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Citation:

Howard, E (2012) The Grub-Street Journal and the Changing Culture of Information in the Early 1730s. *Library & Information History*, 28 (3). 171 - 185. ISSN 1758-3489 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1179/1758348912Z.00000000014>

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Document Version:

Article (Accepted Version)

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**Post print of:** Howard, E. (2012) The Grub Street Journal and the changing culture of information in the early 1730s. *Library and information history*, 28 (3), pp. 171–85

Finalised, PDF version of the article available from:

<http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/maney/lih/2012/00000028/00000003/art00002>

*Library and Information History* is published by Maney Publishing: <http://www.maneypublishing.com/>

## **The Grub Street Journal and the changing culture of information in the early 1730s.**

### **Abstract**

Between 1730 and 1733, the *Grub Street Journal* was one of the most renowned and controversial weekly newssheets produced and sold in London. This article traces the attempts made by the editors of the *Journal* to make sense of and manipulate the changing fashions related to the organisation and consumption of information. The *Grub Street Journal* linked critiques of new forms of information organisation, such as printed volumes with prefaces and indexes, with wider societal changes taking place. This can be seen in the *Journal's* shifting relationships with its audiences and competing journals. As the weekly newssheet became increasingly outmoded, the editors of the *Journal* could no longer successfully manipulate its position within the London coffee-house network, launching more direct attacks on the publication trade. The *Journal* offers a fascinating insight into the changing culture of information in the 1730s and highlights the way in which images connected to information are used to explore culture change, throughout recorded history.

### **Key words**

Grub Street Journal, information history, coffee house, publication trade, 1730s, London.

Between 1730 and 1733, the *Grub Street Journal* was one of the most renowned and controversial weekly newssheets produced and sold in London, with its rival *Weekly Register* calling it 'universally condemn'd, and yet universally read'.<sup>1</sup> This article traces the *Journal* editors' attempts to make sense of and manipulate the changing fashions related to information; how it was thought about and consumed by the London coffee-house audiences that were critical to the continual success of the *Journal*. In particular, the article focuses on the *Grub Street Journal's* analysis of edited volumes of texts, and its changing relationship to its audience and competing periodicals. Many previous studies of the *Grub Street Journal* focus on the journal as a literary artefact, analysing its relationship with dominant authors such as Alexander Pope.<sup>2</sup> In this article, I focus on how the editors of the *Grub Street Journal* link their discussions of changing trends and habits of consuming information with a critique of wider social changes taking place. This work draws upon the development of information history as an academic discipline, which, as set out by Weller, provides a practical framework for analysing the way in which information shapes, and is shaped by the society it represents.<sup>3</sup>

## The eighteenth century: information revolution?

The *Grub Street Journal* attempted to capitalise on the increasing prevalence of trade and credit, that fuelled the development of London as a commercial centre development in the 1730s. Headrick connects this commercialisation with what he perceives to be the beginning of the 'Information Revolution'.<sup>4</sup> Italia connects the development of trade with the increasing popularity of the periodical, which 'coincided with an increasingly commercial literary marketplace, and journalism was often regarded as typifying all the worst qualities of the mass market'<sup>5</sup>. Italia highlights a form of duplicity that seems to be a recurrent theme of the period. On one hand, the proliferation of the market for periodicals indicates their popularity. However, it was also fashionable to attack these journals as lowbrow and immoral; using the image of Grub Street as the backdrop. This can be seen in a satirical pamphlet from 1729:

In short, I am a perfect Town Author ... I am very poor, and owe my Poverty to my Merit, that is, to my writings: I am proud as I am poor: yet, what is seemingly a Contradiction, never stick at a mean Action, when the Welfare of the Republick of Letters, or, in other Words, my own Interest is concerned. My Pen, like the Sword of a Swiss, or the pleading of a Lawyer, is generally employed for Pay.

My Pamphlets sell many more Impressions than those of celebrated Writer; the Secret of this is, I learned from *Curll* to clap a new Title-Page to the Sale of every half Hundred; so that when my Bookseller has sold Two Hundred and Fifty Copies, my Book generally enters into the *Sixth Edition*.<sup>6</sup>

This pamphlet was printed in support of Alexander Pope's *Dunciad*, which satirises what Pope perceived to be the 'malaise of dullness' arising from contemporary developments in learning and society. In one section, Pope berates:

How Index-learning turns no student pale  
Yet holds the Eel of science by the Tail.  
How, with less reading than makes felons 'scape  
Less human genius than God gives an ape.  
Small thanks to France, and none to Rome or Greece,  
A past, vamp'd, future, old, reviv'd, new place.<sup>7</sup>

Pope's commentary highlights the conflict between what he perceives to be the classical image of learning that relies on 'human genius', and newer forms of more structured learning. It is, however, important to question the extent to which commentators such as Pope are self-fashioning these conflicts, in order to sell their products and maintain a certain public image. As McLaverty demonstrates, Pope was in the complex position of commenting upon and attacking contemporary social and commercial developments, yet drawing an immense amount of public fame and monetary success from his manipulation of the tricks of the book trade.<sup>8</sup> The editors of the *Grub Street Journal* depicted Pope as an exemplar of pure and intellectual learning, with issues 12 and 13 commencing with quotations from Pope's oeuvre, this is juxtaposed with similar quotations

from Horace and Ovid, in contrast to the increasing dominance of 'bad books'.<sup>9</sup> However, it may well be that the *Journal* was fuelling Pope's commercial agenda. This supposed clash between works written for pay and learned texts underpins many of the debates within the *Grub Street Journal*.

