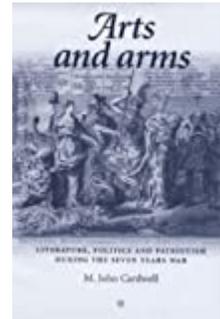




M. John Cardwell. *Arts and Arms: Literature, Politics and Patriotism during the Seven Years War.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004. xii + 306 pp. \$74.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7190-6618-4.



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British Public Opinion during the Seven Years War

This is a useful and well-written addition to the historiography of Britain in the Seven Years War. Unfortunately the book does not get away to the best of starts on account of its perplexing title. The author's subsequent remarks about the title, while comprehensible, hardly justify his choice. The book, which heads into territory ably covered by Marie Peters in her book of 1980, might well have been distinctively entitled *British Public Opinion during the Seven Years War*.^[1]

Cardwell utilizes over one thousand independently published works of political commentary, most of them contemporary. He has also consulted a huge number of political prints, ballads, newspapers, political pamphlets, and broadsides, together with a number of plays and works of fiction. His purpose is simply indicated at the outset: to "examine the representation of the Seven Years War in contemporary political literature" (p. 1). He undertakes to analyze in detail "the practical interrelationship between politics and letters during 1754-63" (p. 4). In general, he achieves his purpose very well. He draws on what may be deemed a fairly comprehensive array of contemporary works and presents them effectively in

their historical context.

Some criticism, however, must be made of Cardwell's methodology. He proposes to "test the accuracy of the information" conveyed by his collection of literary works "against the correspondence and memoirs of politicians, parliamentary debates, and other genres of political propaganda" (p. 3). This implies that the labors of latter-day historians to assess the accuracy of those same sources, for instance the famous memoirs of Horace Walpole, are swept under Cardwell's carpet. Admittedly, he does reassuringly supply at the end of his extensive bibliography a long list of Printed Secondary Works and, indeed, his own commentaries suggest that he has well mastered the main body of such secondary works. Yet, if Horace Walpole often comes near to providing a satisfactory test of the "accuracy" of Cardwell's materials, the same can hardly be said of all of his assembled memoirs. The most dubious of these memoirs must be *Augustus Hervey's Journal*.^[2] The editor of its published version observes: "It is doubtful if [Hervey] meant his account for publication.... From internal evidence [which is duly cited] it seems that it was written between 1767 and

1770—at least eight years after the last event described,” that is, May 1759. Erskine’s comments illustrate the merits of latter-day scholarship in supplying a test of “accuracy.”

Cardwell gives good value in his accounts of the nature and distribution of his collected expressions of political opinion. He supplies an excellent picture of how and where ballads were sung, newspapers read, and satirical poems and political prints disseminated and enjoyed. Plays and fiction were also influential. Various key political decisions taken by the king, William Pitt, the duke of Newcastle, and—perhaps most spectacularly and certainly most self-destructively—by Henry Fox, justify Cardwell’s claim that ballads achieved “a nearly instantaneous response to the development of a political crisis” (pp. 4-5). The pages leading up to Fox’s fraught and career-limiting decision of October 1756 to desert Newcastle, like those preceding the formation, in June 1757, of the war-winning Pitt-Newcastle government, illustrate the barely-resistible power of public opinion. Cardwell’s book, in this sequence, makes its most striking contribution to the history of the war.

It was the emotion aroused by Minorca’s loss and John Byng’s execution that produced the greatest explosion of condemnation, followed by heated controversy. As Cardwell makes clear, the opinion of the majority was, from before the war, strongly in favor of a blue-water strategy. This called for naval predominance and thus the ability to defeat a more populous France, especially where it sought to build up its (much inferior) forces in North America, and also for Britain to dominate generally the trade routes of the world.

The interactions of public opinion and Pitt throughout the war are well illustrated. Not only did Pitt come to power through the publicly perceived incompetence of Newcastle, Philip York, earl of Hardwicke, and George

Anson during the whole episode of Minorca and Byng. There was also the Hanoverian aspect. Pitt, having initially pleased a tranche of public opinion by opposing any British commitment of troops or money to the European continent, eventually saw that the survival of Prussia against the combined attack of Russia, Austria, and France was in Britain’s best interests. The varying reactions of the public to his militarily successful dispatch of British troops to serve under Ferdinand of Brunswick is a theme well illustrated by Cardwell right through to the peacemaking period at the end. Pitt’s resignation in 1761 over the issue of preventive war against Spain is also a highlight. His subsequent acceptance of a peerage understandably generates much entertaining invective from disillusioned patriot supporters.

This book does not claim to be seen as a balanced estimate of Pitt, whether as politician or as war leader. But Pitt is rewardingly portrayed in this book as a great public performer. He emerges as someone remarkably attuned to what the public most wanted to hear and who succeeded in responding, much to the nation’s advantage, in a manner unmatched by any other politician of the day. The book allows the reader to make comparisons with the performance of other leading players, all the way from George II to George III and his favorite, the earl of Bute.

In sum, anyone interested in British public opinion as a determining influence during the Seven Years War will derive much benefit from this book.

Notes

[1]. Marie Peters, *Pitt and Popularity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).

[2]. *Augustus Hervey’s Journal: The Adventures Afloat and Ashore of a Naval Casanova*, ed. David Erskine (Chatham, facsimile reprint, 2002, original ed., 1953).

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