

## INTRODUCTION

### The Transformation of the Standards of Credibility

*The New Tydings Out of Italie Are Not Yet Come* (2 December 1620) is the first English-language newspaper that survives. In this ‘coranto’, as these early newspapers were called, Englishmen read that ‘between the King of Bohemia & the Emperours folke hath beene a great Battel about Prage, but because there is different writing & speaking there uppon, so cannot for this time any certainty thereof be written, but must wayte for the next Post.’<sup>1</sup> This passage was marvelously typical of early newspapers. The subject was a battle distant from England. The source of the news of battle was an anonymous newswriter in far-off Cologne. There were varying reports of the battle, whose conflicting testimony impugned the certainty of any one of them. For what it was worth – and what it was worth is a very interesting question – the reader could have read in the coranto reports from four different letters of a battle in Prague. Here at the birth of the modern newspaper, the credibility of the news was an essential issue.

In August 1622 one of Joseph Mead’s London correspondents reported that ‘the Anwerp post now brings, that 4000 musquetiers coming to have joyned with Count Mansfeild & missing their way were set upon by the elector of Collen, & most slayne’. Another London correspondent reported that ‘a letter from Brussels by an expresse messenger to the king & but 4 days old relates the manner of the fight in this fashion’, that Mansfield’s vanguard indeed was defeated, but that his main army ‘met & fought with Cordova & remained master of the feild’. Moreover, looking to Protestant sources in place of Catholic Antwerp and Brussels, the same correspondent cited ‘letters from Zeland [that] say that the Enimie lost 3000 & Mansfield 2000, but that the Enimie left behind him his ordnance & a great part of his ammunition’. It was, moreover, a victory much against the odds: ‘That Mansfeild was in horse (besides his foot) 8000, & Cordova in all horse & foot 18,000 at this fight.’<sup>2</sup> Which of these accounts could be believed? How could Mead discern the truth from these variable reports?

In October 1622, John Chamberlain wrote Dudley Carleton his account of how news from the siege of Bergen-op-Zoom had come to London:

We have ben as yt were wholly entertained with uncertain reports of Spinolas rising from Bergen: and great wagers were laide both in court, citie, and specially in the Exchaunge *pro et contra*, which grew upon confidence the Spanish faction had of Spinolas forecast and resolution, confirmed by Sir Richard Weston and his followers who comming in the heat of the contention, cooled the most forward, in that they heard nothing of yt by the way, and withall related how assuredly all at Brussels from the highest to the lowest made full account to carrie yt: on the other side ther was no more certaintie but that two stragling passengers (comming over in a pincke that stayed at Sandwich,) saide they were at Middleburg and Flushing when thanckesgeving was made in the churches for the raising of the siege, and that there were not boats enough to be gotten for the people that flocked in great numbers to go to Berghen to see the workes and manner of the siege. The Spanish ambassador to salve all this gave out yt was but a false alarme upon the removing of Spinolaes quarter only, by reason of some inconvenience he found in the ground: in this suspence we continued till the post of Antwerp came on Wensday last and cleared the doubt: which was very welcome newes and as well received here as came many a day, wherin those people may see our true hearts and goode affection toward them, that howsoever we complaine to have found hard usage at their handes, yet we rejoyce exceedingly at their prosperitie and welfare.<sup>3</sup>

In Chamberlain's account of Londoners' reading of the news, credibility and uncertainty are as much leitmotifs as they were in the writing of *The New Tydings Out of Italie Are Not Yet Come* (2 December 1620). Commerce, partiality, eyewitness, the attestation of a socially credible source, the ritual of thanksgiving, tourism and emotional involvement in the news all interact with the assessment of credibility, the acknowledgement and conveyance of belief and the manner of reading the news. Against this prose poem of uncertainty, we may contrast a letter that the Earl of Clare wrote in August 1627 to Dr Williams, Bishop of Lincoln, about the Ré expedition: 'Your Lordship hath heard how the Duke escaped the poysond knyfe ... the knyfe is sent over to the king with the story'.<sup>4</sup> 'Tokens' – gauntlets, shirts, dead bodies – had provided credibility for reports of battle as late as the battle of Flodden in 1513, and the physical object still provided a highly traditional challenge to the credibility of news from Ré that arrived by words, letters, or coranto.<sup>5</sup> In the 1620s, English military news was unstable in medium, uncertain in credibility, contradictory in content and never to be read with blind faith.

News in general was undergoing a great transformation in Renaissance and early modern Europe – and more particularly, in England.<sup>6</sup> The definition of news itself was in rapid flux: it is significant that 'news' was first construed in the abstracting singular in 1566.<sup>7</sup> The ways news was transmitted changed as rapidly as the definition of news. Tellingly, Atherton writes that a host of words relating to news and news culture entered the English language between 1580 and 1620: newsmonger, intelligencer, newsmongery, news-bearer, news-man, news-carrier, news-lover, news-teller, and adviso.<sup>8</sup> Shaaber, who thought of the pre-1620 news

reports essentially as 'forerunners' of newspapers, emphasizes the development of periodicity and variety in the news of this period as the crucial attributes of the modern newspaper.<sup>9</sup> Fritz Levy instead emphasizes the increased velocity and quantity of news, as well as the post-Elizabethan development of a national chain of distribution, which, by escaping censorship, allowed for a free flow of news.<sup>10</sup> Halasz emphasizes a market-place of print, involving Stationers' Company, author, textual property, and reading audience, although in sum an abstract whole greater than the sum of these material components.<sup>11</sup> All these changes underscore the fundamental point of a transformation in news and news culture during this period of time.

