

Addison and steele predecessors to modern media media essay



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Journalism is generally recognized as, ' the collection, preparation, and distribution of news and related commentary . . . through such media as pamphlets, newsletters, newspapers' and other electronic media.(11, n. pag.) Even though modern journalism focuses mainly on the news and current events, it does not necessarily have to be restricted to this certain subject. Joseph Addison and Sir Richard Steele were 18th century writers and they have employed journalism in many of their writings. (11, n. pag.) The most popular example is The Spectator which was one of the most popular pieces of literature written by them. However, they were not necessarily the first journalists, or to employ journalism in their writings. Although Addison and Steele were not the first journalists they still exemplified qualities and similarities of journalism in their literary work.

Joseph Addison (1672-1719) was an English writer and politician. (13, n. pag.) His literary career developed alongside his political career. (1, 15) Despite his political career, '[He] preferred to be a man of letters rather than a man of affairs.' (3, 46) As a writer Addison wrote many types of literature which included poems, prose and essays which also included many periodical essays. (13, n. pag.) If it were not for his essays, Addison's literary reputation would be insignificant. (3, 46) Addison's character was that he was ' curious and observant,' was affiliated to a ' virtuous character, a love of his fellow-men, a reverence for antiquity, and a keen sense of humour.' (xiii -xiv) He finds human characteristics, conduct, thoughts and feelings to be interesting. (6, xxii) He also found interesting to contrast a, ' man's infinite capacities of greatness with his infinite capacities of littleness.' (6,

xxii) This means that he found comparing human's capability to do good and to do wrong interesting. (6, xxii)

What makes Addison such a good writer is that he employs several techniques in addition to his honed writing skills. When he is writing he, 'unobtrusively avoids hammering away at the same theme, for he would think it both bad taste and bad policy to bore his hearers.' (4, 278) He also, 'is averse from all exaggeration; he uses neither high-sounding phrase nor dramatic gesture; he is readier to praise than to find fault.' (4, 278) Addison is also a, 'master of the art of quickening and holding attention. Once you have started for a stroll with him as your companion, you follow his lead to the end, enchanted by the beauty and variety of the scenes through which he takes you. . . . ' (4, 273) When he wrote prose one may describe it as, 'so natural its art, that its occasional lapse into an insouciance reveals a true gentlemanly decorum rather than the frigidly inhuman and geometrical correctness. . . . ' (7, x) As Addison grew more popular with his writings his audience also grew in size. He utilized this opportunity, 'to introduce a large circle of readers to such subjects as the criticism of tragedy, true and false wit, recommendations of ballad simplicity, [and] the morality or immorality of comedy.' (3, 49) What also made him a unique author was that, 'In circumstances of pressing political crisis, when other men were angry and bitter, [he] shows his best qualities; he is extremely amusing, but reasonable and constructive too.' (3, 51) As his audience grew he thought that he had an obligation to educate them and to bring some new knowledge into their lives, in which he mentions, 'Since I have raised to myself so great an audience, I shall spare no pains to make their instruction agreeable, and

their diversion useful, for which reasons I shall endeavour, to enliven morality with wit, and to temper wit with morality. . . .’ (4, 275) He construes this idea because, ‘[he] is deeply alarmed . . . at the relaxation of all moral standards [that] prevail among his fellow-citizens; like them [Addison] believes that this state of affairs cannot continue without danger and dishonor.’ (4, 275) Addison used all, if not most of these techniques in his writings, which included *The Spectator*. He joined together with his lifelong friend Sir Richard Steele and they both wrote *The Spectator* which became the forerunner to the modern day newspaper. (2, 1911) (2, 1912)

Sir Richard Steele (1672-1729) was English essayist, journalist, and politician who was born in Ireland. He is best known for his work with Joseph Addison on *The Spectator*. (14) He actively entered politics from 1707-1710 and began to write periodical essays with Addison, which first included *The Tatler* and then *The Spectator*. (14) (2, 1911) Steele, like Addison, had similar goals in his literary works. His works were unique because he, ‘preached in a supple and precise style, that was warm and penetrating.’ (2, 1912) He, ‘wrote on subjects from describing London and of life in the country to articles on dueling and question of immortality, preached the gospel of reformed gentility and true gentle manliness to oppose the artificial elegance.’ (2, 1912) Like Addison, Steele tried to reform society by providing new and important information and to people in order to educate them. He, ‘ardently desired to stop all the men and women whom he saw around him from falling into the snares of folly and vice. . . .’ (8, xii) This was one of the few goals of his literary work, which included *The Spectator*.

