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BOOKS IN THE NEWS IN CROMWELLIAN ENGLAND

Marcus Nevitt

This article offers detailed analysis of the patterns of book advertising in Marchamont Nedham's government-sponsored newsbook, Mercurius Politicus. It contends that, for a brief period, Politicus was the nearest thing that the mid-seventeenth century had to a literary periodical and contests standard accounts that Politicus was only successful because government monopoly made it so. Instead I show that Politicus was instrumental in creating an image of the Commonwealth and Protectorate as a Republic of Letters; the cheap print of its small advertisements insisted that the publication of a book was an event, that London was a city of the book, and that its inhabitants might respond to the uncertainty of political revolution by eagerly imagining a future comprised of new books as yet unread.

KEYWORDS advertisements; Marchamont Nedham; news; serials

Shortly after the Restoration of Charles II, a loyal satirist celebrated the return of the Stuarts by cataloguing the enormities and veneries of the interregnum. The anonymous author of *Bibliotheca Fanatica* (1660) imagined the recent history of the 1650s as a list of 37 newly published books, the mere titles of which provided a diverting sense of the forces, individuals and institutions that had defined the last decade without monarchy. A ribald fiction itself, the catalogue reported the recent publication of equally scurrilous books such as:

The Defect of a Virtue is worse than the Excess; a Treatise, shewing how much better it is to be hung like a Stallion with *Henry Martin*, than with the Lord *Mounson* to want a Bauble.

Diva Pecunia, a brief Discourse, to prove that there neither is, nor can be any other God, which should be adored by the Saints, but the omnipotent Lady, Money; by *Marchamond Needham* [sic], the Devil's Half-Crown News-Monger.

Fistula in Ano, and the Ulcer of the Rump; wherein is shewn, that there is no better Way to cure such Distempers, than a Burning, or Cauterising: by the Rump-confounding Boys of the City of *London*.¹

These titles caricatured Cromwellian England as a period of self-serving excess and bodily malformation; in a common image, the Rump parliament is remembered as the nation's sore point while the political agency of republicans and regicides like Henry Marten and

William Monson is rendered sexual: either they were monstrously prodigious or laughably deficient. The description of the editor of the regime's official newsbooks, *Marchamont Nedham*, will look broadly familiar to most students of seventeenth-century journalism. Nedham, as is routine in many contemporary and modern accounts of him, is primarily an avaricious reprobate; here, though, he is also a peculiarly Faustian newsmonger, one who sold his soul to the devil just to increase the charges for book advertisements in his newspapers from the customary six pence or a shilling to half a crown per notice.² The deftness of the satire, of course, is that the one who profited by printed lists of books should here find himself victim of one.

In the absence of official account records for his serials, there is only circumstantial evidence to suggest that, whether Satan was backing the venture or not, Nedham did indeed raise the price of book notices to two shillings and six pence. (Another Restoration satire, for instance, depicts him lamenting the penury brought on by the loss of his 'Advertisement Half-crownes'.³) It is likely Nedham did this in 1655 when, as editor of *Mercurius Politicus* and *The Publick Intelligencer*, he enjoyed the fruits of draconian press licensing under the Protectorate. If true, the raised advertising rate was expensive, the equivalent to two and a half day's pay for an unskilled labourer and approached the 'usual cost' of paid notices in eighteenth-century newspapers following the imposition of a shilling duty on each advert under the Stamp Act of 1712.⁴ My interest, however, lies less in the question of whether the book advertising price-hike made Nedham, as Andrew Pettegree has suggested, 'a very rich man', but rather in the fact that a very significant number of booksellers and printers repeatedly paid it.⁵ These men and women were not, I argue, the unfortunate or unwitting dupes of journalistic monopoly and Marchamont Nedham; instead they saw that Nedham (and *Mercurius Politicus* especially) offered productive and unprecedented opportunities in the risky world of book dealing, a chance to reassemble a bookshop clientele reduced and dispersed by civil war. Whereas Joad Raymond has written compellingly of *Politicus* as the Republic's epic and epitaph in prose, this article will analyse its book advertisements to suggest that, for a brief period, *Politicus* was the nearest thing that the mid-seventeenth century had to a literary periodical.⁶ *Politicus* was instrumental in creating an image of the Commonwealth and Protectorate as a Republic of Letters; the cheap print of its small advertisements insisted that the publication of a book was an event, that London was a city of the book, and that its inhabitants might respond to the uncertainty of political revolution by eagerly imagining a future comprised of new books as yet unread.

These are grand claims to make from such unadorned booksellers' lists. Typically, an advertisement, placed by the bookseller, the publisher or the printer of the work, consisted of little more than the title, author and indication of the premises from which a book might be purchased.⁷ Henry Seile, for example, was merely following emerging book-trade practices when in an early edition of *Politicus* he heralded the appearance of the first printing of Fulke Greville's biography of Sir Philip Sidney with zero puffery and without any indication of price:

There is published the life of Sr. Philip Sidney, with the Interest of as Christian Princes [*sic*], as it then stood in Relation to England. Printed for Henry Seile, Over against Dunstain's in Fleetstreet.⁸

The grammatical slip of this notice reveals how most book advertisements were composed; until Nedham and his team developed the form in the late 1650s they were rarely anything more than the barest précis of the title page of a work (here, the typographical error comes from some hasty reading of the full title page which ran *The Life of the Renowned S^r Philip Sidney with the True Interest of England as it then stood in relation to all Forrain Princes*). Such conventions have led Nicholas Brownlees to note a ‘linguistic flatness’ in seventeenth-century book advertisements which lacked the persuasive richness that advertisers used to sell other kinds of commodity or service in the serials of the period.⁹ This has meant that booklists have remained a poor relation in the history of newspaper advertising. They have none of the glamour of those notices in which kings, aristocrats or statesmen advertised the loss of pets, the theft or sale of property.¹⁰ Advertisements of new books for sale are simply not as exciting as those notices for chocolate, cough lozenges, purloined jewellery, stolen horses or violent criminals and are far less affecting than those for lost children, runaway apprentices, fugitive wives or strayed servants. However, their quantity alone suggests that book advertisements warrant far greater attention than they have received; their ubiquity is often taken for granted but rarely analysed in studies of the history of journalism.¹¹

