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The making of Methuen: the commercial Treaty in the English imagination¹

R E S U M O

Though it was a remarkably brief and obscure agreement, the Methuen Commercial Treaty came to exercise an enduring hold over the English imagination as the treaty became a litmus test of political affiliation and national loyalty. Yet the treaty's beginnings were inauspicious. Signed in England in 1703, it remained all but unknown for a decade and in 1713 was almost abandoned in favour of a treaty with France. The attempt to revoke the treaty drew Portugal traders and the "wool interest" into a political confrontation with the Tory government. Though the government drew on the extraordinary propaganda skills of Jonathan Swift and Daniel Defoe to defame the treaty and its signatories, it was unable to overcome animosity to the French, suspicion of free trade, and a new-found popular loyalty to Portugal and its wines. This paper examines the struggle — and the part played in it by Portuguese diplomats — between French and Portuguese commercial interests that elevated John Methuen to something of a national icon and port wine to the national drink.

Few treaties - and very few commercial treaties - are remembered after 30 years. *História's* recognition of the 300th anniversary of the Methuen is thus evidence of the remarkable way the Methuen Commercial treaty worked its way into the imagination of the English and the Portuguese.² For the English - the focus of this paper - that treaty might almost be said to have worked itself not only into their eighteenth- and nineteenth-century consciousness, but almost into their famously unwritten constitution.³ When the last vestiges of the treaty unraveled in 1860, an insightful journalist referred to this moment as the ultimate "disestablishment" of port wine (the

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² There were in all three treaties of 1703 that acquired the name "Methuen". Two were signed in May 1703; and one, the focus of this article, in December of the same year. I shall distinguish these by referring to the first two collectively as the "political treaties" and individually as the "offensive" and "defensive" treaties, and to the third as the "commercial" treaty.

³ It might be wiser to talk of the Anglo-Saxon consciousness, as veneration of the Methuen treaty was not limited to England alone. In 1858, more than 150 years after the treaty was signed, the *New York Times* put the Methuen treaty in a class with the *Lex Julia* and the Napoleonic Code, as treaties that everyone identified by a personal name (*New York Times*, 1858: Sept 28, p. 4).

long-term beneficiary of the treaty), using a term normally reserved for the proposed separation of England's constitutionally entwined church and state.⁴

In some way, its imaginative prominence does not seem surprising. In England, the Methuen Commercial treaty drew the attention of some remarkable writers. It is well known that Adam Smith discussed it at some length in his *Wealth of Nations*, some seventy years after the treaty was enacted. It is less well known, but probably more significant, that when it was barely ten years old, the treaty drew the attention of two of the most famous writers in the English language, Jonathan Swift and Daniel Defoe, as well as their less-famous but quite significant "Augustan" contemporaries Matthew Prior and John Arbuthnot. It was on the occasion of this intervention, I argue, that the treaty entered the English imagination, becoming the subject matter of economic pamphlets, trade periodicals, political squibs, and entertaining satires and eventually part of the vernacular. Here, then, it might seem is a clear case of cultural forces helping to shape the economic and political policies of the nation. But the story is not quite so simple. Though named after the British Ambassador to Portugal and discussed by great writers, the early history of the Methuen treaty actually militates against what one historian has called the "strong historical bias towards articulate and clever men". For all the writers named in fact opposed the Methuen treaty. As we shall see, to the extent that the treaty did enter the British consciousness and constitution, it was enshrined despite rather than because of these great names and primarily through the efforts of obscure merchants, hack journalists, lowly weavers, and perhaps the crucial intervention of an astute Portuguese diplomat.⁵

1703: A brief glance

I do not propose to discuss the details of the commercial treaty's formation—what some have called the "pecado original".⁶ Indeed, it seems a tribute to the imaginative triumph of this famous treaty that the actual historical details of its beginning remain complex, contested, and confused. (Azevedo is probably right when he notes that the treaty is "muito mais falado que conhecido".⁷) Major British historians of Anglo-Portuguese relations seem uncertain about how many Methuen treaties there were and when they were signed.⁸ There are clear disagreements as to who sought the commercial

⁴ TURNER, 1874: 595-620, quotation at 598. Though the treaty had long been abandoned, 1860 is significant because that year port wine, which embarked on its romance with the English by paying lower duties than French wine, now began to pay higher duties.

⁵ SMITH, 1937: Book IV ch VI. For the other writers mentioned in this paragraph, see below. BLACK, 1987: 26-53, quotation at p. 29.

⁶ MARTINS, 1998: quotation at I, 38.

⁷ AZEVEDO, 1978: 385-460, quotation at 396.

⁸ Shillington and Chapman, experts on Anglo-Portuguese treaties, stumble uncharacteristically on these points writing that "eventually two treaties, one largely political, the other strictly commercial, were concluded ... The second, the famous Methuen Treaty, was concluded on 6th May, 1703". In fact, there were three and the commercial treaty was signed on the 27th of December. SHILLINGTON, [1903]: quotation at 224.

treaty (the Portuguese or the British) and why.⁹ Some historians have different views of how long this treaty ran.¹⁰ And many disagree over what its effects (if any) were.¹¹ I hope to avoid the difficulties these questions present by focusing on the treaty in the English imagination, exploring the process by which it went from a relatively unnoticed commercial agreement in 1703 to a totem of Whig politics a decade later, influencing both Anglo-Portuguese and Anglo-French relations throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

To make this case, I shall look at the extraordinary events played out in 1713, when in the course of Anglo-French (rather than Anglo-Portuguese) negotiations around the Treaty of Utrecht, the English government casually sought to abandon the commercial treaty that Methuen had signed. It did not succeed. Instead, the treaty and its supporters caused the Tory government to abandon its plans for free trade with France and ultimately might have helped the country to abandon Tory government for sixty years. Far from being abandoned itself, the obscure and terse commercial treaty of 1703 was transformed into “the Methuen treaty”, an unassailable centerpiece of English trade policy, a rallying point around which anti-French sentiment could gather, and the sort of cultural reference that could be dropped into light verse eighty years after its making, suggesting that the treaty was almost as familiar to the late eighteenth century readers as Shakespeare:

They torture the truth like the essays of Beattie,
Or Statesmen defining the Methuen treaty;
Hence Shakespeare is mangled by weak commentators,
Who gore his fine form like absurd nomenclators

Anthony Pasquin

The Children of Thespis (1768-88)¹²

For a treaty that would endure so long, all began quietly. Understandably in time of war, the almost forgotten political treaties of May 1703, which also bear Methuen’s

⁹ Most writers suggest it was the British who sought the commercial treaty, but Sampaio intimates that, as far as wine was concerned, the proposal originated with the Portuguese. SAMPAIO, 1928: 1-28. Further, writers often suggest the trade agreement was made to entice the Portuguese to sign the political treaties. As the commercial treaty was signed in December 1703, while the political treaties had been ratified the previous May, this seems less likely, particularly if Lodge is right in claiming that Methuen lacked the credentials to sign this treaty. See FRANCIS, 1966: 179 & 197; LODGE, 1935: 152-170.

¹⁰ Francis argues it was superseded by the Treaty of 1810; Unwin that it died in 1813, and Lodge that it ran to 1840. See FRANCIS, 1966; UNWIN, 1991; LODGE, 1935.

¹¹ Adam Smith thought it was bad (for the British), while David Ricardo suggests it was essentially good for both the British and the Portuguese. See SMITH, 1937; RICARDO, 1821: ch. vii. Those, like Sideri, without a British bias tend more readily to assume it was good for the British and disastrous for the Portuguese. See SIDERI, 1970. Francis is one of several authors who believe that the treaty did not have much affect at all.

¹² PASQUIN, 1786-88. It must be acknowledged, that the treaty gained particular significance in 1786 when not only did Britain enter treaty negotiations with France, but also the Portuguese protested that the Irish could not be included under the Methuen treaty’s terms.

name, received much more attention.¹³ Joining Portugal and its important safe harbours to the Grand Alliance, bringing Holland and England to Portugal's defence, and pledging on behalf of all the allies to install Archduke Charles instead of Philip of Anjou (Louis XIV's grandson and candidate) on the Spanish throne, the political treaties were of enormous immediate significance. The London newspapers announced their arrival in May 1703 and, while there was some wrangling over details, politicians on all sides acknowledged their importance to the war effort.¹⁴ The historian Trevelyan would later claim that these treaties, "remained the basis of England's power in southern Europe till the days of Nelson and Wellington"; they, however, rarely provoke anniversary celebrations.¹⁵

Eight months later, the commercial treaty slipped more quietly into London.¹⁶ Its journey there from Lisbon was overshadowed by the storm-tossed journey of Archduke Charles in the other direction to open a military campaign on the peninsula. Ordinarily, any agreement that promised cheap wine would have had an enthusiastic reception in England, where appetite for alcohol was enormous. But the wartime prohibitions against French wine diminished the immediate significance of a treaty taxing Portuguese wines less than French. The Methuen commercial treaty tied these proportionally lower duties, of course, to the removal of the Portuguese "pragmatics"—sumptuary laws that prevented the importation of certain English textiles into Portugal. But few outside the textile trade would have grasped the likely effects of this major concession by the Portuguese king at once. Consequently, though Methuen himself was anxious about the outcome, the commercial treaty was ratified and returned to Portugal in April with as little fanfare as difficulty.¹⁷

Its anonymous beginnings suggest that the commercial treaty did not gain the significance it would carry for 150 years immediately. Indeed, had this treaty been abandoned after ten years, as many at the time thought it should have been, it would

¹³ The political treaties, though negotiated principally by John Methuen, were actually completed and signed by his son Paul Methuen, John, having temporarily returned to London in April, 1703. See FRANCIS, 1966: 172.

