



(Extra)ordinary News: Foreign Reporting on English Politics under William III

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During the late 17th and early 18th centuries a number of German governments received regular updates on English politics from London-based intelligencers. This article examines and compares two sets of these reports from the year 1694, composed by Guillaume Beyrie and Frédéric Bonnet for the Guelph courts in Celle and Hanover and the Prussian court in Berlin respectively. It describes the distinctive character of the reports and situates them within a typology of scribal news ranging from commercial newsletters to the classic diplomatic despatch. In addition, it analyses the detailed political coverage of the accounts which was centred mainly on the royal court and parliament and uncovers some of the sources from which the information originated.

Keywords: diplomatic correspondence; commercial newsletters; parliamentary reporting; foreign perceptions of English politics; Guillaume Beyrie; Frédéric Bonnet

From the 1680s through to the 1710s roughly a dozen purveyors of scribal news based in London supplied a select number of German courts with up-to-date intelligence on English politics.¹ Most prominent among them are the two brothers Frédéric and Louis-Frédéric Bonnet, who catered for the needs of the Prussian rulers, and Guillaume Beyrie who acted for the courts of the Guelph dynasty in Celle and Hanover. Their reports are well known to historians of the period. The Bonnets' despatches, in particular, have attracted attention since the 19th century. Starting with Leopold von Ranke, who used them to great effect in his *History of England Principally in the Seventeenth Century*, American and British scholars like Henry Horwitz, Geoffrey Holmes and the contributors to the relevant volumes in *The History of Parliament* series have mined the accounts for information on what happened in Westminster and Whitehall during the reigns of William III, Queen Anne and the first years of George I, especially since the original despatches, then housed in the central archives of the GDR, became available as microfilms during the Cold War.² The reports by Beyrie

¹Michael Schaich, 'Information Professionals: Huguenot Diplomats in Later Stuart London and Their European Context', in *Huguenot Networks, 1560–1870: The Interactions and Impact of a Protestant Minority in Europe*, ed. Vivienne Larminie (New York, 2018), 75–91.

²Leopold von Ranke, *A History of England Principally in the Seventeenth Century* (6 vols, Oxford, 1875), vi (hereafter cited as Ranke); Wolfgang Michael, *Englische Geschichte im achtzehnten Jahrhundert* (5 vols, Leipzig, 1896–1955), i; *The Divided Society: Parties and Politics in England, 1694–1716*, ed. Geoffrey Holmes and W.A. Speck (1967); Henry Horwitz, *Parliament, Policy and Politics in the Reign of William III* (Manchester, 1977); Geoffrey Holmes, *British Politics in the Age of Anne* (1987); B.W. Hill, *The Growth of Parliamentary Parties 1689–1742* (1976) (indirectly via

have also been consulted in the past, although they received a less favourable reception from English and German historians alike, who found them wanting of the unique insights into high-level politics that they were looking for.³

In contrast to these earlier scholars, this article will not appraise the value of the reports for political history but examine them from the perspective of a history of news and information. The despatches allow us to probe into the role scribal news played in (foreign) reporting about the political scenery in London, and parliament in particular. They reveal the predilections and mental maps that refracted their authors' view of English politics and, at least to a certain extent, also the sources on which they relied. Taking the reports from one year during the middle part of William III's reign, 1694, as an example this article aims to analyse how two foreign observers described the peculiarities of the post-revolutionary set-up, the fractious equilibrium between the court and other centres of political power, and the sometimes cumbersome workings but remarkably efficient outcomes of the parliamentary process. By comparing the two sets of reports it will also become clear how much coverage of the early stages of the 'Age of Party' could diverge. The reports provide snapshots of two distinct ways of portraying England's post-revolutionary transition to a foreign audience. In addition, the two collections of manuscript reports help us refine our understanding of the various types of scribal news. Belonging neither to the category of the commercial newsletter nor to the classic diplomatic despatch, they occupy a middle ground between the two, hinting at the wide variety of forms of manuscript reporting that was prevalent in the late 17th and early 18th centuries.

The article will start with a discussion of the latter point, situating the two sets of reports and their authors within the wider context of scribal news as well as against each other. Questions of materiality and scribal conventions will prove crucial in this regard. It will then discuss the content of the two streams of reporting in more detail, giving particular emphasis to their coverage of parliamentary affairs before finally trying to cast some light on the ways purveyors of news in 1690s London could get hold of valuable political information.⁴

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Both Beyrie and the Bonnet brothers are rather shadowy figures whose lives disappear behind the masses of reports that survive in the archives.⁵ The limited knowledge we have about them shows a remarkable degree of homogeneity. All three belonged to the Huguenot

² (continued) Ranke); *HPC 1690–1715*, ed. Eveline Cruickshanks, Stuart Handley and D.W. Hayton (5 vols, Cambridge, 2002), i, 859. Henry Snyder secured microfilms of Bonnet's reports from the Deutsches Zentralarchiv in Merseburg in the former GDR for the University of Kansas and seems to have made them available to other American historians, see Horwitz, *Parliament, Policy and Politics*, x. The History of Parliament Trust, London, also holds a set of microfilms.

³ Georg Schnath, *Geschichte Hannovers im Zeitalter der neunten Kur und der englischen Sukzession 1674–1714*, (5 vols, Hildesheim, 1976–82), ii, 240–1; B.W. Hill, *Robert Harley: Speaker, Secretary of State and Premier Minister* (New Haven, CT, 1988), 241–4.

⁴ In the following, reference is made to the original reports in the Niedersächsisches Landesarchiv, Hanover, and the Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin. Extracts from some of Bonnet's despatches were edited by Ranke in his *History of England*, vi, 230–64 (for 1694). In those cases, I have added a reference to Ranke's edition in brackets for ease of access.

⁵ Biographical information on all three is to be found in Ranke, vi, 144–7; Schnath, *Geschichte Hannovers*, i, 333, 494, 750–4, ii, 240–1, iv, 54–5 as well as Schaich, 'Information Professionals'.

diaspora that was scattered throughout parts of Europe in the course of the 17th century. While the Bonnets' family had already left France during the French wars of religion and settled in Geneva where it joined the ranks of the professional classes and produced a number of highly regarded physicians, Beyrie was part of the more recent wave of exiles after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 ending up in London shortly afterwards. All three also pursued scholarly interests: numismatics in the older Bonnet's case, historical and genealogical studies in Beyrie's who also corresponded with the polymath Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz.⁶ The younger Bonnet in turn was elected a fellow of the Royal Society and the Berlin Academy of Sciences. Most importantly, all three made their careers on the back of the massive expansion in intelligence gathering that the politically ambitious German princes pursued in the wake of the Peace of Westphalia. Keen on projecting their status on the international stage and participating in great power politics, the princes began to establish permanent embassies in a number of European countries that towards the end of the century expanded their personnel. In addition to their envoys some German courts recruited so-called agents, correspondents or residents whose main task it was to open up an extra channel of information. They were entrusted with keeping ministers and courtiers in the Holy Roman Empire abreast of current developments at their postings and thus became, in the unflattering words of one German historian, 'mere news writers without any diplomatic role'.⁷

Frédéric Bonnet (1652–96), the older of the two brothers, was not the first such correspondent to be employed in the English capital by the court of Brandenburg-Prussia. Earlier examples go back to the days of the Interregnum,⁸ but in contrast to his predecessors who reported for shorter periods of time and often had no immediate successor, leaving large gaps in the coverage of English affairs, Frédéric held on to his job for almost 12 years from 1685 to his death in 1696 only to be followed by his younger sibling Louis-Frédéric Bonnet (1670–1761). The latter remained in London for more than 20 years, rising to the rank of de facto envoy during the last decade of his long stay, a period that is explored in more detail by Charles Littleton in his contribution to this volume. Promotion to the position of official Prussian representative was rather exceptional for a former purveyor of news. His rise is partly to be explained by the stinginess of the Prussian King Frederick I, who recoiled at the expense of sending a new envoy to London on the death of the old one, and partly by the close family ties that bound the Bonnets to Ezechiel von Spanheim, one of the most prominent diplomats of his time and a highly respected figure at the court in Berlin. It had also been Spanheim who secured his nephew, the older Bonnet, the post in London in 1685 in the first place. Beyrie, by contrast, had to do without relatives in high places. His route to permanent employment was paved by his ability to write scribal news. From 1687 he had provided Count Bernstorff, a leading minister at the court of Celle, with regular updates on political developments in London. On the recommendation of Bernstorff and probably also on the merits of a manuscript pamphlet that he had written in early 1689 to set out Electress Sophia's claim to the English throne and circulated among members of the

⁶See the list of extant letters in the database accompanying the edition of Leibniz's correspondence: <https://leibniz.uni-goettingen.de/persons/vie> (accessed 22 Mar. 2021).

⁷'reine Zeitungsschreiber ohne diplomatische Funktion', Schnath, *Geschichte Hannovers*, i, 333.

⁸*Repertorium der diplomatischen Vertreter aller Länder seit dem Westfälischen Frieden* (3 vols, Oldenburg, 1936–65), i, 35.