This omission is striking since advertisements for newly printed books caught the imagination of journalists very early. The first newspaper advertisement for a book in England appeared in *The Continuation of weekly news*, a coranto of 1624, which told its readers that a map illustrating the siege of Breda was soon to be published.¹² Likewise, the following year, prevented by law from reporting upon domestic events, Thomas Archer used one of his corantos to note the recent publication of his edition of George Marcelline’s *Epithalamium Gallo-Britannicum*, a quarto on the marriage of Prince Charles and Henrietta Maria.¹³ By the late 1640s book advertisements appeared more frequently, but still sporadically, in papers like Henry Walker’s *Perfect Occurrences* and the Leveller news-book *The Moderate*; Samuel Pecke, editor of *A Perfect Diurnall*, was perhaps the most enthusiastic adopter of the practice at the end of the decade.¹⁴ In the early 1650s book advertising began to become more regularised, widespread and profitable. Pecke, in competition with papers like Daniel Border’s *Faithfull Scout*, the *Several Proceedings* of Henry Walker and the recently launched *Mercurius Politicus*, charged six pence for advertisements and reserved up to half of the final page of his serial for assorted paid notices, very occasionally carrying as many as eight for books.¹⁵ It was when Pecke, Border and Walker were put out of business by the Protectorate licensing regime in October 1655, that Nedham began turning his attention to book notices in earnest. Over the course of its 600 issues, more than 1000 book advertisements and over 150 booksellers appeared in *Politicus*.¹⁶ Figure 1 shows how when in competition with Pecke et al., in the early 1650s, Nedham printed a maximum of nine book advertisements a month in *Politicus*. Though slightly slow to respond to monopoly conditions—he carried no advertisements in the October that monopoly was established—*Politicus* soon began increasing its book notices: from 10 in November 1655, he printed 26 in May 1656, 39 in May 1658 and 60 in June 1659, the highest monthly total. Even in the final months of Nedham’s editorship *Politicus* still brought in substantial book advertising revenue, with 41 notices placed in January 1660 alone. During this period a single weekly issue of *Politicus* might carry as many as 18 book advertisements across an entire double-page spread.¹⁷

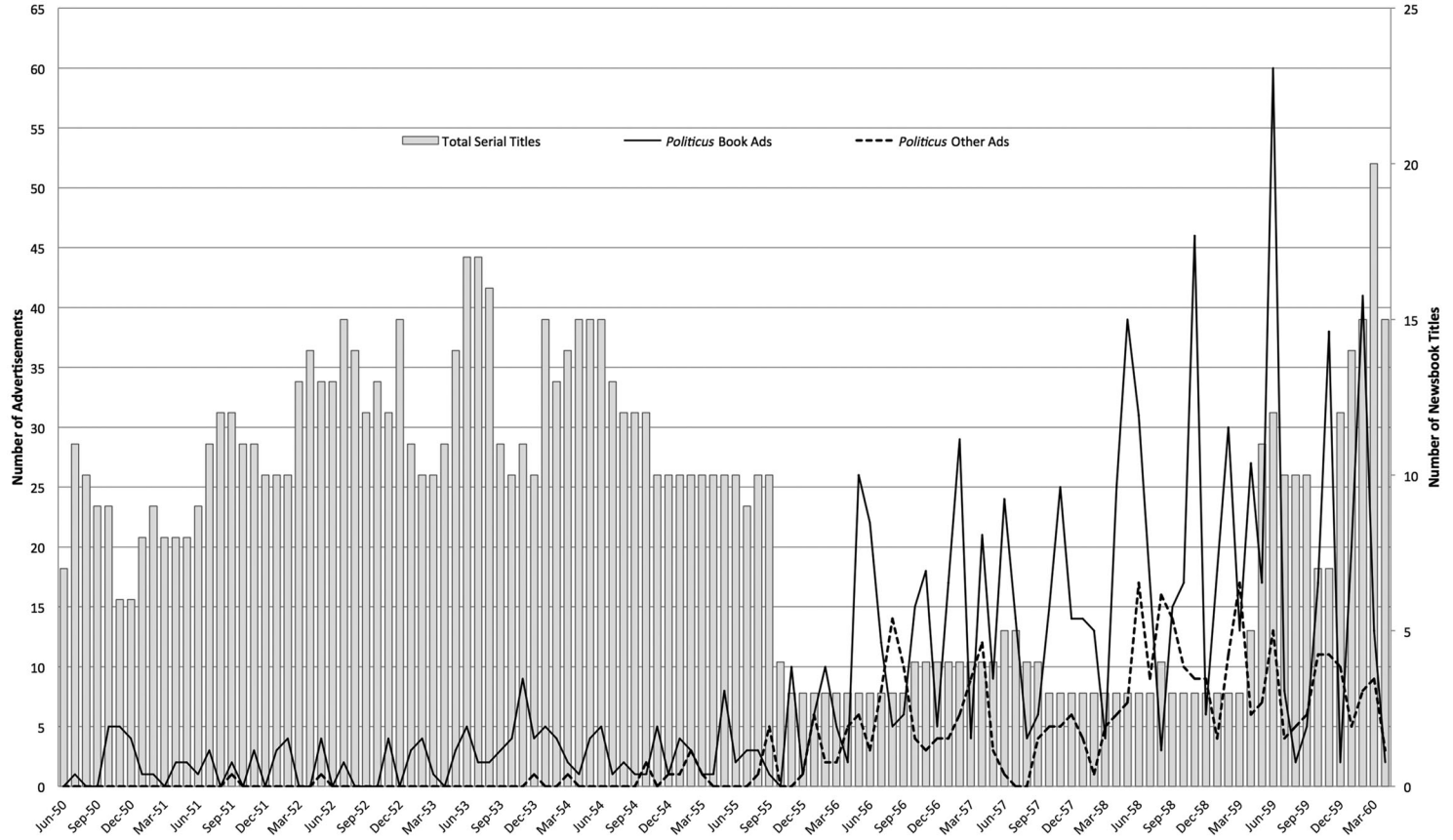


FIGURE 1.
 Advertisements in *Mercurius Politicus* by month.

Such numbers were unprecedented. While they were in large part due to Nedham's favourable position under the Protectorate's monopolistic regulation of the news market between October 1655 and May 1659 they are not straightforwardly or solely explicable in these terms.¹⁸ Book notices were appealing to Nedham and his team because, compared to advertisements for other commodities, they were much shorter and were quicker to set in type (and they could thus, potentially, be placed in multiple positions across separate or consecutive pages without disrupting the presentation of major news items). Because *Politicus'* advertising rates were completely unrelated to space taken or words used—but varied instead according to the kind of product or service advertised—the relative brevity and 'linguistic flatness' of book notices actually made them limber and attractive fare for journalists and their printers. The most commonly advertised proprietary medicine of the period by contrast, Buckworth's lozenges, might have cleared readers' chests and airways, but their advertisement, by no means the most verbose by contemporary standards of puffery, always clogged at least a quarter of a page of *Politicus*.¹⁹ The relative income earned by such products in comparison with book notices is hard to determine since *Politicus'* advertising rates do not survive. However, when in 1657 Nedham launched a short-lived advertising sister-paper, *The Publick Adviser*, he charged 10s for a four-week run of advertisements for medicines or cures and 5s for a single book notice for the same period.²⁰ Whether or not *Politicus'* book notices actually cost half a crown for a single week, if they, too, were just half the price of its medical advertisements then their sheer volume and unflinching frequency made them very lucrative indeed. Buckworth's lozenges were advertised 42 times in *Politicus* alongside a much smaller number of advertisements for other medicines. These are meagre figures compared to the revenue generated by book advertising since *Politicus* took nearly three times as many book notices as it did advertisements for all other goods and services combined.²¹ As [Figure 1](#) shows, there was only the occasional month where book advertisements lagged behind notices for other commodities or commercial opportunities; this happened in just 10 months spread across an entire decade, the equivalent of one month per year for the life of the newsbook. For 11 months of the year, then, the business of books was *Politicus'* bread and butter.