¹⁴ See for example *London Gazette*, 1703: May 24-7, 2.

¹⁵ TREVELYAN, 1941: quotation at 300.

¹⁶ The ever-vigilant diarist Narcissus Luttrell did note the arrival of the commercial treaty but added no comment on its significance (see LUTTRELL, 1703/4: quotation at V 382, entry of January 20). English dates at this period can cause much confusion. Still using the Julian Calendar while Catholic Europe had adopted the Gregorian Calendar, England was 11 days behind by 1703. Furthermore, England celebrated the New Year on March 25th. Thus Luttrell's Old Style (OS) date of January 20, 1703 would have been marked in Portugal as January 31, 1704. Unless marked, the dates in this paper will reflect Old Style usage, and the first three months of the year will be marked as here in the form 1703/4.

¹⁷ To those who understood, however, the commercial treaty certainly was significant. When the Portuguese government lifted its import restrictions, warehouses in Lisbon were already stocked with previously banned goods consigned in advance to the Portuguese markets by Methuen's friends in the wool trade. (See FRANCIS, 1966: 199) Luttrell's entry for May 27, 1704 mentions "Letters from Oporto" reporting the removal of "the prohibition upon English cloth". At this point, he does note the significance, joining the camp of those who thought the advantage was Portugal's: Removing the pragmatics, he notes, "will be of great advantage to that nation" (See LUTTRELL, 1703/4: V, 429.)

now be little more than an obscure footnote to commercial history. It was only after 1713, as A.D. Francis, Methuen's biographer, rightly notes, that "the Methuen treaty, which had counted for little during the war, now came into its own" and Methuen himself became something of a national hero.¹⁸

1713: The Great Now

The desperate struggle that year to keep the commercial treaty alive not only shows how Methuen and his treaty became such powerful icons, but also usefully encapsulates in a couple of years many of the debates that accompanied the treaty throughout its life and beyond. Or, as Matthew Prior argued in another context:

In one great now, superior to an age
The full extreme of Nature's force we find.

Matthew Prior

To Mr. Harley. Wounded by Guiscard (1711)¹⁹

To understand the events of 1713, we have to put commercial matters aside briefly and begin with the political and military relations of the time. By 1710, the once glorious war to keep the Bourbons out of Spain had become onerous. Stagnation in the campaign in the south counterbalanced the earlier victories in the north, while stagnation in trade made the enormous cost of the war daily more burdensome. As the political mood in England shifted, Queen Anne removed the Whig hero the Duke of Marlborough from the head of the army, swept away the pro-war cabinet, and put the government in the hands of the politically astute Tory Robert Harley (future Earl of Oxford), who was ably assisted by Henry St. John (future Viscount Bolingbroke) as Secretary of State.²⁰ Almost immediately, Harley sought peace with France. To sue for peace in this way was highly contentious. Not only had the English government been insisting (with some justice) that the Allies had the upper hand and that the French were war weary, but also the peace Harley sought involved abandoning the current allies, principally the Netherlands, Austria, Savoy, and Portugal, in favour of the current enemy, France.

¹⁸ FRANCIS, 1972: quotation at 142.

¹⁹ PRIOR, 1838.

²⁰ Both men were ennobled during the period under discussion; to avoid confusion I shall persevere with the names they used at the beginning, Harley and St. John, though elsewhere they are often referred to as Oxford and Bolingbroke. Similarly, the English and Scottish parliaments combined in 1706/7. Consequently, where "England" is appropriate at the beginning of the period under discussion, "Britain" would often be better at the end. But for simplicity's sake (and because Scotland and Wales at this period had relatively little interest in either Portuguese wine or textiles), I shall use *England* and *English* throughout.

There were high-minded reasons for such a switch. Perennial enemies, England and France had continually wasted lives and money in fighting each other to a standstill. St. John in particular believed that closer relations, particularly commercial relations, could end this:

*The most certain way of preventing [enmity], is certainly an open and advantageous commerce between the two kingdoms. Nothing unites like interest.*²¹

But there were less exalted reasons too. With France and Spain in a relatively weak negotiating position, England believed it could take for itself the *Assiento*—the monopoly to trade slaves to the Spanish West Indies. Though Spain had never managed to make money from this business, the Tory government had as few financial doubts as moral doubts about a trade that it was confident would help bring the country's budget, deep in deficit because of the war, back into balance. So a treaty with the Bourbons, and one moreover that outflanked England's major trading rival Holland, held much promise. Austria, Portugal, and Savoy and the smaller allies would inevitably be victims of Albion's perfidious behaviour, but, it must be said, they were barely considered.²² The *Assiento* aside, England's major preoccupation was the Netherlands. In principle, an alliance with France could cut the Netherlands off from French markets (in which the Dutch had continued to trade, despite the war) and leave England well positioned to dominate international trade and the Tories to dominate British government. Consequently, the Tory party, who as the contemporary French historian Rapin de Thoyras noted, "généralement parlant, n'entendent pas si bien le commerce que les Whigs," tried very hard to become the party of trade. Their limited commercial understanding, however, contributed to their downfall: With eyes on the main prize, the Tory's implicitly dismissed the significance of the Portugal trade, and that was a serious mistake.²³

Inevitably, such negotiations had to be conducted in secret. After the first negotiator, the Earl of Jersey died, the job went to Matthew Prior, a diplomat who had experience treating with France and a poet well connected to the wits of London. When the negotiations with France finally became public, many claimed that the British government had neglected to consult traders, yet Harley's and St. John's choice showed the extent to which they were concerned with trade.²⁴ A career diplomat and poet's trading experience might seem limited, but in 1710 Prior had been appointed to the Commission of Trade, the body overseeing British commerce whose founding members

²¹ ST. JOHN, Henry (Viscount Bolingbroke), *Letters and Correspondence, Public and Private ...* 4 vols. London: for Robinson, 1798, quotation at IV, 151, to Prior May 31, 1713.

²² Though the term *perfidious Albion* is often traced to this particular period, it is significantly older. See SCHMIDT, 1953: 604-616.

²³ RAPIN DE THOYRAS, 1740: quotation at IV, 333. The Tories were also traditionally closer to the Jacobite cause, whose Catholic candidate for the English throne, James Stuart, "the Old Pretender", was currently sheltered by France. The Whigs, by contrast, were closer to the protestant Hanoverians. Thus the War of the Spanish succession turned, in England, into a struggle over the protestant succession.

²⁴ For comments on the failure to consult traders, see for example RAPIN DE THOYRAS, 1732-47: IV, 317.

included John Locke and John Methuen.²⁵ St. John described Prior to the Queen as “the best versed in matters of trade of all your Majesty’s servants”.²⁶ Furthermore, Prior was accompanied from London to the English Channel on his secret mission by Arthur Moore, a Irish Tory of great financial acumen (which occasionally tipped over into chicanery) who had replaced Locke on the Commission and who is credited (or blamed) for creating the commercial articles offered to France in the peace negotiations. Prior returned, moreover, in the company of a Rouen merchant, Nicholas Mensager, who was sent by Louis XIV to negotiate peace on France’s behalf. Trade was evidently on everybody’s mind.

Moore’s was a new and unfamiliar view of trade, one that offered to replace the mercantilist view previously upheld by the commissioners of trade under Locke, rather as Moore had replaced Locke on the Commission.²⁷ Not only did the Tories evidently seek to expand trade through peace and alliances among equals rather than war and dominance, but also and more importantly, Moore’s articles favoured, at least implicitly, the volume of trade over the balance of trade. That is, where the economics of the day had focused almost obsessively on the balance of trade between two countries, with a positive balance signalling a healthy economy and a negative balance malaise, Moore’s treaty swept this issue aside, inherently assuming that the volume of trade possible with France in conditions of free trade overrode concerns about the imbalance such trade might produce. It was not until the great Scots writers David Hume and Adam Smith transformed the field of economics some sixty years later that such a view became acceptable. Until then, imbalance was a highly potent weapon used endlessly to entrench those trades (such as the Portugal trade) that had a positive balance and to embarrass any government actions that might oppose them. As Hume noted, “apprehension of the wrong balance of trade, appears of such a nature, that it discovers itself wherever one is out of humour with the ministry, or is in low spirits”.²⁸ This fear of imbalance in the English consciousness had, unfortunately for Moore and the Tories, developed in the context of the Portuguese pragmatics, those prohibitions against English wool, which William Petty, in his influential and resonantly titled pamphlet *Britannia Languens* (1680), had specifically blamed for creating a deficit for England in Anglo-Portuguese trade and thereby stagnation in English manufacturing.²⁹ Any attempt to move towards

²⁵ Prior did have some commercial work experience, having waited in his uncle’s wine tavern in London, where through his habit of reading Horace between serving wine he was “discovered” by the Earl of Dorset and set on his diplomatic career. (A master of light verse, in his poem “Epistle to Fleetwood Shephard, Esq.,” Prior gives an insight into not only his own working childhood, but also the chicanery of the wine trade. His uncle’s tavern, however, sold Rhenish wine, so Prior’s knowledge of port was not professional. See LEGG, 1921).