It is the contention of this study that a transformation of the standard of credibility was an essential prerequisite, and companion, to these further changes in the news. It is more particularly the contention of this study that many specific transformations in the way the news was written – the *rhetoric* of the news – and the way the news was read, were results of these transformed standards of credibility. The causes, the evolution, and the results of these changing standards of credibility must be explored to understand the changing news itself, and all that followed from the changing news. The establishment of credit in news, by rhetorical and other means, within early modern England's frameworks of politics and power, is the subject of this study.

As the primary medium of English news shifted in the hundred years before the outbreak of the British Civil Wars, each change of medium required a corresponding shift in standards of credibility before such news could be believed. News was first conveyed either orally (an incredible medium) or by rituals that established credibility by their communal, public performance. The shift to written news, largely exchanged privately and sociably among English gentlemen, relied upon the creation of a new standard of credibility, based upon the honour of these gentle newswriters and newsreaders. The ensuing development of commercial and printed news, public, anonymous, and vulgar, required yet a new standard of credibility. The first generation of printed news and news pamphlets from 1585 to 1610 exaggeratedly mimicked ritual, honourable and sociable standards of credibility; they also shifted the focus of credibility from the newswriter to the news text. The second generation of printed news, corantos (early newspapers) from 1618 to 1637, developed the still-surviving standard of extensive credibility, derived from the deritualized and increasingly unsociable reading of multiple, anonymous texts. This standard soon proved successful: an examination of diaries and letters from the period shows a relatively quick acceptance by newsreaders of the new extensive standard of credibility.

### Definitions of News: Epistemology and Politics

‘News’ generally means ‘tidings; new information of recent events; new occurrences as a subject of report or talk.’<sup>12</sup> But this is not sufficiently precise: much such ‘news’ is of interest only to local audiences. ‘News,’ as it has come to be understood, is the communication of new information about matters of public concern; it belongs to the *res publica*. Switching etymological derivations, news concerns the *polis*, and hence, broadly speaking, is political. The character of the news – news itself in the abstract, and the human acts of communicating or receiving news – is coloured by this political essence. Whatever defines the political – recurring to the *OED*, it is ‘of, belonging or pertaining to, the state, its government and policy; public, civil; of or pertaining to the science or art of politics’ – also enters into the definition of news.<sup>13</sup>

But this definition immediately becomes an argument. The phrase ‘news itself in the abstract’ indicates one tendency of news: that news not only addresses matters of public concern, but also, by its very abstract and universal nature, makes public concern a matter of universal concern, and creates by its implicitly universal address a universal public. News inherently creates and constitutes an unlimited, uncontrollable realm of public discourse. On the other hand, news is also the human acts of communicating or receiving the news. If we focus on these human acts, and relations, then news, political news, must be analyzed in terms of the human efforts to define and control this realm of public discourse. To use another critical vocabulary, news is also fundamentally only one category of knowledge; and given Foucault’s insights that knowledge is the correlative constituent of power throughout history, and that power is relational, then the transmission of information is inherently a matter of power, and the particular control of the transmission of news is therefore a matter of particular relations of power.<sup>14</sup> News, therefore, is inherently tense: it is a universalizing, uncontrollable medium simultaneously subject to the localizing controls of human power. We may usefully define news as an argument universal in scope over the question of who has the power to constitute the definition, the medium, and the content of the transmission of information.

The definition of new information in early modern Europe as either ‘news’ or ‘gossip’ demonstrates how this process worked. Essentially, news and gossip were communicated in the same fashion; the difference between the two lay in their subject matter. By definition, gossip transmitted information that did not rise to a matter of public concern; news was very definitely a matter of public concern. Gossip was a matter of the pregnancy of a farmer’s unwed daughter or a village feud; news was the pregnancy of a queen or a feud among earls. But these labels were themselves political acts, which defined the political world. To say a farmer’s daughter’s pregnancy was gossip was to say that farmers were excluded

from the world of political significance; to call a feud among earls news was to say that earls were political actors. Similarly, to tell news was a political claim: a villager who spoke of the feuds of earls asserted a right to know and to communicate matters of the public, political world. To be the subject or the transmitter of news was to enter into the political world; to be the subject or the transmitter of gossip was to be an apolitical subject. The association of women with gossip was among other things a restatement of the emphatic (albeit often broken) principle that women could not be part of the political world. Gossips were meant to be ruled.<sup>15</sup>

But there is a further characteristic of the news to consider. News is fundamentally only one category of the transmission of information. It is therefore essentially linked to uncertainty. Shannon's information theory defines *information* itself as the reduction of uncertainty, with the stipulation that information cannot be perfect – uncertainty can be reduced, but never eliminated. Neither our supply of information nor the process of information transmission can be made certain; and the same proposition applies to the news.<sup>16</sup> News, both as a universal abstract and a matter of particularizing power and politics, must take into account the essential uncertainty inherent in its nature.

Can we trust the news? In some form or another, this question has always been with us. It is a component of broader questions. As a matter of epistemology, we ask if we can trust human senses to perceive and accurately to convey the truth. This particular problem of knowledge became sharper from the Renaissance on, as philosophers worked out the conclusions logically following from that movement's individualistic assumptions.<sup>17</sup> The newswriters and newsreaders of early modern England may not have phrased the dilemma as formally or as articulately as the philosophers, but they were acutely aware of it. As a matter of private prudence and morality, we ask which other people, if any, we can trust to tell us the truth. As a matter of sociology, we ask if we can trust strangers to tell us the truth. As a matter of practical politics, we ask if we can trust a given datum as a guide to political thought and action.