It is well known that *Politicus* was, quite unlike any other newsbook of the period, book-obsessed.²² It could end an editorial by quoting at length a recent edition of Thomas May's translation of Livy; its dense network of editorial allusions demanded that its readers know something of Aristotle, Hobbes, Sallust and a myriad of other works by respected authors in order to make fullest sense of the reported news events of the week. Never noted before, however, is the extent to which this bookishness was underwritten by the sheer volume of book advertising illustrated above. If Giles Mandelbrote is correct to estimate that there were just over 150 booksellers active in publishing in London in the early years of the Restoration, it is remarkable that 152 of them used *Politicus* to advertise their wares at some stage in the previous decade.²³ The appendix shows how the advertisements came from stationers and booksellers of varying reputations and from most points on the politico-religious spectrum; *Politicus* took money from and gave space to dissenting booksellers like Hannah Allen, Giles Calvert, Livewell Chapman and Philemon Stephens and placed them alongside those from more conformist book traders such as Humphrey Moseley, Henry Herringman, Richard Royston and George Thomason. Although London printers and booksellers placed the overwhelming majority of advertisements,

there were also notices for books being sold in shops in Bristol, Ipswich, Kidderminster, Leicester, Northampton, Norwich, Oxford and Salisbury. With the exception of Thomas Robinson, whose bookshop was on Oxford High Street, most booksellers working exclusively outside of the capital only placed a single advertisement in *Politicus*. They did so, presumably, with stock they needed urgently to shift, knowing something of *Politicus*' extensive reach and popularity with the nation's book-buying public.

Such booksellers' habits can only partly be accounted for by the Protectorate's strict regulation of printed news. What monopoly alone does not explain is why some of *Politicus*' most successful advertising months, and its highest monthly total, came after the censorship of serials had effectively collapsed and when competition was reintroduced to the newsbook advertising market to something like pre-Protectorate levels (Figure 1).²⁴ Likewise, monopoly does not help elucidate the data presented in Figure 2. Even when the grip of Protectorate press regulation was at its tightest, when Nedham had only effectively to compete against himself, publishing *Politicus* on a Thursday and *The Publick Intelligencer* on a Monday, booksellers still overwhelmingly chose to advertise their wares in *Politicus*. Thus from its launch in October 1655 through to its demise in April 1660 *The Publick Intelligencer* carried 340 fewer book notices than its more established companion serial later in the week and thus generated only 61% of its book advertising revenue.²⁵ Figure 3 reveals another compelling reason to nuance the argument that *Politicus* was only a successful paper because draconian licensing made it so. When competition was restored to the market—between the collapse of censorship in May 1659 until the end of April 1660 when Nedham's *Politicus* was closed by the Restoration authorities—printers and booksellers still overwhelmingly chose *Politicus* above all other titles as the best place to publicise their new stock.

II

Instead of interpreting *Politicus*' development of newspaper book advertising as the inevitable outcome of the anti-competitive press licensing restrictions, it is equally plausible that, even under the most strictly regulated days of the Protectorate, booksellers recognised that *Politicus* provided a distinct discursive forum for people interested in books, their content, their appearance and the processes of their making. The case of Humphrey Moseley is instructive. Moseley was the most famous bookseller of the seventeenth century, and for many students of the literary culture of the period he remains the most significant.²⁶ His acquisition of works by leading poets and dramatists of the period alongside his prefatory writings in the editions he produced emphasise his commitment to 'fine literature in an age of polemic'; while building an impressive stable of authors and texts he also, crucially, professionalised the advertisement of his stock.²⁷ He did this with lengthy book catalogues included in a book's spare pages or by printing the lists of his wares separately and inserting them into various volumes for sale from his shop.²⁸ This last practice, honed during the 1650s, has been described as a watershed moment in 'the invention of English literature' as a discrete discourse since Moseley used his lists to discriminate between the genre category as well as the size of the books he had for sale: his wares became 'various histories', 'choice poems', 'excellent translations', 'incomparable comedies and tragedies' or 'new and excellent romances'.²⁹