²⁶ ST. JOHN, *Letters*. IV 369, to the Queen, Sept 27, 1711. It appears that his duties in Portugal and Ireland did not allow Methuen to attend any of the meetings of the Commission. See CLARKE, 1911: 17-4.

²⁷ See ASHLEY, 1987: 335-371; LASLETT, 1990: 137-147. For Locke’s view of the balance, see for example LOCKE, 1692: especially 24-5.

²⁸ SMITH, 1937; HUME, 1904: 316-333, quotation at p. 318; intriguingly given the fight involving the balance and the treaty described below, Hume is taking a jab at Jonathan Swift in this passage.

free trade would have to confront the deep fear of returning to imbalance and a languishing economy.

Swift response

We shall return to the balance of trade, but first we should return to Prior's journey and its consequences. Traveling incognito, he was arrested when he returned to England by a suspicious customs official, presumably for having travelled in enemy country and returned with an enemy representative. The government had to come to his rescue, thus uncovering the secret negotiations in a dramatic way, causing a public sensation, and requiring a government response.³⁰ One of the first responses came from the man who came to fill the government's need for a chief of propaganda, Jonathan Swift, one of the most skilful journalists of his day.

The period was a remarkable one in the history of the English press. Journalists and politicians were discovering the extraordinary power of newspapers and pamphlets to sway public opinion, and the Tory administration proved highly adept at both supporting friendly journalists and punishing unfriendly ones. Under the guidance of Harley and St. John and with the assistance of Prior, Swift had set up the *Examiner*, a twice-weekly periodical supporting the Harley-St. John political viewpoint. Now Swift turned to pamphleteering and, though it upset Prior, quickly published an entirely fictitious account of Prior's journey. Rushed and far from a masterpiece, it nonetheless served its purpose, offering a narrative whose coherence could both appropriate and undermine the fragmented information appearing in Whig press before this could coalesce into a story more damaging to the government.³¹ Purporting to be written by a Frenchman, *A New Journey to Paris* suggested that the English had been drawn into these negotiations by France and that Harley and St. John were merely taking advantage of France's weakness.

It was all, as Swift acknowledged in his *Journal to Stella*, a "formal grave lie, from the beginning to the end," but it managed to confuse the opposition while the ministry prepared Swift for a greater task, the audacious pamphlet,—*The Conduct of the Allies*.³² For this Harley and St. John carefully manipulated Swift.³³ Using many of the skills of

²⁹ PETTY, 1680. See especially pp. 402-3: "We had also the sole Trade for Woollen Manufactures to the Kingdom of *Portugal*, which Trade hath been decaying several years ... but of late hath been worse than ever; by reason that the Government of *Portugal* since the year 1660 hath prohibited the wearing of *English* Cloath; having set up this Manufacture of their own Woolls". Petty then goes on to discuss other setbacks in the wool trade before concluding: "[T]his odds alone seems sufficient to turn the Ballance of our Trade; ... All which by a necessary sympathy is verified in the present condition of our *English* Towns".

³⁰ Daniel Defoe, who had an eye for conspiracy theories and was privy to many government secrets, later suggested that the government, for its own inscrutable purposes, deliberately had Prior was arrested. See DEFOE, 1717: 197.

³¹ SWIFT, 1711.

³² SWIFT, 1948: quotation at I, 356, Letter XXX; SWIFT, 1964: 3-65.

³³ Harley and St. John were not alone in manipulating the press. The Austrian ambassador was probably responsible for leaking details of the peace negotiations to the *Daily Courant*. See EHRENPREIS, 1967: 402.

modern politicians, they invited Swift to Windsor Castle, flattered him with praise and confidences, and introduced him to the French representative Mesnager. Armed from these encounters with a quiverful of government secrets that could be launched on the opposition as if they were sharp truths that the Whigs had deliberately hidden when they were in power, Swift worked up a highly partial account of the perfidy not of England, but of its allies, in one of the most masterful yet understated pieces of writing of his political career. Disingenuously, Swift had spun a story of pro-war profiteers at home in league with self-serving allies abroad taking advantage of guileless England and its credulous ministers.³⁴ Telling a story of the war from its beginnings, Swift suggested that at home the “Money’d-Interest”—financiers who by lending money to the increasingly indebted government would continue to profit only if they could keep Europe at war—and the once-adored Marlborough, to whom the Money’d-Interest was cleverly siphoning a share of their profit, had together betrayed their country and undermined the original, noble aims of the war. The victims, of course, were not only the “Landed-Interest”, traditional Tory allies, but also the honest traders. Swift cleverly divided these from the Money’d-Interest and made the Tories appear as their natural protectors. Overseas, Swift’s story maintained, England had been as innocent as it was earnest in its pursuit of noble goals, and to the same degree the Allies had been unreliable, greedy, and self-interested, willing to fight only when it was in their immediate interest and even then extorting subsidy from England to do so. In such conditions and betrayed on every side, the pamphlet implied throughout, the only decent thing a government with its people’s interests at heart could do was seek peace.

In keeping with the government line, Swift made the Dutch the main villains of this piece, but as the negotiations had sought to split England from all its allies, Swift damned them all, suggesting that “This kind of Treatment from our two Principal Allies [i.e. the Dutch and Austrians], hath taught the same Dialect to all the rest”, so it was easy to accept the thesis that, “no Nation was ever ... treated with so much Insolence, Injustice and Ingratitude by its foreign Friends”, among which unfaithful “Friends” readers would inevitably number Portugal.³⁵

From Swift’s writings in general, we might expect a benign view of Portugal and the Methuen treaties. He had known Methuen personally and liked Portuguese white wine above all French rivals. Moreover, in his fictional world of distorted humanity, it is an “honest *Portugueze*” who rescues his hero Gulliver, and a Portuguese captain, Pedro de Mendez, “a very courteous and generous Person”, who takes Gulliver to Lisbon to help conquer the latter’s profound aversion to mankind. Yet if in the *Conduct* Swift was gentler to the Portuguese than to the Dutch, that may have been more because they

³⁴ This story of innocent England is also at the heart of John Arbuthnot’s masterful satire, *The History of John Bull*. ARBUTHNOT, 1976 (first published 1712).

³⁵ SWIFT, 1964: 24, 15.

were not central to his story than because they were closer to his heart.³⁶ He had, however, to address one aspect of the Portuguese alliance directly. The Tories' predecessors in government had made the vain promise of "no peace without Spain". That is, they promised that peace would not be made until the Allies had supplanted Philip of Anjou, the Bourbon candidate. Now, however, the Tories were proposing a peace without Spain, thereby abandoning Portugal, who had signed the Methuen political treaties in the expectation of better long-term security, to an uneasy life with a Bourbon just across its border. So it was important for Swift to insinuate that, whatever promises had been made, England had no moral obligation to keep them. Thus where Portugal appeared in the *Conduct*, the account was highly partial. Portugal in Swift's story drew England into the Methuen treaties because "The king of *Portugal* had received Intelligence, that *Philip* designed to renew the old Pretensions of *Spain* upon that Kingdom"; England by this account had little interest of its own in the treaties and had entered into them out of good will towards Portugal. Moreover, Swift suggested, the treaties were written entirely by Portugal and merely accepted by England, yet the war in Spain, conducted on Portugal's behalf, had been paid for entirely by England. The Portuguese, in this account, not only contributed little, but frequently tricked the English into paying double subsidy for some Portuguese regiments.³⁷ A country as self-interested as Portugal, Swift's story ran, did not deserve an ally as honourable as England. Again, the only sensible conclusion to such conduct by its allies was for England to abandon both Spain and Portugal to their own devices.

A New Journey to Paris was merely a placeholder; *The Conduct of the Allies* aimed to change the political debate, and it did, creating something of a publishing sensation. Appearing at the end of November 1711, eleven thousand copies were sold within a month, which given the size of England's reading public was extraordinary, as the critic Samuel Johnson pointed out. Johnson did not give all the credit to Swift, however. Weariness with the war and lack of direction provided by the previous ministry made many in the country eager for a new direction. "The nation was then combustible," Johnson wrote, and with *The Conduct*, "a spark set it on fire". The pamphlet not only helped to extract the government from the awkward accusation of betraying its allies and befriending their enemies, but as the historian Trevelyan claimed, "materially helped to obtain peace".³⁸ Towards that end, it dealt as deftly as dishonestly with England's political relationship with Portugal. It did not, however, deal directly with the commercial relationship, and it was that which was to prove the unnoticed weak link in the Tories' attempt to forge the peace.

³⁶ For wines, see SWIFT, 1948: II, 637, Letter LXI: "I love white Portugal wine better than claret, champagne, or burgundy". The same may not have been true of the Francophile St. John who, according to Francis, "when he received a present of Portuguese wine, promptly passed it on to a parson friend" (FRANCIS, 1966: 204).

³⁷ SWIFT, 1964: 13, 24-6.

³⁸ JOHNSON, s.d.: quotation at II, 194; TREVELYAN, 1942: quotation at 192.