Credible news was meant to be the certain antidote to the uncertainties of rumour. Thomas Bette's *A Neue Ballade, Intituled, agaynst Rebellious and False Rumours* (1570) was meant to quiet destabilizing rumours of governmental mishaps in handling the Northern Rebellion.<sup>18</sup> In January 1602 John Chamberlain expressed his gratitude to Dudley Carleton for his letter, for

we had heard a noise and uncertain bruit of something don [at Kinsale], which made us the more impatient till we might learne the truth, for, with much disputing and discoursing at all adventures, we so hammered out the matter and the manner that we had almost wearied our wits, so that your relation came in goode time to relieve us and settle the controversie.<sup>19</sup>

### A 1631 coranto advertised on its title page

the great probability of the truth of the last Newes, being confirmed in this, (concerning the great overthrow given *Monsieur Tilly* at *New-Brandenburgh*) in a Letter from *Amsterdam*, of the 9. *ditto*, contrary to the groundlesse rumours since spread abroad, that they never met together, and that there [was] no such thing as the taking or retaking of that Towne.<sup>20</sup>

But how could one distinguish the true antidote of news from the latest whisper of false rumour?

Implicit in this question is a further one: what are our grounds for judging the credibility of the news? For we do not simply remain in doubtful suspense forever, of news, of information more broadly defined, or even of the most basic sensory impressions. Eventually we decide what news to believe. We come up with principles by which to weigh different pieces of information, and – most crucially – by which to decide between conflicting versions of the truth. By these principles we judge the credibility of news and decide whom we can trust to tell us the news. But the establishment and definition of these principles is not simply a matter of abstract, universal principle: these, too, are a matter of politics and power.

This argument is an extension of Shapin's. Shapin claims that truth is 'a matter of collective judgment'... stabilized by the collective actions which use it as a standard for judging other claims. In short, truth is a social institution.<sup>21</sup> This statement should be rephrased: our *apprehension* of the truth is patterned very considerably by our social institutions. But this proviso noted, Shapin's description of the way social patterning of our apprehension of the truth governed the operation of science in early modern England also describes the operation of news in early modern England. This is not entirely surprising: as Shapin comments, his study of scientific trust focuses largely on '*communications* about the world'.<sup>22</sup> That metaphor considered, the vocabulary (and character) of science does not map perfectly onto the vocabulary of news. In news the word is 'credibility', evoking a limited aspiration towards certainty, rather than science's more ambitious total aspiration towards 'truth'. Nevertheless, whether 'truth' or 'credibility', Shapin's definition works remarkably well.

### Focusing on Military News: A Justification

Early modern English news, without narrowing modifiers, would also be far too broad a subject for this study. Different subject matters lead naturally to different ways of telling the news, different political constraints, and to different standards of credibility; the transformation of the standards of credibility therefore affected each separate subject area of the news in different ways. A similar logic has, for example, led Peter Lake to write on the 'murder pamphlet', a small,

relatively homogenous genre of print culture.<sup>23</sup> I likewise focus on English-language military news, rather than on news writ large, so as to make a properly fine-grained analysis within one particular genre of news, as well as to keep this study to a manageable length.

This focus leads to an obvious question: why military news? But another question must be answered first: was there such a thing that can distinctly be termed military news? During England's decades of domestic peace between 1570 and 1637, military news was obviously part of foreign news; it was also (as will be shown) part of religious exhortation, balladry, family news, diplomatic information, propaganda, wrangles of honour and interest, and much more besides. Simply to say that military news exists distinctly, as an essential thing, is at once to call into question the grounds for saying so.

That such a thing exists is the simplest explanation for a variety of phenomena. In the first place, there are dozens of printed news pamphlets and corantos with titles, and subject matters, such as *A Plaine or Moste True Report of a Daungerous Service* (1580), *A True Discourse of an Overthrow Given to the Armie of the Leaguers* (1591), *A True Discourse of the Occurrences in the Warres of Savoy* (1601), *A True Relation of All Such Battailes as Have Beene Fought in the Palatinate* (1622), *A Historicall Relation of the Famous Siege of the Citie called the Busse* (1630), and *A True and Briefe Relation of the Famous Seige of Breda* (1637). Statistically, Streckfuss categorized 199 of 1,251 news pamphlets published between 1590 and 1610 under the category 'War'.<sup>24</sup> Parallel to these printed accounts are manuscript letters solely devoted to military news: these include reports with such titles, and subject matters, as 'The Winninge of Cales by the Earle of Essex', 'My Lord General Veres Relation of the Enterprise upon Terheyden May 1625', 'Account of the Expedition to the Isle of Rhe', and 'A Breefe Relatione of the Late Batle betweene the Duke of Saxony & the Emperor One the One Sid & the Sweade One the 26 September 1636'.<sup>25</sup> To these one should add manuscript accounts devoted solely to the account of a battle or campaign, though with no title at all.<sup>26</sup> One may add to these newsletters written in the 1590s found in the English government's archives. These also (if their titles may be trusted) concerned themselves solely with reports of military news. Such are the news reports Wernham labels 'Journal of proceedings in Brittany at the siege of Craon', 'The report of a boy of some late actions in Brittany', 'A particular of the estate of the army [in Brittany] and occurrences here', 'Note of Mansfelt's attempt to relieve Geertruidenberg', 'The taking of Doullens, in Picardy', and 'An Italian Report on the taking of Cadiz'.<sup>27</sup> Too many examples exist of news solely devoted to military affairs to regard military news simply as an attribute of some other form of news, or other essential category. It certainly can be regarded as an aspect of other essences, or be regarded in relation with other essences, but it is also a thing itself, and therefore susceptible to and worthy of study.