A key trend commented on by the editors of the *Journal* were shifts in attitudes towards learning and reading, with a growing interest in cataloguing and classifying information.<sup>10</sup> Dacome connects this to a heightened awareness of the individual, stating: 'in eighteenth century Britain Lockean compiling offered an arena in which new needs of order and stability were elaborated in association with new notions of individuality'.<sup>11</sup> This led to the social and commercial impetus for large scale projects such as Johnson's dictionary and Richard Bentley's edition of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Books were produced and reissued with editorial additions such as prefaces and indexes. These indexes became the subject of popular ridicule, but were commercially successful, as can be seen from the increasing amount of advertisements carried for edited works within the *Grub Street Journal*.

Briggs and Burke connect the growth of interest in organising information with 'a reading revolution' in the sense of a shift towards the practices of skimming, browsing and chapter-hopping in the course of consulting books for information on a particular topic'.<sup>12</sup> However, a pervasive and influential oral culture of reading and sharing ideas remained during this period. Thus, in order to maintain its position within an increasingly competitive marketplace, the editors of the *Grub Street Journal* had to successfully manipulate the interrelation between private and public readerships, as can be seen by its echoing of the coffee-house setting and the exchange of information within these networks.

Cowan highlights how the London coffeehouse acted as a place for the sharing and discussion of information. This connects with a preoccupation of the period with the idea of public reputation and image, which could be replicated, misrepresented and transformed with increasing speed, through the oral network of the coffee-house and the written documentation, which both reflected and fuelled this network. In order to secure its place in this lucrative network, the coffee-house had to stock the latest journals and pamphlets, in order to attract custom<sup>13</sup>. As well as being read privately, newsheets such as *The Grub Street Journal* were frequently discussed and compared against each other. The editors of weekly newsheets attempted to strengthen the reputation of their products by highlighting how their product was of superior quality and more current than their competitors. This involved quoting and reformulation of a competitor's content, thus the editors of competing journals entered into a form of dialogue with each other. This can be seen throughout the *Grub Street Journal*, which reprints and reformulates news reports from other journals.

Thus, there were complex interactions between different explorations of learning, reading and participating in commercial networks. The image of Grub Street was often used as a backdrop for such explorations, arguably leading to the creation of the *Grub Street Journal*. According to Heaney, 'Grub Street was the background of a fiercely fought war between the old literary and social order, and a new, uncompromising commercialism'.<sup>14</sup> Like much of the literature, Heaney portrays this war as divisive, with two distinct, opposing viewpoints. As this overview of the literature has discussed, it is important to maintain awareness that this may not always be the case, with one "order" deliberately fabricating and fuelling conflict with another.

## **The *Grub Street Journal*: good and bad books**

Throughout its publication, the editors of the *Journal* explicitly discussed the reasons for its production, and more specifically explained some of the devices they used. Each issue of the *Journal* consisted of four pages, with a long leading piece and some kind of literary content occupying the first page or so. The remaining pages were filled with domestic and foreign news, and advertisements for a wide range of contemporary products such as other, supposedly rival, journals, publications, and medicines.<sup>15</sup>

In the first issue of the *Journal*, the leading article focuses on good and bad books, and the aim of the *Society* of Grub Street:

Books are on all hands allowed to be of the greatest Benefit to Mankind: whence I infer, that a bad book must be one of the greatest of evils. Our Society has been always composed of such learned and worthy members, as have produced the best of Books themselves, and done what in them lay to preserve the bad.<sup>16</sup>

Here, the editors of the journal connect bad books with immorality, positioning the *Grub Street Journal* as a cornerstone of good judgement, purging the world of bad books for the greater good of society. This is an interesting overlay upon the commercial aims of the *Journal's* owners, who, as a consortium of publishers, wished to make a profit by suppressing competitors' products. Throughout the *Grub Street Journal*, the supposed aim of improving mankind through promotion of 'learned and worthy' books is undercut by reminders of the commercial considerations driving editorial decisions.

One of the advantages of analysing a weekly publication is that shifting opinions, attitudes and fashions can be traced. The editors of the *Journal* capitalised on the weekly format to spread content across a series of articles, and refer to earlier editions of the *Journal* through letters and editorial pieces. This acts as a form of advertising, demonstrating an awareness of the appetite for fresh information and manipulating the content to maintain its novelty. It also reflects the coffee-house culture, where publications such as the *Journal* would be read and discussed, reflecting the methods and networks of exchange of knowledge during the 1730s.

