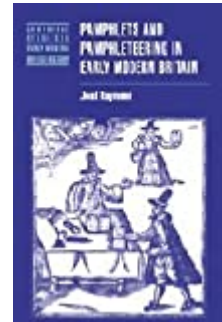


**Joad Raymond.** *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. xviii + 384 pp. \$70.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-81901-5.



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Until relatively recently it was possible for scholars of early-modern Britain to disregard ephemeral printed material in favor of more “respectable” and “reliable” sources such as government papers, court records, or private diaries. Yet over the last twenty years scholars have come to realize the inherent limitations of manuscript sources and have begun to re-assess the importance of the mass of printed material produced during the early-modern period.

This interest in the uses and effects of print-culture has inspired many of the most outstanding books on early-modern history of the last twenty years, such as (to name only three among many possible candidates) Margaret Spufford’s *Small Books and Pleasant Histories* (1981), Tessa Watts’s *Cheap Print and Popular Piety* (1991), and Adam Fox’s *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500-1700* (2000).<sup>[1]</sup> Joad Raymond’s new book *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain* is a timely addition to the literature and will undoubtedly be required reading for all those interested in the development of print-culture and propaganda. At a number of points in this book Raymond challenges us to re-assess some generally accepted ideas about print-culture (such as the chronology of the arrival of serial publication in England or the importance of the “print explosion” of 1641), but the brilliance of this book lies not in the author’s

re-imagining of the period but in his ability to synthesize the now enormous secondary literature on this topic in the disparate fields of history, bibliography, and literary studies. Raymond has used his prodigious reading to produce a remarkably stimulating, engaging, and (on the whole) convincing narrative of the rise and decline of pamphlets in Britain.

Raymond begins by defining a pamphlet as a short, cheap, vernacular work “generally printed in quarto format,... of topical interest or engaged with social, political or ecclesiastical issues” (p. 8). Crucially, pamphlets were associated in the public mind with slander or scurrility. He then suggests that pamphlets were part of the everyday practice of politics, and the primary means of creating and influencing public opinion during the hundred years under consideration in this book, from 1588 to 1688. Having outlined the parameters of this study, he turns his attention to the first sustained use of the pamphlet as a propaganda weapon—the Marprelate controversy of the 1580s and 1590s. This is not just a simple re-telling of a well-known story. Raymond’s literary background and his profound historical sensibility enable him to examine the significance of the affair and the literary strategies of the Marprelatist propagandists. He is particularly good at capturing the language, style, and cadences of the material he describes.

Having hooked the reader with a bravura opening performance, Raymond then proceeds to a very useful overview of the mechanics of printing and distributing pamphlets. This chapter includes an excellent summary of the status of authors, printers, and publishers, and of the complex relationships between them. This is done so well that it is tempting to suggest that for all but a handful of readers with a specialist interest in, and knowledge of, the early-modern booktrade, this chapter will be the only work that they need to consult on this subject. The next chapter, on the development of serial production, provides a succinct overview of the development of serial productions such as corantos and newsbooks up to 1660. Again, for all but the most specialized of readers this chapter provides all that one could ever want to know about early serial production in Britain.

In many ways chapters 5 and 6, covering the period 1637 to 1660, are the core of the book. They are also the best and most informative chapters, not merely because the huge growth in print during the Civil Wars and Interregnum makes for a good yarn, but because this is the period with which Raymond is most familiar. The confidence and panache with which he tackles these chapters is extremely impressive. In an important revision, he warns us to be wary about reifying George Thomason's collection of Civil War pamphlets and asks us to look beyond London to Scotland and the United Provinces for the origins of the "print explosion" of the early 1640s. Thomason, he shows, tended to collect material printed in London which reflected his own political or religious preoccupations. As such, those who have worked extensively on the Thomason tracts have often missed the fact that Charles I's opponents in Scotland or in exile on the continent used print as a political weapon during the 1630s. For Raymond, the dramatic year of 1641, which saw the publication of more than four thousand titles, only amplified an existing trend, and occurred upon a geographical axis of print and polemic extending between Glasgow, Edinburgh, London, Leiden, and Amsterdam.