English political elite, Beyrie was taken on as correspondent for the court of Celle in the same year. In 1693 he added an assignment by the second branch of the Guelph dynasty, the court of Hanover, to his portfolio and stayed in his post until 1711.⁹ Officially Beyrie was given the title of agent and only elevated to the rank of resident in 1706, whereas Bonnet appears in the records as ‘resident’ from the beginning.

Although Beyrie, and probably also Bonnet, ran errands for other persons in the wider orbit of the Guelph and Hohenzollern dynasties (Leibniz for example used Beyrie as an intermediary to access English scholarly networks),¹⁰ their main duty consisted of composing bi-weekly newsheets to their patrons in Celle, Hanover and Berlin. Written in French, they were commonly referred to by both authors as ‘ordinaires’, a standard term used at the time for all sorts of reports whose periodicity was dictated by the delivery slots of the postal service.¹¹ In drafting their correspondence, both men had to bear in mind that they worked alongside officially accredited envoys who wrote despatches of their own. English high-level politics, the discussions going on between and the decisions taken by the monarch and his ministers, were beyond the scope of Beyrie, Bonnet and their like. Conversely, none of their reports dealt with the immediate political concerns of the courts that employed them.¹² Despite the fact that since 1692 the princes of Celle and Hanover had been allied with William III in the fight against Louis XIV Beyrie, for example, remained silent about the Anglo-Hanoverian negotiations in the autumn and winter of 1693/4 to stop Elector Ernst August from withdrawing his troops from the Grand Alliance and to persuade him to fulfil his treaty obligations during the next campaigning season.¹³ This diplomatic wrangling had to be left to the envoy proper. Strikingly, Beyrie and Bonnet also did not relay news stories that may have had any bearing on the politics of the Holy Roman Empire. Apart from the visit of Prince Louis of Baden to William III at the beginning of the year, which as a London-based event fell within their remit, only half a dozen reports between them alluded to topics that were even remotely linked to imperial affairs.¹⁴ And if any further evidence were needed, the absence of passages in cipher, the tell-tale sign of confidential diplomatic correspondence, confirms that the content of Bonnet’s and Beyrie’s reports differed markedly from what envoys would cover in their missives.

As a consequence, Bonnet’s and Beyrie’s reports contain only ‘events which any intelligent observer could notice independently’,¹⁵ even if gleaned information on political

⁹The history of the Guelph dynasty in the 17th century is convoluted and marked by divisions and the exchange of territories between different branches of the family. For the purposes of this article, it suffices to say that until 1705 when the future George I united the two principalities under his rule, the duchy of Celle and (from 1692) the electorate of Hanover were ruled by two brothers, George I’s uncle, Georg Wilhelm, and his father, Ernst August, respectively. For a succinct summary, see Andrew Thompson, *George II: King and Elector* (New Haven, CT, 2011), 10–15, 19.

¹⁰See, e.g., Nicolas Fatio de Duillier to Guillaume de Beyrie, London 30 Mar. 1694: <http://ckkc.huysenknaw.nl/epistolarium/letter.html?id=huyg003/2853> (accessed 30 Jan. 2021).

¹¹Wolfgang Behringer, “Von der Gutenberg-Galaxis zur Taxis-Galaxis”: Die Kommunikationsrevolution. Ein Konzept zum besseren Verständnis der Frühen Neuzeit’, *Kommunikation und Medien in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Johannes Burkhardt and Christine Werkstetter (Munich, 2005), 44.

¹²NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, f. 79v contains one line on the arrival of merchant ships from Hamburg and Bremen in London.

¹³Schnath, *Geschichte Hannovers*, ii, 244–6.

¹⁴GStA PK, I. HA GR, R.ep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 3v, 67, 74, 78v; NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 8v, 100, 108v–9.

¹⁵Ranke, vi, 145.

developments not shrouded by state secrecy was more difficult than this aside by Ranke makes us believe. Still, the accounts abound with news about proceedings at the English court and in parliament, Jacobite plotting, the arrival of merchant fleets, the fighting between English and French forces in various maritime theatres of war, the preparations for the next round of fighting in Flanders, and every now and then the latest gossip from London's aristocratic society. Sent out twice a week on post days, Bonnet's and Beyrie's newsheets gave their recipients a broad overview of the main political events occurring in London and other locations of the British Isles.

If this sets the reports apart from diplomatic despatches, they don't exactly conform to the traditional model of the 17th-century commercial newsletter either. We don't come across the staccato rhythm of rather short news items arranged in individual paragraphs and in the order in which they arrived that is characteristic of the world of the *avvisi*. Although Beyrie in particular set store by covering an array of different topics, as a rule both he and Bonnet offered their readers a more limited number of news items than conventional newsheets. Instead they provided more extensive information on each story, often adding their own comments and assessments – something that is unusual in other scribal news of the commercial variety, let alone printed newspapers. Theirs was a more specialised service that shied away from the matter-of-fact style of reporting to be found in other news outlets, although both men expected their readers to have a thorough grounding in English political affairs. Background information on, for instance, parliamentary procedures, constitutional rules and the geography of the British Isles was rarely forthcoming.¹⁶ The emphasis clearly was on an extended digest of topical news.

The peculiar nature of the reports, falling as they do between the established categories of the traditional manuscript newsletter and the diplomatic despatch, is also reflected in their outward appearance and materiality. Laid out in neat handwriting and composed with little or no space for marginalia they were obviously meant for quick consumption. In contrast to the habit of some English newsletter writers trying to establish a formal relationship with their readers and addressing them with a formal 'Sir', neither Beyrie nor Bonnet used any form of address. Their reports just bear a heading of London and the date at the top of the page and then start without any introduction with the first news item. Both reporters also did without the elaborate closing salutations familiar from diplomatic despatches and refrained from signing their reports, which brought them more into line with the conventions of the manuscript newsheet.

In terms of length they comprised on average four pages. But while Beyrie adhered to the standard quarto format of many commercial newsletters, Bonnet wrote his reports on folio pages giving him almost double the space his counterpart had at his disposal: 510 to 520 words in Beyrie's case compared with roughly 950 words in Bonnet's.¹⁷ In contrast to newsletters, though, the length of the reports could vary considerably. During William III's sojourns on the continent when topical news was harder to come by the number of pages repeatedly dropped to three and, in Bonnet's case, sometimes even to two or just one. The nadir was reached in the second half of October when, in the expectation of the imminent return of the king, political life in London came to a standstill and Beyrie had to admit that

¹⁶E.g., GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, f. 68v; NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 270v–1, 103.

¹⁷Bonnet's reports from 1694 have not survived in their entirety, 20 out of a total of 103 are missing. Beyrie's despatches, with one exception (despatch dated 20/30 Oct.), are preserved complete.

his reports had become 'stale' because there was nothing to report.¹⁸ At the other end of the spectrum, moments of high political drama like important parliamentary debates or the final illness of Mary II in December resulted in much longer despatches of five or six and, in one instance, even eight pages.

Their affinity to both diplomatic despatches and manuscript news is also evident in the inclusion of further scribal documents and newspapers. The enmeshing of print and manuscript that has been identified by literary scholars and historians as a typical feature of the news production of the period also holds true for Bonnet's and Beyrie's reports.¹⁹ Both men repeatedly added the French version of the *London Gazette*. Roughly a third of Bonnet's reports were accompanied by the latest issue of the court's semi-official mouthpiece and in one instance also by a Dutch newspaper. Beyrie's despatches must have sported a similar number of copies, but at least some of them were removed before archiving.²⁰ Unsurprisingly, both men enclosed more copies of the *Gazette* during the periods of William's absence to make up for the brevity of their reports. In addition to printed newspapers they also sent handwritten copies of documents circulating in parliament. Royal speeches, addresses by both Houses, protests by certain groups of peers, individual acts, a list of English warships, a pamphlet²¹ and letters handed out to members of parliament, and even a *nouvelle à la main* from Versailles are among the enclosures to be found in Beyrie's and Bonnet's despatches, relayed either in full or as extracts but always faithfully translated into French.²² So often did they send extra material that twice Beyrie added the same enclosures again within weeks without realising his mistake.

Despite these commonalities the two sets of reports also show some differences. Beyrie's accounts usually cover a greater variety of topics and venues from the royal court and parliament to developments in Scotland and Ireland, the fate of merchant shipping and the latest military news. This mode of reporting betrays some resemblance to the newsletter model, whereas Bonnet preferred to home in on a limited number of themes, sometimes just two or three, and cover them in a more detailed fashion as diplomats might have done. This applies in particular to his reports during parliamentary sessions, when he often focused almost exclusively on the debates in both chambers and dealt with other news items only very briefly at the end of his despatch or left them out entirely. Bonnet also ran a few stories about the activities of other diplomats at the court of St James's²³ while Beyrie never so much as touched upon the topic. Beyrie's reports, on the other hand, were repeatedly enlivened by what in modern parlance we might call feature stories. He wrote about a diver walking the width of the Thames from Whitehall to Lambeth, the winners of the main prize in a lottery draw, a man shot in a duel who had been bankrolled by a mysterious high

¹⁸'sterile', NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, f. 225.