### **Bentley's edition of *Paradise Lost***

One of the longest topics of discussion within the *Journal* was the first edited volume of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, produced by Richard Bentley and published in 1733.<sup>17</sup> In the ninth issue of the *Journal*, the leading letter is from Zoilus, a type of stock character well known to the journal's audiences as the intellectually inept critic of literature, misinterpreting the texts he reads. In the letter, Zoilus discusses how his 'leisure time has been of late chiefly spent correcting MILTON; who has hitherto appeared with as many faults as any of the ancient poets'.<sup>18</sup> This is followed by a series of farcical textual

emendations, highlighting Zolus's folly. This early criticism of Bentley's project echoes the general sentiment about the forthcoming edition of *Paradise Lost*, and the sceptical attitude towards the increasing amount of more systematic criticism of literary works.

This early criticism is continued in issue 100 of the *Journal* in 1731, which included 'An Epigram, occasion'd by seeing some Sheets of Dr Bentley's Edition of *Paradise Lost*', which contrasts the execution of Charles I with the weak figure of Bentley:

Did Milton's prose, O Charles, thy death defend?  
A furious foe unconsciously proves a friend.  
On Milton's verse does Bentley comment? -- know  
A weak officious friend becomes a foe.  
While he but fought his author's fame to further,  
The murd'rous critic has aveng'd thy murder.<sup>19</sup>

Intense contrasts of scale are used, contrasting the execution of a head of state and the 'weak officious' Bentley. The contrast serves to highlight the small, pathetic nature of authors seeking fame. This criticism of Bentley's work continues in issue 101 of the *Journal*, soon after Bentley's home burnt down, destroying much of his personal library. The editors write a poem from the perspective of Bentley's edition of *Homer*, using the image of the flame attempting to 'snatch' the book from 'his hands'. However:

From the kind purpose of the fire I'm torn  
And to the wretched lot of Milton born.<sup>20</sup>

Here, the fire is portrayed as a cleansing force, tallying with the aims of the *Journal* of reacting against what the editors perceived to be bad books. As can be seen from the above quotation, this image of bad books is used as a lens for deeper social commentary, by connecting the image of Bentley with the ultimate disruption of the established social order; namely, the establishment of the Commonwealth.

In later issues of the *Journal*, various commentators pick apart specific aspects of Bentley's *Milton*, focussing on minutiae such as individual emendations. There is a period of particularly intense debate between issues 113 and 118. In issue 113, a supposed 'Correspondent' took issue with Bentley's dating of the first edition of Milton's *Paradise Lost*:

The real truth of the matter is this: The first edition of *Paradise Lost* was published, not in 1667, as the Doctor affirms, but in 1669, and the second of *Paradise Regained*.<sup>21</sup>

After this dating was challenged elsewhere in *GSJ 113*, a response from the correspondent was printed in *GSJ 116*:

PS: In my last, I had mentioned Milton's Poem to be first published in the year 1667, which you have changed to 1669, upon the authority (as I suppose) of your Correspondent JT<sup>22</sup>

In response to this change in date, and a general distrust of Bentley's work, the correspondent 'looked over several Catalogues of Books for auctions and sales'. The explicit

reference back to the previous letter highlights the way in which the *Journal* was attempting to build up a repeat market for its business, by implying that content would be refreshed over several issues as soon as it was available, encouraging continual readership of the *Journal*. What is also reflected by this structuring of information is the preoccupation with accuracy of factual evidence, and the importance of good textual scholarship. This 'Correspondence' overtly reflects the anti-Bentley sentiment found earlier in the *Journal*. However, by repeatedly placing this material as the lead material for several issues, the *Journal* is playing to a market that is at least interested in the hunt for accuracy, as described by the correspondant's research in catalogues. Throughout the debate surrounding Bentley's Milton, there are criticisms of individual editorial decisions about words or phrases, with the authors offering their own viewpoints. Rather than being a resistance of the trend of books being produced, as implied by material such as Pope's *Dunciad* and its denouncement of index-learning, this shows the 'Correspondents' to the *Journal* portraying the fact that they could do a better job of editing than Bentley. This is not a rejection of the increasing trend of editorial interference, but highlights the appetite for these edited works. The image of Bentley was used as a convenient shared point of reference, for people following the fashion of criticising edited works, whilst covertly being fascinated with the process of how these works were constructed.

There is some evidence from within the *Journal* that the editors may have been more sympathetic towards Bentley's Milton. In issue 110, a letter criticising Bentley and a younger editor, is printed, with its author attacking their intellectual capabilities:

A good index, we read over, makes both of them critics and authors, but neither of them understands Horace, however it came into their heads that they did.