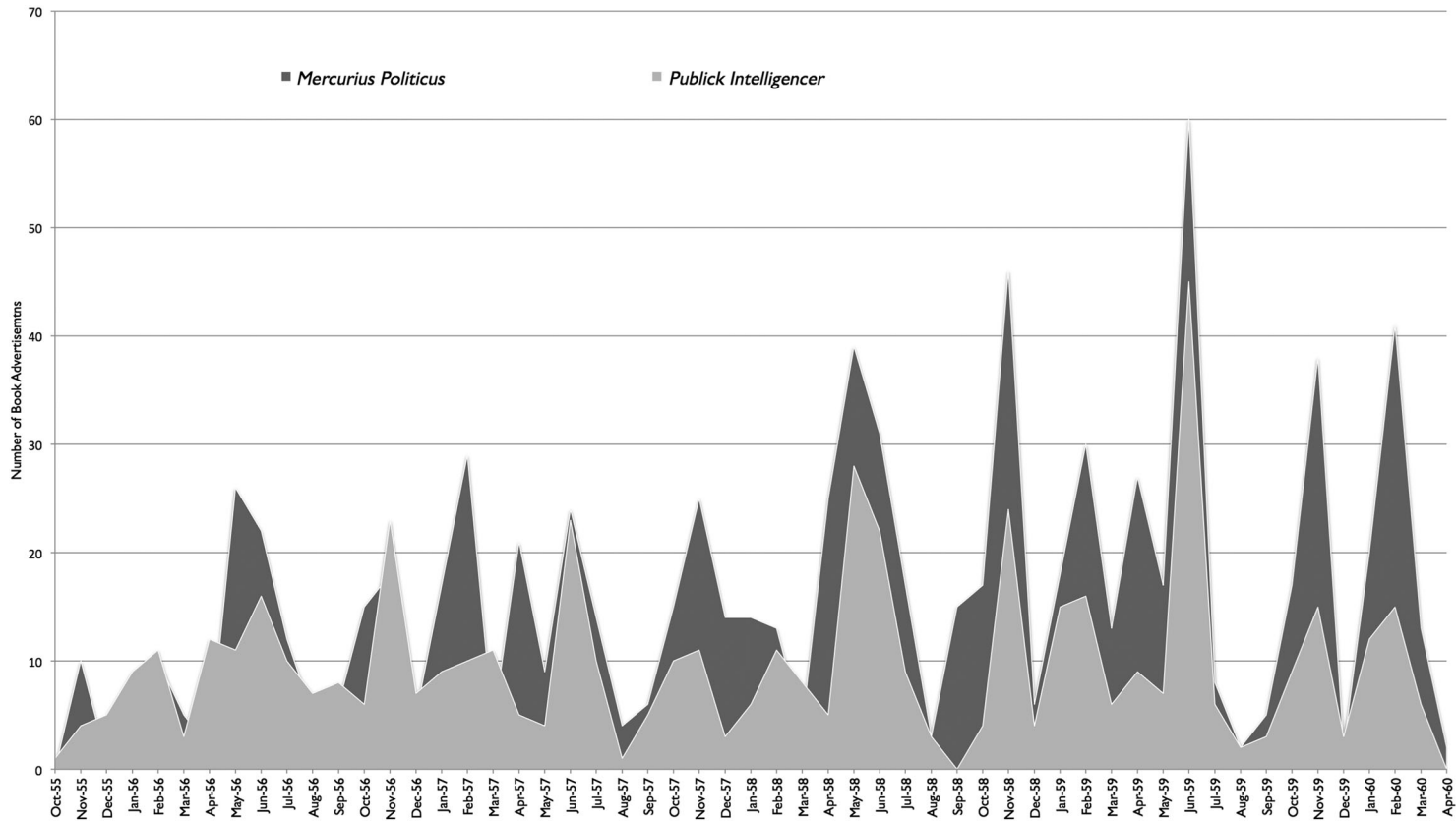


FIGURE 2. Book Advertisements in *Mercurius Politicus* and *The Publick Intelligencer* by month.

<i>Mercurius Politicus</i>			<i>The Publick Intelligencer</i>			All Other Titles		
Book Ads	Issues	Average	Book Ads	Issues	Average	Book Ads	Issues	Average
225	48	4.69	123	49	2.51	200	187	1.07

FIGURE 3.

Total newsbook advertisements 1 May 1659–30 April 1660.

While Moseley's 1650s' catalogues have rarely been undersold by bibliographers or literary critics, it has gone unnoticed that throughout the same period, he repeatedly printed lists of his newest books for sale in the Protectorate's government-sponsored newsbooks. Moseley vigorously promoted seventeenth-century literary values in the news, defending the importance of fine writing and his business interests on what is, for modern scholarship at least, an unfamiliar front. He was, by some distance, the most visible of London's booksellers in *Politicus*; he placed almost twice as many book notices (78) as his nearest competitor Thomas Dring (41), three times more than one of the most eminent members of the Stationers' Company, George Sawbridge (26) and substantially more than those other notably 'literary' booksellers of the period Richard Royston (24) and Henry Herringman (17). Thus, *Politicus*' readers learned of the appearance of Moseley's editions of Abraham Cowley's *Poems* (1656), John Denham's translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*, *The Destruction of Troy* (1656), *The Last Remains of Sir John Suckling* (1658), as well as Edmund Waller and Sidney Godolphin's translation of Virgil *The Passion of Dido for Aeneas* (1658).³⁰ He regularly advertised the latest translations of new volumes of French romances and, for those of a different cast of mind, served notice of the publication of William Sanderson's hagiographic biography of Charles I, *A compleat History of the Life and Reign of King CHARLS from His Cradle to His Grave* (1658) and Thomas Stanley's *History of Philosophy* (1655).³¹ If such titles help confirm Moseley's place among networks of royalist artists and thinkers in the interregnum, they also reveal that this defender of 'fine literature in an age of polemic' was much less averse to polemical cheap print than we might have thought.³² He evidently saw something in *Politicus*' values that, for all their political differences, were akin to his own interests and concerns.

Moseley favoured advertising in *Politicus* over *The Publick Intelligencer*, placing almost twice as many book notices in the longer-established serial when the papers were appearing concurrently.³³ This reveals his recognition that *Politicus*—under monopoly or not—was the foremost literary newsbook of the era, that it had a prodigious reach among readers of various political persuasions and that it was therefore a vital means of getting the greatest possible number of customers into his shop. A key driver of this was the fact that Nedham's newsbooks, unlike the book catalogues printed for Moseley and other booksellers in the period, never arranged their books by discipline, subject or size; their only organisational principle was place of purchase or point of sale (so that book notices were printed in the order in which they came into the office and were thus only grouped according to where they could be bought).³⁴ Appearing in multiple places in any issue—rather than more coherently on the final

page as had been the case with most advertisements in the commercially successful newsbooks of the 1640s—*Politicus'* book notices were embedded in the week's news rather than distinct from it, encouraging the impression that the publication of books were important events and not just a revenue stream which kept journalists and their papers afloat.

The following example from 1656 is typical of the *mise-en-page* which brokered important connections between news reporters and booksellers, the readers of serials and a potential book shoppers:

From our Fleet at Cape St. Maries in the way to Cadiz, April 16.

Not having timely notice of the going of one of our ships for England, I am loth to neglect to make use of this inch of time to give you some briefe Account of our condition. As for News, We understand, that the Spanish Fleet are all in Cadiz ...

An Advertisement of Books newly Published: [...]

Good Thoughts for every day of the Moneth. Translated out of French. Sold by Thomas Dring, at the George in Fleetstreet, near Cliffords Inn.

The Shepherds Kalender, newly augmented and corrected. Sold by Fran. Grove on Snow-hill, near the Saracens head without Newgate.

Mr. Mauger's French Grammar inriched with several choice Dialogues containing an present under King Lewis the Fourteenth. The second Edition. Sold by John Martin and James Allestree, at the Bell in St Pauls Church-yard.

Jamaica, March 12. 1655.

May it please your Highness,

The *Marston Moor* ariving in this harbor on Jan. 15. last, by which we received your Highnes Letters and Instructions; on the 24 of the same month, we dispatched away *the Wildeman*, being one of the Ships least usefull, with a Packet ... We shall now only add what hath been transacted since; the present condition of this Island, Fleet, and Army, and our Opinions, so farr as we are able to judg of your Highness affairs in these Parts.³⁵

Although the use of framing line borders and italics insists that advertisement and news are distinct discourses, the very habit of printing book notices at unpredictable and irregular intervals amid the news—which itself was printed at unpredictable and irregular chronological intervals, according to the order in which it arrived in the office—effectively undermined that distinction.³⁶ Rather, both discourses were part of a noteworthy but unsteady flow of information; thus any normative discursive hierarchy which privileged an official

communication to Oliver Cromwell about the English invasion of Jamaica above a more familiar newsletter about other naval encounters with the Spanish, or which placed either of these missives above details of recent commercial activities of London booksellers is entirely absent or refused. Likewise, there is no standard bibliographic hierarchising of the book titles on offer here: a duodecimo of quotidian devotions for the pious, a folio almanac-cum-husbandry manual (bearing no relation to Edmund Spenser's pastoral of the same title but, with over 60 woodcuts, more lavishly illustrated), and an octavo French grammar each compete equally for the reader's eye regardless of the price, popularity or prestige of author, printer or bookseller. However, unlike the items of news here—reporting as they do significant and completed actions of others in the nation's very recent revolutionary past—book notices always emphasised the agency of their readers in the present, offering a fleeting imagining of their future as the enlightening potential of encounters with books and bookish people as yet unread, unmet or well acquainted. By omitting the price of a title and stressing only the location of booksellers' shops and the signs that might guide a reader to particular books before street numbers, these notices fostered a kind of sociability which enticed the committed bibliophile, leisured amateur or eager autodidact from the pleasures and frustrations of reading the news to the delights and misunderstandings of literary conversation. In an era which saw the advent of the first coffee houses—an institution, like the newspaper, so central to Habermasian ideas of an emergent public sphere—the bookshop was a much more familiar and long-established venue for such sustaining and transformative talk.³⁷