¹⁹See, e.g., R.S. King, ' "All the News That's fit to Write": The Eighteenth-Century Manuscript Newsletter', in *Travelling Chronicles: News and Newspapers from the Early Modern Period to the Eighteenth Century*, ed. S.G. Brandtzaeg, Paul Goring, Christine Watson (Leiden, 2018), 95–118; R.S. King, 'The Manuscript Newsletter and the Rise of the Newspaper, 1665–1715', *HLQ*, lxxix (2016), 411–37; and the contributions by Rachael Scarborough King, Charles Littleton and others in this volume.

²⁰E.g., NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, f. 116 refers to an issue of the *London Gazette* which has not survived.

²¹Samuel Johnson, *An Essay Concerning Parliaments at a Certainty, or, The Kalends of May* (1694).

²²GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 23–4v, 88–91, 118, 119–20v, 125–6, 130–v, 132–4v, 176–7, 193–4, 223, 225, 230–1v; NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 14–19, 32–3, 39–48v, 52, 110, 239–40.

²³E.g., GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 5, 19, 70v, 78, 199v, 204v, 217 (Ranke, vi, 261).

society lady for years, and the chivalrous behaviour of two officers who during a shipwreck let their wives take the last two remaining places in a rescue boat thereby sacrificing their own lives.²⁴ He also had a soft spot for crime and made a habit of covering sensational murder cases²⁵ as well as the misdeeds of English aristocrats such as Lord Mohun,²⁶ the earl of Warwick²⁷ and others who were prone to losing their temper and attacking or even killing their social inferiors and sometimes those of their own rank.²⁸ None of this would ever have found its way into Bonnet's despatches. They were too focused on politics, and parliamentary politics in particular, to regard human interest stories as newsworthy.

Both men, therefore, did not comply fully with the conventions of either of the two main genres, the manuscript newsletter and the diplomatic missive. Their reports have to be situated somewhere in between these two extremes, but on this spectrum Beyrie's accounts were certainly closer to newsheets while Bonnet's gravitated towards the diplomatic variant.

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The substance of their reporting, by contrast, had much in common. It does not come as a surprise that in the middle of the Nine Years War English military preparations and naval warfare formed a major thread as did the state of overseas trade, gauged usually by the eagerly awaited arrival of fleets from the colonies and the success or failure of raids by French privateers on merchant shipping. Even in times of war, though, politics trumped any other topic. Most of the available room – in Bonnet's case even more so than in Beyrie's – was given over to the inner workings of Whitehall, Westminster and Kensington.

Remarkably, what was going on at court and in parliament dominated coverage to such an extent that other aspects of political culture were relegated to the margins. In recent years historians have pointed to the significance of popular politics and the role of print and public discourse for the analysis of the later Stuart period, but neither Beyrie nor Bonnet paid much attention to these aspects.²⁹ Beyrie referred a few times to the anti-French and anti-Catholic feelings of a seething populace and described the intimidation of witnesses by an angry mob during a political trial, but despite his Huguenot heritage his disdain for such outbursts of popular sentiment was unmistakable.³⁰ Crowds were only allowed a walk-on part as backdrop to monarchical ritual, for example when they were cheering the king on his return to London from the continent.³¹ Print publications did not fare much better. Between them Beyrie and Bonnet found just a handful of pamphlets worthy of mention

²⁴NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 56v, 224v, 102, 254; for further examples, see ff. 226, 251v.

²⁵NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 221v–2, 228v, 231v–2.

²⁶Charles Mohun, 4th Baron Mohun of Okehampton; *HPL 1660–1715*, iii, 794–802.

²⁷Edward Rich, 6th earl of Warwick; *HPL 1660–1715*, iv, 194–7.

²⁸NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 57v–8, 74v, 113, 219v, 257v.

²⁹See, among others, Andy Wood, *Riot, Rebellion and Popular Politics in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke, 2001); Mark Knights, *Representation and Misrepresentation in Later Stuart Britain: Partisanship and Political Culture* (Oxford, 2005); Tim Harris, *Revolution: The Great Crisis of the British Monarchy, 1685–1720* (2006).

³⁰NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 86, 120v, 231v, 233.

³¹NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, f. 237v. William's entry is also one of the rare occasions when Bonnet talks of the 'people', GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, f. 192 (Ranke, vi, 248).

during the course of 1694, in one case mainly because it gave rise to diplomatic frictions between England and Denmark.³² Coffeehouses are equally conspicuous by their absence. Only once, in the wake of William III's rejection of the Place Bill, did Beyrie note the anger virulent in London's coffeehouses, at the Exchange and in the City more widely.³³ At least London's merchant community had a certain presence in the accounts because of both men's strong interest in the financial benefits of English trade for the king's coffers³⁴ and their wonder at the riches that investors could make from the colonial enterprise.³⁵ City merchants or trading companies such as the East India Company petitioning parliament for more military protection of their ships and the prolongation of their monopoly appear in a number of reports, especially by Bonnet.³⁶ Political wrangling about the City lieutenancy was also the subject of a couple of despatches.³⁷ Yet the City as an independent political actor was an outlier in both men's perception of English politics, predicated as it was on the dominance of court and parliament.

Even Jacobitism did not fundamentally alter this view. Rather than portraying it as a movement with strong popular support, Beyrie – whose coverage in this respect was more extensive – represented it mainly as a nebulous threat emanating from individual (Scottish) conspirators.³⁸ When supporters of the exiled James II show up in his reports they have just been apprehended, are under guard pleading for better prison conditions or have escaped with amazing ease from their confinement. Sometimes one cannot avoid the impression that Beyrie's interest in Jacobitism came first and foremost from the colourful stories that it offered, which would also explain Bonnet's silence about some of the arrests and escapes. This rather impressionistic coverage of Jacobitism had, of course, also to do with the low level of plotting in 1694. Still, when in the late summer and autumn of that year the authorities uncovered an alleged plot in Lancashire and Cheshire, arrested numerous suspects and put them on trial, Beyrie wasn't unnecessarily concerned. Even before some of the prisoners were acquitted and a second trial collapsed due to a lack of evidence, he clearly regarded the official reaction as paranoid and heavy-handed and saw no danger to the king's regime.³⁹ From his point of view, and probably also Bonnet's whose reports are missing for parts of the period, there simply wasn't enough popular support for the Jacobite cause to pose a serious threat. For both men the real political impact unfolded only when in December the Commons began to investigate the handling of the affair by ministers and revived

³²GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 3v, 9, 12v (Robert Molesworth's *Account of Denmark*), 57 (an anonymous riposte to Molesworth), 214v (Ranke, vi, 259) (an unnamed tract by Charles Davenant on the king's finances); NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 78 (tract on Naturalisation Bill), 244 (an unnamed tract by Charles Davenant on the king's finances), 260v (Arthur Bury's *The Naked Gospel*).

³³NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 35v–6v.

³⁴NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 77, 105; GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 55, 60, 199v.

³⁵NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 88, 101, 103, 233v, 258v; GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 71v, 68, 199v.

³⁶NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 84, 102v; GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 1, 7–8, 35, 48, 65, 70, 71v, 183, 189. For the convoy system, see Patrick Crowhurst, *The Defence of British Trade 1689–1815* (Chatham, 1977), 46–50.

³⁷GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 31v, 57.

³⁸See, e.g., NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 12, 23, 69v, 78v, 104v, 228, 265; GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 8v, 39, 83.

³⁹NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 221, 227–8, 231v, 247, 249v; GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 185, 187v.

the High Treason Bill that William III had already rejected earlier in the year. This was a more serious challenge to the monarch than secret Jacobite plotting and one that featured prominently in their reports.⁴⁰

If court and parliament mattered most to Beyrie as well as Bonnet, there were still notable differences in the way they characterised the role of these institutions and their relationship to each other in the aftermath of the Glorious Revolution. Of the two Beyrie put more emphasis on the court. Throughout the year he assiduously chronicled the movements of king and queen, reporting their hunting excursions and visits to other royal palaces in and around London, their stays in town and country houses of the nobility and their attendance at court festivities or religious observances.⁴¹ The state visit by Prince Louis of Baden, one of William III's German allies, at the beginning of 1694 afforded him a welcome opportunity to paint a detailed image of court life, from the prince's public entry and the official festivities laid on for his entertainment to the numerous sightseeing tours, invitations by members of the aristocracy, the odd ceremonial dispute and a rather salacious dinner spent in the company of celebrated court beauties.⁴² Interestingly, Beyrie spilled so much ink on the visit despite the fact that Louis of Baden was detested in Hanover for his opposition to the recent elevation of Duke Ernst August to the rank of elector.⁴³ Other major events at court which Beyrie covered were less controversial such as the celebrations for the king's birthday and his return from Flanders in November.⁴⁴ Beyrie also faithfully conveyed the illnesses and miscarriages in the royal family and among the king's favourites,⁴⁵ culminating in a blow-by-blow account of the queen's final sickness and death at the end of 1694.⁴⁶

Gossip about court intrigues and the rise and fall of ministers and courtiers was another feature in Beyrie's coverage.⁴⁷ He left his recipients in no doubt about the significance of the court as a place where careers and reputations were made (and destroyed).⁴⁸ Repeatedly he commented on the efforts of noble families to strike marriage alliances or secure office for one of their own or of individual courtiers, politicians and military men in search of employment to curry favour with the king.⁴⁹ Besides, reports about the deaths of the great and good and speculations about who was going to succeed them in their position,⁵⁰ the investment of noblemen with regiments,⁵¹ and the creation of new peerages⁵²

⁴⁰NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 247v, 251v–2, 258, 259v, 266, 268v; GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 200v–1 (Ranke, vi, 251–2), 204 (Ranke, vi, 253), 205v (Ranke, vi, 254), 208, 210v, 209 (Ranke, vi, 255 and 257), 216 (Ranke, vi, 259), 217v (Ranke, vi, 261), 221v–2.