This general commentary is followed by more specific criticisms of Bentley's Milton. What is different about this letter, however, is that it is undercut by the editors of the *Journal*. The flow of the letter is interrupted, with footnotes undermining its content, such as 'This appellation is too severe'. An explanatory note at the beginning of these notes states 'The desire of the Gentleman who wrote the Letter, That *no alterations should be made, except in the Spelling* has been exactly complied with: however, it may not be amis to subjoin a few notices'.<sup>23</sup>

By undercutting the letter with editorial commentary, the editors of the *Journal* ridicule the content of the letter, using humour to make this criticism less barbed. This use of humour recurs in another main editorial piece that criticises Bentley's Milton. In the middle of the period of most intense debate, between issues 133 and 138, a correspondant submits 'an emendation in the Bentleian manner' of the common ballad 'Chevy Chace':

In the common editions we read:  
A bow he had bent in his hand  
Naaie of a trusty tree  
An arrow of a cloth yard long  
Full to the head drew he.

This corrupt reading leaves us to seek what wood the tree was made, only informing us it was of a *tree*; and it makes the rime not bold enough Read therefore on my authority,

-- made of a trusty yew  
An arrow of a cloth drew long  
Full to the head he drew.

What an easy alteration is this? none but a dull wooden-headed blunderbuss of an Editor could suppose the Poet wrote otherwise.<sup>24</sup>

Like the comparison of Bentley to Charles I in issue 110 of the *Journal*, distortions in scale are used, where a simple ballad is ironically subjected to the process of textual editing and reshaping. This appears to fit in with the general criticism of Bentley's Milton. However, this piece is placed in the midst of what appear to be earnest attempts to criticise and improve individual aspects of Bentley's work. Thus, the mock ementation of 'Chevy Chace' satirises both Bentley's Milton and the obsessive nature of the critics correcting his work. This signals a recognition at the difficult task that Bentley was undertaking, whilst also capitalising on the general ridicule directed towards the project, in order to satisfy the *Journal's* audience.

An analysis of the *Journal's* treatment of Milton highlights the impossibility of discovering the editor's overall position on a certain issue. Opinions shift according to the fashions of the time, commercial pressures and developments of editorial thought. This can be seen in the *Journal's* wider critique of the publication trade.

### **Digestion and information: the *Journal's* exploration of the publication trade**

Images of food and digestion are used within the *Journal's* exploration of the increasing amount of information being produced, and the methods of production behind it. This may reflect the development of recipe books in the period, as part of the increasing interest in classifying information in a logical way. As Shearman highlights, recipe books were used as a tool for debating whether the ancients or the moderns were more culturally advanced.<sup>25</sup> The connection of food, learning and culture can be seen in issue 77 of the *Journal*, the leading article is a letter discussing how:

all Essay-writers, Casual-discourers, Reflecion-coiners, Meditation-founders; &c, would mend their hands for the future ; and to advise the Pamphleteers in particular to become modest in their title-pages; and not boast in their Prefaces.

The elaborate titles highlight the author's view that the material produced is excessive, in contrast to the 'modesty and politeness' that are 'inseparable from good writing'. The author mocks the elaborate nature of the Pamphleteers by stating:

Were I not afraid of being tedious, I should transcribe some places from our late *Answers, Replies, & c* which I saved the other day from the pastry-cook.<sup>26</sup>

The image of the pastry-cook reading or possibly producing *Answers and Replies* highlights the over-elaborate nature, and the excessive quantity, of printed material being produced. Furthermore, the author hints at a change in the social order. It is important to avoid overstating the supposed rise in literacy during this period. McIntosh, for instance,

estimates the level of literacy at around 60% for men, and 40-50% for women, during the 1700s, and literacy was concentrated in the higher classes, rather than spread across the population.<sup>27</sup> However, socioeconomic developments, in particular the increasing importance of trade and commercial activity, resulted in a wider section of the population being interested in gaining access to information, in particular news and gossip.

The connection between food and badly produced books is developed in issue 86 of the *Journal*, in an article 'to be prefix'd to the next Edition of Dr Arbuthnot's Book of Aliments', written from the perspective of the author. The mock-figure discusses the 'design' of his book, highlighting that 'different men / Ask different aliment', and that six guests at the table must be gratified by 'nine courses, and those of the best'.<sup>28</sup> The courses are described using language connected with editions, prefixes and designs of books, making a statement that such additions to a basic text are excessive, causing the ailments described in the book. Unlike Bentley's Milton, where criticism was tempered by covert respect for the project, the satire is sharper and more direct, of what the editors of the *Journal* perceive to be a worthless information product. This implies a form of hierarchy, where different types of books and publications are awarded different values, according to their purpose and audience.

The *Journal's* analysis of the publishing trade goes further than criticising emendations such as indexes and prefaces, but also criticises the practices of certain categories of authors and the material they produce. This can be seen in the 'Receipt to make an Epigram', in issue 99 of the *Journal*. Here, the authors ironically break down the process of writing a poem into logical, recipe like stages such as 'Your matter must by Nature be supply'd' and 'in proper places proper Numbers use'. The epigram ends with the following couplet:

These rules observ'd, your Epigram's Repeated  
And fare to please, altho' ten time repeated. <sup>29</sup>

By ending the Epigram with 'repeated', the author connects the sterility of the recipe-like instructions with an overabundance of formulaic Epigrams. This emphasises the idea of hierarchy, with authors such as Pope being revered throughout the *Journal*, in contrast to the producers of epigrams. However, Pope can be considered to be one of the first authors to cultivate his own image, and make a great deal of money from this image. Furthermore, the booksellers behind the *Journal* were brokering many of the products that the *Journal* satirised, such as publications by subscription. Thus, the hierarchical presentation of information products contrasts with the reality of the commercial market.