No peace without Portugal

The peace Swift helped to obtain was still a long time in coming. Negotiations opened in Utrecht at the end of January 1711/12. England sent Matthew Prior along with Lord Strafford and eventually St. John himself. Along with the Conde de Tarouca, Portugal sent its London ambassador, Luís da Cunha.³⁹ With numerous representatives from all parties, multilateral and bilateral negotiations lasted until the spring of 1712/13, at which point a treaty of peace along with a “Treaty of Navigation and Commerce” between England and France, following the lines set out by Moore two years before, went to London for ratification.

In public at least, the Tory Government was confident that the Treaty of Utrecht would be signed with all the commercial agreements intact, the allies set a drift, and lucrative trade with France opened. St. John foresaw some futile protests but nothing to derail smooth passage.⁴⁰ Its success, Robert Walpole wrote in his history of the parliament, was “entertain’d by *our great Men*, as a thing very indifferent to them”. Other Tories, however, revealed a certain unease, for the country was not as tractable as it had been in the immediate aftermath of Swift’s *Conduct*.⁴¹ Signs of trouble first arose when the new treaties were laid before the Queen’s council in April. Two members opposed them. The council nonetheless gave its approval in principle, and though as St. John acknowledged, the protestors only wanted more time (the Lord Chief Justice had, however, apparently got heated in the debate), both opponents were swiftly removed from their council seats. Already, perhaps, the government sensed a need to maintain discipline in its ranks.⁴²

While opposition was not particularly coherent at this point, there was evidently some shame felt at unilaterally breaking treaties, oaths, and alliances—“bargaining for yourselves apart” as Lord Shrewsbury called it.⁴³ One issue here turned out to be the Methuen commercial treaty, which the government’s strategy had almost entirely overlooked. At the centre of concern were articles VIII and IX of the proposed Treaty of Navigation and Commerce. These are too long to give in full here, but the shoulder notes from a published translation (the treaty was in Latin) provide a useful précis:

³⁹ FRESCHOT, 1715.

⁴⁰ ST. JOHN, *Letters*. IV, 86-7, to Lord Lexington May [], 1713, and IV, 137, to Lord Shrewsbury, May 29, 1713

⁴¹ WALPOLE, 1713: 22; for the unease, see [STRAFFORD, Thomas Wentworth, earl of], *The Wentworth Papers, 1705-1739*... London: Wyman & Sons, 1883, 324, Letter of Peter Wentworth, March 20, 1713, suggesting some Tory leaders felt “the Peace is not so good as to stand the test of nice inquiry”; while Tindal’s edition of RAPIN DE THOYRAS suggests that the government deliberately tried to rush the legislative Bill to prevent opposition gathering (RAPIN DE THOYRAS, 1732-47: IV, 315).

⁴² ST. JOHN, *Letters*., IV 29, to Lord Shrewsbury, April 8, 1713; [STRAFFORD], *Wentworth Papers*, 329, Letter of Lord Berkeley, April 24, 1713.

⁴³ Shrewsbury to St. John, quoted in TREVELYAN, 1942: vol. III, 186; Bishop Burnet prepared a speech on the topic of oath breaking but in the end did not deliver it; he did, however, print it in his *History*, see BURNETT, 1969: VI, 154ff.

VIII: Both sides [i.e. England and France] to have the same Favour in Trade as any foreign Nation the most favoured.

IX: Goods from *France* to pay no more Duty than the like Goods from any other part of *Europe*.⁴⁴

With these articles included, ratification of the treaty with France of 1713 would inevitably entail abrogation of the treaty with Portugal of 1703, for the preferential favours promised in the latter were incompatible with equality promised in the former. The choice that the ministry wished to place before people's minds was the peace treaty with France or continued war. The choice they found themselves unexpectedly wrestling with was articles VIII and IX of the commercial treaty or the continuation of the Methuen treaty. Many, as Daniel Defoe accepted, thought the latter "a fair, a just, and a reasonable Treaty ... [that] ought to be kept Sacred".⁴⁵

In May, the two treaties from Utrecht were laid before the House of Commons, which did not receive it "in very good humour concerning the trade," Lord Berkeley reported with some surprise, but made "some difficulties of taking off the duty upon Wine". "But they say it will all blow over," he confidently predicted. There he was wrong.⁴⁶

Some of the opposition was predictable. The Turkey and East India companies feared for their monopolies. The government addressed their fears with subtle redefinitions of terms in the treaty and then with "Amendments to some of the Amendments," as the Tory historian Pittis grumbled.⁴⁷ And inevitably, some wine merchants objected. These the government felt it could ignore as "what some will lose by, others, and those incomparably more numerous will gain".⁴⁸ Whatever the Portuguese, Spanish, or Italian wine merchants lost, that is to say, would be made up with advantage by members of the Vintners' Company, dealing in French wines. The issue, however, seems to have stirred the Whigs out of their defensive torpor and unsettled the Tories, who had either forgotten or dismissed the Methuen commercial treaty's second component, for it was not so much the wine as the wool linked to the wine that began to swell the murmur of opposition. When the articles of commerce went before a committee of the house, two MPs, Lechmere and Stanhope argued that equalizing wine duties in England would lead, as the Methuen treaty allowed, to prohibition of English textiles in Portugal and the destruction of the Portugal trade.⁴⁹ So though wine merchants from Spain, Italy, and Portugal were allowed to make their protests against

⁴⁴ See KING, 1968: quotations at I 63 & 65.

⁴⁵ DEFOE, 1713: quotation at 22.

⁴⁶ [STRAFFORD], *Wentworth Papers*, 333, Letter of Lord Berkeley, May 12, 1713

⁴⁷ PITTIS, [1713]: quotation at p. 127.

⁴⁸ PITTIS, [1713]: 91; the quotation is from a speech in the House of Commons, probably made by Moore. He was addressing the House on a preliminary motion to remove a 25 *l.* surcharge that had been placed on French wine in 1696.

⁴⁹ [STRAFFORD], *Wentworth Papers*, 335, letter of Peter Wentworth, May 14, 1713.

the bill, only James Milner, a Lisbon Merchant with good political connections to the Whig Party, seems to have been heard with particular respect: only he could raise the spectre of the old pragmatics.⁵⁰ The government had failed to see not only the connection between the wool and wine, but also that (as the Portuguese had learned to their cost) while the wine trade gave pleasure to many, it gave wealth to relatively few; but the labour-intensive wool manufacturing provided many people with a good living that they would fight to protect, particularly if the government's actions meant not only the loss of the overseas market in Portugal, but competition in their home market from France.⁵¹

Slowly, but for the ministry fearsomely, the English wool interests—from weavers, and clothiers, and stockingers, to the great manufacturers who provided employment for them and the great landowners who maintained sheep to supply them—roused themselves to fight for their lucrative markets in Portugal. “Petitions from all Parts of the Country began to alarm” the politicians, Walpole wrote, “and whether out of a regard to the Good of the Country, or an Apprehension of losing their next Elections, I will not determine; but a sudden Turn was taken”.⁵²

Defoe's defiance

One turn, on the government's part, was back to the Tory press. The debate, however, had shifted from the days of Swift's *New Journey* and *Conduct of the Allies*. Commercial not political alliances were the focus and a Tory divine like Swift with no knowledge of trade was of limited use.⁵³ So instead the government wisely turned to Swift's great contemporary, Daniel Defoe. This brilliant and prolific pamphleteer and journalist had maintained his extraordinary bi-weekly *Review*, a landmark in the development of journalism, for almost ten years. It had begun in 1704 as the *Weekly Review of the Affairs of France* and ended in 1712/1713 as the *Review of the State of the British Nation* and, focusing heavily on matters of trade, qualified Defoe above all others to pass judgment on the commercial relations between these two countries.

Before considering Defoe's views on these relations, we should note that, as in the case of Swift, there is reason to believe from Defoe's life and writings in general that he too was relatively well disposed towards Portugal and its trade. Not only had he been

⁵⁰ For Milner's political connections, see OLDMIXON, 1742: 27ff; for his evidence, see [ANON]. *A Letter from a Member of the House of Commons to His Friend in the Country Relating to the Bill of Commerce...* London: for Baker, 1713, 21, which though it ultimately dismisses Milner's evidence, too, begins, “the whole Complaints of all the Traders that appeared before us, except the *Portugal* Merchants, were capable of this very easy Cure”.

⁵¹ As Luís da Cunha, the Portuguese ambassador to the Court of St. James put it, “a muito sahida dos vinhos era lucro de poucas pessoas principaes mas que a augmentação das fabricas era o remedio de innumeraveis povos” (quoted in SAMPAIO, 1928: 18).

⁵² WALPOLE, 1713: 20-1.

