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Chapter 6

“On the Behalf of the Printers”

A Late Stuart Printer-Author and Her Causes

PAULA MCDOWELL

“**W**HOWER IS for making Printing a Free Trade are Enemies to God, their King, and their Country.” So declared the printer-author Elinor James (c. 1645–1719) in her petition *To the Honourable House of Commons. Gentlemen, Since You have been pleased to lay such a heavy Tax upon Paper*, n.d. (c. 1696–8), a broadside that she not only printed but also wrote and distributed herself. James in fact wrote and printed more than ninety broadsides and pamphlets over a period of at least thirty-five years from 1681 to 1716. A self-educated tradeswoman with a press in her own home, she addressed print trade issues such as the economic *disadvantages* of a free press, labor relations in printing houses, and the infringement of what we would now call “copyrights.” She advised City of London leaders on issues such as the enforcement of City by-laws, and she routinely printed her opinions on the major national political events of her time. (In 1689, she was arrested, tried, and fined for “dispersing scandalous and reflecting papers” condemning William III for accepting the English crown.)¹ Satirized as “London City-Godmother,” this self-appointed spokesperson for her trade nevertheless declared proudly in *Mrs. James’s Advice to all Printers*, n.d. (c. 1715), “I have been in the element of Printing above forty years, and I have a great love for it, and am a well-wisher to all that lawfully move therein, and especially to you that are masters.”²

In her pioneering study of the advent and implications of printing in early modern western Europe, Elizabeth L. Eisenstein explains her decision to focus

1. Narcissus Luttrell, *A Brief Historical Relation of State Affairs from September 1678 to April 1714* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1857), 1:617. For further information, see Paula McDowell, *The Women of Grub Street: Press, Politics, and Gender in the London Literary Marketplace 1678–1730* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), and McDowell, ed., *The Early Modern Englishwoman: Essential Works: Elinor James* (Aldershot, Hants.: Ashgate, 2005).

2. Reprinted in John Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century*, 9 vols. (London, 1812–6), 1: 306–7. This broadside does not appear to have survived in the original.

on the larger social and cultural consequences of printing rather than on the human agents involved:

I would have liked to underline the human element in my title by taking the early printer as my ‘agent of change.’ But although I do think of certain master printers as being the unsung heroes of the early-modern era and although they are the true protagonists of this book, impersonal processes involving transmission and communication must also be given due attention. In the end, practical considerations became paramount. I decided that cataloguing would be simplified if I referred to the tool rather than its user.³

While Eisenstein chose not to focus on “the human element” in printing, scholars have since agreed that we know far too little about the men and women who manufactured printed texts and about their understandings of printing as a social force. This essay contributes to what Adrian Johns has recently heralded as a “new historical understanding of print”⁴ by introducing a new source for publishing historians: Elinor James’s broadsides addressing print trade issues between c.1695 and c.1715. James routinely petitioned the Houses of Lords and Commons concerning bills and legislation affecting her trade, and, as we have seen in her *Advice to all Printers*, she also petitioned her peers in the trade. Her petitions shed new light on the British book trade at a key transitional period in its history: one that saw the end of official prepublication censorship in 1695, the first copyright statute enacted in 1710, and the consolidation of important ongoing shifts in the organization and economics of the trade. One of only a few early modern printers who were also prolific authors (others include Benjamin Franklin and Samuel Richardson), James provides us with an insider’s view of the printing house and the political and economic factors—and human personalities—that affected it. While the extant originals of her broadsides and pamphlets are widely dispersed in archives throughout Great Britain and North America, the inaugural collection and reprinting of known texts as of 2005⁵ has recently made facsimiles available to scholars of political, economic, and publishing history, and further archival discoveries are likely to result from wider recognition of this outspoken female printer-author as a figure worthy of our attention.

3. Eisenstein, *PPAC*, xv.

4. Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998), 28.