This conflict can be seen in issue 102 of the *Journal*, which prints 'Fragments of a Satire in the Third Volume of Swift and Pope's Miscellanies'. The fragment comments on 'meagre Gildon' and his 'venal quill', with the writer wishing 'him a dinner, and sit still'. The connection between writing for pay and bad poetry is the central theme of the fragment. The writer discusses the use of punctuation by such writers, with:

Commas and points... set exactly right ;  
And 'twere a sin to rob them of their mite.<sup>30</sup>

The reading practices of this poet are also subjected to criticism, as he 'thinks he

reads, when he but scans and spells'. This connects back to the idea of true reading and true intellect, placed in opposition to the newer practices of scanning, and the obsession with punctuation. However, the presentation of the material contrasts with the material contained within it. The piece is a reprinted fragment, one of the key ways in which editors ensured that the content in their journal was fresh and continued to sell. Furthermore, this can be seen as a covert form of advertisement for this product. Thus, the technique of reprinting, often criticised by the editors of the *Journal*, is used to advance the commercial objective of selling more issues.

Whether it was part of a plan to create intellectual stimulation, or simply to sell more material, the *Journal's* editors continually referred to the truth and accuracy of the information and the critiques on London society and literature contained within the *Journal*. A key device connected to this aim is the shaping and description of the *Journal's* relationships with its audience and competitors in the market.

### **Relationships with audiences: the coffee – house**

The editors of the *Journal* kept in the foreground forms of dialogue between its audience and its competitors, allowing the researcher to gain a sense of the influences behind a particular culture of information sharing. The majority of the issues of the *Journal* carried some form of correspondence between supposed readers and the editors, often as the leading article. This allowed the editors to sharpen their satirical stance, or align themselves with the opinion being presented by the correspondence, through editorial commentaries. The leading article in issue 37 of the *Journal* discusses translations of classical texts into English prose. This is presented in a letter, from a "learned correspondent". The tone of the letter is heavy-handed and indignant, including mock references to obscure poets such as "Nonnus, a Christian poet about Theodosius's time", and exclamations such as:

Besides the paltry language of this translation, a school boy would deserve to be whipp'd for construing it so: and yet the editor says 'tis for the use of schools. *Perfus for the use of schools!* an author the most unfit for schools of any now extant in any language.

The serious tone of the letter contrasts with the editorial comment preceding it:

I must own, I entirely differ from my Friend's opinion. I cannot but think that these Prose Translations ought by all means to be encouraged, as the most probable way of reducing the most Parnassian Authors to the profoundest Grubbism.<sup>31</sup>

This contrast in tones draws into question the overall purpose of this article. The letter appears to be criticising the production of translations, in particular for use in education. However, the commentary undercuts the seriousness of the letter, with Bavius mock-supporting what the editors perceive to be the destruction of classic texts through editorial practices. Although both the article and preceding editorial commentary discuss the same topic, the contrast in tone highlights the sometimes playful nature of the *Journal*. By presenting two contrasting tones, the *Journal* is engaging its readership in a kind of game, of deciphering what exactly the article is trying to say. This game represents the

relatively small and elite core readership to which the *Journal* is trying to appeal. In order to successfully enter into this game of deciphering multiple personae and unpicking the satire behind the mock elaborate references, the reader must possess a certain amount of contextual knowledge, in order to interpret the humour and participate in the network of debate and witticism. This is reflected in the *Journal's* descriptions of the coffee-house, one of the key stages for such debate.

As discussed by Cowan, the links between coffee-houses and the publication trade were extremely close, with houses attracting customers by stocking the latest journal, and acting as booksellers.<sup>32</sup> The coffee-house acted as a place for moral and political debate, and could be considered as the place to be seen in 1730s London. In issue 4 of the *Journal*, the mock bookseller Kirleus is described as going to 'three or four coffee houses, in hopes of seeing' the *Journal*, and then how one of the editors of the *Journal* assured him "that it was a very silly Paper, without one dram of wit, and that some ingenious Friends of his, who meet at a Coffee-house near the Change, had pronounced its doom".<sup>33</sup> Here, the editors of the *Journal* capture the oral culture of discussion and gossip. This culture shapes the *Journal's* output, as it was dependent on gaining a positive reputation within the coffee-house network. This is linked to the constant play with characters and voices in the *Journal* arguably echoing the structure of debate and information exchange in the coffee-house, in order to appeal to its audience as a publication that reflected their interests. This provides another outlet for the *Journal's* social commentary, both appealing to this in-group and indirectly critiquing it. Issue 27's leading article is a letter discussing the imprisonment of Thomas Woolston. Woolston had originally been convicted for blasphemy and been imprisoned in the King's Bench, but had obtained 'Liberty of the rules', allowing him to reside within a certain distance of the prison after payment of a fee. The correspondent describes how he 'was mentioning the hardship of [Woolston's] case to some Persons at the Temple Coffee-House, who were pleased to entertain this company with loud laugh'.<sup>34</sup> The correspondent sends for the *Journal* where he read about the imprisonment, to be mocked by one of the people at the coffee house, who:

told me, with some seeming compassion for my misfortune, that into such blunders and such absurdities people must unavoidable fall, who would interpret Scriptures and Newspapers in a literal sense.<sup>35</sup>