⁴¹E.g., NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 67v, 81v, 83, 99, 101, 118, 119, 220, 224, 253v–4, 255, 257, 260v, 261, 264v.

⁴²NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 2, 4v–5, 7–8v, 9v, 11, 21v, 24, 27v, 31, 34v–5, 54v, 59, 61, 62.

⁴³Schnath, *Geschichte Hannovers*, ii, 244.

⁴⁴NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 226, 231, 233, 237, 241, 255.

⁴⁵NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 27, 71v, 86, 119, 231, 243v, 247v, 251, 253v, 255, 257.

⁴⁶NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 265v–6, 267–8, 270–2v.

⁴⁷NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 12, 24v, 53v–4v, 67, 75.

⁴⁸Tellingly, Beyrie also speculated about the rise of a reversionary interest after the death of Mary II (NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 272v–3) while Bonnet said nothing of this sort.

⁴⁹NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 51, 60v–1, 63v–4, 69, 71, 81, 83, 106, 238, 257.

⁵⁰NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 1v, 9, 90, 112.

⁵¹NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 12, 59, 113.

⁵²NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 117, 118, 122.

provided a running commentary on aristocratic society. In sum, Beyrie conveyed to his readers the image of a princely court like any other in Europe, keen on splendour and ceremonial, riven by personal ambition and functioning according to the rules of rank, honour and clientelism. They would instantly have recognised in Beyrie's account the world they themselves inhabited in Celle and Hanover.

Court news was not absent from Bonnet's despatches either.⁵³ By and large they followed the same pattern as Beyrie's, but the Prussian resident was less fascinated by the subject matter. He reported unevenly, ignored certain stories when other topics seemed more important,⁵⁴ and in addition kept his account often very brief, sometimes adding just one short sentence at the end of his despatch, where Beyrie had been more comprehensive.⁵⁵ Bonnet's coverage rarely surpassed that of his counterpart, and when it did it was mainly because parliament did not generate enough newsworthy material.⁵⁶ At least once Bonnet had to pay a heavy journalistic price for his reserve. Wary of reporting sickness in the royal family,⁵⁷ he failed to inform his readers in Berlin of the first signs of Mary's fatal disease and had to rectify the omission in his next despatch while the courts of Hanover and Celle knew about the grave news that reverberated throughout Europe days earlier.⁵⁸

Strikingly, Bonnet also put a different spin on court affairs. He often presented them in contexts that suggested a wider relevance beyond princely spectacle and aristocratic socializing. While Beyrie, for example, devoted a whole paragraph to the dismantling of James II's Chapel Royal in Whitehall Palace and noted the reuse of the marble stone for the decoration of Hampton Court Palace, Bonnet passed over William's attempt at monarchical representation and took the opportunity that the rededication of the space as the king's library gave him to talk about Richard Bentley, the new librarian, whom he regarded as the greatest living scholar in England.⁵⁹ In a similar vein he used William's review of troops which Beyrie mentioned as part of his routine coverage of public royal engagements as an excuse to discuss the preparations for embarking English regiments bound for the continent.⁶⁰

Bonnet's slant emerges most clearly in his treatment of changes in court and government positions. Where Beyrie had stressed family connections, patronage and royal favour to explain the rationale behind individual decisions Bonnet drew on party politics and considerations of parliamentary expediency. The appointment of a new vice chamberlain was thus reported as a scant success for a group of Tory politicians around Sir Edward Seymour,

⁵³See, e.g., the following run of reports: GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 74, 78v, 81, 87v, 192 (Ranke, vi, 248).

⁵⁴E.g., Bonnet doesn't mention William's and Mary's visit to the Chapel Royal at Easter (GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, f. 66) nor does he pass on information about the preparations in October for the great ball in honour of William's birthday.

⁵⁵GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 37v, 44, 207, 213v. For the rare example of a despatch opening with (albeit very brief) court news f. 46.

⁵⁶GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 4–5, 6, 61, 77, 184, 195, 197v.

⁵⁷For an instance where Bonnet stayed silent about Mary II's illnesses, see GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 49–52. For a few examples where Bonnet did mention illnesses, see ff. 199v, 201v, 204v, 219v.

⁵⁸GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 220–1v.

⁵⁹NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, f. 88; GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, f. 57v.

⁶⁰GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, f. 70v; NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, f. 101.

which was losing its political clout but could still cling on to a minor court office that had previously been held by one of their allies.⁶¹ The award of the second regiment of guards to John, Lord Cutts, in turn, was presented as a ruling by the king in favour of an able courtier but also a 'grand Whig' and strong supporter of the government in the Commons.⁶² And when at the end of April 1694, after the parliamentary session had come to a close, William III enacted a major reshuffle Beyrie mentioned just the names of a few newly appointed figures without giving much background information, while Bonnet provided an extensive analysis of the raft of new appointments and honours detailing in each case the political reason why someone was dismissed (punishment for voting against the ministry, Jacobite leanings) or given a job (usefulness in parliament, pertinent knowledge).⁶³ This pattern repeated itself on other occasions when posts in central government or at county level had to be filled.⁶⁴

On reflection, then, Bonnet's was in many ways a more 'modern' view of political decision making that accentuated structural and (party) political considerations. He saw the court as an important, but ultimately secondary arena and interpreted developments there within the wider framework of ministry and parliament. Beyrie, on the other hand, subscribed to a vision of English politics with the court at the centre and one which as a consequence still pivoted around personal relationships and the interests of kinship networks.

3

Accordingly, both men's treatment of parliament diverged as well. Each of them allocated the two chambers a central place in their reporting; even Beyrie spent more time writing on parliament than the court. But their assessment of parliamentary proceedings and parliament's place in the political landscape digressed again in characteristic ways. To start with, the breadth of their coverage was slightly at odds. For pragmatic reasons both covered only what could be deemed salient to ministers and courtiers in the Holy Roman Empire. Topics 'concerning only domestic politics', as Beyrie put it, were to be excluded.⁶⁵ In theory, this meant private bills and discussions below the level of national or international politics. In practice, however, things were never as clear cut. Beyrie, for example, excused himself in some despatches from reporting about the debates in the Lords with the argument that only private bills had been discussed but in others was more than happy to deal in some detail with the frequent disputes in the English nobility about succession to a title, inheritance of the family fortune and the claims of wives to their dowry.⁶⁶ This clearly reflected his obsession with the traditional pillars of society, but Bonnet had preoccupations of his own. He was alone, for example, in reporting about the delayed compensation of some victims of

⁶¹ GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 35v, 39.

⁶² GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, f. 184; for a similar case f. 81.

⁶³ NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, f. 117v; GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 78v, 80. For the context, see Horwitz, *Parliament, Policy and Politics*, 132.

⁶⁴ GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 80, 84v, 86, 209 (Ranke, vi, 257); NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, f. 121.

⁶⁵ 'qui ne regardent que le dedans', NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, f. 70.

⁶⁶ NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 35v, 50v, 53, 55v, 59, 63, 71, 73, 74v, 77v, 257v.