5. McDowell, *Elinor James*.

“A Mad Woman . . . at the Doors of the House of L[or]ds & Commons”

Elinor Banckes James was married in 1662 at “about seventeen years”⁶ to the twenty-six-year-old journeyman printer Thomas James, who set up as a master printer in about 1675. She worked alongside her husband for thirty-five years, then succeeded him as head of the business in 1710. Upon her death in 1719, her property passed to her eldest daughter, Jane James Ilive (1670–1733), who later succeeded her own husband, Thomas Ilive, then passed down the business to their son Jacob. In 1705, the bookseller John Dunton described Elinor James’s husband as “a competent printer and well-read man” but added that he was “something the better known for being husband to that *She-State Politician* Mrs. *Elianor* [sic] *James*.”⁷ As the great-grandson of Thomas James, the first Bodleian librarian, Thomas James Jr. was perhaps most notable for having possessed an extraordinary inherited library of some three thousand books. Yet there is little evidence that his wife had access to these books during his lifetime, and indeed, his will specifies that she should inherit the printing house only on two conditions: first, that “no part of my Library of Books . . . be taken by my said Wife,” and second, that “she dos [sic] not molest my Executors in the Execution of this my Will.”⁸ Yet Elinor James somehow managed to gain control of her husband’s books after his death, and she chose to donate them to Sion College Library.⁹ She also donated a striking portrait of herself labeled “Eleonora *Conjux Thomae James*,” which may have been painted on the occasion of her great bequest (fig. 6.1). This portrait shows her holding a magnificent book (most likely the “Sion College Book of Benefactors 1629–1888,” which records her bequest in detail) and displaying one of her own works, *Mrs. James’s Vindication of the Church of England* (1687).¹⁰

The concerns that James expresses in her broadsides demonstrate her hands-on familiarity with the printing business. In her *Advice to all Printers*,

6. Corporation of London, Guildhall Library, MS 10,091/26, marriage license of Thomas James and Elinor Banck(e)s, October 27, 1662.

7. Dunton, *The Life and Errors of John Dunton Citizen of London*, 2 vols. (London, 1705; repr., New York: Burt Franklin, 1969) 1:252–3.

8. London, National Archives, PROB 11/515, fols. 148v–149v, will of Thomas James, proved May 9, 1710.

9. These books, forming the “Thomas James Library,” are now housed at Lambeth Palace Library, London.

10. The Benefactors Book, now catalogued as the “Sion College Book of Benefactors 1629–1888” (London, Lambeth Palace Library, MS L40.2/E.64), lists by title and size each of the thousands of books that James donated. Sample pages are reproduced in McDowell, *Elinor James*, 290–3.

for instance, she complains of apprentices “flinging their houses into pie”—that is, “pieing” their type, or upsetting the wooden “houses,” or typecases, in which printers stored their fonts. As the mistress of a printing house, she almost certainly oversaw the printing of her own texts if she did not physically print them. While one of her earliest extant works shows the imprint “Printed by *Tho. James* at the *Printing-press* in *Mincing-Lane*. 1682,”



Fig. 6.1. “*Eleonora Coniux Thomae James*,” n.d. [c. 1711], painting. Artist unknown. Reproduced by permission of the National Portrait Gallery, London.

the majority show her name in imprints or do not have imprints. For her, a formal imprint was redundant, because she typically signed her papers with the phrase, “Your Soul’s Well-Wisher, Elinor James,” and she often gave them titles such as *Mrs. James’s Advice*, *Mrs. James’s Reasons*, or *The Petition of Elinor James*.

James’s broadsides are best understood in the context of early modern petitioning. Petitions were formal requests for favors or redress of grievances addressed to monarchs, members of Parliament, and other public bodies and private individuals. In England, petitioning was a right theoretically available to the meanest subject.¹¹ James intended her petitions as interventions in particular political crises and legislative debates. Timing was more important to her than aesthetics, and she shows little interest in writing for posterity or cultivating a reputation as an author. As a petitioner with a press in her own home, James could produce her petitions more rapidly than most. On at least one occasion, she responded—in print—to parliamentary debates within less than twenty-four hours, as the phrase “Yesterday . . . I did hear” in one of her petitions suggests.¹²

James addressed her petitions chiefly to three different groups: six successive monarchs (Charles II, James II, William and Mary, Anne, and George I), the Houses of Lords and Commons, and the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of the City of London. Petitioners often tried to gain an audience with the addressees of their papers, and James preferred to distribute her petitions herself. She describes delivering the first of her numerous petitions to Charles II in about 1671 or 1672 and she claims to have obtained audiences with James II and William III.¹³ Most of her extant petitions, however, are addressed to the Houses of Lords and Commons. For thirty-five years, she petitioned Parliament on average *at least once a year*. The essence of parliamentary petitioning was attendance in person at the doors or lobby of the Houses of Parliament, and James appears to have done considerable “lobbying” of her own, for a manuscript notation on one of her broadsides in what looks like a contemporary hand describes her as “A Mad Woman who used to attend at the Doors of the House of Lds & Commons.”¹⁴

11. On petitioning conventions, see David Zaret, *Origins of Democratic Culture: Printing, Petitions, and the Public Sphere in Early-Modern England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000).

