

Double-Faced Wagers: Exchange Coffeehouses in Post-Revolution England

Wes Morrison '26

In his monumental work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Jürgen Habermas cites the coffeehouse as a key social space in the development of a public sphere in Early Modern England, with open discourse, news dissemination, and intellectual discussion paving the way for Enlightenment thought and popular scrutiny of state authority.¹ While this image of the coffeehouse as a democratizing force may seem rosy, the impact of 17th - century financial innovations on the coffeehouse tells a more complicated story. Throughout the Early Modern period, growing urbanization enabled the rise of a diverse group of professionals and tradespeople comprising the middle class, as well as the rise of coffeehouses in urban centers like London in the 1650s.² The proliferation of the coffeehouse in England coincided with the Glorious Revolution, in which the protestant Dutch stadtholder William of Orange and his wife Mary were invited by parliament to depose James II and the Catholic Stuart dynasty.³ In addition to promoting constitutionalism through a bill of rights, William supported a series of financial innovations like the Bank of England, joint-stock companies, and robust property rights, known as the Financial Revolution, which contributed to the upward mobility of the urban middle class.⁴

These financial policies, as well as tax policies intended to help fund English wars, were largely constructed and administered by the Whigs, a liberal party devoted to free trade and sympathetic to the middle-class.⁵ One consequence of this new financial regime was stock-jobbing, or the networking of investors to different stocks, a trade which proliferated in the crowded coffeehouses surrounding the London Stock Exchange, primarily Garraway's and Jonathan's.⁶ How supportive were these coffeehouses and the Habermasian public sphere of this financial system and the rising middle class? While public commentary on finance in the coffeehouse focuses primarily on its vices, the extensive documentation of bourgeois gambling, speculation, and examples of Whig political economy within these satires demonstrates the importance of the coffeehouse as both an agent for and a reflection of finance and liberalism in post-Revolution England. Furthermore, the distinct division between financial coffeehouse culture and public views on such activities challenges the notion that coffeehouses were uniform in promoting a democratic public sphere.

Speculative ventures and avenues for class mobility, while largely depicted as baseless and unproductive, figured heavily into coffeehouse culture, demonstrating the importance of this institution in promoting finance and liberalism in England. One example of coffeehouse finance is found in the 1720 farcical comedy *Exchange-Alley*, which the unknown author dedicates to "the Gentlemen daily attending at Jonathan's Coffee-House."⁷

¹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Enquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. (The M.I.T. Press, 1991), 30 - 35.

² Peter Temin and Hans-Joachim Voth, *Prometheus Shackled: Goldsmith Banks and England's Financial Revolution after 1700*, (Oxford University Press, 2013), 12 - 22. Phil Withington, "Where Was the Coffee in Early Modern England?" *The Journal of Modern History* 92, no. 1 (2020): 40-75.

³ Niall Ferguson. *The Ascent of Money: a Financial History of the World / Niall Ferguson*. (New York: Penguin Press, 2008), 75.

⁴ Temin and Voth, *Prometheus Shackled*, 7 - 22.

⁵ Temin and Voth, *Prometheus Shackled*, 12 - 13.

⁶ Cowan, Brian. *Social Life of Coffee - The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse*. (Yale University Press, 2011), 192.

⁷ *Exchange-Alley: or, the stock-jobber turn'd gentleman; with the humours of our modern projectors. A tragi-comical farce. Humbly Inscrib'd To the Gentlemen daily attending at Jonathan's Coffee-House*. (London: printed for T. Bickerton, at the Crown in Pater-Noster Row, 1720), 1 - 38.