Charles II's Stop of the Exchequer, the debates about the coinage and counterfeit money, and Irish forfeitures, topics that probably appealed to his abiding interest in issues of money and finance.⁶⁷ In other respects, too, Bonnet's coverage of parliamentary affairs differed from Beyrie's. Regular readers of his despatches were also acquainted with a draft bill to encourage British privateering,⁶⁸ the Naturalisation Bill,⁶⁹ an attempt to reform the legal basis for the treatment of crimes committed at sea,⁷⁰ and the possible introduction of capital punishment in certain cases of perjury.⁷¹ All of these topics Beyrie treated marginally at best and in most cases not at all.⁷²

There was, however, agreement about what parliamentary business could not be left unreported. At the top of the agenda were the finances of the monarchy. Here parliament's central concern in the first half of William's reign, supply legislation,⁷³ converged with the wider strategic interests of the German courts reliant on English subsidies for the continuation of the war against France. Both sets of despatches are awash with more or less detailed summaries of endless debates over which one of the many alternative finance proposals and tax schemes put forward by different groups in the Commons should be adopted to fund the fledgling fiscal-military state. This was on the one hand, as Bonnet put it, 'the most curious [topic] for those abroad',⁷⁴ but on the other could bore even the 'Curious' who had to trawl through a mass of financial detail as Beyrie recognised.⁷⁵ Debating these issues was also a long-drawn-out process. During the spring of 1694 both correspondents complained about the 'great slowness' of the deliberations and a lack of decisive action.⁷⁶ Only from the beginning of April, parliamentary proceedings appeared to gain momentum when William III's desire to leave for the continent and the inordinate length of the session put pressure on Members to finalise their deliberations.⁷⁷ It was with a sigh of relief that Beyrie at long last could report the end of the waiting game in the closing days of April.⁷⁸ Needless to say, the same story repeated itself in December when the Commons started to ponder the various means of supply for the following year.⁷⁹

⁶⁷ Compensation: GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 46v, 49v, 56v–7 (Ranke, vi, 245); a brief reference to this subject in NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, f. 91v; coinage: GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 76v–7 (Ranke, vi, 248); Irish forfeitures: GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 10v, 31, 53v, 55 (Ranke, vi, 244), 204 (Ranke, vi, 253).

⁶⁸ GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 65, 71v–2, 75v (Ranke, vi, 247), 76v (Ranke, vi, 248), 219 (Ranke, vi, 261), 219 (Ranke, vi, 261).

⁶⁹ GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 42 (Ranke, vi, 241–2), 55 (Ranke, vi, 244).

⁷⁰ GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, f. 76v (Ranke, vi, 248).

⁷¹ GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 216v (Ranke, vi, 260), 217v, 219 (Ranke, vi, 261).

⁷² Perjury: NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, f. 266r.

⁷³ *HPC 1690–1715*, I, 393–4.

⁷⁴ 'le plus curieux pour le dehors', GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, f. 217 (Ranke, vi, 261).

⁷⁵ 'Curieux', NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, f. 2; similarly ff. 81v–2.

⁷⁶ 'beaucoup de lenteur', GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 7, 36 (quotation); NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 4, 8v, 26.

⁷⁷ GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 64, 66, 71, 73, 76v (Ranke, vi, 248); NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 98, 99–100, 104v, 105v, 113.

⁷⁸ NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, f. 116.

⁷⁹ NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 243v, 247, 252, 254v, 256, 258, 262; GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 198 (Ranke, vi, 249–50), 200v–1 (Ranke, vi, 251–2), 205 (Ranke, vi, 253–4), 210 (Ranke, vi, 256).

Despite all of this, admiration for the financial might of the English monarchy is widespread in the reports and outweighed any reservations that Beyrie and Bonnet might have had against the slowness of the process. The apparent eagerness with which the Commons agreed to vast sums of money for the war effort at the beginning of December, for example, excited Bonnet more than any other event during this year. In an emphatic tone he told his readers that there never had been a parliament that gave the king more money in a shorter time span and with more grace than the current one, almost £5,000,000 in just one week.⁸⁰ Beyrie's reports also conveyed the image of a parliament that despite the odd squabble was compliant most of the time and mainly argued about the best way to find the funds that it had gladly promised to the monarch. This positive assessment came on the back of a more general appreciation of the wealth that England as a nation acquired. Both men were in awe of the 'great riches' that had been accumulated through trade and that formed the basis of her political power.⁸¹

For this reason, they were also prepared to go into intricate detail about the various finance schemes that were discussed in the Commons despite the tiresome effect this might have had on their readers. Bonnet, for example, had no qualms about rehearsing not only the stratagems of the various groupings in the Commons to push through their specific proposals, but gave free rein to the technicalities of financing the war against France.⁸² The newly created Bank of England caught his attention in particular.⁸³ He covered the debates in both Houses setting out the arguments for and against a national bank, analysed its governance structure and funding and wrote about the scramble of the wealthy to invest their money once the subscriptions had opened. He confidently predicted that in financial terms it would become the most profitable venture of its kind in the world. Early on he also recognised the political dividend that William III earned from the new institution. By putting their money into the bank, the social elites literally bought into the government agenda.

Although there is no suggestion in the sources that Bonnet had been prompted by the court in Berlin to supply intelligence on this novel form of deficit financing, he clearly was acutely aware of the implications and the exemplary character of many of the debates in the Commons for other states seeking to exploit new financial resources. This applies in some measure also to Beyrie, who informed ministers in Celle and Hanover of the progress of the various finance bills going through parliament. Yet his reports often lacked the technical detail that distinguished Bonnet's despatches.⁸⁴ He remained focused on politics, and when he went into the finer points of the various schemes it was mainly the proposals for a new lottery that caught his attention.⁸⁵ Conversely, the new national bank received a more

⁸⁰ GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 202, 204 (Ranke, vi, 252–3). Bonnet was similarly upbeat at the end of the parliamentary session in April, f. 75v (Ranke, vi, 247).

⁸¹ 'grandes richesses', NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, f. 105; GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, f. 71.

⁸² A good example of both is his coverage of the debates on 15 and 18 Dec., see GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, f. 214 (Ranke, vi, 258–9). See also ff. 40, 63, 61, 66, 73, 75, 202, 204 (Ranke, vi, 252–3), 205 (Ranke, vi, 253–4), 217 (Ranke, vi, 260–1).

⁸³ GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 68, 72, 73, 75 (partly in Ranke, vi, 246), 88–91, 93, 183v–4, 187, 189v–90.

⁸⁴ Compare, e.g., NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 81, 85v–6, 101 with GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 43, 49, 68.

⁸⁵ See, e.g., NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 91v–2, 99v, 224, 263v–4, 266. Bonnet, by contrast, regarded lotteries as rather unreliable means of raising money, see GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, f. 67v.

guarded reception.⁸⁶ He did not come down on either side of the argument, but his coverage of the debates was certainly more cautious and ambiguous than Bonnet's. Rather than promoting new ways of tapping the national wealth he appears to have been in favour of more conventional forms of government funding.

If in their coverage of state finance Beyrie and Bonnet wrote with one eye on their patron's putative interests, the remainder of the space devoted to the two Houses was taken up by the set pieces of parliamentary oratory as they occurred during the year. In this respect the two correspondents stayed true to their journalistic ethos and were solely guided by the saliency of debates in Westminster. As a result, alongside a few smaller debates,⁸⁷ the inquiries into naval mismanagement and crown payments to Members⁸⁸ and the aborted Place Bill⁸⁹ in the first half of the year, and the Triennial Act,⁹⁰ the revival of the Place Bill⁹¹ and the High Treason Bill⁹² in the second, were at the forefront of what ministers and courtiers in Berlin, Celle and Hanover came to know about English affairs in 1694. Both men thus covered what most historians nowadays would regard as the political high points of the year.⁹³

Thematic coherence notwithstanding, there were differences, in the way they reported parliamentary business. Not least among them was the depth of analysis. Beyrie's journalistic style did not lend itself to detail in the same way as Bonnet's more targeted 'diplomatic' approach. Since Beyrie prized a greater variety of topics over focusing on a smaller number of core themes he had to deal with parliamentary proceedings in a more generic manner. This difficulty was compounded by the more restricted space that he had at his disposal due to the smaller paper format he used. In those rare cases when he concentrated mainly on one major debate in the Commons at the expense of other news items Beyrie wrote 40% less than Bonnet in his parallel despatch.⁹⁴ If we take one of Beyrie's average reports with its mixture of subject matter the proportions become even more skewed. Then Bonnet's coverage of parliament could be more than four times that of

⁸⁶NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 102v, 105v–6, 113v–15 where, in an unusually detailed analysis of the Bank of England's structure, he pointed out the liability risks that investors excluded from the board of the Bank faced. A rather ambiguous report about the Bank also f. 222v.

⁸⁷E.g., on a bill for the punishment of deserters and mutineers: GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 38 (Ranke, vi, 241), 43, 45v (Ranke, vi, 242–3), 49v, 46v, 48, 216v (Ranke, vi, 260), 219 (Ranke, vi, 261); NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 70, 84, 105.

⁸⁸NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 4, 11v–12, 20–1, 24, 26v–7, 31v, 55v–6, 60v, 64; GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 1v, 5, 12, 13v–14 (Ranke, vi, 233), 17 (Ranke, vi, 235), 20v, 27, 32, 33, 35, 36–7, 40v, 42 (Ranke, vi, 241).

⁸⁹NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 4, 29v–31, 34, 64; GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 18, 20 (partly in Ranke, vi, 236), 21, 23–5v (Ranke, vi, 236–8), 36–7.

⁹⁰NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 244v, 247, 256v, 260, 261v–2, 264, 268; GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 198 (Ranke, vi, 249–50), 202v, 204 (Ranke, vi, 253), 208v, 210 (Ranke, vi, 255–6), 211 (Ranke, vi, 257–8), 216 (Ranke, vi, 260), 217 (Ranke, vi, 260–1), 221v (Ranke, vi, 262), 223.

