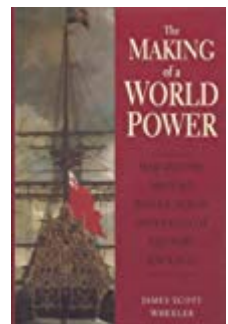
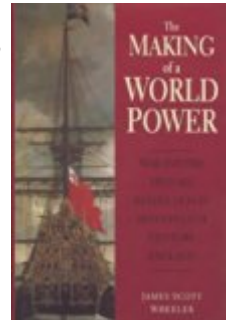


Claude J. Summers, Ted-Larry Pebworth, eds.. *The English Civil Wars in the Literary Imagination*. Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1999. xi + 279 pp. \$39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8262-1220-7.

Scott Wheeler. *The Making of a World Power: War and the Military Revolution in Seventeenth-Century England*. Stroud, England: Sutton Publishing, 1999. viii + 280 pp. \$36.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7509-2025-4.



Reviewed by D. J. B. Trim

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The two works reviewed seem at first sight as unlike each other as two books on seventeenth-century England can be. Military, institutional historians, focusing on the records of central government (especially financial), and literary scholars, intuitively interpreting the texts of a few key authors (often in the light of modern theory) appear to be worlds apart; while between an academic monograph and conference proceedings there is often likewise a great gulf. What both the works in question demonstrate, however, is the centrality of events in the middle decades of the seventeenth century -- not just chronologically, but in virtually every respect.

The collection of essays contains fifteen papers, originally presented in 1996 at the twelfth

biennial Renaissance Conference, University of Michigan at Dearborn. All the essays have been revised by the contributors since the conference in the light of reaction to their own and others' papers, but the volume's subject matter remains diverse. Nevertheless, thanks to the variety of topics they address, the essays complement and challenge each other in a stimulating way, while in any case they do have a more-or-less common theme -- one which is, or ought to be, of interest not only to literary scholars, but to political, ecclesiastical, intellectual and cultural historians as well. All deal with the response of the seventeenth-century literary imagination to the extraordinary and manifold events of the 1640s, '50s and '60s which had such a profound impact on

early-modern English church, state, society and culture.

Professor Wheeler's exhaustively-researched and well-produced monograph has a strong thesis: that "England experienced a series of interrelated developments in military technology and government financial administration in the relatively short period ... 1639 to 1675, which revolutionized the way the English state fought and sustained warfare" and which in turn enabled the Anglo-British state to become a world power. These developments, Wheeler believes, were "Military and Financial Revolutions" (p. 216), in capitals. This book reveals in great detail the range of changes that occurred under the Stuarts (albeit mostly not organised by them) and laid the foundations for British power in the eighteenth century. However, this is not enough for Wheeler, a professor at the United States Military Academy, for he is engaging in the wider debate about the existence and periodization of an early-modern "Military Revolution". Most of his book is basically a history of English financial and military institutions and how they were reformed, but its real point is to fit those reforms into the military revolution paradigm (and along the way chapter 3 argues for a "Naval Revolution" as well!). Wheeler convincingly demonstrates that developments in the financing and administration of war were essentially revolutionary, rather than evolutionary; but questions remain as to whether they comprise Revolutions with a capital R. We are in Eltonian territory here, though his lack of references to the late doyen of sixteenth-century history's *Tudor Revolution in Government* (Cambridge, 1953) suggests Professor Wheeler is unaware of it. His thesis comes on top of the existing fierce debate as to whether or not the events of the 1640s and '50s comprise an "English Revolution". To these existing potential revolutions in early-modern England, Summers and Pebworth add "the revolutions in genre and form that characterize the literature of the mid-seventeenth century" (pp. 1-2). The contributors to their collection take this for

granted, though they are not concerned with a "literary revolution": their "r" words are the "representation" of the civil wars and the ways they are "refigured and refracted". And thus they side-step debate as to "whether the English civil wars constituted a genuine revolution or a more limited ...rebellion" (p. 1; an exception is in Graham Roebuck's insightful and revealing etymology of the word "cavalier", pp. 9-26, esp. pp. 10-12). Professor Wheeler, too, arguably has three buzz words, albeit rather more prosaic: customs, excise and assessment, each of which has a chapter to itself (chapters 6-8). In the light of the linguistic turn of many of the contributors to *Civil Wars in the Literary Imagination*, it seems appropriate to point out that these different key terms signal the different approaches of the two volumes. Yet, again, for all that the military historian seeks to demonstrate that England was transformed and why, whereas the literary scholars seek to explore how that transformation reveals itself, all are certain of the transformatory nature of events in the middle of the seventeenth century.