The preface to the piece includes the observation that “if you are at a Coffee-House, the only conversation turns on the Stocks.”⁸ While the author’s comments are intended simply to preface the exaggerated satire that follows, they also connect these farcical scenes to the reality of the coffeehouse, cautioning readers against speculative schemes and the coffeehouses in which they proliferate. The five scenes center around characters named “Bubble,” “Mississippi,” “Cheat-All,” and “Crave-More,” with the former two intended to mock the speculative schemes of the time, and the latter intended to disparage the deceptive brokers and stock-jobbers operating in Jonathan’s coffeehouse.⁹ Furthermore, the farce depicts everyday activities in Jonathan’s with scenes of stock purchases and speculation on “insurance from Cuckoldom” and “noses insur’d from fire,” demonstrating the author’s view that finance in the coffeehouse is relegated only to fools and swindlers.¹⁰ The basic plot is that Miranda, daughter to Mississippi, is intended to marry the newly-affluent and thus more “agreeable” Africanus, whom she realizes in the final scene is actually a beast who only earned his gentlemanly status through stock-jobbery.¹¹ Further mockery of economically mobile individuals is found with Africanus’s company of fellow new-gentry beasts, one of whom is a monkey who was previously a “journey-man Taylor.”¹² While these depictions of financially self-advancing and nominally middle-class individuals as brutish animals demonstrate the negative views of farcical authors surrounding finance, the mere existence of this mockery indicates that this was indeed a trend that was – to some extent – pervaded through the coffeehouse. Further evidence of these trends within the coffeehouse is found in Arthur Murphy’s satirical periodical *The Gray’s-Inn Journal*, in which Jonathan’s is once again home to nefarious and immoral stock-jobbers, this time primarily depicted as Jews and newly-minted gentry exaggeratedly clamoring over their finances.¹³ While this offensive portrayal of stock-jobbers is meant

to be demeaning, the country-gentleman who bemoans taxation and the “Infernal leeches” that engage in stock trading is portrayed mainly as the protagonist of the story.¹⁴ This lop-sided comparison comes down heavily on finance, but also highlights the financial nature of the coffeehouse through its satirical narrative structure. Despite the common disparaging of speculation, stock-trading, and economic mobility among these authors, their farcical works demonstrate a fundamental assumption that these phenomena not only existed within, but were proliferated by exchange coffeehouses.

Another vice featured heavily in public discourse was the bourgeois habit of gambling, illustrating the link between the coffeehouse and growing wealth generated by finance. For instance, Temin and Voth view Hogarth’s *A Rake’s Progress* plate six, in which newly-wealthy Tom Rakewell piddles his money away in White’s coffeehouse and gambling den, as a warning for the rising middle-class against irresponsible forms of finance.¹⁵ This depiction of White’s coffeehouse as the bane of the new-Gentry is clearly negative, but beyond a moral critique it also demonstrates how they would use their newfound wealth and status through new forms of middle-class recreation, indicating that the social space of the coffeehouse played many financial roles both in middle-class wealth accumulation and expenditure. Additionally, Cowan asserts that White’s was a haven for the “Whig aristocracy,” indicating further connections between gambling-centered coffeehouses and post-Revolution financial reforms.¹⁶ Furthermore, the satirical dialogue *The Art of Getting Money by Double-Fac’d Wagers*, once again set in Jonathan’s coffeehouse, depicts a citizen placing bets on the outcome of an ongoing siege in Belgium, and a swindler hoping to profit from the unfortunate situation.¹⁷ The satire seeks to deride gambling and profit-seeking within the coffeehouse, and since wagering on a siege in which the lives of English soldiers were at stake was considered

⁸ *Exchange-Alley*, 1 - 5.

⁹ *Exchange-Alley*, 1 - 5.

¹⁰ *Exchange-Alley*, 13 - 16.

¹¹ *Exchange-Alley*, 1 - 38.

¹² *Exchange-Alley*, 32 - 33.

¹³ Arthur Murphy. *The gray’s-Inn Journal. In two volumes.* ... Vol. 2. London: printed by W. Faden, for P. Vaillant, in the Strand, MDCCLVI. (1756), 29 - 34.

¹⁴ Murphy, *The gray’s-Inn Journal*, 29 - 34.

¹⁵ Temin and Voth, *Prometheus Shackled*, 7 - 12

¹⁶ Cowan, Brian. *Social Life of Coffee - The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse.* (Yale University Press, 2011), 190.