Once we accept the existence of military news, we must also note that it is a much broader category than the core of news reports composed simply of military news. Around this core are a great number of news reports that include military news, but are not solely devoted to it. Virtually all news reports dedicated to foreign news – from 1620 on, virtually all corantos – included sections about battles or campaigns, or at the very least skirmishes, in form nearly identical to the stand-alone military news reports. When they did not – often in winter, when armies rarely fought<sup>28</sup> – they usually reported the recruiting of new armies and the movements of existing ones, echoing the threat of war even where it did not immediately break out. Military news could also appear as part of a composite work – one section of a varied whole. Printed military news could be bound together with another piece of news, a military drill manual, an editorializing dialogue, a martyrdom account, or a prayer of thanksgiving.<sup>29</sup> Manuscript commonplace books similarly jumbled together military news with drill manuals, sermons, and other disparate material.<sup>30</sup> General newsletters included military news in a hodgepodge of foreign, court, and parliament news.<sup>31</sup> Private letters could shift from family news and gossip to battle accounts in the blink of an eye.<sup>32</sup> The ‘Advertisements’ received by the government came with a constant leaven of military news among them, regardless of their titles.<sup>33</sup> Sections, paragraphs, and sentences of military news are marbled throughout the news accounts of the era. Furthermore, the way that military news was communicated shifted in medium and genre during this period. Military news consisted not only of letters, manuscript newsletters, and printed pamphlets and corantos, but also of ballads, sermons, plays, bell-ringing, thanksgivings, visual spectacles, and whispered rumour. Military news developed from multiple ancestors, shifted in and out of several contemporary genres and media,<sup>34</sup> and produced a surprising variety of descendants. Its boundaries were expansive and fuzzy.

Yet for all its marbling and indefinite boundaries, military news remained a distinct form. Its scope can perhaps best be discerned by contemporaneous perceptions of it. Levy broadly divides early modern Englishmen’s perceptions of news into domestic news about ordinary men, domestic news about great men, and foreign news.<sup>35</sup> Of these three, military news was certainly a part of foreign news – but we may discern within this general perception of military news as part of foreign news a sense that military news was a thing itself. John Taylor wrote of an English audience with a clear idea of, and desire for, military news:

*And as for newes of battailes, or of War ...  
At Ordinaries, and at Barbers-shoppes,  
There tydings vented are, as thick as hoppes,  
How many thousands such a day were slaine,  
What men of note were in the battell ta’ne,  
When, where, and how the bloody fight begun,*

*And how such sconces, and such townes were won,  
How so and so the Armies bravely met,  
And which side glorious victory did get:  
The month, the weeke, the day, the very houre,  
And time, they did oppose each others power.<sup>36</sup>*

A 1630 coranto wrote simply that ‘most mens desire is to heare of [military] action.’<sup>37</sup> Contemporaries also had a fair idea of what was a battle, what a skirmish, and what was peace (or at least the absence of open conflict). Thomas Gainsford certainly knew what battles were, defining ‘set Battails’ as ‘one dayes tryall by equall agreement of both parties’, and carefully distinguishing between such set battles and the more usual sallies and skirmishes engaged in by the Turks and the Poles.<sup>38</sup>

And newswriters and newsreaders certainly knew what was *not* military news. In September 1591 Anthony Bagot wrote from Calais to his father Richard Bagot of a strenuous stretch of riding by Essex’s troops; there had been no fighting yet, but ‘the Barron Byron is marching towardes us with the King hys Campe at whose comynge we shall do somewhat.’<sup>39</sup> In March 1612 Dudley Carleton wrote from Venice to John Chamberlain, not of a full-scale battle, but merely of ‘some bickering of late at Zara betwixt the Venetian horse, which lie there in garrison, and the bordering Turks, wherein the captain of our horse was hurt and 40 Turks slain.’<sup>40</sup> A letter from Ratisbon printed in a 1632 coranto commented, laconically and dismally, that ‘all is indifferently quiet for the present. The March is up and downe, too and fro. The Souldiers daily ride a pillaging for bootie.’<sup>41</sup> Military news was perceived by men who knew the difference between peace and war; between everyday violence, skirmishes, and major battles; between the ordinary news of armies preparing for war and marching around the countryside and the extraordinary news of actual major combat; and discriminated among these concepts as they transmitted the news.

The repetition of a standard account of a battle in this period also establishes a norm of military news. In private letter, governmental letter, and printed account (see the Appendix) a battle happened at such a place and such a time. So many of the enemy were killed and so many were taken prisoner. Such and such notable incidents occurred. These three examples, albeit somewhat varied in their prose style, are concise versions of the standard news account of a battle – and in their concision not entirely representative of the genre. Nevertheless, military news would always bear a family resemblance, and fashion itself from these basic building blocks. These were the standards from which individual reports would deviate.

Military news existed; but why focus upon it? First, as has been noted above, it was a coherent, plentifully sourced genre of which a study can be made. Second, military news was a central component of the news writing and news reading

of the day. Military news was a spur to the production of news in general: an explosion of news pamphlets followed England's entry into the war with Spain in 1585, and the corantos were born as Europe descended into the Thirty Years' War. To study military news is to study the heart of the transformation of early modern news. Thirdly, English readers expressed continuous interest in military news throughout this period, and associated it with the constant context of international religious strife. These continuities of contemporaneous interest and conceptualization justify considering military news as a genre, and so justify brutally abstracting sources within the confines of a genre study. Fourthly, and most importantly, the nature of English military news peculiarly emphasized the difficulties of establishing sources of credibility.