The final chapters, on female involvement in the production and distribution of pamphlets and the history of the pamphlet after the Restoration, are interesting and informative, and marshal a huge range of sources into a readable, lucid narrative structure. This book is a breath of fresh air in an age in which it seems that many publishers, even reputable academic publishers, are churning out more and more books not because they are any good but because they can convince enough libraries to purchase them. *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering* is that rarest of things: a book that when one has finishing reading it

one cannot help thinking, "I wish I had written that."

Yet, despite the brilliance of Raymond's achievement this book is not without its faults. On second and subsequent readings of the text, it seems both to be too long and to cover too short a chronological period.

A good editor could have shortened this book by 20 percent without impacting adversely upon Raymond's narrative, central argument, or achievement. The reader is frequently force-fed numerous examples when one or two would suffice. On several occasions Raymond says that this book is not the place to discuss a particular topic, such as the history of reading, before launching into extraordinarily long and detailed footnotes which are obviously the product of weeks of study on his part. There is an unmistakable tension between the parts of the book which are the result of Raymond's prodigious reading of the secondary literature, and the portions in which he supplements this literature with his own primary research, mostly in the years between 1640 and 1660, but also in the 1610s. One cannot but wonder whether *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering* began life as a shorter textbook which took on a life of its own as the author read more and more.

More importantly, this book deals with too short a period of history. It claims to provide an account of pamphlets in early-modern Britain, but it really only covers the hundred years from 1588 to 1688. Raymond ends his story in 1688 because he claims that by this time increasing numbers of controversial, topical items, which had previously been produced as quarto pamphlets, were now being printed in formats such as folio, octavo, or duodecimo. In this account, by the early 1690s the pre-eminent position of the quarto pamphlet in political debate had been assumed by the folio news periodical. This fetishization of the quarto format of the pamphlet is strange because even in the late-sixteenth century, as Raymond himself notes, pamphlets were "generally" (p. 8), but not exclusively, printed in quarto format. Even during the heyday of the pamphlet in the mid-seventeenth century some publishers produced folio editions of quarto pamphlets, so the re-adoption of the practice in the 1680s was not as ground-breaking as Raymond would have us believe.

Bibliography can often complement historical and literary enquiry, but it is not without its problems; one of the greatest bibliographers of the twentieth century once claimed that nothing of any real importance happened in mid-seventeenth-century England because the number of sheets of paper going through the printing press

in 1641 was roughly the same as in previous decades. This bibliographical truth missed the profound historical significance of the change from printing, say, an eight-hundred-page theological work in Latin before 1640 to printing one hundred separate eight-page topical pamphlets in English during the Civil War. The amount of paper being used had not changed, but the way in which it was being used had. In a similar fashion, Raymond notices the increasing use of octavo-sized rather than quarto-sized paper in pamphlets after 1688, but fails to see the continuity of the contents, arguments, and strategies of the pamphlet into the eighteenth century. Tom Paine's best-selling *Common Sense* (1776) was produced in octavo format, but it was intended as a short, cheap vernacular pamphlet which engaged with topical social, political, and ecclesiastical issues. It was certainly read

as a pamphlet by contemporaries, and denounced as such by the authorities. Although newspapers certainly came into their own during the eighteenth century, the idea that pamphlets were a spent force by 1690 is untenable; few printed texts have had such a dramatic effect on political events as Paine's *Common Sense*. A history of the pamphlet in early-modern Britain should begin, as Raymond does, with the Marprelate controversy, and it should end not with the damp squib of the Glorious Revolution but with the wonderfully clear, lucid, and irresistible prose of Tom Paine.

#### Note

[1]. Editor's note: For Adam Fox, see H-Albion review at <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=46131009478806>.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-albion>

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