12. *I Can assure Your Honours, that I have always been for the Peace of King and Kingdom*, n.d. (1698 or 9).

13. For further discussion of these claims, see McDowell, intro., *Elinor James*.

14. This copy of *June the 21th 1715. Mrs. James’s Reasons, to the Lords Spiritual and Temporal*, currently housed at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas, Austin (shelfmark Ak.J232+715m), is reproduced in McDowell, *Elinor James*, 223.

“An Art and Mistry that ought . . . not to be made . . . common”

The period of James's career was a decisive one in the history of the British book trade. In 1695, the Printing or Licensing Act of 1662 (14 Charles II, cap. 33) was allowed to lapse for good, ending prepublication censorship and government restrictions on the number of printers and presses throughout England. Printing was no longer confined to London, York, and the two university towns, and controls on the importation of books were relaxed. Today we understand this event as a landmark in the history of freedom of the press, but to James it was at once unexpected and undesired. Parliament had tried to revive licensing in 1695 but failed to agree on specifics before the end of the session. At least eight further bills would be introduced over the next decade, but none would become law.¹⁵ It is important to note, however, that although most stationers wished for licensing to be revived, many (including James) argued against the particular bill put forward in 1695. For while this bill revived prepublication licensing, it made no mention of the ancient privileges of the Stationers' Company (particularly the right to control the registration and ownership of copies) or of any need to restrict the number of printers. For the first time in English history, the printing trade was opened to all.

James argued in support of licensing in numerous petitions, most notably *Mrs. James's Application To the Honourable the Commons Assembled in Parliament, On the behalf of the Printers*, n.d. (c. 1695) (fig. 6.2); *Mrs. James's Reasons that Printing may not be a Free-Trade; because it is not for the Peace of the Kingdom, nor the Good of the People*, n.d. (c. 1695–1702); and *To the Honourable House of Commons. Gentlemen, Since You have been pleased to lay such a heavy Tax upon Paper*, n.d. (c. 1696–8). The sweeping omissions in the 1695 bill help to explain her tone of astonishment here:

I Can assure Your Honours, I could not have thought that any one could have dared to have given such a Bill against Printing (till I saw the *Printers Reasons*). Sure it must be a **Fire-brand** of Hell that presumed it? For it wholly aims at the ruin of *Printers, Book-sellers* and *Stationers*; and it is as if they designed to destroy the whole Nation: Indeed the *Messenger* that preferr'd this unreasonable Bill told me, *That he would hang up half the Printers*, and at this rate he may hang them all. (*On the behalf of the Printers*)

15. John Feather, “The Book Trade in Politics: The Making of the Copyright Act of 1710,” *Publishing History* 8 (1980): 19–44; and *A History of British Publishing* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 73. See also Raymond Astbury, “The Renewal of the Licensing Act in 1693 and Its Lapse in 1695,” *The Library*, 5th ser., 33 (1978): 296–322. John Feather, in *Publishing, Piracy, and Politics: An Historical Study of Copyright in Britain* (London: Mansell Publishing, 1994), provides a table titled “Book trade bills 1695–1710” (table 2.1) and notes that there were “fifteen [bills] in all between 1695 and 1714, which, in one form or another, sought to regulate the affairs of the book trade” (51).

Mrs. JAMES's Application
To the HONOURABLE the
COMMONS
Asssembled in PARLIAMENT,
On the behalf of the PRINTERS.

I Can assure Your Honours, I could not have thought that any one could have dared to have given such a Bill against Printing (till I saw the *Printers* Reafons) Sure it must be a **fire-brand** of Hell that presumed it? For it wholly aims at the ruin of *Printers*, *Book-sellers* and *Stationers*; and it is as if they designed to destroy the whole Nation: Indeed the *Messenger* that prefer'd this unreasonable Bill told me, *That he would hang up half the Printers*, and at this rate he may hang them all. For,

I. What an unreasonable thing it is to expose Printing? That any one may Work at it, that have not served an Apprentiship to it. When,

II. There is not half Employ for them that are already, and a great many are gone off for want of Employment.

III. And for the most part of those Journey-men that do remain, when they come to be Sick they cannot support themselves, but are forced to have a gathering in their own Trade, which is but small Relief for a Sick Man and his Family; besides it is a great shame, since they have so many Privileges to keep them from want (if the Company of *Stationers* did not detain them) that they might live like Men and be happy.