⁵³ Swift, however, did not abandon the fight. In May 1713, he published his *History of the Four Last Years of the Queen*, but it had far less effect than his *Conduct*. For the date of publication, see SWIFT, 1948: 669n, Letter LXIV, May 16.

more than once to Portugal, visiting Porto, where he described the dangers of the Douro river bar and the floods that came down the river, and Lisbon (probably in 1694), where he was impressed both by the city's beauty from the river and its oppressive heat; he had also worked in the "Portugal Wine Trade", claiming to have imported 700 pipes of "Oporto wine" in a single year.⁵⁴ In the *Review* he backed the honesty of the Portuguese wine merchants against the corruption of the (French wine) Vintners and he acknowledged Portugal's vulnerability to Spain. Portugal also emerges with some honour from his major fiction. As with Gulliver at the end of his travels, so it is a Portuguese captain that helps Robinson Crusoe escape from slavery near the beginning of his.⁵⁵ The *Review* had, however, been skeptical about the capabilities of the Portuguese army and thus about the extent of Portugal's contribution to the alliance and its Iberian campaign, concluding, "I must reckon the *Portuguese* for just no Body". As, once the Methuen Treaties were signed, the government too reckoned Portugal and most of the allies for nobody, Defoe must have seemed particularly well suited to launch their new public-relations offensive in the press.⁵⁶ (His enemies described him as a "Hireling" and an "ambodextrous mercenary Scribbler".⁵⁷)

With the help of Arthur Moore, the government set Defoe up as editor of a new bi-weekly newspaper, *Mercator, or Commerce Retrieved*, at the end of May 1713, just in time for the first readings of the proposed Anglo-French treaties in the House of Commons.⁵⁸ As Swift had been given access to secret diplomatic information, so Defoe was given special access to trade data held in the Customs House. With unprecedented resources, furious energy, and an appetite for a journalistic artillery barrages, Defoe launched himself on the opponents of the trade agreement with France.

He faced, however, several inherent difficulties. In the first place, he had a long published record, which opponents could search for inconsistencies to fuel charges of hypocrisy. For example, in 1704, not long after ratification of the Methuen commercial treaty, he had written in his typically direct way:

⁵⁴ The amount is remarkable, and coming in a year in which Defoe claimed 40,000 pipes of wine were imported, is hard to tally with available data. See *Review of the State of the British Nation*, 1711, viii, 307; 1704, i [ix], 193; 1711, viii, 14; BASTIAN, 1981: 91. Like Prior, Defoe was privy to the cheating and falsification that was endemic to the wine trade. See *Review, Review of the State of the British Nation*, 1711, viii 307.

⁵⁵ Crusoe then becomes a planter in Brazil, from where he set out on his fated voyage, hoping to circumvent the *Assiento* and find low-priced slaves.

⁵⁶ *Review of the State of the British Nation*, 1708, iv, 256.

⁵⁷ St. John used Defoe's notorious pamphlet *The Shortest Way with Dissenters*, as a byword for the sort of publishing he loathed. See ST. JOHN, *Letters*, IV, 343, to Drummond, Sept 4, 1711. Some suggested that a pending case before the government helped persuade Defoe to take up the government's cause.

⁵⁸ For Moore's collusion, see SUTHERLAND, 1937: 200. Moore's hand can probably be traced in *Mercator* 8 (1713), which attempts to counter the opposition belief that the Ministry had consulted no traders other than Moore in designing the treaty of commerce. Defoe also wrote numerous pamphlets on the topic, and these, along with the *Mercator* provide evidence for my argument.

*It is better for England we should drink all Turnip-Wine, or any Wine, than that we should drink the best Wine in Europe, and go back to France for it. At present the Gust of the French Wine is laid by, and the gross Draught of the whole Nation is upon Portugal Wines. ... were we now actually at Peace with France, we should not Import any of their Glass, their Hats, or Lustrings, nor a fifth part of the Wine, nor above a third of their Brandys, nor half their Linens; and this great Alteration, must of course, turn the Channel of Trade against them.*⁵⁹

As the *Mercator*, he had to forget this (though his opponents made that difficult) and make the opposite case.⁶⁰

Second, however privileged his sources, their data complicated his argument, for in general trade figures showed that England historically ran a deficit when it traded with France. Indeed, it was this imbalance that the previous quotation had been trying to address. While he might have wished to dismiss the importance of the trade balance, it was impossible to break free of the dominant economic discourse of the day. Consequently, as Defoe tried to argue for the benefits of free trade with France, the historical imbalances between the England and France continually undermined the force his arguments in the eyes of most readers.

With regard to Portugal, Defoe's arguments, for the most part, developed along two lines. First, he argued that the French were no threat to the Portuguese, because Portuguese wines would always be wanted in England, though his reasons why shifted rather uneasily. On the one hand, he suggested that Portuguese wines were becoming more popular and could hold their own; but when that argument faltered, he claimed, on the other, that even if French wines should be more attractive to the English, Portuguese wines would always be needed to fortify weak French wines and to supplement poor French harvests.⁶¹ But second, he was also prepared to argue more abruptly that it didn't really matter what the Portuguese thought as they had no alternative outlet for their wines (in essence the Dutch would not like them, and the French would not need them) and no viable textile manufacture, so they would have to accommodate their principal client and supplier, England. "It does not seem rational to me," he concluded, "That the King of *Portugal* should quarrel with *England*, [and] Prohibit our Trade".⁶² Again, this was a difficult argument to maintain. Not only was there evidence that Portugal was considering retaliating with prohibitions on textiles if the English equalized the duty on wine in contravention of the Methuen commercial treaty, but also, with the

⁵⁹ *Review of the Affairs of France*, 1704 [i], 86.

⁶⁰ In one attack, he was nicknamed "Tom Double" for his ability to make opposing arguments with equal conviction, see [ANON]. *Torism and Trade Can Never Agree. To Which Is Added, an Account and Character of the Mercator and His Writings*. London: A Baldwin, 1713.

⁶¹ *Review of the State of the British Nation*, 1713, viii 76; DEFOE, 1713: 24.

⁶² DEFOE, 1713: 31; See also *Mercator*, 1713, 39, 1, DEFOE, 1713: 28.

end of the war, examples were emerging of other countries doing exactly what he argued was unlikely, setting up textile manufactures and imposing sumptuary laws.⁶³

As these arguments floundered, Defoe turned to invective and accusation, of which he was a master but which in these circumstances, suggest a certain desperation. In a minor key, he suggested that Portugal had broken the Methuen treaties almost from its beginning and could hardly call itself a friend if it was threatening a trade war. Given England's behaviour towards Portugal since 1711, complaining about bad faith and invoking the notion of "friendship" was unlikely to move many hearts. More aggressively, as the signs that the Ministry was in serious trouble grew, rather than merely suggesting that it was permissible to break the Methuen commercial treaty, he argued that it had been impermissible to make it in the first place. He called it a "felonious treaty," one that John Methuen lacked the credentials to sign and that, more importantly, infringed severely on Parliament's right to adjust taxes as it chose. As members of parliament have always been sensitive to attacks on their prerogatives, this strategy signalled a determined effort to whip wavering Tories back into the right lobby. Finally, he attacked Methuen himself, suggesting that Methuen had had a financial interest in negotiating the treaty.⁶⁴

Rapid response

If Defoe's arguments look increasingly uncertain and desperate, it was in part because, unlike Swift's *Conduct*, the *Mercator* could not dominate debate. Very quickly, opponents of the French and supporters of the Portuguese treaty began their own paper, the *British Merchant, or Commerce Preserved*. Its editor Henry Martin was a Whig essayist who also wrote occasionally for the better-known newspapers the *Guardian* and *Spectator*. Arguing against Defoe, point by point, the *British Merchant* aimed both to oppose the planned commercial treaty with France and to uphold the existing commercial treaty with Portugal. To the latter end, one of its more important contributors was James Milner. Variousy described as a London and a Lisbon Merchant, Milner was based in London but traded extensively with Portugal. It was Milner (along with Martin) who, as we have seen, had pled the case of the Portuguese trade when Parliament solicited responses to the proposed Treaty of Navigation and Commerce and it was probably Milner who was responsible for the data on the Portuguese trade that was launched back at Defoe by the *British Merchant*.⁶⁵

The paper sought not only to respond rapidly and aggressively to anything Defoe argued, but also to strike terror of French trade into English manufacturers and the

⁶³ The *London Gazette* of 5-9 May, 1713, [4] reported Spain's attempt to "set up a Manufactory of Cloth", while the *Daily Courant* of July 6, 1713 [1] noted Prussia's edict forbidding the use of foreign cloth in military uniforms.

⁶⁴ *Mercator* 1713 39, 1 & 2; *Mercator*, 1713 40, 1.