The Spectator was a periodical that ran from 1711 to 1712. Even though The Spectator was a periodical and that Addison and Steele were journalists, the writings themselves, ' show few signs of journalism's interest in news, and indeed on the whole they avoided it.' (3, 47) In which Addison confirms the notion by saying that, ' My paper has not in it a single word of news, a reflection in politics, nor a stroke of party; so on the other, there are no fashionable touches of infidelity, no obscene ideas, no satire upon priesthood, marriages, and the like popular topics of ridicule; no private scandal, nor anything that may tend to the defamation of particular persons, families, or societies.' (10, 248) Through his writing of The Spectator, Addison neither insulted nor condemned anyone, ' whether of Right or Left. He excluded not only party politics from his paper but also partisan and sectarian morality. . . . ' (4, 277) This idea of Addison and Steele wanting to publish a work of literature without bias showed that they wanted to have literary work could be applicable to all kinds of people. (4, 277) However, the true purpose of The Spectator was, ' to bring " philosophy out of the closets and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea tables and in coffee-houses.' ' (7, xiii) Addison devoted himself to the education of people. (4, 310) In other words, Addison and Steele wanted to bring education to the common people, through their literary work. (7, xiii) The Spectator had no specific audience to which it catered to. Addison and Steele meant its main audience to include all kinds of people, it did not matter whether a person was male or female, or their political stance. (4, 266)

Media today has come a long way since the times of Addison and Steele. However, some main aspects are similarly displayed. First of all, the role of the media is to educate people on current events, news and to provide people with entertainment. Addison and Steele also expressed this information in some of their literary works. However, the media today is more focused more on sensationalism, which is the use of, 'startling or thrilling impressions' used to excite an audience and to increase viewership. (15, n. pag.) Addison's and Steele's goals were to educate through their media, not to gain a large audience for the purpose of popularity. (4, 310)

Modern media does encourage spectatorship, but maybe not in the way as Addison envisioned it. Today, media encourages spectatorship, but through different means than Addison and Steele had done. For example, media today offers many entertainment shows and programs that are based on reality, that are called reality shows. These shows supposedly focus on the reality of things and offer spectatorship to the viewers. However, these reality shows do not necessarily focus on educating people and some of these shows do not have any intellectual value. They primarily focus on providing entertainment to the masses and are rated on popularity rather than on intellectual merit. Journalism, since the time of Addison and Steele, has also suffered due to this shift in media's priorities. Journalism also encourages spectatorship, but differently than Addison and Steele had done with their journalistic works. Journalism today still does focus on news and current events, but sometimes it focuses more on sensationalism in politics, current events and celebrities in order to gain a larger audience. Some media that focus on the news and current events sometimes tend to show bias. Addison and Steele almost did the opposite of what modern media is

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doing in the present. They focused on bring information and education to the masses through their journalistic work, and they did not care whether they had a large audience or not, that is why they did not use sensationalism in their work. They also did not include politics in some of their writings to avoid bias. Even though a lot of the modern media has changed, that involves more of the use of sensationalism; it does not represent all mainstream media. There are still some media that stay true to the purpose of media, which Addison and Steele exemplified in their literary work.

Journalism primarily provides access to people about the news, current events, and commentary. Its purpose is to educate of the unknown. Addison and Steele through their qualities and their writing styles brought truth to the purpose of journalism. Although they were not the first journalists they still exemplified qualities and similarities of journalism in their literary work. There were many before them that developed the writing styles that they had used. The Spectator is a perfect example of Addison's and Steele's journalistic writing styles. It exemplifies the intent and purpose of journalism and did not discriminate against on whether someone could read it or not, it was a piece of literature that was intended for everybody. Today, modern media does promote spectatorship, but not necessarily in the ways Addison has defined or had intended it to be. It has strayed slightly from its original purpose. The modern media today focuses more so on sensationalistic ideas and events than on providing educational information. It does this in order to gain a large audience and in return receive a bigger financial paycheck. Even though not all media is like this it still makes one question the integrity of media that has progressed and changed throughout the years. This is why

we have to reevaluate our system of the media to focus less on sensationalism and more on education like Addison and Steele did.