Here, the *Journal* captures the social forces fuelling the coffee-house: the necessity of being the first to become aware of the latest and most accurate information, and the risk of being ridiculed if one read the wrong journal and the old news. By including the comment about interpreting Newspapers as the truth, the *Journal* depicts itself as the source for the latest information, available in the best coffee-houses, attempting to establish a repertoire for its audience, at an early stage in its development. In the early stages of the *Journal*, there is a distinct sense of this public audience, highlighted by the discursive structure of its content, incorporating voices and debate. This interacts with the more private form of reading encouraged by information products such as Bentley's edited version of *Milton*.

In issue 109, when the *Journal* had a more secure position in the market, the editors describe coffee-houses in different terms. The *Journal* satirises an advertisement for Orator Henley's *Transactions*, printed in the rival *Daily Journal*:

Whereas some persons in Grub Street pretend to sell Strops for razors: this is to inform the Publick, that the true original Strops for Razors are sold only by the first Inventor, Mr Roberts at the Corner of Lincolns-Inn Fields near Clare-market...The shop is situated between dust and ashes, that is to say, between a Snuff-Shop and a Coffee-House. <sup>36</sup>

In this instance, a coffee-house working with a rival audience is described as a non-entity. This shows the specificity of the market and the network in which the *Journal* was operating. Rather than portraying an overarching viewpoint on coffee houses, the *Journal's* presentation shifted according to the house in question. The Temple Coffee House is described in fashionable terms in issue 27 of the *Journal*.<sup>37</sup> In contrast, a nearby Covent Garden house in issue 110 of the *Journal* is likened to a brothel, associated with 'Ladies' and 'catterwauling frolicks'.<sup>38</sup> According to Cowan, coffee-houses were used by Londoners in order to pinpoint their location, whilst in London.<sup>39</sup> The editors of the *Journal* show how coffee-shops are used for social as well as physical orientation, with friction between different networks and their associated journals. This friction is reflected in the *Journal*, which is filled with cross references to the material and editorial practices of rival journals.

### **Competition or conversation: the *Journal's* relationships with competitors**

The relationships with competing journals are built into the structure of the *Journal*. Approximately half of each issue's content is given over to domestic and foreign news, consisting of quotations from other, usually rival journals. This allows the editors of the *Journal* to ridicule the journals that printed news stories highlighting the follies of contemporary society. The news section of issue 15 of the *Journal*, for instance, contains snippets of news highlighting the activities of the Company of Surgeons and the Royal Society, reprinted from the *London Evening*:

The court of assistants of the Surgeons Company, who met on Tuesday last, being acquainted with the honour the Earl of Burlington had done in taking a survey of their theatre...At the same time they chose the ingenious and learned Dr Goldsmith for the reader of their Osteological letters.<sup>40</sup>

The direct quotation of phraseology of 'ingenious' and 'learned' from another journal is a typical technique used by editors of weekly journals. Content is quoted, manipulated and built upon in order to win an argument against an opponent. In this case, the quotation is ironic, building on the *Journal's* satirical portrayal of scientific bodies such as the Royal Society. This manipulation of content can be seen at greater length in issue 76 of the *Journal*. In the news section, one of the invented members of the Grub Street Society reports that he 'read the following Epigram, printed in the Courant of June 11'. The Epigram connects the Grub Street Industry with 'dullness', a mock goddess-figure used to highlight the stupidity of the age. The epigram starts with the following couplet:

Three sons of dullness, an illustrious race  
Pride of the goddess, and this realm's disgrace.

The epigram directly comments on the *Journal*, 'Alike admired are D'anvers, Fog are

Grub', who are the most 'impudent and dull'. The *Courant's* epigram is followed by a subtitle in larger type, where 'Mr Maevius said, he thought it was a fine Encomium upon our Journal, and presented the following Lines, by way of grateful Return'. The epigram directly imitates the structure of the *Courant's*:

In one bright age three fam'd Grubeans born,  
The same bright cause with various art adorn;  
With thoughts and styles, which none before e'er hit one  
The COURANT, LONDON JOURNAL and FREE BRITON.<sup>41</sup>

Again, the technique of direct echoing and twisting of content can be seen, with the *Courant* and the *Grub Street Journal* attempting to make their content ever more innovative. This form of rivalry recurs throughout the early part of the *Journal*, as the editors of the *Journal* attempts to assert its superiority. However, by including direct references to the *Courant*, it could also be argued that the *Journal* is acting as a form of advertiser, as it draws attention to the *Courant's* existence. While the editors of the *Journal* have an agenda to portray their product as the best in the market, the tone of their attacks on rival journals can border on the playful, imitating and aping rather than directly attacking. This may relate to the fact that this form of imitation was acceptable, and indeed expected practice, in the earlier 1730s. By copying and mocking each others' content, the weekly journals created and manipulated a form of network of communication and sharing of knowledge. The editors of each journal were aware of the rules of participating in this network, in order to create the image of asserting superiority and therefore boosting the sales of their particular product.