IV. The spreading of Printing over the whole Kingdom, will Ruin the *Book-sellers*, for no Man will send to *London* for Books, if he can have the Privilege of Printing them, and any Book that sells most, they will Print, not regarding any Mans Right, tho' sometimes the Copy cost the *Book-seller* a great deal of Money; Besides the hazard of Printing, which if they fell not their Impressions off, it would be their great loss; so by this means the *Book-seller* will lose his Countrey Trade, and by consequence have little employ for the *Printer*.

V. As for bringing Books from Forreign Parts ready Printed, it will destroy both *Printers*, *Book-sellers* and *Stationers*, besides the unavoidable inconveniency of Importing Treason.

I don't doubt but when Your Honours considers the ill Consequences of this *BILL*, but that you will abhor it, and sling it out: And if Your Honours will Establish Printing right, according to *Acts of Parliament* on that behalf provided,

I. That there shall be but Twenty-four Master *Printers*, besides the KING's *Printers*.

II. That the greatest of them should have no more than Three Apprentices at a time, and others less.

III. That they should employ none but Free-men, and their Privileges was to have Copy Money and Holy-days: But by the Multiplication of *Printers*, they Under-work the Trade so much, that the Master cannot afford to give it as formerly. For indeed the Master *Printers* by this means becomes Slaves to the *Book-sellers*, fearing to offend them, least they should have no Work at all. I can assure Your Honours, it is not self-interest, but the Publick Good, and the Peace of the Kingdom, and the great love I bear to Justice and Equity, that moves me to trouble Your Honours in this matter.

And I humbly beseech Your Honours (since the most High GOD hath given you Power) to Redress the great Grievances of the *Printers*; seeing the Company of *Stationers*, have all the Copys that belongs to *Printers* divided among themselves, which are very considerable, and were given for their Incouragement because they were confin'd from setting up. And if Your Honours would vouchsafe to Order the Company of *Stationers* to restore their Copys (or make better Provision for them) which they cannot justly deny, then will You be like *Mordecai*, that saved his People from Ruin and Destruction.

And by doing good and settling the *Printing-Trade*, Your Honours will secure the Peace of this Kingdom, and there's none will presume to go into holes and corners to Print Treason: But these that are here will admire Your Honours, and the Generations to come will be bound to bless GOD for You, and Your Memories will be precious.

And the Most High God grant that you may not only be precious to Men, but that you may find favour before GOD, and be eternally happy. Which is the desire of your Humble Servant and Souls-well-Wisher,

ELIANOR JAMES.



Fig. 6.2. Mrs. James's Application To the Honourable the Commons, n.d. (c. 1695). Reproduced, by permission, from the copy in The Crawford (Bibliotheca Lindesiana) Collections at the National Library of Scotland (shelfmark Crawford MB 694).

James saw the 1695 bill as “against Printing” because it lifted restrictions on printing that helped to ease chronic unemployment for printers and journeymen. As she explained: “There is not half Employ for them that are already, and a great many are gone off for want of Employment. . . . And for the most part of those Journey-men that do remain, when they come to be Sick they cannot support themselves, but are forced to have a gathering in their own Trade.” She advised members of Parliament: “if Your Honours will Establish Printing right, according to *Acts of Parliament* on that behalf provided,” there should be “but Twenty-four Master *Printers*, besides the KING’s *Printers*. . . . the greatest of them should have no more than Three Apprentices at a time, and others less” (*On the behalf of the Printers*). Multiplying printers would have dire economic and ideological consequences, for recurring unemployment meant that some desperate printers would be tempted to break the law: “great Numbers of Printers must needs be very destructive to the Kingdom; by reason all that set up take Apprentices, and then their Necessity makes them do any thing that offers to Employ them” (*That Printing may not be a Free-Trade*). If a limited number of printers could make an honest living, then none would find it necessary to “go into holes and corners to Print Treason” (*On the behalf of the Printers*). Accordingly, James urged, “I would have Printers to have full Employ, for that is the only way to make them honest and above Temptations” (*Such a heavy Tax upon Paper*).