¹⁷ *The Art of Getting Money by Double-Fac’d Wagers, Or, Cross and Pile Whether Mons be Taken, Or no? a Dialogue between a Courtier, a Citizen, and a Sharper of the Town : The Scene, Jonathan’s Coffee-House,* (London: 1691), 1 - 4.

morally questionable at the time, this exaggerated situation can be read as a critique of the coffeehouse-going middle classes and their novel forms of financial accumulation and recreation.¹⁸ This social concern surrounding the coffeehouse reflects the growing power of the middle class during this era, and also indicates a divide between the public perception of finance and the actual socio-economic shifts seen in the coffeehouse.

As representatives of the new liberal regime of free-trade and finance, the presence of Whiggish economic thought in exchange coffeehouses was largely lambasted in public media, proving that these institutions were havens of Whig finance. Published in 1701 by Tory politician and ardent Mercantilist Charles Davenant, the satirical piece *The True Picture of a Modern Whig* depicts a meeting at Garraway's exchange coffeehouse between Mr. Whiglove and Mr. Double.¹⁹ Meant to stereotype Whig party members of the post-Revolution era, the two characters describe Whig policies as pursuing financial self-interest and profit, even if they must sell out king, country, and the public good.²⁰ Aside from Whig plots allowing France to become a hegemonic power, further examples of their schemes for self-enrichment include war profiteering, public lending to the government, and excessive taxation, all serving to "run the Nation over Head and Ears in debt."²¹ In addition to mockery and exaggeration of specific Whig policies, the piece also takes aim at the urban middle-class, with Mr. Double describing how he gained his fortune despite being the son of a shoemaker, and his friends "have got much better Fortunes since the Revolution, and from as poor Beginnings."²² By associating the economic mobility of the middle-class with the post-Revolution financial reforms of the Whigs, Davenant takes a strongly anti-finance position, while also inherently demonstrating the importance of coffeehouses like Garraway's in facilitating discourse among Whig-adjacent figures and

groups.²³ Such anti-coffeehouse sentiments are also evident in Daniel Defoe's essay on the influence of stock-jobbing in Parliament, in which he remarks that "Country Gentlemen may sit at Home; and only Corresponding with the Brokers at Jonathan's and Garraway's, as the Prices Rise or Fall, they may dispose of their interests in the Towns they can Govern, at as good a rate as they can."²⁴ Defoe sees the financial role of exchange coffeehouses as a key factor in growing parliamentary corruption, and considering this piece is not a satire but an essay by an influential social commentator of the era, his observations are perhaps more reflective of the reality of finance as a major element in post-Revolutionary coffeehouses.²⁵ Furthermore, Defoe argues that England would become weaker and more vulnerable to French invasion "if the great Affairs of the kingdom concerted in Parliament should come to be prepar'd, manag'd, and byass'd at Garraway's and Jonathan's Coffee-house, and expos'd to Sale by a parcel of Stock-Jobbers."²⁶ Defoe's concern over the growing influence of exchange coffeehouses in Parliament – specifically as agents of the dominant Whig financial regime – highlights the common public apprehension against finance-oriented coffeehouses. Arthur Murphy's piece also targets Whig dominance in exchange coffeehouses, specifically increased taxation. While these authors don't address the Whigs directly – and Defoe's other writings actually indicate support for reforms like the Bank of England – their rhetoric on the new-Gentry, stock-jobbing, and taxation is anti-Whig in a similar vein to Davenant's satire.²⁷ These pictures of exchange coffeehouses portray strong ties to Whig financial doctrine, and while their sentiments are anti-Finance their social commentaries reveal the presence of finance in these settings, demonstrating the separation of the Habermasian public sphere from its foundation within the coffeehouse.

¹⁸ Markman Ellis. *Eighteenth-Century Coffee-House Culture*, volume 1 / Edited by Markman Ellis. London: (Pickering & Chatto, 2006), 233

¹⁹ Charles Davenant *The true picture of a modern Whig, set forth in a dialogue between Mr. Whiglove & Mr. Double, two under-spur-leathers to the late ministry*. 3rd ed., (1701). 1 - 64

²⁰ Davenant *The true picture of a modern Whig*, 2 - 6.