⁹¹NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 244v, 247, 264; GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 198v (Ranke, vi, 250), 204 (Ranke, vi, 253), 216 (Ranke, vi, 259–60).

⁹²GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 204 (Ranke, vi, 253), 208, 201v, 209 (Ranke, vi, 255 and 257), 216 (Ranke, vi, 259), 221v–2, 217v (Ranke, vi, 261); NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 259v, 266, 268v.

⁹³Horwitz, *Parliament, Policy and Politics*, 132–9; *HPC 1690–1715*, i, 447–8.

⁹⁴Take for example the debate on 23 Nov.: Beyrie's 525 words fall way behind Bonnet's 740; NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 247–9v; GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 200–1v.

Beyrie.⁹⁵ As a result Beyrie usually provided what can best be described as an executive summary of proceedings. He gave a rundown of the most important bills discussed on that day, briefly described some of the main arguments for or against them, assessed the way the debates were going from the point of view of the government and sometimes ventured a guess as to their likely outcome.⁹⁶ Only a few particularly heated debates in the two chambers merited a more specific treatment. On these occasions he recorded the names of a few speakers, usually of those regarded as ‘the best heads’⁹⁷ of the House, conveyed the gist of what they were saying and sometimes also the numbers of divisions albeit not always correctly.⁹⁸

Bonnet by contrast preferred the elaborate report to the executive summary and, in addition, prided himself on accuracy. None of the divisions he reported appears to have been wrong, and despatches that rehearsed individual debates in some detail are plentiful.⁹⁹ Naming the principal speakers, outlining their main points and reporting the majorities in the House had become second nature to him. He was also attuned to the manoeuvring and positioning going on in the Commons, and repeatedly informed his readers about strategic moves by one party or the other.¹⁰⁰ On some occasions Bonnet went even further than that and covered parliamentary business beyond the debates. He reported for example from committee meetings, relayed the punishment of a clergyman who had fallen foul of a Member and devoted a whole paragraph to the selection of commissioners for the public accounts, mentioning that in one case the Speaker had to cast a decisive vote between two candidates and that one of the merchants chosen did not hold a seat in the Commons.¹⁰¹ Bonnet was not above assessing Members’ performances on the floor of the House either. He described Cutts for example as ‘one of the best speakers’,¹⁰² and called Seymour whom otherwise he portrayed with some irritation as a thorn in the side of the government as a ‘great parliamentarian’.¹⁰³

One of the most noticeable traits of Bonnet’s style of reporting was his ability to capture the atmosphere in the two Houses. With obvious delight he described a withering attack launched by the earl of Montagu on Seymour’s erratic behaviour since the Revolution, his constant changes of political positions and party loyalties that put private above public interests. For good measure he also added that many in the chamber secretly applauded this assault.¹⁰⁴ On another occasion, at the start of the new parliamentary session in

⁹⁵ Compare Bonnet’s 664 words with Beyrie’s 151 on 4 Dec.; GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 202, 204; NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, f. 256. For further examples, see the parallel reports by both men in: NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 77v–8. 88, 107v–8, 112v–113, 259v–60v; and GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 40, 53, 55 (partly in Ranke, vi, 243–4), 73, 75, 76 (Ranke, vi, 247–8), 208, 210 (Ranke, vi, 255–7).

⁹⁶ Good examples of his style of reporting are NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 35v–6, 69v–70.

⁹⁷ ‘les meilleurs testes’, NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, f. 268v, similar ‘testes fortes’, f. 74.

⁹⁸ NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 12, 14–15, 35v, 63, 112, 268v. For reports which give the numbers of divisions incorrectly, see ff. 70, 261v–2.

⁹⁹ See, e.g., GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 38 (Ranke, vi, 240–1), 40, 42v (Ranke, vi, 241), 53, 55 (partly in Ranke, vi, 243–4), 56–7 (Ranke, vi, 244–5), 58v–9.

¹⁰⁰ GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 56–7 (Ranke, vi, 244–5).

¹⁰¹ GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 10v, 49, 72.

¹⁰² ‘un des meilleurs parleurs’, GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, f. 42 (Ranke, vi, 241).

¹⁰³ ‘grand Parlementaire’, GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, f. 191.

¹⁰⁴ GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 56–7 (Ranke, vi, 244–5).

November, Bonnet described in vivid terms over the course of several despatches the barrage of criticism aimed at the government and, remarkably, at William III personally, while the supporters of the court struggled to contain the onslaught and had to resort to ridiculing their opponents.¹⁰⁵ At his best Bonnet was capable of capturing the high drama of the oratorical contest in the Commons while at the same time dissecting the tactics of the various parties, providing pithy summaries of their main political points and reliably predicting the future course of events.

Yet Bonnet's penetrating analysis had wider implications for the image of parliament that was emerging from his pages. Unsurprisingly, given what we learned earlier about his treatment of the court, the Prussian resident created the impression that parliament and the Commons in particular had become the dominant arena in English post-revolutionary politics. By simply allocating so much space and detailed coverage to the two Houses and side-lining all other venues, the balance of power shifted perceptibly in Westminster's favour. Even more importantly, Bonnet's blow-by-blow account of debates and divisions impacted on perceptions of the nature of parliamentary politics. What his audience was taking away from his descriptions was the picture of a cut-and-thrust environment where coteries of politicians were vying for influence and power.

Bonnet's treatment of parties was at the bottom of this portrayal. Rather than depicting them as organisations united by common beliefs, he described parliamentary parties as loose groupings without much of a programmatic basis. Every now and then he marked out members as Whigs or Tories, supporters or enemies of the court, but what these terms stood for, which political loyalties they denoted remained unclear.¹⁰⁶ Only on a few occasions did Bonnet hint at certain principles underpinning party allegiances. They were primarily about religion, a subject that with few exceptions was otherwise curiously absent from both our reporters' missives. In the context of the appointment of the new archbishop of Canterbury in December 1694, for example, Bonnet pitted Whigs and their support for dissenters, or Presbyterians as he called them, against intransigent high church zealots and hotheads,¹⁰⁷ terms of abuse that appear a few more times in his and also Beyrie's accounts.¹⁰⁸ Apart from such instances, though, politics was mainly a mundane pursuit without ideological demarcations. Creating this perception may not have been intentional, since Bonnet was well aware of the origins of political parties in England and of the differences between them.¹⁰⁹ But his brand of journalism, concentrating as it did on the slow progress of day-to-day politics and a few high profile oratorical contests, certainly gave rise to such a reading. Even debates about constitutional issues such as the Triennial Act or the High Treason Bill were often

¹⁰⁵ GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 196–7 (Ranke, vi, 248–9), 189 (Ranke, vi, 249), 200–1 (Ranke, vi, 250–2).

¹⁰⁶ Intriguingly, the term Country Party appears neither in Bonnet nor Beyrie. When Bonnet gave a brief overview of the various parties extant in England, he mentioned that there were 'des Whigs & des Torys' and then those 'pour la Cour & contre la Cour', GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, f. 46.

¹⁰⁷ GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, f. 209 (Ranke, vi, 257).

¹⁰⁸ E.g., NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 56, 69v, 248; GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, f. 199 (Ranke, vi, 250).

¹⁰⁹ Once, when speaking about Irish affairs, Bonnet used the term Tory in its original derogatory meaning as 'Torys ou Raperies', GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, f. 219.

broken down to the level of legal technicalities and thus lost their wider political significance.¹¹⁰

Bonnet's penchant for figures and numbers and all things financial did not help either. Much of his parliamentary coverage was about Members bogged down in discussions about the ins and outs of state finances. Such were the minutiae of examining supply bills that on occasion even Bonnet had to admit that an altercation centred round an 'obscurity', a minor clause in a bill, which did not stop him, though, from reporting it in extenso.¹¹¹ Strikingly, the wider arguments that he rehearsed, especially those put forward by supporters of the ministry, in some cases boiled down to stressing natural constraints such as time pressure, procedural restrictions or simply a lack of alternatives and refrained from giving a substantive reason for a certain course of action.¹¹² It may have been this focus on Realpolitik that appealed to Ranke when he discovered the despatches. It is also no coincidence that Bonnet grouped Members according to whether they voted with or against the government. They were either among the 'well-intentioned' who formed 'the party of the Court' or they were 'discontented', 'those who oppose the interests of the Court' whom Bonnet on one occasion denounced as 'Crieurs'.¹¹³ The more ideologically loaded terms Whigs and Tories were seldom part of the equation and mainly used when Bonnet had to deal with politics outside parliament, for example the appointment of office holders or political pamphlets.¹¹⁴

In any case, reporting debates was as much about personal ambition as it was about party affiliation. In the gladiatorial contests between the main orators, arguments could play a lesser role than tactics or individual agendas. For example Bonnet wrote with some amazement about Members who, for no apparent reason, shifted allegiances and as a result contradicted views which they had held only a short while earlier or voted against the side to which they nominally belonged.¹¹⁵ For some debates Bonnet clearly stated from the start that Members were not debating along party lines but according to their personal views and private interests.¹¹⁶ Besides, Bonnet repeatedly referred to Members in government pay in order to explain the success of ministerial policies.¹¹⁷ The prominence of debates about

¹¹⁰See, e.g., the debate in the Lords about the Triennial Act and the endless discussions whether as a consequence of the act the sitting parliament had to be dissolved in 1695, 1696 or 1697, GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, f. 216 (Ranke, vi, 260). References to constitutional issues can be found in GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 21v (Ranke, vi, 236–7), 208, 210 (Ranke, vi, 255–7).