Credibility was in any case a central concern in military news of the era: the Florentine diplomat Lorenzo Magalotti was driven to write that 'I think you know how difficult it is to discover the truth about a solitary battle that is no more than four leagues away from the court in which one writes'.<sup>42</sup> In the first place, battlefield news possessed intrinsic uncertainties. In 1596 at Cadiz Dr. Roger Marbeck wished he could report the good behaviour of all English participants, 'But for that I thincke yt an impossibilitie to be done because noe man livinge, can so preciselie observe such A matter where so greate danger is alwayes present to disturbe, and so many and divers intermedlinge to hinder everie particular observation'.<sup>43</sup> As a 1631 coranto put it, 'I beleeve and know, that of a Battle, and of the taking of a Towne in this manner all particularities cannot be knowne nor told by one man, how much soever he observe'.<sup>44</sup>

But for Englishmen the establishment of credibility was uniquely difficult, and uniquely central, to the military news. It was possible for Englishmen to verify most categories of news – the dying speeches of murderers, floods, two-headed babies, etc. – to some extent, either by talking with witnesses, or by comparing the reported events to similar events in their own experience. In the case of military news, however, this process of personal verification could not operate normally. For the two long generations before the Civil Wars brought battles back to English soil, most Englishmen learned about war as news from abroad. War in England itself was scarce: the country's wars were usually fought on foreign soil. However difficult it was for a Kentishman to verify news from Yorkshire, it was exponentially more difficult for any Englishman to verify news of a battle in Flanders – much less a battle in the Palatinate, or Mantua, or Poland. G. B. put it in *Newes out of France for the Gentlemen of England* (1591) that

the newes being not inacted in our own Countrey, comming from farre, as also wee our selves not present, or *oculati testes*, but relying on letters, bare reportes, and heresay, like *testes auriti*, wee must needs misse of much of the matter, & sometimes happily, (or rather unhappily) either in too much, or too little commit an absurditie.<sup>45</sup>

In 1623 Thomas Gainsford wrote that ‘what numbers of forces the Marquesse of *Jegevensdorff* now hath in the field, is not here certainly knowne; wee commonly from remote parts heare of many more, than they do there, for fame and snowballs encrease as they goe.’<sup>46</sup> As Girolamo Busoni noted, ‘the distance of the places and the lack of information gives journalists [*novellisti*] great freedom.’<sup>47</sup> Even the calendar was uncertain, as the Gregorian calendar spread patchily through Europe: ‘the difference of *stilo novo*, and *antiquo*’ made it difficult to date news, or to piece into a coherent narrative different reports from the same place.<sup>48</sup> In England, for decades separated by water from war, military news reports were the journalistic equivalent of what Shapin classifies as ‘travelers’ tales’: reports of events from an unknown land, transmitted by unknown men, whose trustworthiness could not be personally verified – yet some of whose reports had to be believed.<sup>49</sup>

But to an unusual extent, the grounds of belief could not be personal experience of any sort. One can compare a reported flood to a flood one has witnessed oneself – but how can one verify the likelihood of a report of a battle if one has never been in a battle? Few Englishmen were sufficiently martial or unfortunate to serve as soldiers, and the vast majority enjoyed the luxury of learning about war as a literary experience.<sup>50</sup> They read about the progress of wars; they read about the details of battles; they read treatises on tactics and strategy; they read about the mettle of a soldier’s mind; they read about the nature of battlefield experience itself. During England’s decades of peace, Englishmen’s experience of war came largely filtered through various sorts of texts.<sup>51</sup> As Anthony Nixon wrote in 1610, it

is now stil possible to call together 20000. of our english nation into one place, and amongst them all not to find or picke out one Souldier, when in other forren realmes (vext continually with uproares) it hath bin, and to this day is hard to call together 100000. and to cull out of them any other person but a Souldier.<sup>52</sup>

Unlike other Europeans, Englishmen, to an extraordinary extent, could only judge the words of military news in reference to other words, and not in reference to direct experience. The transformation of the standards of credibility within English military news can be examined particularly clearly because so few external credibility checks interfered with their operation.

### The Study’s Scope: Limits, Lacunae and their Consequences

This study largely limits itself to English-language sources. Partly this decision is to keep the numbers of sources under control: include source material in foreign languages, and the study would expand uncontrollably into a study of military news throughout Europe. In some ways, this is inescapably a distortion of the

truth: there *were* foreign-language news reports bring read in England. A good number of Englishmen were literate in foreign languages, particularly French, Italian, and Latin, and were reading news in those languages. In December 1590 Cecil received a paragraph of news of the French Civil Wars in French.<sup>53</sup> Between 1620 and 1622 Robert Bertie, Lord Willoughby, received at least three manuscript newsletters describing the wars in Europe written in French.<sup>54</sup> In April 1622 Mead referred to reading *Mercurius Gallobelgicus*; that same month he also received 'the Emperors Answer given to the Popes Nuncio' in Latin.<sup>55</sup> In September 1632 John Pory wrote to John Scudamore news of the siege of Maastricht in 'a note translated out of French'.<sup>56</sup> Contrariwise, English news reports were translated into foreign languages and entered continental news circuits. The Fuggers received a plentiful supply of news from and about England in the generation after 1570, largely via their agents in Antwerp. The Fugger newsletters included in their English news a large amount of specifically military news, including reports of the Hispano-Papal invasion of Ireland in 1580, of English fighting in the Netherlands in 1586–7, of the English invasion of Portugal in 1589, of English fighting in Brittany in 1591, of the 1596 conquest of Cadiz, and reports of English difficulties in Ireland in 1598–9.<sup>57</sup> We can talk of a separate English world of military news only by some falsifying simplification.

But falsified and simplified or no, there is still substantial truth to the idea of a separate English world of military news. Englishmen preferred to read news written by Englishmen, and the monolingual majority perforce read their military news in English. As a community of news writers and readers, reacting to the news and to each other's reactions to the news, their material was in English. They were not isolated from news in foreign languages – but the act of translation was an essential bridge to bring it into the community. If Joseph Mead read news in Latin, it is essential to note that he wrote to Martin Stuteville that 'because it was in Latin I gott a scribe this morning to write it in English according as I could read to him on the suddaine by that meanes I endeavored to make it the more easie for you to communicate'.<sup>58</sup> The great majority of letters of military news written by foreigners that entered the English news circuits appeared in print, translated and (where they were not already unknown) rendered anonymous by the London printers. The act of translation, recorded in scores of printed news reports, was an acknowledged, essential part of making a community of English-language military news. English military news was inseparable from its European sources – Englishmen probably read more military news written by continental Europeans than military news written by Scotsmen, Welshmen, or Irishmen. So the shadow of translation gave English military news an essential element of its character. Yet English military news remained distinct, by dint of this translation, and even more by dint of the fact that the manuscript news circuits (which retained superior credibility for much of this period) drew far more heavily on

purely English sources. The limitation of this study to English-language sources records a significant reality.

