

Jayne E. E. Boys. *London's News Press and the Thirty Years War*.

Studies in Early Modern Cultural, Political and Social History 12. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2011. x + 338 pp. \$99. ISBN: 978-1-84383-677-3.

Jayne Boys's book, based on her doctoral thesis, is a welcome addition on a much-needed topic: the role of foreign news in the printed serial news publications in the early seventeenth century. While foreign news is sometimes treated as an inferior substitute for domestic news, and the foreign-news corantos of the 1620s and 1630s as inferior substitutes for 1640s newsbooks (a view the author oddly attributes to this reviewer), in fact there was a clear and sustained demand for news of Europe in Stuart Britain. This demand sustained a lively trade in publications, despite government interventions, and the history of how this trade fitted into early Stuart politics, debate, and foreign policy is complex.

Boys offers a more detailed account of this history than has hitherto been available. She has a clear understanding of 1620s and 1630s politics, and presents a wealth of evidence, mainly from the corantos themselves. (A note on terminology: Boys uses the term *corantos* to refer exclusively to single-sheet double-column print, and *newsbooks* to designate a quarto serial pamphlet of news. I follow here contemporaries, who tended to use the former to refer to foreign-news publications, and the latter to domestic and mixed-news, though the distinction is relatively unimportant.) The book is broken down into three sections, more or less corresponding to themes and approaches to the topic: the first on the place of periodicals in the book trade, and the emerging market for news in a printed form in England and elsewhere; the second on editing styles and sources, and their relationship with readers; the third on news and the state, and the use and suppression of the press by the government.

The presentation of material is highly descriptive. There is an underlying narrative, in which shifts in production and licensing in 1622 and the suppression of corantos in 1632 play important parts. However, the description tends to bury the analysis. While the plentiful materials are useful and interesting, they are not arranged in a way to invite a sustained and engaged read. And while Boys's grasp of 1620s and 1630s politics is excellent, it is doubtful that the book adds much either to revisionist or post-revisionist arguments, which sometimes seem less than clearly distinguished. An analysis of the internationalism of news culture, and the place of England's news (the question of Britain receives only cursory attention) in Europe's news networks, should surely provide a means of reassessing the political culture of the period. The most useful analyses provide a basis for such a reassessment. Chapters seven and eight — which are particularly good — look at Sir Francis Cottingham, James's licenser to the press, and Georg Weckherlin, Charles' licenser. Boys stresses the role of both as mediators in relations with stationers, adopting a multifarious approach to control. She rightly suggests that neither court nor press were entirely lacking in pro-Palatine advocates. Censorship is integral to the vision of the book, and Boys adopts a now-conventional moderate role, seeing it as partly effective yet not ideologically absolutist. It worked through

a series of measures rather than absolute proscription, and foreign relations were a central concern. The grasp of the ideological issues around control is limited and there is some confusion about the relationship between entrance in the Stationers' Register and Company and ecclesiastical licences.

The book offers a wealth of evidence. At times, however, this evidence seems excessively homogenous. As in traditional newspaper historiography, much inference is based on the content of the corantos and on extant copies. The survival of copies is used as evidence for the size of print runs and the extent of circulation. This is simply too speculative to be persuasive, and the numbers are too small to be statistically significant. And the suggestion that 1620s editors learned to listen to their readers is almost entirely based on internal evidence; more evidence from heterogeneous sources — the sources now familiar in histories of reading — would have made this internal evidence more reliable. That corantos were numerous and culturally significant — and that they lay at the end of pan-European news networks — is indubitable. Yet there needs to be much more concrete research undertaken on the relationship between the networks and on the particular material manifestations at the ends or nodes of these networks, including corantos. This is a welcome addition to recent scholarship on early modern news, but it indicates how much more remains undone.

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