⁶⁵ The paper may also have had its own exclusive sources. It seems to have had very detailed knowledge of Methuen's negotiations, and this perhaps came from John Methuen's son Paul, to whom volume III of the paper was dedicated when it was published in book form. See, for example, *BM* III, 59.

politicians they supported. To do this it argued first that, *pace* Defoe, the equalization of duties would indeed swamp the English market with French wines and drive out Portuguese ones.⁶⁶ In arguing this way, they showed little faith in Portuguese wines, but defenders of the Methuen treaty rarely did.⁶⁷ Thus while Defoe, its opponent, was arguing that Portuguese wines were good enough to look after themselves, Methuen supporters insisted that they were inferior and the English were predisposed towards the French wines. Indeed, it was generally argued that if it came to a struggle between the English palate and English loyalty, the palate would probably win and the palate would favour France. Dryden's allusion to the prohibition of French wines in 1692 (coincidentally, perhaps, in the preface to a play about Don Sebastian of Portugal), playing on the French king's title as "His Most Christian Majesty" summed up this opposition thus:

Tho at the Mighty Monarch you repine,
You grant him still most Christian, in his Wine

Even the Portuguese ambassador had little confidence in the ability of Portuguese wines in open competition, arguing that French wines "são melhores, mais baratos ... e não são tão fortes, de que se segue o seu major gasto".⁶⁸

So, contrary to Defoe, the *British Merchant* argued that the Portuguese wines would probably lose their leading position in the wine market if duties were equalized, in which case the Portuguese government certainly would invoke the Methuen commercial treaty and reimpose their prohibitions against importing certain woolens.⁶⁹ Moreover, as the Methuen commercial treaty had been "the immediate ruin of all the Fabricks in that Country and opened to us a market" (as one correspondent proudly noted) the *British Merchant* raised the fear if pragmatics were reimposed, the Portuguese would revive their defunct manufactures and so England might never again have the opportunity to dominate the Portuguese textile markets. Breaking with Methuen, in sum, would be from the point of view of the wool interest not only a mistake, but an irreversible mistake. Further, the paper argued, the loss of Portuguese outlets for wool would lead to a loss of the inflow of Portuguese gold, currency that circulated in and sustained many English wool towns. Meanwhile, the paper's grim predictions went on, the English textile manufactures, weakened by the loss of their major market, would be overwhelmed by cheap French textiles. (These would be cheap because French labourers lived, according to the *British Merchant*, upon "Roots, Cabbage, and other Herbage".) All of this would tip the balance of trade with Portugal from its healthy surplus to the dreaded

⁶⁶ *BM*, I, 351; II, 198. *BRITISH MERCHANT* (hereafter *BM*).

⁶⁷ See, for example, Richard Steele's *Englishman* 1713 8, October 22.

⁶⁸ DRYDEN, 1883: vol VII, quotation at 321; Louis da Cunha quoted in Sampaio, 19. The question whether drinking French wine was unpatriotic was the subject of a furious debate in the very last Scottish parliament before the Union. See BOYER, 1722: 71-72.

⁶⁹ *BMI*, 203; II, 26.

deficit with its attendant evils of unemployment, loss of rents, and stagnation feared since the days of Petty's *Britannia Languens*. In all, as another opponent of the bill before parliament put it: "Our Trade to *Portugal* will maintain, nay, enrich our Poor; That with *France* ... will beggar and undo our Gentry".⁷⁰

The *British Merchant's* tone, always aggressive, was at its most insistent in responding to the attacks on Methuen the man, whose name now became closely associated with the commercial treaty.⁷¹ Defoe had unwisely argued that Methuen deserved to be beheaded for his "felonious" treaty. On the contrary, the *British Merchant* responded, "that Minister ... who by his Advice has done so much Honour to his Prince, and so much Service to his Country" and who "had the Address and Dexterity to gain us such a Stipulation from the King of *Portugal*, ought to be for ever sacred in this Kingdom".⁷²

Urged on by the *British Merchant*, rejecting Defoe's increasingly awkward arguments, and refusing despite a long war to accept the Tory credentials as the party of the peace, the wool interest rounded on their politicians.⁷³ Indeed, the newspapers and pamphlets of the day give a curious image of London during the summer of 1713. Two separate processions, both coming from counties, towns, and villages around the country, bore down on the capitol. One, made up of mayors and sheriffs, carried obsequious congratulations to the Queen on the occasion of the peace and urged the ratification of the Treaty of Utrecht; the other, made up of what Defoe called "Complaining Crouds with Petitions and mournful Representations," embraced merchants and manufacturers, clothiers and weavers, carrying diatribes and threats aimed at MPs who would think of voting for the eighth and ninth articles of the Treaty of Navigation and Commerce.⁷⁴

On the 18th of June, a parliamentary bill to approve the eighth and ninth articles of the treaty commerce was given its final reading. The debate lasted from three in the afternoon to eleven at night, with Moore and St. John determined to rally the government side. At the debate's end, by a margin of 185 to 194 the vote went against them. "By so small a majority," Bishop Burnett wrote, was a bill of such great importance lost".⁷⁵ Most prominent of those who deserted the Tories, was Thomas Hanmer, one of the most important members of that party.⁷⁶ His constituency was in Suffolk, an area

⁷⁰ [EGLETON, John], 1714: quotation at 18.

⁷¹ *BM* II, 39-41

⁷² *BM* III, 39-40, 46, 49.

⁷³ In the struggle between peace and prosperity represented in this debate, Toriano, who spoke for the Italian and Spanish wine interests, infuriated the Tories when he asked rhetorically of the Treaty of Utrecht, which many thought would allow the French to beggar the victors in the long run, "Is this your boasted peace?" See *The History and Proceedings*, 1781-96: quotation at V, 35.

⁷⁴ For the congratulations on the peace, see *London Gazette*, 1713, 9-12 May to 1714, 17-20 April, when messages from the American colonies finally arrive). For the protests, see *The History and Proceedings*, 1781-96 : V, 13-37; [DEFOE, Daniel], 1713: quotation at p. 40.

⁷⁵ BURNETT, 1969: VI, 153.

⁷⁶ Hanmer was involved with and fulsomely praised in Swift's pamphlet *The History Last Four Years of the Queen*. This was one of Swift's weaker efforts and contributed little to the debate. Nonetheless, Swift himself was "tempted to think that if the Tract had been published at the time of the Peace, some ill Consequences might not have happened", SWIFT, 1965-72, I: 375 to Charles Ford, July 9, 1713.

dependent on the wool trade. Three of the four London MPs, including the Lord Mayor, all again heavily dependent on trading interests, also defected.

The extent to which the Tories had miscalculated can perhaps be measured by the confidence with which they thought that the bill could be successfully reintroduced in the following session.⁷⁷ Harley told Swift that he “did not care whether this Parlmt pass the Commerce or no, and that the next should have the Honour”. But the English, turned towards France by Swift, and his remarkable skills as a propagandist, had been turned away by a determined and far less sophisticated group loosely embraced by the term the “wool interest”. Looking ahead to the new parliament, Defoe valiantly tried to maintain the battle, but he now faced not only the *British Merchant*, but also Richard Steele’s new Whig periodical the *Englishman* which, with the *Guardian* and the *Spectator* and an unceasing flow of pamphlets, kept pressure on both the members of parliament. The bill was beyond resuscitation.⁷⁸

Rousing the wool interest

When the Tory ministry sent its representatives secretly to Paris in 1711, what is recognized today as the Methuen treaty was a little-known commercial pact that the ministers themselves, either by accident or design, ignored. By the time they suffered their defeat in 1713, ultimately a death blow to their power and their aspirations, Methuen had been transformed into an unavoidable *Ur*-text of England’s unwritten constitution, a litmus test for the coming election, and somehow inextricably woven into the fundamental tenets of the Whig party along with the Protestant succession to the throne, enmity to France, and the continuing struggle for a positive balance of payments.⁷⁹ Methuen himself had become a near sacred icon of these causes—a man

⁷⁷ See the Queen’s speech at the closing of Parliament,

London Gazette, 14-18 July, 1713; SWIFT, 1965-72, I: 375, to Charles Ford, July 9, 1713.

⁷⁸ More far sighted in this regard than the politicians, a group of wine merchants quickly realised the bill had no future and sought other means to help them recover from a failed speculation. They had brought a consignment of French wines into the Thames—a faint echo of those merchants that had textiles in Lisbon in expectation of the ratification of the Methuen treaty—on the assumption that the Treaty of Utrecht would succeed and the duties on French wines come down. When their speculation proved unwise, they hurriedly applied for a special bill granting lower duties for this consignment alone, but they were refused. See STRAFFORD, *Wentworth Papers*, 343, letter of July 14, 1713. This may be the same event that is described in *History and Proceedings*, 1781-96: V, 5. FRANCIS, 1966, notes that Bordeaux merchants more generally had loaded wines in expectation of falling duties.

⁷⁹ One of the interesting things about the iconic status of Methuen, and by extension port, was that it developed a rather chameleon character. While in many eyes associated with the Whigs, Swift, who as noted was particularly partial to white Portuguese wine (which might have been white port), later managed to make port drinking a gesture of Tory defiance in his poem “On the Irish Club” (1729/30), where he writes oft quoted lines,

Be sometimes to your country true,
Have once the public good in view:
Bravely despise Champagne at Court,
And chuse to dine at home with Port.

See, SWIFT, 1937. He may here be inverting the opposition used by his good friend Matthew Prior, who regularly opposed “thick port” and “fine champagne”. Prior generally associated the former with thick-headed physical and financial prowess, the latter with wit. See “The Chameleon”, “An Epitaph”, “Alma: Or, The Progress of the Mind” in PRIOR, 1838.

who, as Charles King wrote, when he republished the *British Merchant* in 1721, “deserves to have his Statue erected in every Trading Town in *Great Britain*”.⁸⁰ It took, as I noted earlier, almost 150 years to effectively undo the reflexive English belief in “Methuen”.

While the “wool interest”, remains a useful catchall phrase, it is interesting to consider more closely who was involved in this process by which Methuen (man and treaty) was saved and so entered the English imagination. Unintentionally, the Tory ministers, Swift, Defoe, Arbuthnot and other Tory writers; intentionally, the Whig press, Martin, and King, with a little help from their more famous peers Steele and Addison.⁸¹ Also, probably more significant though less famous, the merchants led by Milner and others and the numerous workers in wool-related trades throughout England. But is there no place for the Portuguese in this story which had such significant effects on the Portuguese and their economy? What role, if any, did they play in enshrining Methuen and his treaty, and what was their attitude towards it?