The bookshop conversations and purchases prompted by *Politicus* would have been voluminous and various. Advertisements for expensive legal folios wrestled for readers' attention alongside those for pamphlets and quarto editions of poetry and drama; grammar school textbooks jostled with French romances, works of biblical exegesis, geometry, history, mathematics, philosophy and theology; there were notices for translations, medical treatises, recipe books (for English, Dutch and French cookery), a guide to cultivating fruit trees as well as a manual on swimming technique.³⁸ All these notices were for the very latest editions of works, whether new, altered, enlarged or reprinted. In politico-religious rather than genre terms, however, especially when monopoly was in force, the dialogue was less raucous. Giles Calvert, for instance, a regular advertiser and the publisher of George Fox, never once placed an advert for any of Fox's books—or those by other Quaker authors in his stable—with *Politicus*, presumably knowing that the serial would not have been a congenial host. In fact, nothing obviously damaging to the current administration was advertised in *Politicus* until the Rump was recalled, the Protectorate was dissolved and the licensing system was in disarray from April and May of 1659. Politically inflected works advertised in the serial before this moment were (at least outwardly) avowedly loyal to the Cromwellian administration: William Davenant's *Gondibert* in December 1650; Nedham's own translation of John Selden's *Mare Clausum* in November 1652; a notice for Marvell's *First Anniversary* in January 1655; a book on titles of honour bestowed by Oliver Cromwell in 1657; in the same year, there were repeated notices for a semi-official denunciation of *Killing No Murder*, a pamphlet advocating the assassination of Oliver Cromwell.³⁹ By 1659, with the Protectorate in tatters, however, the picture changed markedly and, as the number of book

notices climbed steadily, there were advertisements for titles maintaining diametrically opposed positions on the same topic. Thus, though *Politicus* toed the official government line on tithe payment—advertising days and collection points around the country, and reproducing the text of legal documents demanding tithe payment—by 1659 it was advertising Immanuel Bourne's *A Defence and Justification of Ministers Maintenance by Tithes* as well as repeated notices for Milton's evisceration of the entire system, *A Consideration Touching the Likeliest means to remove hirelings from the Church*.⁴⁰ Likewise, even though Fifth Monarchist books were absent for most of *Politicus*' issues, by 1659 a book by the Fifth Monarchist John Rogers found page room, as did William Prynne's defence of the abolished House of Lords and several works anticipating or celebrating the return of the Stuart dynasty.⁴¹

III

If the period from 1659 represents *Politicus*' book advertising pomp, it is important to recognise that this was not simply the result of the collapse of monopoly but of a bibliophilia cultivated over the life of the newsbook. As is well known, that lover of all things bookish, John Milton, was involved with *Politicus* in some capacity from its inception; he was its official licenser in 1651 and perhaps helped Nedham with some of his editorialising for the paper in its early years.⁴² Even as the venture closed, however, as the light died on the Protectorate, he featured, raging against the dying of that light, in one of the serial's longer book notices:

The ready and easie way to establish a free Commonwealth, and the excellence thereof compared with the inconveniences and dangers of readmitting Kingship in this Nation. The Author *J. M.* Wherein by reason of the Printers haste, the Errata not coming in time, it is desired that the following faults may be amended. Page. 9. line 32. for the *Areopa us* read of *Areopagus*. P. 10. l 3 for full Senate, true Senate, l4 for sits, is the whole Aristocracy, l. 7. for Provincial States, States of every City, p 17. l.29 for cite, citie, l.30 for left, felt sold by *Livewell Chapman* at the Crown in Popes head Alley.⁴³

If Milton could not move the English people to see the error in their attachment to monarchy, he could at least alert a news-reading public to the mistakes made by printers when setting his writing in moveable type. Milton's fastidiousness is not the only noteworthy factor here, of course. It is a rare serial indeed where another book's errata leaf makes for acceptable copy and a rare piece of puffery which advertises chiefly what is wrong with a book, flagging the lapses in the processes of its making. It was Thomas Newcomb, the printer of *Politicus* and regular printer of Milton's prose works (including *The Readie and Easie Way*), who probably ensured the migration of an errata list from the paratextual matter of the pamphlet itself to an advertisement in a newspaper. (One hostile contemporary, who had read the advertisement but not the book, noted the unusualness of the advert and surmised as much.⁴⁴) In marked contrast to *Politicus*, when the second edition of *The Readie and Easie Way* appeared a month or so later it made no observations on the matter of these typographic slips, silently correcting them or omitting the passages containing them.⁴⁵ Only in a newsbook like *Politicus*, where the business of news and the business of books were so utterly enmeshed, could a late admission of printing errors become a timely notice.

The unusual trailing of Milton's *Readie and Easie Way* affords a glimpse of one of the ways in which *Politicus*, well before the advent of literary periodicals in the eighteenth century, might encourage its readers to interrogate what made books good and texts legitimate. Another involved the Bishop of Norwich, Edward Reynolds, who took out a paid notice in *Politicus* to illustrate how a work had been falsely attributed to him in another bookseller's printed catalogue. In May 1659 Henry Marsh had printed a list claiming that one of the small duodecimos he had for sale was *A Word of Caution to the Present Times ... by Edward Reynolds D.D.* Less than a month later Reynolds assured *Politicus*' readers—and not, more obviously, simply his own readership or Henry Marsh himself—that he 'was never either the author or Publisher of any such Book, but hath be herein wronged by the compiler and publisher of that Catalogue'.⁴⁶ Like Milton's belated errata list this small but important correction of a single entry in a book catalogue could only flourish in a serial which repeatedly made the appearance of new books remarkable or newsworthy. This practice was not, however,—or at least not only—an abstract or intellectually curious consideration of literary worth or bibliographic value, but was the direct consequence of Nedham, Newcomb and their team asserting the vested interests of their advertisers (be they booksellers, fellow members of the Stationers Company or other individuals close to particular books). This is best seen in the way that, alongside its roaring trade in book advertisements, *Politicus* carried numerous paid notices alerting the public to spurious imprints of texts and supposedly rogue agents at large in the book trade. Following the death of the Bishop of Exeter Ralph Brownrigg in 1659 the newsbook took money from Brownrigg's executor, Thomas Buck, to warn of:

some Sermons Printed under the name of Doctor or Brownrigg, late Bishop of Exeter, deceased, out of his Copies, very imperfect, and full of gross mistakes ... ; Notice is hereby given by the Executor of the said Bishop, That as those already come forth are not to be owned at his; so hereafter the Reader is to expect the hand of Doctor Gauden ... to attest whatsoever is to be published under the name of that Learned Bishop. What shall otherwise be set forth under his name, is to be accounted spurious.⁴⁷