²¹ Davenant *The true picture of a modern Whig*, 12 - 27.

²² Davenant *The true picture of a modern Whig*, 16.

²³ Davenant *The true picture of a modern Whig*, 14.

²⁴ Daniel Defoe. *The free-Holders plea against stock-jobbing elections of Parliament men*. London: [s.n.], (1701). 1 - 28.

²⁵ Bruce Louis Anderson and Philip Leonard Cottrell, *Money and Banking in England: The Development of the Banking System: 1694-1914*. (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1974), 74.

²⁶ Defoe, *The free-Holders plea*, 21

²⁷ Anderson and Cottrell, *Money and Banking in England*, 74 - 85 / Defoe, *The free-Holders plea*, 11 - 13.

Evident in all aforementioned sources is a disconnect between the views of the Habermasian public sphere on finance, and the reality of exchange coffeehouses and their support for finance. The preface to *Exchange-Alley* includes critiques of speculative trading as a source of “imaginary profit” inferior to more productive working-class trades, and states that swindling gamblers take up a “more profitable Business at Jonathan’s Coffee-House.”²⁸ One of the key tenets of the Financial Revolution and a source of wealth for many new-Gentry, joint-stock trading is disparaged as inefficiency and corruption. Similarly, Arthur Murphy’s periodical takes aim at the moral bankruptcy of stock-jobbers, as well as the actual bankruptcy of the English public as a result of financial trickery.²⁹ Periodicals like Gray’s Inn were fundamental to the creation of the public sphere, and Murphy framing finance as a drain on the English productive classes epitomizes public disapproval of the new direction the state was taking in terms of finance. Even Davenant, who held a cautious yet fond appreciation for public credit in the wake of the English financial crisis of 1698, lambasted the middle-class benefactors of the new financial system in his coffeehouse satire.³⁰ However, the very existence of finance within the coffeehouse, as laid out by this piece, demonstrates that this public criticism was not reflective of the sentiments found within finance havens like Garraway’s, Jonathan’s, and White’s. This division between the public sphere and the coffeehouse over the issue of finance implies that coffeehouses were not universally conducive to public interests. In fact, considering the role that exchange coffeehouses played in expanding wealth and influence to a relatively small group of middle-class bourgeois in their bid to rival the landed aristocracy, the existence of strong financial interests in these institutions directly contradicts Habermas’s idealized picture of the coffeehouse as a democratizing force, at least in an economic sense. While I agree with his idea of the coffeehouse public sphere challenging the authority of the absolute monarchy – a tendency which

is evident from prominent players in the public sphere like Davenant – the Glorious Revolution asserted parliamentary power and ushered in a new financial regime dictated by Whigs, and exchange coffeehouses both benefited from and supported this new form of state authority.³¹ Thus, the exchange coffeehouse was not a meaningful participant in the public sphere in the post-Revolutionary period, and Habermas’s general story of public antagonism from the coffeehouse against the state must be complicated further by considering the new form of elite power that emerged during the Financial Revolution.

In reality, the exchange coffeehouse was – despite its internal tensions surrounding finance – an economically liberal institution reflecting the financial interests of the middle class with a veneer of democratic representation. While some authors argue that middle-class interests were only reflected in politics after electoral reforms during the Industrial Revolution, evidence of middle-class finance in the coffeehouse in the context of Whig reforms indicates that this social strata was perhaps more content with the ruling administration than once expected.³² Although the coffeehouse did have a degree of democratizing effect on society through the public sphere – evident in the biting social commentary of popular satires and publications – participation in exchange coffeehouses was effectively limited to the urban bourgeoisie and adjusted to suit their needs. Contrary to contemporary views on political action within the coffeehouse, working-class interests were largely neglected in this social space and, unlike middle-class interests, would only achieve an expression of agency a century later during the movement for a People’s Charter.³³

Works Cited

Primary Sources:

Davenant, Charles. *The true picture of a modern Whig, set forth in a dialogue between Mr. Whiglove & Mr. Double, two under-spur-leathers to the late*

²⁸ *Exchange-Alley*, 1 - 5.