This was most clearly a victory for what the English call the “Portugal trade”, whose supporters celebrated with illuminations throughout London on the night following the Tories’ parliamentary defeat.⁸² That phrase embraced primarily English merchants trading to and from Portugal and had little to do with the native Portuguese merchants or politicians. Whether the Portuguese saw the victory of Methuen as a triumph is a different matter. Certainly, they must have been a little wary of England’s claims of friendship. The English believed that trade deficits were an abomination, and supported the treaty because they knew it inflicted a heavy deficit upon the Portuguese. They believed that manufacturing was the basis of a solid economy, and rejoiced that they had destroyed the “Fabricks in that Country”.⁸³ They believed that economies expanded by finding new outlets, and determined to keep the Portugal trade locked into the British market. They sold Portuguese wine, and happily proclaimed it was inferior to French wine and ill suited to the English. And they believed in the accumulation of gold, and actively sought to drain Portugal of the gold it possessed. The old adage “with friends like these, who needs enemies” is never far away when contemplating England’s behaviour.

For their part, the Portuguese faced unenviable choices, both in 1703 when the Methuen commercial treaty was made and in 1713 when it was nearly abandoned. In 1703, they could befriend England and alienate the great power of southern continental Europe and open themselves up to reappropriation by Spain if the Bourbons won the Spanish succession. Or they could befriend the Bourbons and have the major naval powers (Holland and England) block access to their colonies, without being quite sure that this would keep Spain within its borders. Equally, they could protect their nascent

⁸⁰ From quotations given in SAMPAIO, 1928, it seems likely that Pombal read this edition.

⁸¹ Addison’s contribution was the anaemic *The Late Tryall and Conviction of Count Tariff* (first published 1714). See ADDISON, 1914, II: 265-272.

⁸² BOYER, 1722: 633.

⁸³ *BM* III, 89-90.

textile industry, and lose their footing in Europe's greatest wine-importing market once a peace opened that market to French wines. Or they could ensure privileged access to this market for wine, but in so doing surrender their future as a textile producer.⁸⁴ Similarly, in 1713, they could support the Methuen, and continue to subordinate their economy to the British, or they could support the Treaty of Utrecht, and see the French push them out of the English market. Given these choices, it would not be surprising if Portugal remained catatonic.

If they did not portray them as actively malevolent, as Swift did, the English were always tempted to portray the Portuguese as passive followers of the line of least resistance. We have seen Defoe counting them as "no body". John Arbuthnot's brilliant satirical image of the War of the Spanish Succession as a law suit mounted by *John Bull* (England) and *Nick Frog* (the Netherlands) against "old *Lewis Baboon*" (Louis XIV) in *The History of John Bull* portrays Portugal as *Tom the Dustman*, a sleepy figure willing to go along with the suit "provided that *Bull* and *Frog* would bear the Charges".⁸⁵— Equally, when the *British Merchant* and the Whig press in general applauded the victory of Methuen in 1713, they had little consideration for either the participation of or the effects on the Portuguese themselves in this victory. But did Portugal simply stand aside while this debate whose outcome would profoundly affect its future raged on? There are some indications that it did not. For this we need to know a little about the Portuguese in a position to affect the debate.

The official envoy to England at the time was Luís da Cunha.⁸⁶ In 1713, however, da Cunha was still in Utrecht, haggling over the protracted bilateral relations between Portugal and Spain. In London, he was replaced by José da Cunha Brochado. A.D. Francis gives two quite different views of Brochado's attitude towards the events of 1713. On the one hand, he notes that "At the end of the war ... Brochado ... severely criticised both the Methuen treaty and its creator"; on the other, when the Treaty of Navigation and Commerce was defeated and thus the Methuen commercial treaty preserved, Francis reports that "Brochado was jubilant".⁸⁷ Perhaps one account reflects Brochado's personal opinion and the other his official reaction. Francis does not tell us. But the question is not inconsequential. A number of almost contemporary English historians suggest, as we shall see, that it was Brochado who managed to rouse the English wool interest to such remarkable ends. If he did, then whatever his views of Methuen and his treaties were, Brochado was following in the Englishman's footsteps.

⁸⁴ Major disagreements remain about how viable the industry nurtured by the Conde d' Ericeira really was.

⁸⁵ ARBUTHNOT, 1976: I iv.

⁸⁶ SAMPAIO, 1926. (I am grateful to Prof. Jorge Ribeiro for this reference.) Serving since 1696, da Cunha's position was probably never easy, but its difficulties increased as Swift and Defoe martialled sentiment against the Portuguese. In 1711 he lodged a protest against the *Post-Boy*, one of London's more boisterous anti-Catholic papers, and he had to withstand the ubiquitous derogatory comments about the Portuguese king and his army. See BOYER, 1712: 280. Even the Secretary of State, St. John, showed little respect for the envoy's abilities. See ST. JOHN, *Letters*, IV, 416, to the Earl of Strafford, Feb 13, 1712/13.

⁸⁷ FRANCIS, 1966: 214 & 205.

For when Methuen wanted to put pressure on the Portuguese court to sign the treaty, he tried to arouse the British merchants. He was not particularly successful.⁸⁸ If it was Brochado who first raised the wool interest then he was not only following Methuen, but he was also, by contrast, brilliantly successful, as we have seen.

The first piece of evidence (and the only exactly contemporary piece I have found) comes in the anonymous pamphlet, *Trade With France* (May, 1713).⁸⁹ It suggests that the threat to the Portuguese wines has “already awaken’d the *Portugueze*, the Consequences of which may be very fatal to our Trade, and by that to the Landed Interest”, suggesting in that “already” that the Portuguese were quicker to take action than anybody else. What action is more clearly described in William Pittis *History of the Third Session of the Last Parliament* (probably published in 1713) in which a Tory proponent of the Anglo-French treaty talks of “the Threatnings of [the Portuguese] Envoy, who has represented, *That if any Breach [of Methuen’s commercial treaty] be therein made, the King his Master will renew the Prohibition of the Woollen Manufactures of Great Britain*”.⁹⁰ A decade later, this story is repeated a little more fully by the Huguenot historian Abel Boyer in his *History of the Life and Reign of Queen Anne* (1722):

But ’twas not long before the Eyes of the Generality were open’d. For, about the beginning of May, Signior Bruciado, the Portugueze Minister in London, in a Memorial, represented to the Court, “That in Case any Breach was made in the Treaty concluded in 1703, whereby the Duties on French Wines were stipulated to be, at least, one Third higher than on those of Portugal, the King, his Master, would renew the Prohibition of the Woollen Manufactures, and Products of Great Britain: Which not only alarm’d the Portugal Merchants in London, but also all Persons concern’d in the Woollen Manufacture.

This story is then repeated in numerous histories during the eighteenth century.⁹¹ If Boyer does record the sequence of events and if it was indeed “about the beginning of May”, as *Trade With France* and Pittis would indicate, then Brochado may indeed have been instrumental in alarming “all Persons concern’d in the Woollen Manufacture”, who turned into so formidable a lobby.

Against this, however, must be set two categorical statements by Francis, who had read Brochado’s letters to Portugal (as I have not). Francis asserts that Brochado,

⁸⁸ LODGE, 1935: 218n.

⁸⁹ [ANON]. *The Trade with France, Italy, Spain and Portugal, Considered: With Some Observations on the Treaty of Commerce between Great Britain and France*. London: for J. Baker, 1713. This pamphlet is occasionally attributed to Defoe. Given its anti-French message and the date, it is unlikely that Defoe was the author. From internal evidence, it is possible to date the pamphlet fairly precisely to May, 1713. (On page 13, the pamphlet refers to an item that can be traced to the *London Gazette* of May 5-9, 1713, as appearing on “the 9th Instant”).

⁹⁰ PITTIS, [1713]: 91; italics in original.

⁹¹ BOYER, 1722: quotation at 633. See also OLDMIXON, 1735: 518; RAPIN DE THOYRAS, 1732-47: 315; *History and Proceedings*, 1781-96: V, 6n; SMOLLETT, 1827: II, 233-4.

*had been much tempted to use his final argument, the threat that if the preference for Portuguese wines guaranteed by the Methuen treaty was abolished, the restrictions on the imports of English woolen cloth would be reimposed. He found that he had no need to do so and congratulated himself on having refrained.*⁹²

Assuming Francis is right in his readings of the letters, it may be that Brochado was not entirely honest in his letters to Portugal or that in his mind his threatening behaviour in London was more indirect than pamphleteers and historians subsequently took it to be. Whatever the right account, Brochado does seem to have had a very clear view of what from Portugal's point of view was the desired outcome of the Parliamentary debate and, whatever his opinion of Methuen and his treaty, to have been pleased at the defeat of the opposing articles from the Treaty of Utrecht. While we may not be "jubilant" at the long-term effects on Portugal—seen by many, in Sampaio's caricature, to be a century of "escravização económica à Inglaterra e um verdadeiro enfeudamento político àquela nação"—we can at least, take pleasure that in the short term Portugal, so often manipulated by the English, was quite capable of doing some manipulation of its own.⁹³

Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to address some questions about culture, politics, and economics in the context of the Methuen commercial treaty. In the first case, I have tried to show that if, as I believe, the treaty can be said to have held a distinct and privileged place in the English imagination during most of the eighteenth and part of the nineteenth century, it was elevated to that position not in 1703, when the treaty was made, but in 1713 when it was saved from extinction. The argument presented here also indicates that when something like the Methuen treaty is transformed in this way, even though significant cultural forces may be in play, that transformation is not necessarily brought about by those forces. Indeed, in the case of the Methuen treaty, it seems that the material actions of merchants, manufacturers, clothiers, weavers, and perhaps envoys were more important. The transformation happened despite (or at least, as unintended consequences of) the participation of the greatest prose writers of the period Swift and Defoe.

