CHAPTER 8

Jonathan Swift’s Peace of Utrecht

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In January 1713, Jonathan Swift wrote to Archbishop William King of Dublin from London, acknowledging that ‘Some Accidents and Occasions have put it in my Way to know every step of this Treaty better, I think, than any Man in England.’\(^1\) Swift was referring to negotiations, under way since January 1712, which produced the Treaty of Utrecht in April 1713. The following year, Swift petitioned Queen Anne to warn her that, since proceedings ‘in relation to the peace and treaties’ were, however, ‘capable of being very maliciously represented to posterity,’ he hoped that she might appoint him to the post of Historiographer-Royal and thereby enable him to ensure ‘that the truth of things may be transmitted to future ages, and bear down the falsehood of malicious pens.’\(^2\)

As the essays in this volume vividly illustrate, international diplomacy had started to attract unprecedented levels of public interest by the early eighteenth century. As Swift acknowledged to King, in another letter of March 1713, it was indeed ‘a very new Thing among us,’ to have ‘every Subject interposing their Sentiments upon the Management of foreign Negotiations.’\(^3\) Moreover, Swift’s magniloquent claim to possess unparalleled knowledge of the political manoeuvring that underpinned the Treaty of Utrecht was asserted in his capacity as a polemical propagandist who remained in London whilst the diplomatic negotiations took place abroad. Accordingly, this essay examines the ways in which Swift sought to promote public acceptance of the controversial decision of Robert Harley’s Tory government to sue for peace against Britain’s traditional enemy, France, and end the War of the Spanish Succession. In doing so, it emphasizes the phenomenal influence of Swift’s polemical pamphlet, *The Conduct of the Allies* (1711), whilst also exploring arguments advanced in his lesser-known *History of the Four Last Years of the Queen*, which he wrote between September 1712 and May 1713, though the *History* remained unpublished at the time of Swift’s death in 1745. The manuscript was acclaimed,

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however, by his friend, John Boyle, earl of Orrery, in 1752 as ‘the clearest account of the treaty of Utrecht, that has hitherto been written’ and, six years later, Swift’s History was published for the first time. Whilst The Conduct of the Allies sought to vindicate the Tory ministry’s actions and enjoyed sensational commercial success and polemical purchase, Swift’s attempt to supply an ostensibly objective account of the treaty negotiations in his History quickly became an awkward and anachronistic liability for the Tory ministers that had instigated peace negotiations. For his part, Swift’s keen interest in writing about the Peace of Utrecht became inextricably related to his hopes for personal and professional preferment that were ultimately frustrated when Swift reluctantly left London for Dublin as the newly-appointed Dean of St Patrick’s Cathedral in June 1713 and failed to secure appointment as Historiographer-Royal the following year.

**Swift’s Case for Making Peace**

On 27 November 1711, Swift’s tract entitled The Conduct of the Allies, and of the late Ministry in beginning and carrying on the Present War was published anonymously and sold prodigiously. Within two days, a second edition was printed but sold out within five hours, and, appearing in six editions, more than 11,000 copies had been sold by the end of January 1712. The day after its first publication, Swift related in his Journal to Stella that various people had ‘advised me to read it, for it was something very extraordinary’ and, two days later, gratifyingly confirmed that ‘the pamphlet makes a world of noise, and

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4 John Boyle, Remarks on the Life and Writings of Dr. Jonathan Swift, by John, Earl of Orrery (Dublin: Dean of St. Patrick’s, 1752), 327.