¹¹¹'obscurité', GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, f. 66v.

¹¹²GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 16 (Ranke, vi, 234), 40v, 49, 73, 75 (partly in Ranke, vi, 246), 76 (Ranke, vi, 247–8).

¹¹³'bien-intentionnez', GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, f. 189v; 'le parti de la Cour', 'mécontents', ff. 200v and 201 (Ranke, vi, 251–2); 'ceux qui s'opposent aux intérêts de la Cour', f. 205v (Ranke, vi, 254). Other examples in Bonnet are: 'partie de la Cour', 'le parti, qu'on peut en general appeler le bien intentionné', ff. 58v–59; 'parti de la Cour', ff. 208 and 210 (Ranke, vi, 256); 'les Seigneurs affectionnez à la Cour', f. 76 (Ranke, vi, 247); 'Membres, qui avoient la direction des intérêts de la cour', 'parti oppose', f. 202 (Ranke, vi, 252–3); 'le parti contraire à celui de la cour', f. 220v. In some despatches Bonnet called those opposed to the court 'Jacobites', see e.g., f. 18.

¹¹⁴See, e.g., GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 31v, 57, 80, 209 (Ranke, vi, 257). For rare examples of the use of 'Whig' and 'Tory' in parliamentary contexts, see ff. 18v, 52, 56v–57 (Ranke, vi, 245).

¹¹⁵See, e.g., GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 36v, 40v, 45 (Ranke, vi, 242–3), 208 and 210 (Ranke, vi, 256), 211v (Ranke, vi, 258).

¹¹⁶See, e.g., GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 13 (Ranke, vi, 232), 36v, 46, 65, 66v, 211v (Ranke, vi, 258), 216 (Ranke, vi, 260).

¹¹⁷E.g., GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 36, 33v, 76v (Ranke, vi, 248), 209 (Ranke, vi, 257).

the Place Bill in 1694 also helped to reinforce the impression that private interests went a long way to explain the outcome of policy decisions. In the end, it was a rather Namierite vision of parliamentary politics that unfolded in Bonnet's despatches.¹¹⁸

Some of these observations also ring true for Beyrie's reports. In his account, too, ideological concerns played second fiddle to more pragmatic reasoning. Politics was at best about finding practical, short-term solutions to problems such as the funding of the war effort and at worst the outcome of erratic personal behaviour.¹¹⁹ Members again fell into two categories, 'the party fond of the Court' and 'the party opposed to the Court'.¹²⁰ Still, Beyrie looked at parliament from a slightly different angle that was informed by older notions of what constituted parliament or assemblies of estates more generally. His parliament was a less adversarial and competitive place but one where the idea of an ultimately harmonious relationship with the monarch had not lost all its currency.

To be sure, Beyrie could not avoid dealing with the repeated conflicts between William and parliament. On the contrary, he repeatedly drew William as a strong figure that enforced his will on parliament. For example, early in 1694 Beyrie credited William's address to the Lords with ending a stalemate between the two Houses over the land tax.¹²¹ When shortly afterwards a draft treason bill threatened to restrict the government's room for action, William appeared in the Lords, followed the debate for hours and by his sheer presence cowed the anti-court party into submission.¹²² During the final stages of the controversy surrounding the establishment of the Bank of England the king once more made his views known to a number of lords in private and thus achieved the passing of the Tonnage Act.¹²³ And if all else failed Beyrie's William harboured no doubts about denying the royal assent, as was the case with the Place Bill. Beyrie justified this move that caused immense anger among Members by stating that 'nothing was capable of bending him [the king] to do something that was prejudicial to what he believed to be his authority' and added for good measure that William had exercised this right in his first few years as king twice as often as Charles II in the whole of his reign.¹²⁴ This depiction of events was slightly at odds with Bonnet's, who also reported the royal veto but didn't highlight William's agency during this controversy, shining the light instead on the supporters of the king in the Commons who after a raucous debate defused the situation.¹²⁵ Interestingly, Bonnet had also omitted to mention the king's intervention before the vote on the Tonnage Act and ascribed the success of the bill purely to parliamentary arithmetic.¹²⁶

¹¹⁸A view shared by many contemporaries, see Julian Hoppit, *A Land of Liberty? England 1689–1727* (Oxford, 2000), 146.

¹¹⁹For an example of the latter, see NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 63, 74.

¹²⁰'le parti affectionné a la Cour', NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, f. 35v, similarly ff. 74, 92, 113; 'bien intentionné', f. 86; 'La partie opposé a la cour', f. 77v. The terms 'Whig' and 'Tory' occur hardly at all in Beyrie's parliamentary reporting, for the few references to 'Wiggs', see NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 56, 64, 244v–5v.

¹²¹NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, f. 29.

¹²²NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 73–4. Bonnet's despatch for this debate is missing but see GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, f. 38v (Ranke, vi, 241) where he mentions plans within government to use the king's presence to stifle opposition.

¹²³NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, f. 112v–13.

¹²⁴'que rien n'étoit capable de le plier a rien faire au prejudice de ce qu'il croyoit estre de son autorité', NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 29v–31 (quotation at 29v), 34v, 35–7.

¹²⁵GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 18, 20 (partly in Ranke, vi, 236), 21, 23–5v (Ranke, vi, 236–8).

¹²⁶NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 112v–13; GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, f. 76v (Ranke, vi, 248).

In a way, the rendering of William as a strong king only confirmed the image of parliament's subservience to the monarch that was prevalent in many of Beyrie's reports. Especially in the coverage of supply legislation parliament appears as docile, with Members squabbling among themselves but giving the king what was his due.¹²⁷ William, on the other hand, is portrayed by Beyrie on many occasions as magnanimous, showing clemency to his Jacobite enemies¹²⁸ and 'prudence' in his dealings with parliament. He was prepared, for example, to compromise in the best interest of the country over bills¹²⁹ and to listen to the advice given by parliament. In an extraordinary report, Beyrie presented the heated debate in the Lords about the revamped High Treason Bill shortly before Christmas 1694 – a bill that fundamentally threatened to undermine the government – as a classic example of the peers of the realm giving counsel to their king, rather than a power struggle that William lost as Bonnet did.¹³⁰ Once again the king was present during the debate. This time he was not depicted as overawing the lords but as 'listening to their opinion', with opponents and supporters of the bill weighing arguments and giving their 'contrary opinion' on the matter in hand. Strikingly, Beyrie dispensed with all party-political labelling and drew the lords in their entirety as servants of the king who saw it as their duty to 'counsel' the monarch. The same concept pervaded other reports, for example, when he described how William invited Louis of Baden to watch him give his royal assent in front of the political nation assembled in parliament.¹³¹

Beyrie's more benign view of parliament can partly be explained by his more broad-brush style of reporting. Where Bonnet preferred the close up and dissected debates, Beyrie zoomed out and gave a summary of events that by necessity tended to gloss over frictions and tensions. In no small measure, however, it was also the upshot of his emphasis on debates in the Lords. Whereas Bonnet in his parliamentary coverage clearly prioritised the lower over the upper chamber relishing its confrontational style some of Beyrie's most detailed accounts dwelt on proceedings in the queen's chamber which with their ceremonial trappings and repeated presence of the monarch harked back to a more traditional understanding of parliament, and one that, for many of his German readers, was closer to how they envisaged the relationship between ruler and estates.

4

This, finally, begs the question how foreign residents and agents were able to gain access to the information that underlies these two diverging views of English politics. As with most providers of scribal news, be they commercial newsletter writers or diplomats, neither Bonnet nor Beyrie disclosed the sources from which they were drawing, especially when they were not generally available and thus only served to highlight the particular value of the newsmonger in question.

¹²⁷ See, e.g., NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 251v–2, 254v, 256.

¹²⁸ NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 12, 69v, 104v, 253v.

¹²⁹ 'prudence', NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, f. 20v; inquiry into naval mismanagement: f. 20v–1; Mining Bill: ff. 50v, 55v.

¹³⁰ 'd'entendre leur avis', 'avis contraire', 'conseille', NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, f. 268v; GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, f. 218v (Ranke, vi, 262).

¹³¹ NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, f. 29.

