1640-1660*, ch. 1.

who demanded a different literary diet to that provided to them by the Commonwealth newsbooks. The genius of Marchamont Nedham was to recognise these demands and change the menu accordingly. And yet the Licensing Act and the newsbooks that followed it set the mould for the rest of the 1650s. If the news market was not reconfigured, it was at least brought under state control: unlicensed newsbooks were quickly suppressed, and those that emerged were kept under much greater political direction. During the late 1640s, licensers and editors were gradually being brought in-house to be employed directly by the state. The confidence, too, with which the Council of State embarked on planning and implementing the Licensing Act – drawing on and reshaping an older critical vocabulary – is reminiscent of the confidence with which the Commonwealth tried to rework a variety of symbolic and ritual languages in order to justify its authority.⁵⁴ If the early Commonwealth newsbooks were ultimately a dead end in the development of their genre, they were nonetheless a substantial milestone in state control of the press on the part of the fledgling regime that created them.

⁵⁴ Kevin Sharpe, “‘An image dotting rabble’: the failure of republican culture in seventeenth-century England”, in Kevin Sharpe & Stephen Zwicker (eds.), *Refiguring revolutions: aesthetics and politics from the English revolution to the romantic revolution* (Berkeley, CA and London, 1998), pp. 25-56; Kelsey, *Inventing a Republic*, pp. 200-227.

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