

Absurdity of the multi-documentary approach

The Letters of Junius

Junius was the pseudonym of a writer who wrote acrimonious letters to the London Public Advertiser, from Jan. 21, 1769 to Jan. 21, 1772. He used other pseudonyms before, during, and after this period. There is a marked distinction between the "letters of Junius" and his so-called miscellaneous letters. The "letters of Junius" had the definite object of seeking to discredit the ministry of the duke of Grafton whose administration had been formed in Oct. 1768 when the earl of ^{Chatham} Catham was compelled by ill health to retire from office. Junius fought for the return of Chatham to power when he recovered. His private correspondence with the enemies of the duke of Grafton has been preserved. As political writings they possess no intrinsic value. His letters are invective and abusive and several of his accusations were shown to be unfounded. The satires of Juvenal and the speeches of Cicero against Catiline supplied the inspiration for the employment of personal abuse and satire. If others were doing the same thing Junius did, he did it better than anybody else. His superiority lay in his style. He was by no means original, and he was unequal. He shows the influence of Bolingbroke, of Swift, and above all of Tacitus, who appears to have been his favourite author.

Before 1772 there appeared at least 12 unauthorized republications of his letters, made by speculative printers. Other independent editions followed in quick succession. Junius had been early aware of the advantage he secured by concealment and confessed "the mystery of Junius increases his importance." For two ~~years~~ generations after the appearance of the letter of the 21st of Jan. 1769, speculations as to the authorship of Junius were rife, "and the discussion had hardly ceased in 1910" (Encyl. Brit., 1911 ed.). The 1956 edition of Encyl. Brit. says "discussion had hardly ceased in 1929." Joseph Parkes, author with Herman Merivale of the Memoirs of Sir Philip Francis (1867), gives a list of more than 40 persons who had been supposed to be Junius.