Recalling the royal charter of incorporation granted to the Stationers’ Company by Queen Mary I in 1557 and confirmed by Queen Elizabeth in 1558, with its frequent references to the “Mistery or Art of Stationery,”¹⁶ James suggested that printing should not be a “Free-Trade” because it was not really a “trade” at all. She urged: “Printing is not a Trade as other Trades are, but it is an Art and Mistery that ought . . . not to be made so common, as that it should be slighted and trampled under Foot” (*Such a heavy Tax upon Paper*). In her view, the crown had granted the stationers corporate legal status with the understanding that they would limit their own numbers for the good of the nation: “for as [printing] is an Art that may do much good, so it may be injurious and destructive; and Queen *Elizabeth*’s Princely Wisdom foresaw the Evil, and therefore restrain’d their Number, knowing that was the only way to secure Her Government, and keep Her Kingdom in Peace” (*Such a heavy Tax upon Paper*).¹⁷ In return for their privileges, the stationers were bound to the crown by ties of fidelity and service—that the govern-

16. The Stationers’ Company Charter is reprinted in Edward Arber, ed., *A Transcript of the Registers of the Company of Stationers of London; 1554–1640 A.D.*, 5 vols. (London: privately printed, 1875–94), 1:xxviii–xxxii.

17. An ardent Protestant who idolized Queen Elizabeth, James tends to erase Queen Mary I, a Catholic, from the history of the granting of the charter.

ment in 1695, James warned, now threatened to undermine. Prepublication licensing should be revived, for “there’s not any thing can corrupt the Minds of the generality of the People more than Vain Books and Pamphlets” (*That Printing may not be a Free-Trade*). The stationers themselves could not be entrusted to censor the press, for they could not be disinterested judges in these matters: “As to Things relating to Church and State, neither Booksellers nor Printers are sufficient Judges; for they depend one upon another; therefore it must be done by a Power above them” (*That Printing may not be a Free-Trade*). Finally, for both economic and ideological reasons, controls on the importation of books must be reintroduced: “As for bringing Books from Forreign Parts ready Printed, it will destroy both *Printers, Book-sellers* and *Stationers*, besides the inavoidable inconveniency of Importing Treason” (*On the behalf of the Printers*). For all of these reasons and more, James expressed her desire that Parliament would revive some version of the Licensing Act but not pass the inadequate bill put forward in 1695: “I don’t doubt but when Your Honours considers the ill Consequences of this *BILL*, but that you will abhor it, and fling it out” (*On the behalf of the Printers*).

“Slaves to the *Booksellers*”: Copyright and the Consolidation of Capital

Since the incorporation of the Stationers’ Company in 1557, the printers’ power and status within the company had substantially declined. While one central concern of James’s trade petitions is the need to revive licensing, another is the changing relationship between printers and booksellers, and specifically, what she saw as the role played by the major booksellers’ accumulation of copyrights in the deterioration of the printers’ status. James frequently addressed issues of copyright in a variety of contexts. In arguing against the lifting of restrictions on the number of printers, for instance, she informed Parliament that the spread of printing beyond London would dramatically increase the infringement of these “Right[s]”:

The spreading of Printing over the whole Kingdom, will Ruin the *Book-sellers*, for no Man will send to *London* for Books, if he can have the Privilege of Printing them, and any Book that sells most, they will Print, not regarding any Mans Right, tho’ sometimes the Copy cost the *Book-seller* a great deal of Money. (*On the behalf of the Printers*)

The geographical spread of printing would make restitution for stolen property even more difficult to obtain: “Printers having the Liberty to set up in every Corporation, the Bookseller being at a great distance will not be sensible presently, but when he does know what Restitution can be made, they

can never recover the damage” (*Such a heavy Tax upon Paper*). “Booksellers and others” needed to have their “Propriety” protected,

for their Copies is their cheif [*sic*] Support, and they have as much Right to them as any Man that Builds a House and pays the Workman for Building it. And when Printers are set up and have Apprentices, they will not regard any Man’s Propriety, but if there be any Saleable Books, they will Print them for their own Support. (*Such a heavy Tax upon Paper*)

