

PRESS & TELEVISION

the number of daily stories dropped from 157 to 92.

Gannett has made some improvement in its new property, writes Katel. The *New Mexican* runs some excellent local features and gives good coverage of nearby Espanola. But, like Gray, Katel suggests that conglomerates may not be big enough to fill small newspapers' shoes.

Milton as Censor

"John Milton's Place in Journalism History: Champion or Turncoat" by Mark Fackler and Clifford G. Christians, in *Journalism Quarterly* (Winter 1980), School of Journalism, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kans. 66045.

John Milton (1608–74) has long puzzled historians of journalism. His impassioned 1642 essay, *Areopagitica*, is perhaps the most compelling defense of free speech ever penned in English. But to some scholars, Milton's later brief service as Oliver Cromwell's press licenser showed him to be lacking "the courage of his convictions."

Fackler and Christians, researchers in journalism at the University of Illinois, Urbana, defend the epic poet's reputation.

A long-time foe of the Stuart monarchy and England's Anglican state religion, Milton enthusiastically supported the Puritan Revolution of 1642. After Oliver Cromwell's victorious "Roundheads" executed Charles I in 1649, Milton joined the Puritan administration for one year as Secretary of Foreign Tongues. His prime responsibility was composing state correspondence elegant enough to allay the fears of continental monarchs wary of the Puritan regicides. He also oversaw *Mercurius Politicus*, an official newspaper, and licensed publications for printing.

How stiff a censor was he? A close reading of styles in *Mercurius Politicus* suggests that the ailing Milton was an absentee adviser, who contributed occasional paragraphs but gave chief writer Marchmont Needham nearly free rein. Indeed, during Milton's tenure, there was less to Puritan censorship in general than the harsh-sounding laws of the Roundheads have led some historians to conclude. The Printing Act of 1649, for instance, which curbed the number of presses, the production of type, and printers' profits, was not enforced until 1651. And full-time Puritan censors were phased out soon after Cromwell's victory, not to re-emerge until 1662.

Milton apparently stretched the definition of "acceptable literature" in the Puritans' eyes. Soon after he left public service, the nearly blind bard was summoned to defend his licensing of a heretical catechism. His defense (allowed "just this once" by the Council of State): He had simply followed the principles expressed in *Areopagitica*.

Milton himself never perceived a conflict of interest between his belief in free speech and his "censor's" role. He held that free expression must advance justice and virtue. To him, in 17th-century revolutionary England, that meant "the good of my country and . . . the glorious cause in which we were engaged."