²⁹ Murphy, *The gray’s-Inn Journal*, 29 - 34.

³⁰ Carl Wennerlind, *Casualties of Credit the English Financial Revolution, 1620-1720*. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011), 1 - 14. Davenant *The true picture of a modern Whig*, 12 - 27

³¹ William Deringer, *Calculated Values: Finance, Politics, and the Quantitative Age*. Harvard University Press, 2018, 43-50.

³² D. J. Rowe, “The London Working Men’s Association and the ‘People’s Charter.’” *Past & Present*, no. 36 (1967): 73–86.

³³ Rowe, “The London Working Men’s Association and the ‘People’s Charter,’” 73-86.

- ministry. 3rd ed., (1701). *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*: 1 - 64. link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0104930224/ECCO?u=mlln_w_willcoll&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=69ac165d&pg=65.
- Defoe, Daniel. *The free-Holders plea against stock-jobbing elections of Parliament men*. London: [s.n.], (1701). *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*: 1 - 28. https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0104126910/ECCO?u=mlln_w_willcoll&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=bfbf4666&pg=11.
- Exchange-Alley: or, the stock-jobber turn'd gentleman; with the humours of our modern projectors. A tragi-comical farce. Humbly Inscrib'd To the Gentlemen daily attending at Jonathan's Coffee-House*. (London: printed for T. Bickerton, at the Crown in Pater-Noster Row, 1720). *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*: 1 - 38. https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0115155972/ECCO?u=mlln_w_willcoll&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=3757c200&pg=1.
- Murphy, Arthur. *The gray's-Inn Journal*. In two volumes. ... Vol. 2. London: printed by W. Faden, for P. Vaillant, in the Strand, MDCCLVI. (1756). *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, 29 - 34. https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0111466884/ECCO?u=mlln_w_willcoll&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=f58d311f&pg=34.
- The Art of Getting Money by Double-Fac'd Wagers, Or, Cross and Pile Whether Mons be Taken, Or no? a Dialogue between a Courtier, a Citizen, and a Sharper of the Town : The Scene, Jonathan's Coffe-House*, (London: 1691), 1 - 4. <https://www.proquest.com/books/art-getting-money-double-facd-wagers-cross-pile/docview/2240870635/se-2>.
- Deringer, William. *Calculated Values: Finance, Politics, and the Quantitative Age*. Harvard University Press, 2018.
- Ellis, Markman. *Eighteenth-Century Coffee-House Culture / Edited by Markman Ellis*. London ;: (Pickering & Chatto, 2006).
- Ferguson, Niall. *The Ascent of Money : a Financial History of the World / Niall Ferguson*. (New York: Penguin Press, 2008).
- Habermas, Jurgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Enquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. (The M.I.T. Press, 1991).
- Rowe, D. J. "The London Working Men's Association and the 'People's Charter.'" *Past & Present*, no. 36 (1967): 73–86.
- Soll, Jacob. *The Reckoning : Financial Accountability and the Rise and Fall of Nations*. (Boulder: Basic Books, 2014).
- Temin, Peter., and Hans-Joachim. Voth. *Prometheus Shackled : Goldsmith Banks and England's Financial Revolution after 1700*, (Oxford University Press, 2013).
- Wennerlind, Carl. *Casualties of Credit the English Financial Revolution, 1620-1720*. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011).
- Withington, Phil. "Where Was the Coffee in Early Modern England?" *The Journal of Modern History* 92, no. 1 (2020): 40–75.

Secondary Sources

- Anderson, Bruce Louis, and Philip Leonard Cottrell. *Money and Banking in England: The Development of the Banking System: 1694-1914*. (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1974).
- Cowan, Brian. *Social Life of Coffee - The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse*. (Yale University Press, 2011).