The distribution of military news reports reflected several main factors of supply and demand. Christian-Muslim conflict excited continuing interest, despite the remoteness of England from the front lines of religious war, and Englishmen's intra-Christian hostility to the Catholic protagonists of these reports. A steady trickle of military news came throughout this period from the bloody Christian-Muslim frontiers of Europe – Malta, Cyprus, Croatia, Vienna, Hungary, and Poland.<sup>59</sup> Dramatic battles at any distance were likely to engage some English interest, and a sporadic supply of reports of battles came from Geneva or Sweden or Russia.<sup>60</sup> News of interest to England's foreign suppliers of news was also overrepresented in England's news circuits: For a notable example, given the great influence of Dutch printers on English news, a very great number of Dutch exploits were either printed in England or printed in English in the Netherlands. *A True Report of All the Proceedings of Grave Mauris before the Towne of Bercke* (1601), printed in London from a Dutch translation, and other reports of Dutch feats in the Low Countries and nearer Germany probably also appealed to a genuine English interest, but Hendrik Cornelis Loncq's *A True Relation of the Vanquishing of the Towne of Olinda* (1630), printed in Amsterdam, about the Dutch capture of Pernambuco in Brazil, can hardly have been a subject of great concern to England. Availability of copy rather than intense demand probably best explains its publication in English.

But the strongest factor affecting the geographic distribution of these reports was English interest in and participation in wars abroad.<sup>61</sup> The wars Englishmen cared about and the wars Englishmen fought in – largely overlapping categories – were heavily overrepresented in the English news circuits. Partly this was a function of demand; partly it was a question of supply. A very large portion of letters about battles, and a large portion of printed accounts of battles, were provided by English participants writing home. So in the early period of this study, when England was slipping towards, or engaged in, open hostilities with Spain, a very large number of the reports concerned the wars in the Netherlands (broadly, 1566 to 1609, though with the heaviest interest from 1585 to 1604) and the civil wars in France (especially from 1589 to 1593). England was less directly engaged in the Thirty Years' War, but concern about the fortunes of the Protestant cause, and some participation by English and Scottish soldiers, maintained a significant level of interest. A considerable number of reports came from Englishmen serving in the Netherlands (1622–37) and the Palatinate (1621–2), and from Scots serving in the Swedish armies (especially 1629 to 1634). English dynastic and religious affections also brought in significant numbers of reports from Bohemia and Germany throughout the Thirty Years' War. Various English

expeditions throughout this period, including to Portugal in 1589, to Cadiz in 1596, and to Ré in 1627, also inspired numerous letters home by Englishmen.

It must be stated plainly that we will never have more than a hazy idea of who read military news. By its very nature, reading leaves less of an impress on the historical record than does writing. As Fritz Levy notes, there are no booksellers' inventories from the late 1580s to the early 1600s, and the surviving library inventories provide fragmentary information at best.<sup>62</sup> Heroic efforts have begun to give us something of a history of reading in early modern England, but these are most effective as microstudies of individual readers who happen to have left behind an unusually rich trove of evidence.<sup>63</sup> We have some equivalent information for readers of military news. Inventories taken in 1584 of the books owned by Francis, second Earl of Bedford reveal that he owned a fair number of news pamphlets, among them *A Discourse of the Present State of the Wars in the Lowe Countryes* (1578) and Thomas Churchyard's *A Scourge for Rebels ... Touching the Trobles of Ireland* (1584).<sup>64</sup> In October 1596 Thomas Cornwallis sent a letter to his London agent, John Hobart, thanking him for sending him a copy of *Mercurius Gallobelgicus*.<sup>65</sup> Morrill tells us that William Davenport, living in Cheshire, was part of a newsreading circle: Davenport probably never owned any news reports himself, but he possessed them long enough to write into his commonplace book reports of Mansfield's army in 1625, of Ré in 1627, and of Gustavus Adolphus's campaigns.<sup>66</sup> Family correspondence and a bookseller's bill from the 1630s reveal that Thomas Barrington read and/or ordered 'French curantoës' and *The Eighth Part of the Swedish Intelligencer*.<sup>67</sup> Atherton informs us that the papers of Viscount Scudamore (1601–71) contain over one thousand letters containing news, from at least forty-three correspondents, and include a great many news separates. Scudamore received news from professional news writers, government officials, and friends and family. He corresponded with several professional newsmongers, including John Pory and one Mr Tucker in the 1620s, although their reports do not survive.<sup>68</sup> A few notables, such as Henry Wotton, arranged for whole strings of foreign correspondents to write them foreign and military news, in essence reproducing on a small scale the arrangements of the English government.<sup>69</sup> Joseph Mead's decade-long series of newsletters to Martin Stuteville provide us an extraordinary mine of information about what military news these two men read. The diaries of Yonge, Rous, D'Ewes, Whiteway, and Crosfield (see below) are invaluable sources. But these pieces of the jigsaw puzzle are scarcely comprehensive, and cannot tell us about the English readership in general.