As her phrasing here suggests, in her writings about copyright James tended to represent bookseller-publishers as proto-capitalist employers and printers as their vulnerable “Workm[e]n” (rather than as the dignified custodians of an ancient “Art and Mistry” entrusted to them by the queen). The infringement of rights to copies, she stated, hurt printers not because printers owned major copies but because the major copy-holders, the booksellers, would “lose [their] Countrey Trade, and by consequence have little employ for the *Printer*” (*On the behalf of the Printers*). In James’s view, the most pressing problem with copyright in her time was not the occasional infringement of these rights by needy printers but the systematic concentration of copies in the hands of a small number of powerful booksellers. By the early seventeenth century, booksellers had already become the major copy-holders, but in the eighteenth century there was an even greater concentration of capital—thus giving James the impression that “the Company of *Stationers*, have all the Copys that belongs to *Printers* divided among themselves” (*On the behalf of the Printers*). Looking back to what she saw as the halcyon days of the incorporation of the Stationers’ Company, she suggested that the sovereign originally granted printing privileges to printers in return for their limiting their own numbers: “the Copys that belongs to *Printers*” were “given for their Incouragement because they were confin’d from setting up” (*On the behalf of the Printers*). Concerned that the booksellers were gaining far too much control, James worked to clarify for members of Parliament the relationship between the printers and the other stationers:

Booksellers and Stationers should not directly, nor indirectly, set up Printing-Houses; for indeed, the Printer has nothing to live upon but his Printing, when Booksellers and Stationers have their several Employments to live on: Printing indeed, is part of the Booksellers Business, so far as to Employ the Printer; but Stationers have nothing to do with Printing. (*That Printing may not be a Free-Trade*)

James urged Parliament to “Order the Company of Stationers to restore [the printers’] Copys (or make better Provision for them).” She also noted that lift-

ing restrictions on the number of printers would benefit only booksellers, not printers: “the Master *Printers* by this means becomes Slaves to the *Book-sellers*, fearing to offend them, least they should have no Work at all” (*On the behalf of the Printers*).

Although today it is commonly suggested that the eighteenth-century struggle over copyright was “essentially . . . a battle between two groups of booksellers,”¹⁸ James’s writings on copyright remind us just how intimately this battle affected diverse sectors of the trade. In her view, these struggles were about the evolution of relationships among a wide number of groups (printers vs. booksellers, London-based vs. provincial booksellers, and so on). At the same time, though, it is significant that despite her awareness of the number of groups affected, James only once mentions the writers of texts, and she never actually uses the word or employs the concept of an “author.” As historians of copyright have observed, the first modern copyright law, the Statute of Anne (8 Anne cap. 19), legally empowered authors by recognizing them as possible proprietors of their works, yet the most powerful players in copyright debates, the booksellers, employed the concept of “author’s rights” chiefly to protect their own property. James argued that the increased infringement of copyrights due to the multiplication of printers “will make the Bookseller afraid to buy any Copies, and so Ingenius [*sic*] Men that might do the Nation good, will be discouraged for Writing, by reason no man [i.e., Bookseller] will care to buy, because he cannot call it his own” (*Such a heavy Tax upon Paper*). As this quotation suggests, a more urgent issue for her than the rights of “Ingenius Men” was the readiness of booksellers to buy copies and finance their printing. The writers of texts were thus in no better or worse situation than their printers: both were at the mercy of a small number of major property-owners who had the capital to finance the printing of texts — just as “any Man that Builds a House and pays the Workman.”

Paper Taxes and Printing-House Practices

By 1705, “the revival of licensing in its old form was a dead issue,”¹⁹ and the government was looking for new ways to control the press. Between 1690 and 1713, a need to finance almost continuous foreign wars led to the introduction of new taxes on domestic and imported paper and the first-ever taxes on

18. Mark Rose, *Authors and Owners: The Invention of Copyright* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1993), 4.