The bookseller George Thomason may have heeded the warning of this notice since he avoided collecting the unauthorised edition traduced here, Thomas Riland's octavo edition of four Brownrigg sermons, *Repentance and Prayer* (1660). He did, however, acquire a copy of one of the works that *Politicus* trailed for his magisterial collection of books and pamphlets: Bishop John Gauden's funeral sermon and biography the *Memorials of the Life* (1660). Not much is known about Riland; this may have been the only book he ever published and he seems not to have had his own shop since, according to its imprint, he was selling it out of another bookseller's premises on Duck Lane, at the north end of Little Britain, one of London's bookselling centres.⁴⁸ Whether Riland was an opportunist hawking an illicitly acquired text or a newcomer out of his depth and infringing rights without realising it, *Politicus* calculated that an announcement about an unnamed, misbehaving bookseller and a description of his injurious wares might be as eye-catching for its readership as those more familiar hues and cries for delinquents and criminals it printed elsewhere.

Occasionally the tales of human frailty and delinquent books were much closer to home. In August 1657 an apprentice cloth drawer, Nathaniel Butler, slit the throat of an

apprentice silkman, John Knight, and was tried and executed for his murder. *Politicus* ran one instalment of a news story of 'the horrid murther' while Butler—begging time for repentance—awaited his fate in Newgate.⁴⁹ Rather than complete this gripping narrative of one the most infamous murders of the day, however, and provide details of Butler's execution and his heart-rending recognition of wrongdoing, the news story was surprisingly dropped from *Politicus* for nearly a month. During this time, as Peter Lake has illustrated, the incident became the stuff of several sensationalising murder pamphlets as well as an 'official' response orchestrated by the Lord Mayor of London which read the episode as an exemplary conversion narrative in which the penitent criminal died a good death at the hands of the state.⁵⁰ In *Politicus'* hands, however, the official story of dead bad man turned good became a tale of books and their agents gone wrong. Nedham and Newcomb did not continue their coverage of the Butler story because they instead made space for the Lord Mayor and his hired pen, Ralph Yearwood, to announce the imminent arrival of a work 'that will be of an Universal concernment to every Master of a Family'. Despite its distinctly patriarchal flavour 'all persons whatsoever [were] desired to desist the buying or perusal of any Counterfeit Books relating to the said Butler, since they may suddenly expect the above mentioned, by especial Order of the Right honorable the Lord Mayor'.⁵¹ This sanctioned book just happened to be printed by Thomas Newcomb and when it appeared as *The Penitent Murderer* (1657) it was heralded by another notice denouncing the unspeakable behaviour of a bookseller rather than the homicide:

Whereas there is lately published a certain Pamphlet, Entituled, A full and the truest Narrative, &c. touching the Murther permitted by Nath. Butler, Printed by T. Mabb for John Saywell. These are to certifie ... That it is a false, imperfect, and unlicensed Pamphlet, fitter for the Fire, or the Stock-Fishmarket, then perusall. And if any thing shall hereafter come forth under the said Mr Saywells name (relating to this subject) you are to look upon this Stuff of the same nature, and fallacious Matter of his own Coyning.⁵²

Though he had previously placed half a dozen paid notices in the paper, Saywell never advertised in *Politicus* after this infraction. *Politicus'* censure of the pamphlet was more pointed for those readers with an intimate knowledge of London's bookselling districts; there was a precisely topical and geographical hook for the jibe that it was fitter for the Stock-Fishmarket than perusal, since one of the sites from which Saywell sold his stock for a short period at the end of his career was on the corner of Lombard street next to a fish market.⁵³ The denunciation also involved redescribing the making of the officially sanctioned text as a process that conformed to the same logic as the narrative of the reclaimed, if executed, sinner. Just as Butler's late scaffold repentance helped atone for his sins, the expansive inclusions of Newcomb's legitimate text pardoned its delayed appearance. Whereas Saywell's short unlicensed murder pamphlet appeared very soon after the murder, Newcomb's belated printing ran to more than 80 pages containing 'Confessions, Speech, Prayer, and the Sermon preached after his Execution, with several other usefull Admonitions and excellent Discourses, worthy the perusall of all; and will abundantly make amends for the delay in publishing it.'⁵⁴ This entwining of the stories of Butler the penitent murderer and Saywell the errant publisher afforded *Politicus'* readers a sense of the practicalities of press regulation at work. It presumed, as did all serials, that they

would find murder fascinating; but it also wagered that its readers would regard an act of book denunciation diverting, enthralling or noteworthy, something which enabled them to participate in their own less easily regulated discussions about what constituted a legitimate text and how the commercial interests of printers and booksellers might relate to the operations of state power and religion.

That some of *Politicus'* readers indeed used the serial to reflect upon and debate the value of certain books can be seen in a notice placed by Nicholas Bernard, editor of the works of Archbishop James Ussher. Bernard was Ussher's first biographer and frequent advertisements for his editions of Ussher's writings had appeared in *Politicus* since 1656. In November 1659, however, he was moved to insert a paid notice reflecting upon the textual authority of a rival editorial team's collection of some of Ussher's Oxford sermons which had been advertised in *Politicus* just the previous month. Bernard had seen the book 'mentioned in [the] late diurnall' and wrote to clear any misapprehensions experienced by fellow readers of the serial:

These are to give notice, That as it was against [Ussher's] minde that any of his sermons, so taken from him, should be Printed ... these were disowned by him in his life time ... And the many mistakes, both in the matter and manner of expression, shews sufficiently to any intelligent Reader that knew him, how much he is in divers passages injured by them ... there is a great Error, in calling the Preface concerning the Author, A Narrative of his Life, which it is not. Besides, I have very lately had the sight of other Notes of these Sermons, taken by a then judicious and learned Person in Oxford, and do finde them far more worthy of the publick then these ... Thus much I held my self obliged to declare, in vindicating the most Reverend Primates Fame and Honor, Nov. 4. 1659. N. Bernard.⁵⁵

Bernard had evidently read the edition very carefully indeed. His corrections of textual minutiae as well as broad editorial errors of judgement are of a piece with the other bibliophilic paid notices we have seen but also anticipate much later contributions to the letters' pages of literary periodicals. The self-aggrandisement of the interested, specialist correspondent would only be worthy of attention in a serial which fetishised the book as a peculiar kind of commodity, and which regarded insider information about authors, books, book-trade practices and, of course, news as commensurable and vendible discourses. Such book notices were crucial stages in the commercialisation and professionalisation of the news business in the seventeenth century; they might also have made Marchamont Nedham and his colleagues very rich. The anonymous loyal author of the *Bibliotheca Fanatica*, as we saw at the outset, certainly thought this and joked that this advertising revenue was the devil's coin, unspeakable wealth at too great a price. The politics and hyperbole of that pamphlet's satire concealed a more demonstrable truth, however: *Politicus'* book advertisements also vastly enriched the literary and cultural life of revolutionary England, impelling the nation's readers to know, to want and to talk books.