This particular episode also challenges assumptions about the relationship between literary figures and business and economics made by the school of "new economic criticism". In the eyes of this school, writers are generally backward-looking conservative thinkers who fight against change and favour government restrictions, and by contrast businessmen are inherently forward looking, proponents of free trade.⁹⁴ Yet in 1713 it

⁹² FRANCIS, 1972: 140; for a very similar comment see FRANCIS, 1966: 212.

⁹³ SAMPAIO, 1928: 20.

⁹⁴ See, for example, DELANEY, 2002. Swift's deep distaste for the Money'd-Interest, however, does support Delaney's arguments that some writers viscerally dislike for finance capital.

was exactly the leading writers who were arguing the case for free trade and the traders and manufactures who resisted them most vehemently. So while the Whiggish *Englishman* praised the perspicacity of merchants and the shortsightedness of politicians, the Tory *Examiner* was closer to the truth in noting that “our Merchants were fix’d in the Business with other Countries: That some would not, and others were not able to remove their Stock or Credit into a new Channel; and that those engag’d elsewhere would be Selfish enough to oppose the opening of a new Branch of Commerce, however beneficial to the Publick”. St. John was probably right when he argued that if a free-trade treaty was to be successfully concluded, they would have to work, “More in the character of Statesmen, than of Merchants”. But as we have seen, the statesmen were unable to overcome the power of the merchants and their allies.⁹⁵

This paper has also tried to use the early years of the Methuen commercial treaty to show that Anglo-Portuguese relations were not necessarily the outcome of Anglo-Portuguese negotiations. Sideri, by contrast, chooses to discuss the Methuen treaty while explicitly “ignor[ing] any connection which either partner may have had with third countries”.⁹⁶ Such an approach is, in the political realm at least, questionable. Throughout the eighteenth century, England’s relations with Portugal were always circumscribed by its relations with France. According to Lodge, Paul Methuen acknowledged that England paid attention to Portugal when it wanted to draw it into the war, but had for the most part forgotten about it when the war ended. St. John showed himself to be quite unaware of what certain treaties with Portugal entailed, and Lodge suggests that the Board of Trade had lost its copy of one of critical treaties.⁹⁷ Trevelyan, however, praises St. John (who shamefully abandoned the Catalans at the end of the war) for disinterestedly protecting Portuguese interests in the Brazils during the peace negotiations. St. John’s letters, however, suggest that he was principally worried that Portugal could otherwise invoke the Methuen defensive treaty and drag England back into war with France. Beyond that he was simply irritated by Portugal’s attempt to get even part of what was promised to it when it joined the Grand Alliance. In all, while the Methuen Treaties seem primarily to involve England and Portugal, France is the *eminence grise* that hangs over most of England’s actions (or lack of action).⁹⁸

This essay has also tried to understand the Portuguese contribution to the victory for the Methuen commercial treaty in 1713 and to suggest that its envoy might have been an active participant in its salvation. Certainly, as I have noted, the choices faced by the Portuguese were both limited and unappealing. But they were choices and the Marquis de Alegrette who negotiated with Methuen 1703 and Brochado who seems to

⁹⁵ *Englishman* 1713, 3, October 10; *Examiner* 1713, 25, 7-10 August; ST. JOHN, *Letters*, IV 141, to Shrewsbury, May 29, 1713.

⁹⁶ See SIDERI, 1970: 18.

⁹⁷ LODGE, *English Factory*, 244, 241.

⁹⁸ LODGE, *English Factory*, 243; TREVELYAN, 1942: vol. III, 255. ST. JOHN, *Letters*, III, 434, to Shrewsbury, Feb 17, 1712/13; IV, 356 & 358 to Strafford, June 20, 1713.

have fought for Methuen in 1713 tried to do the best they could in the circumstances. The nature of their dilemma—in essence to form or continue a treaty with England or not—are best explained by Pombal, who noted, “Nenhuma Potencia costuma celebrar sem competente garantia tratados voluntarios com outra Potencia de forces superiores: porque estas convenções sempre são leoninas; em razão de que entre as duas partes contractantes aquela que tem a seu favor a prepotencia obriga a outra parte menos forte a que cumpra tudo o que lhe promete, ao mesmo tempo em que nunca acha razões que bastem para cumprir o que estipulou”.⁹⁹ In 1834, at the end of its civil war when again Portugal faced the choice of making a treaty with England or not, it leant the other way and refused to treat with England. Its economy nonetheless remained significantly subject to England’s whims, as before, suggesting how hard and also how futile the choices can be when power is so disproportionate.

Given the circumstances of 1713, it is tempting yet troubling to consider the counterfactual possibilities. What if England had accepted all the articles from the Treaty of Utrecht and England and France had begun to trade freely? Might it, as St. John believed, have produced an era of peace and prosperity for both countries? Was such promise sacrificed to the immediate demands of English workers and Portuguese diplomats? We can surely understand the difficulties these groups confronted without the absurdity of blaming them for a century of war and disruption.

Finally, as we ponder the long life of the Methuen commercial treaty in the English imagination, we must acknowledge again that there were many in England after 1713, besides Adam Smith, who thought the treaty pernicious. Cyrus Redding, a nineteenth-century wine writer was a leading opponent of the treaty in the wine trade, writing,

*The history of no country in the world furnishes an example of greater political absurdity than our own, in the conclusion with Portugal of what is commonly called the Methuen Treaty, better characterized as the Methuen or gin merchant’s job. By this treaty Englishmen were compelled to drink the fiery adulterations of an interested wine company, and from the coarseness of their wines, exposed to imitations without end.*¹⁰⁰

Redding’s target was not so much the Portuguese as the *Companhia Geral da Agricultura das Vinhas do Alto Douro* and the complacent port wine faction in England and Porto that had till that point exercised such a strong grip on the wine market. The French, who as we have seen inadvertently had their own hand in the canonization of Methuen, while regretting the loss of a lucrative market, were willing to report with glee some of the more preposterous claims of the port faction. In 1865, for example, after the final “disestablishment” of Methuen (which was, predictably, the result of Anglo-French negotiations conducted with very little attention to the Portuguese), the *Moniteur Vinicole* gleefully reprinted the following “vigoureuse résistance de la part des

⁹⁹ Quoted in SAMPAIO, 1928: 21.

¹⁰⁰ REDDING, Cyrus, *A History and Description of Modern Wines* (1833) quoted in UNWIN, 1991: 278.

vieux partisans du port, les hommes du traité de Methuen” from an English newspaper, which argued that port made the British army invincible and hence the French were eager to offer their weak wine in its place:

It was the Port Wine for the officers, and the strong beer for the soldiers, that helped to make British arms invincible in many a battle, and I can easily understand Louis Napoléon eager to jump at any treaty that enabled him to wash the brave sons of Britain out their muscle and manhood by this sour and attenuated tipple.

Evidently willing to believe that Methuen had led the British imagination off into a 150 year delusion that culminated in such diatribes, the *Moniteur* felt that now the clock would be reset: “L’Angleterre moderne tend à revenir au point où se trouvaient les vieux Anglais du dix-septième siècle, avant le traité de 1703 qui a définitivement exclu les vins français, au grand regret des bons buveurs”.¹⁰¹ Around this period of disestablishment, then, it should be no surprise that French wines for the first time since the sixteenth century surpassed Portuguese wines in English imports, nor that in the novels of writers such as Benjamin d’Israeli and Anthony Trollope young men generally show an affinity for claret and locate affection for the Methuen treaty and the wine it fostered in the imagination of earlier generations only.¹⁰²

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¹⁰¹ L’Esprit Public Anglais. *Moniteur Vinicole*, 1865 10 (79): 313. While such extraordinary views were news to the *Moniteur Vinicole*, they were not entirely new to the English. See, for example Benjamin d’Israeli’s, novel Vivian Gray:

Ah! it’s the fashion of you young squires to cry down port wine; but depend upon’t, it’s the *real* stuff. We never should have beat the French, if it hadn’t been for their poor sour wines.

[D’ISRAELI, Benjamin], 1827: quotation at I, 125.

¹⁰² George Vavaseur in Anthony Trollope’s *Can You Forgive Her*, though an aspiring wine merchant, when offered port “would drink none at all.” “I suppose,” his port-drinking grandfather responds, “you mean you drink nothing but claret.” See TROLLOPE, 1991: Bk II, Ch 1; Vivian Gray, more simply is said to have had a “due detestation of the Methuen treaty”. See D’ISRAELI, 1827: V, Bk VII, Ch 5.

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