The only references as to the origins of news in both sets of reports are to unnamed ‘letters’ which contained intelligence about events outside London. Both men regularly drew on letters from various port cities along the English south coast as well as from Edinburgh, Dublin and other Irish ports. In addition, letters from the Netherlands and, in declining order of frequency, ports in Spain and Portugal as well as some colonies in the West Indies supplied information about events further afield.¹³² In most cases these letters ‘derived from people, usually merchants, who were commissioned to write regularly to London’, but were not necessarily paid for their services.¹³³ Like most other Londoners, Bonnet and Beyrie probably did not subscribe to these letters but consulted them in places where they were readily available such as coffeehouses and the Royal Exchange. At any rate it is striking how frequently both men relied on a common source when they were covering the fate of merchant fleets, military engagements on sea, the English war preparations or the latest developments in Scotland and Ireland.¹³⁴ How much detail they fetched from the letters may have differed, but the specifics of a story, the mistakes they shared and sometimes even the wording make it abundantly clear that they had used the same template. In addition to these ‘letters of public news’¹³⁵ Bonnet at least appears to have had access to government information that either was provided to all foreign diplomats (or those of allied powers) or came from sources within the various departments that he had befriended. This would explain why Bonnet could report about what was debated in the cabinet council, in one case even down to the particulars of a discussion.¹³⁶

It is more difficult to find out where Bonnet and Beyrie gleaned their information about proceedings in the two Houses. As is well known, under parliamentary privilege debates were supposed to take place out of the public gaze. Recent research has shown, though, that ‘the palace [of Westminster] was a remarkably permeable space open to far larger numbers of people than is often assumed’ and that foreign diplomats especially could get access to the two chambers with the Commons installing a visitors’ gallery in the 1690s.¹³⁷ This does not mean, however, that both men really availed themselves of the opportunities open to them as semi-diplomatic reporters or that they indeed qualified as foreigners to whom access was not denied. Although both Houses were at the centre of their reporting, Bonnet and Beyrie did not so much as hint at their sources or say whether they were present at debates or not. Still some circumstantial evidence may point us in the right direction.

Beyrie, in particular, does not appear to have been a frequent visitor to the Commons, if he was one at all. Many of his less detailed reports certainly could have been written on the basis of English newsletters that were circulating at the time,¹³⁸ and it has to be

¹³²Sometimes called ‘ordinaires’, e.g., NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, f. 60.

¹³³Mark Goldie, *The Entering Book of Roger Morrice 1677–1691* (7 vols, Woodbridge, 2007), i, 126–7.

¹³⁴Compare, e.g., NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 261v, 78v–9, 93, 103, 107, 108, 112, 116v; and GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 213, 42v, 60, 63, 71v, 75v, 74, 77, 80.

¹³⁵Goldie, *Entering Book*, 126.

¹³⁶GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, f. 196. For a further instance where Bonnet seems to have received information from inside government, ff. 60 and 63.

¹³⁷Robin Eagles, ‘“Got Together in a Riotous and Tumultuous Manner”: Crowds and the Palace of Westminster, c. 1700–1800’, *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, xliii (2020), 350.

¹³⁸A.W. Barber, ‘“It is Not Easy What to Say of our Condition, Much Less to Write It”: The Continued Importance of Scribal News in the Early 18th Century’, *Parl. Hist.*, xxxii (2013), 293–316.

left to future research to determine if his reports were dependent on what could be found there. But even some of his more detailed despatches don't have the air of being eye-witness accounts. As has been noted earlier they rarely managed to convey the heat of debates in the same way as Bonnet. It is also worth stating that Beyrie's reports about proceedings on post days on occasion did not contain developments that happened late in the afternoon or in the evening, presumably because he was not present in the chamber and had to wait for the latest news to come in from other sources.¹³⁹ For example, in one instance he had already finished his report by saying that one could not fathom what resolution the Commons had taken today when 'in that moment' he learned that they had been adjourned till tomorrow.¹⁴⁰ On another occasion he opened his despatch with a brief and rather convoluted outline of the king's speech from the same day based perhaps on hearsay and concluded it with a detailed and structured summary after he probably had got hold of a handwritten copy.¹⁴¹ There are, though, a small number of debates where the intimate knowledge of particulars makes his presence in the House likely. One of them is the inheritance dispute fought out between the earls of Bath and Montagu in the Lords in February that he covered in great detail, analysing not only the various stratagems deployed by both parties but the confidence, or lack thereof, with which participants in the debate spoke.¹⁴²

Tellingly, Bonnet did not attend the debate as his rather succinct account and the use of qualifying language like 'they say' indicate.¹⁴³ Instead he seems to have been in the Commons listening to a parallel discussion about corrupt Members taking bribes from the court that was conducted 'with Heat', as he noted in a report typical of his thorough résumé of parliamentary business.¹⁴⁴ This level of detail that regularly included observations on the mood in the house, technical detail of legislation, tactical ploys and Members' rhetorical style would have been difficult to achieve if Bonnet had had to rely on written sources, and most likely came from first-hand experience.¹⁴⁵ There are other indications that corroborate this conclusion. On one occasion he appears to report conversations between Members that he overheard before or after a Commons session, although the wording of the passage is not entirely clear.¹⁴⁶ In addition, Bonnet's reporting on post days rarely ever slacked. He mostly maintained the same exhaustive coverage¹⁴⁷ and repeatedly reported occurrences that Beyrie could not include because the information hadn't reached him in time. When Beyrie had problems laying his hands on what William had said in the Lords, Bonnet inserted the king's speech verbatim at the beginning of his despatch. On the day that Beyrie

¹³⁹NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 67, 70v, 88v, 102v, 258, 259.

¹⁴⁰'dans ce moment', NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, f. 88v.

¹⁴¹NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 91, 92v.

¹⁴²NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 42, ff. 63, 65–7. For another occasion where Beyrie may have been present, this time in the Commons, f. 249.

¹⁴³'on dit', GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, f. 37.

¹⁴⁴'avec Chaleur', GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 36–7, quotation at 36v.

¹⁴⁵Particularly revealing GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 202 and 204 (Ranke, vi, 252–3), 208 and 210 (Ranke, vi, 255–7). See also, ff. 66, 196–7 (Ranke, vi, 248–9), 200–1 (Ranke, vi, 250–2), 211 (Ranke, vi, 257–8).

¹⁴⁶GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, f. 192v.

¹⁴⁷For three examples among many GStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, ff. 38 (Ranke, vi, 240), 48, 53 (Ranke, vi, 243–4).

heard of the adjournment of the Commons only the moment he was finishing, Bonnet covered the six-hour debate in his usual meticulous way.¹⁴⁸ None of this would have been possible had he not been in the chamber on these occasions. Although we lack incontrovertible evidence that links Bonnet to the houses of parliament it is highly likely that he spent many a day in the Commons in particular, closely following debates and later on conveying their content to his patrons. Bonnet certainly relied for some of his parliamentary reporting on commercial newsletters, but large parts must derive from his presence in the Palace of Westminster.

5

Despite some commonalities, then, Beyrie's and Bonnet's accounts of English politics betray telling differences. Bonnet can indeed be described as a parliamentary reporter *avant la lettre*. He seems to have observed debates from close range, put them at the centre of his coverage and prided himself on his knowledgeable and exhaustive analysis of proceedings. This has earned him the appreciation of modern historians, but it remains an open question why courtiers and ministers in Berlin wanted to be informed in such detail about what was going on in Westminster.¹⁴⁹ Beyrie, on the other hand, cast himself as a foreign correspondent who tried to give equal weight to a range of news stories that happened under his watch even to the inclusion of human interest stories, although parliament still claimed the lion's share of his coverage. More than his Prussian counterpart, he regurgitated information from other news outlets such as public letters and probably also commercial newsletters which suited the more elevated position from which he covered events. These differences in journalistic groundwork and style went hand in hand with a differently nuanced view of court and parliament that reflected the transitional nature of post-revolutionary English politics. Whereas Beyrie still attributed considerable political weight to the machinations at court and described England in some respects as an *ancien régime* monarchy, Bonnet laid his emphasis on parliament describing it as a place where technocratic thinking, personal ambition and ministerial management converged.

These are preliminary findings given the source base of just one year of reporting, although samples from other reports by Beyrie and Bonnet appear to confirm the rough outlines of what has been said.¹⁵⁰ It is beyond doubt, however, that Bonnet's and Beyrie's despatches are further proof of the wide variety of scribal news in the later 17th century. Both men cultivated a particular type of scribal news that should be recognised by future research. Defying easy categorisation as either newsletters or diplomatic despatches the reports can best be described as diplomatic letters of news. Their example highlights how much attention we have to pay to the differences in social status and professional self-understanding of writers of scribal news as well as to the nuances of content, style and materiality.

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¹⁴⁸GSStA PK, I. HA GR, Rep. 11, no. 1807, f. 53 and 55 (partly in Ranke, vi, 243–4), 58; for further examples f. 37,68.

¹⁴⁹For a general discussion of these issues Matthias Pohl, *Marlboroughs Geheimnis: Strukturen und Funktionen der Informationsgewinnung im Spanischen Erbfolgekrieg* (Cologne, 2016), 302–72.

¹⁵⁰See for Bonnet Ranke, vi, 148–274 (1690–95) and for Beyrie NLA, Cal.Br. 24, no. 62 (1701).