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Notes

1. *Bibliotheca Fanatica*, 5.
2. For more generous accounts of Nedham see Raymond, "Marchamont Nedham"; Worden, *Literature and Politics*. On newsbook advertising and pricing in the period see Williams, *History of English Journalism*, 158–71; Frank, *Beginnings of the English Newspaper*, 146, 172, 219, 240, 258; Walker, "Advertising in London Newspapers," 113; Ferdinand, "Constructing the Frameworks of Desire"; Pettegree, *The Invention of News*, 302.
3. *Mercurius Politicus: A Private Conference*, 3.
4. Muldrew, *Food, Energy and the Creation of Industriousness*, 209; Raven, *Publishing Business in Eighteenth-Century England*, 129.
5. Pettegree, *The Invention of News*, 302.
6. Raymond, *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain*, 155.
7. In the absence of account books for the newsbooks of the period, it is difficult to determine who paid for the placement of an individual advertisement. It is likely that booksellers paid for many of them since they regularly advertised 'job lots' of multiple titles for sale in their shop only. In contrast, a printer or publisher might give notice of an individual title available from multiple booksellers in the capital. For examples of both kinds of advertisement see *Mercurius Politicus* 412, 15–22 April 1658, 475; *Mercurius Politicus* 565, 28 April–5 May 1659, 412–13.
8. *Mercurius Politicus* 76, 13–20 November 1651, 1216.
9. Brownlees, *Language of Periodical News*, 172.
10. Charles II advertised the loss of one of his larger spaniels and offered 'good reward' for its return in *The Parliamentary Intelligencer* 31, 23–30 July 1660, 492; Sir Arthur Haselrig gave notice of the sale of his horses in *Mercurius Politicus* 592, 20–27 October 1659, 825; the Earl of Dorset appealed for information about the theft of one of his Van Dyck paintings in a paid notice placed in *Mercurius Politicus* 381, 10–17 September 1657, 1629.
11. For insightful exceptions, focusing on *The London Gazette* and other late seventeenth-century serials, see Brownlees *Language of Periodical News*, 161–80; Harris, "Timely Notices".
12. Frank, *Beginnings*, 11, 301.
13. Williams, *History*, 26.
14. For examples of book notices in 1649 newsbooks see *The Moderate* 39, 3–10 April 1649, sig. qq^v; *Perfect Occurrences* 122, 27 April–4 May 1649, 1015.
15. *A Perfect Diurnall of some passages* 132, 14–21 June 1652, sig 6R4^v. On Pecke's pricing see Frank, *Beginnings*, 146, 340.
16. See Appendix.

17. *Mercurius Politicus* 552, 27 January–3 February 1659, 204–5.
18. On Nedham and monopoly, but not advertising, see Raymond, “Mercury with a Winged Conscience”.
19. The first advertisement for Buckworth’s lozenges in *Politicus* was in April 1656; *Mercurius Politicus* 304, 3–10 April 1656, 6083.
20. *The Office of Publick Advice*, no sig.
21. There were 1014 book advertisements in *Politicus* and 378 notices for all other goods and services. These are purely commercial figures and exclude ‘official’ announcements like obituaries and state proclamations. The seventeenth-century bookseller, George Thomason collected all but two issues of the newsbook and frequently collected more than one copy of the same issue. The advertisements in the missing issues (*Mercurius Politicus* 281, 25 October–1 November 1655 and 372, 16–23 July 1657) have been included in these figures and all data from duplicate copies has been excluded.
22. On the literary qualities of *Politicus* see Norbook, *Writing the English Republic*, 223–5; Raymond, *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering*, 155; Worden, *Literature and Politics*, 21–5.
23. Mandelbrote, “From the Warehouse to the Counting-house,” 52.
24. On the regulation of news in 1659 see Peacey, “Cromwellian England: A Propaganda State?”.
25. Between October 1655 and April 1660 *Politicus* carried 869 book notices compared to *The Publick Intelligencer’s* 528. Thomason only missed one copy of *The Publick Intelligencer* (the issue for 22–29 March 1658) and did not collect any duplicates. The book advertisements placed in the issue that Thomason missed have been included in my count.
26. Potter, *Secret Rites and Secret Writing*, 20; Coiro, “Milton and Class Identity,” 277; Hooks, “Booksellers Catalogues,” 459.
27. Corns, *Uncloistered Virtue*, 61.
28. See Raylor, “Moseley, Walker and the 1645 editions of Waller”; Kewes, “Give me the Sociable Pocket Books”; Pollard and Ehrman, *The Distribution of Books by Catalogue*.
29. Kastan, “Humphrey Moseley and the Invention of English Literature”. For an example of Moseley’s lists see *The Academy of Complements*, sigs. A5^v–A8^v; Lindenbaum, “Publishers’ Booklists in Late Seventeenth-Century London,” 398–400.
30. *Mercurius Politicus* 309, 8–15 May 1656, 6969; 401, 28 January–4 February 1658, sig. LI3^r; 572, 16–23 June 1659, 525.
31. *Mercurius Politicus* 87, 29 January–5 February 1652, 1391; 189, 19–26 January 1654, 3218; 231, 9–16 November 1654, 4022; 313, 5–12 June 1656, 7025; 404, 18–25 February 1658, 347.
32. On Moseley and royalist communities of writers see McDowell, *Poetry and Allegiance*, 19.
33. After October 1655 Moseley placed 54 advertisements in *Politicus* and 33 in *The Publick Intelligencer*. Only 18 of *Politicus’* adverts appeared in the Monday paper. This suggests that advertisement regimes for the two papers were distinct (i.e. buying an advertisement in *Politicus* did not guarantee an advertisement in *The Publick Intelligencer*).
34. In this, *Politicus* also distinguished itself from later lists of new books such as the Term Catalogues, organised according to academic discipline and genre.
35. *Mercurius Politicus* 308, 1–8 May 1656, 6952–6953.
36. For the blurring of news and advertisement in post-Restoration serials see Harris, “Timely Notices,” 148.
37. See Mandelbrote, “From the Warehouse to the Counting-House”.