In the later stages of the *Journal's* existence, the relationship between the *Journal* and its competitors became more directly combative. The rise of the daily newsheet and the monthly magazine was a recurrent theme for comment in the *Journal*. The rise of these forms of o publications presented a dual threat for the *Journal*, with the dailies being able to present new stories more quickly than the *Journal*, and the monthly magazines containing a wider range of material, appealing to a variety of tastes and fashions. The leading article of issue 184 of the *Journal* is the first in a series of leading articles on newspapers.<sup>42</sup> Unlike many earlier leading articles, which employ different voices and humorous tones to mock a particular topic, these articles have a directly emphatic tone. In issue 184 of the *Journal*, the author discusses 'The many accurate pieces, upon all sorts of subjects, which are continually produced'. In particular:

the news-papers are more especially remarkable, and particularly those which make their appearance every morning in the week...These five papers, like five stately fountains, are continually pouring out streams of fresh occurrences, which, from time to time quench that ardent thirst after news, which full returns, and inflames a true British palate.<sup>43</sup>

The author highlights the fact that the appetite for news has increased, fuelling the success of daily newspapers. It also highlights a shift in format, as daily newspapers were quicker and cheaper to produce. The increasing distance between the *Journal* and the fashions of the audience it attempted to serve can be seen in this series of vitriolic attacks on daily newspapers. The editors of the *Grub Street Journal* were witnessing their

publication being overtaken by the changing information environment it was formerly able to manipulate, leading to the decline in popularity of the *Journal* after 1733.

## Conclusions

In this article, I have highlighted how the editors of the *Grub Street Journal* commented on the changing relationship between the society it portrayed, and the information produced by this society. As well as a commercial agenda which shaped the *Journal's* editorial practices, images connected to the consumption and sharing of information transfer were used to comment on social change. Distortions in scale are used, in order to highlight the potentially disruptive nature of these changes, such as the pastry-cook gaining access to information through recipe books in issue 77 of the *Journal*. Throughout the *Journal*, the authors create an almost symbiotic relationship between change and information, with one shaping and affecting the other in a cyclical process.

. This can be compared with Pope's connection of 'index-learning' to what he perceived to be the encroachment of inferior, modern forms of learnings upon British society. In both these cases, discussions of new forms of creating and sharing knowledge are used to present a decline in social values. In Pope's eras, access to printed information products was more restricted. In his his 2007 study of the history of the early information society, however, Black attacks the

welcoming vision of a 'haven' society forced onto our consciousness by a powerfully persuasive technological determinism and the abrupt, dislocating and disquieting consequences of the shift to post-modern modes of social, economic and cultural life.<sup>44</sup>

A direct comparison cannot be made between a printed volume of the 1600s and the development of the Internet. Such a link would be anachronistic, and ignore the vastly different social contexts commented upon by Pope and Black. What these examples do show, however, is that the image of information, whether it is understood as an act of informing oneself, or as a phenomenon in its own right, is used as a framework for exploring change. Throughout recorded history, social and informational changes are bound together, in a cyclical process.

This draws into focus the idea of change itself. Many accounts of information history, such as Headrick's and Black's, apply a form of "revolution" or "big-bang" approach to describing the development of information networks and societies, where there is one point of radical revolution, from which the development of the modern information society can be traced. As the examples above may show, this may not fully account for the longevity of humanity's relationship and understanding of information. An analysis of commentaries of the information society reveals a continual, cyclical pattern, where new technologies are used as a conduit to promote or attack shifts in society. This can be seen in the *Grub Street Journal*, which shifts from being the most notorious newsheet in 1732, to its editors attacking the prevalent information culture in 1733 when the weekly newsheet format was losing popularity.

This cyclical framework may well be a useful starting point for exploring the links between information and society. Of course, care must be taken to avoid arbitrary comparisons, such as Brigg's and Burke's connection of medieval paintings with Superman

comics!<sup>145</sup> However, broader, more thematic comparative studies may be useful, allowing for a deeper understanding of the intricate connections between information and its manifestations within society. The *Grub Street Journal* offers a fascinating insight into the changing culture of information in the 1730s and highlights the way in which images connected to information are used to explore culture change, throughout recorded history.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Weekly Register, or, Universal Journal*, 117 (8 July 1732).

<sup>2</sup> J T Hillhouse. *The Grub Street Journal (with special reference to its connection with Alexander Pope)*, (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1928).