19. Feather, *History of British Publishing*, 85.

certain classes of printed matter.²⁰ Well into the eighteenth century, England was still heavily reliant on continental sources for high-quality paper. While the cheaper grades of brown paper could be manufactured domestically, white paper required expensive linen rags, and as James informed Parliament, “the *English Paper Makers cannot make Paper so Good, nor so Cheap; neither can they make enough; for they have not the Linnen-rags here, as they have in those Countries with whom we deal for Paper, by reason we consume not so much Linnen, as they do.*”²¹ In 1696, Parliament passed a bill taxing both domestic and imported paper for a term of two years, from March 1, 1696/7 to March 1, 1698/9 (Stat. 8 & 9 Wm. III, cap. 7, “An Act for granting to His Majesty several Duties upon Paper Vellum and Parchment”). There was a great deal of pamphleteering both at the passing of this act and later when the government tried to renew it, for paper was an enormous expenditure for printers. James protested against paper taxes in *To the Honourable House of Commons. Gentlemen, Since You have been pleased to lay such a heavy Tax upon Paper*, n.d. (c. 1696–8); *To the Honourable House of Commons. May it please your Honours, Seriously to consider, That Trade is the Life of the Nation*, n.d. (1701 or 1702); and *March 7. 1702, To The Honourable House of Commons*. In c. 1696–8, she expressed her astonishment at the government’s actions: “Gentlemen, Since you have been pleased to lay such a heavy Tax upon Paper, as the like was never known” (*Such a heavy Tax upon Paper*). In c. 1702 when the government considered reviving the two-year tax, she observed, should “this Paper Act pass, . . . it will destroy the Booksellers, Stationers, and Printers, that I have a kindness for . . . it will be a continual Grief to me to hear their Complaints, which the dearness and scarceness of Paper will occasion” (*Trade is the Life of the Nation*). She acknowledged Parliament’s need to raise revenue to support the war, yet she took every opportunity to remind Parliament that the earlier paper tax had failed miserably to serve this purpose. As an act of 1702 pointed out, the 1696 “Act for granting . . . Duties upon Paper Vellum and Parchment” had proved wholly “insufficient to satisfie all the Monies which were borrowed upon Credit of that Act.”²² James observed “how prejudicial the Taxe [*sic*] upon Paper was, and how little Advantage it brought to the Kingdom” (*Trade is the Life of the Nation*). Reviving this tax would “prove utter ruin to a great many; for it will undo the Stationers,

20. See John Bidwell, “French Paper in English Books,” in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, vol. 4, 1557–1695, ed. John Barnard and D. F. McKenzie, with the assistance of Maureen Bell (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), 583–601; D. C. Coleman, *The British Paper Industry 1495–1860: A Study in Industrial Growth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958); and Rupert C. Jarvis, “The Paper Makers and the Excise in the Eighteenth Century,” *The Library*, 5th ser., 14 (1959): 100–16.

21. *March 7. 1702, To The Honourable House of Commons*.

22. 1 Anne, cap. 7: “An Act for making good Deficiencies & for preserving the Publick Credit.”

Booksellers, Printers, Book-binders, and Paper-makers, &c. who already have been great Sufferers” (*Trade is the Life of the Nation*). Paper taxes were unpatriotic, giving an additional advantage to Continental paper makers on whom England already relied: “what have we to do with the Dutch, for to destroy ourselves, to promote their Interest?” (*Trade is the Life of the Nation*). Instead of introducing new taxes, the government should “study to promote Trade, that the People may be able to live and pay the Taxes” (*Trade is the Life of the Nation*). Rather ingeniously, James concluded one petition by suggesting that Parliament tax men’s wigs instead of paper: “I don’t doubt but your Honours Wisdom will find out a more easier way. . . . For what if your Honours laid Six pence upon every Perewigg [*sic*], this will raise a great deal of Money, and it will not undoe any Man” (*Trade is the Life of the Nation*).

In 1711 and 1712, acts were passed imposing duties on certain classes of printed matter (stat. 9 Anne cap. 23 and 10 Anne cap. 19). The so-called Stamp Taxes were yet another effort to raise revenue after nearly twenty years at war, but it may also have been hoped that these new taxes would help to control the press. In January 1712, Queen Anne asked Parliament to consider remedies to the licentiousness of the press, and that spring, the crown prosecuted a succession of libel cases. James seized this opportunity to suggest her own remedy to this problem. In *March 27th 1712. To the Honourable House of Commons. The Grief of Elenor James*, she acknowledged that “the Printers Sins has been very great” yet expressed her hope that the government “would punish the Guilty, and let the Innocent go free.” Reiterating a theme of her earlier petitions, the relationship between unemployment and a temptation to break the law, she proposed that the Queen should “allow a small Sallery [*sic*]” to printers “to tie them to Obedience.” If printers could support themselves and their families, she suggested, they would not be tempted to publish libelous and seditious works: “then Your Honours will find that Printing will be regulated” (*March 27th 1712*).