38. The swimming manual was William Percey's *The Compleat Swimmer* (1659); *Mercurius Politicus* 571, 9–16 June 1659, 489.
39. *Mercurius Politicus* 29, 19–26 December 1650, 486; 130, 25 November–2 December 1652, 1055; 240, 11–18 January 1655, 5066; 399, 14–21 January 1658, 252.
40. *Mercurius Politicus* 343, 1–8 January 1656, 7498; 591, 13–20 October 1659, 809; 592, 20 October 1659, 825.
41. *Mercurius Politicus* 415, 6–13 May 1658, 522; 585, 1–8 September 1659, 713; 615, 5–12 April 1660, 1247.
42. Milton French, "Milton, Needham [sic] and *Mercurius Politicus*"; Dobranski, *Milton, Authorship and the Book Trade*, 146–50; Worden, *Literature and Politics*, 129, 204–7.
43. *Mercurius Politicus* 610, 1–8 March 1660, 1151.
44. Collinne, *The Spirit of Phanatiques Dissected*, 7.
45. There were more printers' errors than those listed in the *Politicus* advert. See Wolfe, *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, 7, 345.
46. *Mercurius Politicus* 564, 21–28 April 1659, 397; Leigh, *England Described*, no sig.
47. *Mercurius Politicus* 605, 26 January–2 February 1660, 1064.
48. The book was sold from the Hand and Bible on Duck Street. According to H.R. Plomer and the ESTC the only bookseller operating from this venue at this time was Richard Skelton; Plomer, *Dictionary of Booksellers*, 165.
49. *Mercurius Politicus* 375, 6–13 August 1657, 7979.
50. Lake and Questier, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat*, 159–70.
51. *Mercurius Politicus* 378, 27 August–2 September 1657, 1598.
52. *Mercurius Politicus* 380, 3–10 September 1657, 1612.
53. Saywell's main premises were at the Greyhound in Little Britain. However, the unlicensed pamphlet on the Butler murder plus several other works were sold 'at the sign of the Pile of Bibles in the Stocks Fish-market looking over in to Lombard Street, over against the Post house'. For a list of 14 other items he offered at this location in 1658 see Haestens, *Apocalypsis*, sig. Aaa^v.
54. *Mercurius Politicus* 380, 3–10 September 1657, 1619.
55. *Mercurius Politicus* 594, 10–17 November 1659, 873.

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Appendix
Booksellers Advertising in *Mercurius Politicus*

50 or more Advertisements

1. Humphrey Moseley 78

20 or more Advertisements

2. John Allen 30
3. Gabriell Bedell 28
4. John Clark 27
5. Thomas Dring 41
6. Richard Lowndes 22
7. Thomas Robinson (Oxford) 20
8. John Rothwell 22
9. Richard Royston (London and Oxford) 24
10. George Sawbridge 26
11. Philemon Stephens 20
12. Henry Twyford 21
13. Francis Tyton 34

10 or more Advertisements

14. James Allestry 13
15. Thomas Basset 12
16. Edward Brewster 11
17. Henry Brome 14
18. Nathan Brooks 12
19. Adoniron Byfield 13
20. Giles Calvert 14
21. Livewell Chapman 12
22. Thomas Collins 16
23. Henry Cripps 12
24. John Crooke 17
25. Thomas Davies 10
26. Thomas Dicas 12
27. Nathaniel Ekins 12
28. Edward Farnham 12
29. Henry Fletcher 14
30. Samuel Gellibrand 10
31. William Grantham 17
32. Henry Herringman 17
33. Thomas Johnson 15
34. Joshua Kirton 13
35. Henry Marsh 10
36. John Martin 15

37. Simon Miller 16
38. Henry Mortlock 10
39. Daniel Pakeman 11
40. John Place 19
41. Thomas Pierrepoint 13
42. Matthew Simmons 12
43. Ralph Smith 13
44. John Starkey 12
45. John Sweeting 11
46. Samuel Thompson 19
47. Richard Tomlins 12
48. Thomas Underhill 11
49. Nathaniel Webb 18

5 or more Advertisements

50. Edward Blackmore 5
51. Thomas Brewster 7
52. Nathaniel Brooke 9
53. Francis Cossinet 6
54. Joseph Cranford (London and Norwich) 9
55. Andrew Croke 5
56. John Hancock 7
57. Robert Horne 7
58. William Leak 7
59. William Lee 9
60. Lodowicke Lloyd 9
61. Joseph Nevil 7
62. William Place 9
63. Humphrey Robinson 5
64. Abel Roper 9
65. Theodore Sadler 5
66. John Saywell 6
67. Henry Seile 5
68. Edward Thomas 7
69. Thomas Williams 6
70. Anthony Williamson 8

2 or more Advertisements

71. Charles Adams 3
72. John Baker 2
73. Joseph Barber 3
74. Robert Beaumont 3
75. Nicholas Bourne 3
76. George Calvert 4
77. Laurence Chapman 3

78. Robert Clavel(l) 3
79. Robert Crofts 2
80. James Davis 2
81. Edward Dod 4
82. Francis Eglesfield 3
83. George Eversden 2
84. Luke Fawne 2
85. John Field 2
86. Thomas Firby 2
87. William Fisher 2
88. Timothy Garthwaite 4
89. Robert Gibbs 3
90. Thomas Heath 4
91. John Holden 4
92. William Hope 3
93. George Hurlock 2
94. Andrew Kembe 3
95. Richard Marriot 2
96. Thomas Newbery 2
97. Henry Eversden 3
98. William Palmer 2
99. Thomas Parkhurst 4
100. Edmund Paxton 2
101. John Playford 2
102. Isaac Pridmore 3
103. Octavian Pulleyn/ 3
104. John Redmayne 3
105. Thomas Rooks 2
106. William Roybould 3
107. John Shirley 3
108. John Sims 3
109. Nevil Simmons (Kidderminster and London) 2
110. Francis Smith 4
111. Samuel Speed 4
112. Peter Stent 2
113. George Thomason 2
114. Richard Thrale 3
115. Timothy Twyford 3
116. Elisha Wallis 4
117. Robert Walton 2
118. Matthew Walbank 2
119. Daniel White 2
120. John Williams 2
121. John Wright 3

Single Advertisements (33)

122. John Adams 1
123. Hannah Allen 1
124. William Ballard (Bristol) 1
125. William Barlow 1
126. Philip Briggs 1
127. Thomas Collins (Northampton) 1
128. Matthew Collings 1
129. John Courtney (Salisbury) 1
130. Richard Davis (Oxford) 1
131. John Garfield 1
132. William Gilbertson 1
133. Samuel Eyre 1
134. Francis Grove 1
135. Nathaniel Heathcoat 1
136. Richard Hodgkinson 1
137. Matthew Keynton 1
138. William Larner 1
139. George Latham 1
140. Stephen Lincoln (Leicester) 1
141. Thomas Matthews 1
142. Samuel Mearne 1
143. Abraham Miller 1
144. William Milward 1
145. Miles Mitchel1
146. Joseph Moxon 1
147. Nathaniel Paris 1
148. Nathaniel Ranew 1
149. Roger Rea 1
150. Austin Rice 1
151. John Stafford 1
152. William Tomson (Leicester) 1
153. W. Weekly (Ipswich) 1
154. M. Wright 1