Sociable news (see below) was circulated amongst England's gentry: letters and manuscript newsletters seem to have been largely written by gentlemen (and some nobles and merchants) to other men of their same class. At any rate, these letters have come down to us in large numbers: poverty and illiteracy probably

limited the number of letters written by lower classes, but such letters as they wrote were also less likely to survive the test of time. The readers of manuscript military news, whether given or sold, we may generally also take to be gentlemen – but our evidence for gentry reading is largely drawn from a double-counting of the transmission of news writing (see below). Where letter writers were passing on news, rather than reporting eyewitness testimony, they logically were acting as news readers (or listeners) as well as news writers. To this we can add their comments in letters, diaries, etc. about their habits of newsreading and news-listening. The picture of a letter- and manuscript-newsreading group bound by class and social ties is moderately persuasive, if inevitably fuzzy and partial.<sup>70</sup>

But if there must be some doubt about this statement as it pertains to anonymous manuscript news separates, there is far more doubt as it pertains to printed military news. Printed military news was not expensive, it was not distributed socially, and it was perceived at the time as appealing to a broad, vulgar audience: therefore we may reasonably believe that it included a much broader readership (in social terms) than did manuscript military news. On the other hand, this perception should not be taken too far. As Frearson notes,

the corantos were intended for a more sophisticated audience. Unlike the news ballads, corantos were written in dense prose, tightly packed onto small quarto pages, without the relief of woodcut illustrations or ballad tunes to aid the semiliterate. The news was foreign, concerning distant places and unfamiliar figures, and involving complex reports of diplomatic and military affairs. Comprehension of coranto news depended on regular readership and the consistent purchase of weekly editions, priced at between twopence and threepence per copy. Thus although individual copies sold for about the same price as a couple of ballads, an almanac, or a chapbook, the corantos cost more than twelve shillings to buy in a complete series of fifty numbers. These factors remove the corantos from useful comparisons with the domestic news ballads and other forms of 'cheap print' designed for the lowest levels of the literate.<sup>71</sup>

Moreover, printed news reports explicitly addressed themselves to an audience of gentlemen. *Good News for the King of Bohemia?* (1622) addressed itself to the 'Gentle Reader', in a phrase that has come down to modern times.<sup>72</sup> This address was doubtless aspirational, as well as complimentary to an audience probably less gentle in fact. After all, *A Trumpet to Call Souldiers on to Noble Actions* (1627) addressed itself to 'Noble Souldiers, wishing you all no worse fortune in your Battailles, no no lesse fame, than here the Sweves have atchieved, I leave you to reade that which may serve as a patterne and president for all heroicall spirits to follow.'<sup>73</sup> The 'Noble Souldiers' of comfortable England doubtless thrilled to think of themselves as martial; but this is addressed to the ideal self-image of the audience, not to its actual characteristics. The same is very likely true of addresses to gentlemen. Still, we should not assume that the disjuncture of aspiration and

reality was total: could it have been an effective selling ploy if there were no actual gentle readers of printed military news? We may believe that military news remained moderately exclusive and was not read universally – perhaps not even by a majority of Englishmen.

That noted, the readership of corantos, and of military news in general, still included a remarkably broad section of Englishmen. It included all those below the official political nation who, inchoately, expressed their wish to influence policy by a keen reading of the news. In general, we believe that an extensive network of formal and informal postal carriers disseminated corantos and other written media of news from London to the farthest reaches of the country,<sup>74</sup> and that men and women of all classes and places inquired after the latest word from travellers of all sorts.<sup>75</sup> By at least the 1620s, literate Englishmen not only read the news themselves but also read the news out loud to their illiterate companions.<sup>76</sup> While the direct evidence we have of news reading is largely from the gentry classes, with occasional pieces of evidence from the merchant and artisan classes,<sup>77</sup> indirect evidence suggests (if it does not prove) a far wider readership of printed news.<sup>78</sup> The evidentiary basis is unpleasantly thin: still, it suggests we would be wiser to err in overestimating news readership than in underestimating it.

Yet we *do* have evidence for newsreading in this period. This study draws largely upon diaries, commonplace books, and letters of news written in England recording news from abroad. However, the number of surviving sources from which to draw a sense of how Englishmen read the news is lamentably small, heavily weighted towards Protestant English gentlemen, and disproportionately drawn from the 1620s and 1630s. As with many other studies of reading and reaction of this period, the names Chamberlain, Mead, Yonge, Rous, D'Ewes, Whiteway and Crosfield will recur frequently. This is not only an unrepresentative sample of Englishmen but also a familiar unrepresentative sample to specialists in the field. While the evidence drawn from this narrow basis remains significant, it must of course be taken as intrinsically tentative.

This study's evidence for newsreading relies heavily on a form of double-counting. Some sources – letters – are being taken both as evidence of newswriting and evidence of newsreading. To write the news is inevitably a register of having read (heard) the news, and, to some extent, a way of figuring out what newsreaders considered important. There is of course selection bias: this was only the news that newsreaders considered worth writing down, with their decision modified by a sense of their intended audience and their unintended audience (both censors and all the unknown public to whom a letter could be shown). But such newswriting remains a window into newsreading, although it must be interpreted cautiously.

To use such sources at all is in part the result of following the counsel of scarcity: our other sources are few and far between. Most diaries – to focus on a somewhat purer source – do not say much about military news; those that do are often not very revealing. In May 1622 Simonds D'Ewes wrote in his diary that 'the King of Bohemia was with Count Mansfield of which I speake the lesse, because I have the bookes.'<sup>79</sup> A few days later he added that 'I studied little and received much good newes concerning the King of Bohemia which I omitt because I have it.'<sup>80</sup> This tells us that he possessed books of news, and perhaps received other sorts of news as well: this is mildly informative, but, all in all, sentences of that nature are frustratingly circumspect. There is not enough evidence to address this subject without using these double-counted news letters.