<sup>3</sup> T. Weller *Information history – an Introduction: Exploring an emergent field*. (Oxford: Chandos, 2008); T. Weller, *Information History in the Modern World: Histories of the Information age* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> D. Headrick. *When Information Came of Age: technologies of knowledge in the age of reason and revolution, 1700 – 1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> I. Italia, *The Rise of Literary Journalism in the Eighteenth Century: anxious employment* (London: Routledge, 2005), p.1.

<sup>6</sup> R. Savage, *An Author to be Lett*, (London: Printed for L Gilliver, 1732), p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> S. Johnson, ed., *The poetical works of Alexander Pope, Esq., to which is prefixed the life of the author a one-volume edition of the Twickenham text with selected annotations* (Philadelphia: J J Woodward, 1820), p. 180, lines 274 - 284 .

<sup>8</sup> J. McLaverty, 'Pope and the book trade', in *The Cambridge Companion to Alexander Pope*, ed. by Pat Rogers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 188 – 197.

<sup>9</sup> *Grub Street Journal* (hereafter *GSJ*), 12 (26 March 1730) 1; 13 (2 April 1730), 1; ed. by B. A Goldgar, 4 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2002), i.

<sup>10</sup> Headrick. 142 – 180.

<sup>11</sup> L. Dacome, 'Noting the Mind: Commonplace Books and the Pursuit of the Self in Eighteenth-Century Britain' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 65 (2004), 603-625.

<sup>12</sup> A. Briggs and P. Burke, *A social history of the media: from Gutenberg to the Internet* 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), p. 53.

<sup>13</sup> B. Cowan, *The social life of coffee: the emergence of the British coffeehouse*. (London: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 169 – 184.

<sup>14</sup> *An anthology of eighteenth century criticism: Grub Street* ed. by P. Heaney (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1995), p. 8.

<sup>15</sup> For a fuller overview of the *GSJ*, see Goldgar's introduction in *GSJ*, 1. p. vi – x

<sup>16</sup> *GSJ*, 1 (1, January 8 1730), 1; ed. by Goldgar, i.

<sup>17</sup> For an overview of the Bentley Milton project, see J. Levine, 'Bentley's Milton: philology and criticism in Eighteenth-century England', 50 (1989), 549 – 568.

<sup>18</sup> *GSJ*, 9, (5 March 1730), 1; ed. by Goldgar, i.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 100 (2 December 1731), 3; ed. by Goldgar, iii.

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- <sup>20</sup> Ibid., 101 (9 December 1731) 3; ed. by Goldgar, ii.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid., 113 (2 March 1731 [*recte* 1732]), 3; ed. by Goldgar, i.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid., 116 (March 23 1731 [*recte* 1732]), 3; ed. by Goldgar, iii.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid., 110 (10 February 1731 [*recte* 1732]), 3; ed. by Goldgar, iii.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid., 137 (17 August 1732), 3; ed. by Goldgar, ii.
- <sup>25</sup> S. Shearman, 'Gastronomic History in Eighteenth-Century England', *Prose Studies*, 26 (2004), 395 – 413.
- <sup>26</sup> *GSJ*, 77 (24 June 1731), 1; ed. by Goldgar, i.
- <sup>27</sup> C. McIntosh. *The evolution of English prose, 1700-1800: style, politeness and print culture*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press McIntosh, 1998), p. 171.
- <sup>28</sup> *GSJ*, 86 (26 August 1731), 2; ed. by Goldgar, ii.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid., 99 (25 November 1731), 3; ed. by Goldgar, iii.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid., 102, (16 December 1731), 3; ed. by Goldgar, i.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid., 37 (17 September 1730), 1; ed. by Goldgar, i.
- <sup>32</sup> Cowan, pp. 173 – 175.
- <sup>33</sup> *GSJ*, 4, (29 January 1730), 1; ed. by Goldgar, i.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid., 27 (9 July 1730), 1; ed. by Goldgar, i.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>36</sup> *GSJ*, 109 (3 February 1731 [*recte* 1732]) 3; ed. by Goldgar, iii.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid., 27 (9 July 1730), 1; ed. by Goldgar, i.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid., 110 (10 February 1731 [*recte* 1732]), 3; ed. by Goldgar, iii.
- <sup>39</sup> Cowan, p. 179
- <sup>40</sup> *GSJ*, 15 (16 April 1730), 2; ed. by Goldgar, i. 2
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid., 76, (17 June 1731), 3; ed. by Goldgar, ii.
- <sup>42</sup> Articles on the same theme appear in *GSJ*, 187 (5 July 1733), 190 (26 August 1733) and 194 (13 September 1733)
- <sup>43</sup> *GSJ*, 184 (5 July 1733), 1; ed. by Goldgar, iv.
- <sup>44</sup> A. Black, D. Muddiman, H. Plant. *The Early Information Society: Information Management in Britain before the Computer* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 4
- <sup>45</sup> Briggs and Burke, *A Social History of the Media*, p.3