While James addressed the majority of her petitions concerning printing and bookselling to Parliament, she also addressed at least one petition on this topic to her peers in the trade. In *Mrs. James’s Advice to all Printers*, she assumed that her fellow printers were already familiar with the problem she outlined: the increasing conflict between the traditional, guild-based system of apprenticeship, with its codes of mutual agreement among printers, and the illicit but evidently common practice of printers hiring others’ apprentices on a freelance basis:

You cannot be ignorant of the great charge in bringing up of servants [apprentices] in the art of printing; neither can you be insensible how remiss, provoking, and wasteful some servants are, especially when they are encouraged

therein, by the unjust hope of getting away from their masters, and having over-work from other masters that have not had the charge and trouble of bringing them up.

Hiring other printers' apprentices seriously undermined the system of apprenticeship, for "giving [an apprentice] money makes him a journeyman before his time." Perhaps drawing on her own personal experience, she observed:

When a boy has served half his time, and has gained some experience in his trade, he presently begins to set up for conditions with his master; then he will not work unless he has so much for himself . . . which if his master denies, . . . away he runs with great complaints, . . . it is no wonder to hear a boy that wants an honest principle to do his own duty, rail against and bely his master *and mistress*. [My emphasis]

She urged printers to "take no man's servant from him, and then a master may (as he ought) have the benefit of the latter part of his time, to make him amends for his trouble and charge." She also urged them to limit the number of their apprentices, and "not to bind any boy except he be above the age of fourteen." She then went on to address her journeymen "brothers": "Now to you, journeymen; you are my brothers, for my husband was a journeyman before he was a master, and therefore I wish you well." Expressing her solidarity with these men while also reminding them of their subordinate position as employees, she advised, "take care that you are not guilty of any ill-thing, as shewing servants ill examples, and giving bad counsels, for if you should, you would be like Judas, in betraying your master." She especially reminded the journeymen of their duties as husbands and fathers: "For what benefit have you in starving your wives and children, and making yourselves sots only fit for hell?" Twenty years earlier, as we have seen, she expressed her sympathy with the journeyman's economic struggles. (Perhaps she remembered the thirteen years that her own husband had spent as a journeyman before being able to set up his own shop.) As always, she blamed these struggles on a shortage of work for printers: "by the Multiplication of *Printers*, they Under-work the Trade so much, that the Master cannot afford to give it as formerly" (*On the behalf of the Printers*).

The Local Labors of Printing and the Challenge of Disciplinary Boundaries

Elinor James was a middle-class tradeswoman whose mental life revolved around issues of business, faith, and politics. Her ninety extant broadsides and pamphlets show her to be, in number of works printed, one of early

modern England’s most prolific women writers. Her petitions concerning the book trade are a rare (and in some ways unique) source for the study of the mental world and material practices of printing. While we know a good deal about a few deservedly renowned printers, we know far less about the day-to-day activities and struggles of the more typical, but no less determined men—and especially women—responsible for printing the bulk of early modern printed texts. If our attempts to understand the printing press as an agent of change have too often rendered the printers themselves “strangely ethereal,”²³ then greater attention to England’s first woman printer-author (fl. 1681–1719) will make an important contribution to our understanding of early printers’ local labors.

Yet James’s broadsides will reward the attention not only of historians of printing but also of political and economic historians, literary scholars, and others. Indeed, they are especially useful precisely because they challenge our own ideological assumptions (such as the benefits of a free press) and our own disciplinary boundaries and critical frames. James’s papers address a staggeringly broad range of concerns, from issues of commerce to national and local politics to religious debates, and they will demand the collective efforts of many different types of scholar to “unpack.” (Only a historian of printing, for instance, is likely to decipher immediately her complaint about apprentices “flinging their houses into pie.”) These “ephemeral” texts are densely topical, yet also often undated; in addition, James typically assumed that she was writing to an audience that already knew what she was talking about. She seldom bothered to specify which bill before Parliament she was objecting to, which speech she was responding to (and so on). These cheaply printed, hastily produced broadsides also challenge existing critical models of intelligibility and value. What do literary scholars, for instance, do with a prolific author who may never have “written” her works at all but composed them directly at the printing-press with type? What do literary scholars do with an author who always signed her texts, yet was largely uninterested in them after their immediate strategic goals had been achieved (or not)? How are feminist literary scholars to understand a prolific woman writer who intended her works neither for private coterie circulation nor (chiefly) for sale in the literary marketplace but rather for a different sort of audience altogether? It is precisely because James’s texts raise provocative questions like these ones that they will reward the attention of diverse scholarly audiences—audiences as diverse as those that this determined petitioner of monarchs, ministers, master printers, and others addressed three hundred years ago.

23. Johns, *Nature of the Book*, 18.