But to use such newswriting as evidence of newsreading is also to recognize that in early modern England reading and writing the news were twinned activities: the news circuits required a mass of participants engaged in both. This certainly applied to the world of military news, where readers were expected to transmit the news in turn. As the author of *The True Reporte of the Skirmish* (1578) wrote, 'I praye you imparte these newes unto all our Country men.'<sup>81</sup> In June 1626 Viscount Scudamore wrote news to his great-uncle Rowland that largely duplicated the news he had just received from James Palmer, including Palmer's commentary.<sup>82</sup> Starting in 1620, Joseph Mead copied newsletters from London and sent on the copies to Martin Stuteville for more than a decade.<sup>83</sup> As friends engaged in sociability, and as active citizens (see below), news readers were expected to reciprocate one act of writing with another, to transmute reading into further writing. There was no terminal reader in the news circuits: the circuits were well-named, and involved endless and circuitous reading and writing. The use of news letters as twinned forms of evidence is in some ways faithful to this basic reality. This study still attempts to discriminate between evidence of writing and reading, but it does so knowing that this is neither entirely possible nor entirely desirable.

The temporal focus of this study, 1570 to 1637, crosses over several major inflection points in news history. England's entry into war with Spain in 1585 sparked a great upsurge in printed news, so great as to create in the early 1590s something approaching serial, periodical news.<sup>84</sup> In 1594 *Mercurius Gallobelgicus*, a Latin semi-annual publication printed in Cologne by Michael ab Isselt, first appeared; this is often called the first newspaper.<sup>85</sup> The newspaper quickly spread to much of Europe; *Gallobelgicus* was soon imitated in the Netherlands, Germany, France, Italy, and Spain.<sup>86</sup> Between 1618 and 1621 corantos appeared in the Netherlands, were translated for the English market, and began to be published by Englishmen themselves; these were, by many accounts, the first English newspapers. In 1632 corantos were banned: For the next six years only semi-annual intelligencers, only marginally news, and with pretensions to be regarded

as histories, provided foreign news in England.<sup>87</sup> I believe that the changes in credibility standards in the news correspond roughly with these inflection points: that is to say, ritual, honourable, and sociable credibility, corresponding with the dominance of rituals and letters of news, dominated before the upsurge of printed news in the 1580s; the intensive credibility of commercial and anonymous news, corresponding with the dominance of the printed news pamphlet, dominated between the 1580s and the 1610s; and the extensive credibility of commercial and anonymous news, corresponding with the dominance of the coranto, dominated in the 1620s and 1630s.

This study describes a transformation of news that in turn depends on a particular classification of news. In terms of medium, I divide the transmission of news into oral (conveyance of news by the spoken word), ritual (conveyance of news by sign or action, both individual and communal), written (conveyance of news by the written word), and printed (conveyance of news by the printed word). In terms of genre, I divide written and printed news into the sociable letter (conveyance of news within a written letter of personal communication), the separate (conveyance of news separated from personal communication, but generally communicated by sociable, written letter), the commercial manuscript newsletter (written, separate news, sold rather than communicated sociably), the news pamphlet (a sold, printed account of news, generally concerning one incident of news), and the coranto (a sold, printed newspaper, generally concerning all news received within a set period of time). My taxonomy, and my narrative of transformation from one mode of news to another, assume the existence of these particular categories, and have led me to categorize the different sorts of news within them. While I have tried to be sensitive to the possibility that individual pieces of news may blur or contradict these categories, the simple act of categorization inevitably oversimplifies the data. For reasons of space, I have also excluded genre categories such as the printed news ballad.<sup>88</sup>

Furthermore, the structure of this book is analytical and oversimplifies by classifying and sorting different texts by the mode of credibility they demonstrate. I do not mean to assert any simple evolution or to assert any lack of intermediary forms. Indeed, the rough chronological narrative for the credibility shifts analyzed in this study provided by the dates in the paragraph above should be taken as only the roughest of guides: quotations demonstrating each mode of credibility have, as much as possible, deliberately been drawn from each of these chronological periods, so as to emphasize their complicated overlap and interweaving. All these modes of credibility co-existed with one another; to say that the dominant mode of establishing credibility shifted is not to argue for cataclysmic, all-encompassing transformation, but to argue for a shift of emphasis among competing modes, amid continuities that stretched across these temporal inflection points and (to some extent) united these various media. For reasons

of space, I have not illustrated this point here, but I direct the reader to my previously published case study of the complex newsreading and newswriting practices of Joseph Mead.<sup>89</sup>

The overall temporal focus of this study provides the obvious potential to make more local arguments about the narrative of Elizabethan and early Stuart British political history – to claim that this shift in news credibility, itself the product of specific incidents and increasing tensions in British politics from the late sixteenth century on, in turn undermined royal authority over the communication of information, and took its place among the contributing causes to the collapse of the Stuart monarchy and the birth of a revolutionary English polity. More generally, this study may also be read to support and to modify the general arguments, whether Whig, Marxist or Habermasian, linking the early modern transformation of the news with the transformations of political culture, and eventually of regime, that led to the ultimate triumphs of liberal democracy. These arguments should be considered to be hovering in the background of this study, but only explicitly addressed by way of brief corollary in the conclusion. To tie my argument in this fashion to political history and political theory would require another study of equal length to make properly, and does not seem essential to prove or disprove this study's more narrowly focused thesis. A study tying the history of news credibility to the British political narrative, or to the emergence of the public sphere, would be worth undertaking, but is not undertaken here.

This study makes arguments about news as a whole based very largely on sources drawn from the specific genre of military news – indeed, I would like to stress again to the reader that this monograph does *not* address itself to any of the other genres of news. While I believe that the transformation of the standards of credibility also operated in the other genres of English news in this period, and that this work speaks more largely to early modern English (and European) news, I recognize that military news was not a genre that qualifies as a microcosm of the whole. Indeed, because it was uniquely unverifiable, it is in some ways *atypical* of English news: the very clarity the genre provides for issues of credibility marks it as an outlier among the news genres. The cautious reader is encouraged to take all narratives and interpretations offered here as applying only to military news; and to use it as an aide, not a model, for the study of other genres.

With these notes in mind, let us begin with an examination of oral news.