One can quibble with Professor Wheeler's point of departure, since his claim that England was a second-rate European power at the start of the Stuart period seriously misrepresents the actual military power wielded by the Elizabethan regime and the significance of the kingdom in Europe in the first years of the seventeenth century. He criticises (pp. 10-11) John Brewer for such a misrepresentation in his splendid *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State 1688-1783* (New York, 1989), yet in effect the thrust of his own work repeats the error. Still, it is certainly true that the Tudor position of strength was diminished by James. The contrast between Britain in 1605 (carefully chosen by Wheeler as two years after Elizabeth's death) and 1705 would actually be more marked if it were between 1615 -- after James had helped to mediate the disputed succession to the duchies of Cleves-Juliers -- and 1715, when Britain, in the wake of the War of the Spanish Succession had clearly eclipsed Bourbon

France and Habsburg Spain, its two great rivals of a hundred years before. However, the overall point is still a good one; although England's relative status in Europe at the start of the seventeenth century is distorted by Wheeler (and he is in good company in that), the rise in English -- and thus British -- power under the Stuarts is truly remarkable. When one reflects on the nadir reached under Charles I (and James II) the powerful position bequeathed to the Hanoverians relatively soon afterwards is even more remarkable. It was, Professor Wheeler argues, due to the reforms (or were they revolutions?) he carefully details.

What one must ask, however, is were the *military* events of 1639-58 really so remarkable as to comprise a revolution and was Wheeler's "revolution in the state's financial affairs" truly "directly the result of the Military Revolution" (p. vii)? Chapter One subjects the concept of a military revolution to some much needed clear-headed analysis. In effect, Wheeler argues that a long-term sequence of changes can be separated from the original series of events which triggered them; it is the latter, rather than the former which thus comprise a revolution. This is an important contribution to the debate, though Professor Wheeler does not give it the prominence it deserves. However, if one is to judge in these terms, then it could be argued that a military revolution in fact occurred in England in the sixteenth century and that all the events of the following hundred years, turbulent though they were, were simply "the long-term sequence of further changes which were set in motion by the qualitative nature" of earlier events (p. 9). This rather undermines the idea that the "making" of England as a world power took place as the result of a military revolution in the seventeenth century.

Professor Wheeler convincingly establishes that the Civil Wars were crucial in the process of financial and administrative change, but *pace* his claims at various points, he does not demonstrate a causal connection between those changes and

specific strategic, tactical or technological advances. In short, while he does show that the events of the mid-seventeenth century triggered a Financial Revolution which took place because of the stresses of war, he does not show that those stresses were due to (or even were in and of themselves) a Military Revolution.

There is a point of contact here with the Summers and Peabworth collection. Few of their contributors attempt to show how actual military operations are reflected in the literary imagination; their concerns are with "the wars" in general, rather than the fighting. The papers of Diane Purkiss and M. L. Donnelly provide notable exceptions. Professor Purkiss attempts something innovative, but the results are not quite convincing. In "Dismembering and Remembering" (pp. 220-41) she addresses the supposed emasculating effect of battle and its memory, particularly upon soldiers who had witnessed and/or suffered battle injuries. This is an imaginative thesis and enjoyable to read, but it is not really supported by the evidence. Throughout the essay Professor Purkiss asserts that examples drawn from a wide variety of texts reflect loss of (or at least doubts about) masculine identity; but rarely do the original authors' own statements warrant such judgments--her conclusions are generally inferential and based on her own anachronistic reading *imposed* on the texts. Dr. Donnelly explores "Milton's Revaluation of the Heroic Celebration of Military Virtue" (pp. 202-19). One is inclined to wonder if what some critics see as Milton's disenchantment in the face of the horrific realities of war is not actually simply the poet's attempts at some degree of realistic depiction, as practised by Sir Philip Sidney. However, Donnelly's conclusion that Milton had a more paradoxical, ambivalent attitude to the traditional martial virtues than indicated by much recent scholarship rings true and this is a stimulating essay.

Traditional historians might at this point object and say, "so what?" Poets are, of course, extra-

ordinary, but surely they are usually extraordinary not in what they feel, but in the depth of those feelings and their ability (even need) to communicate them. If, as both Donnelly and Purkiss posit, Milton felt first lust for war, followed by a certain amount of revulsion and disenchantment, then surely many other young and middle-aged men must have done and felt likewise. His poetry may thus be an expression of a common experience: a change in attitudes to warfare as a result of experiencing it. The paradox is that this does not seem to have stopped a great expansion of the military sphere by the state. This paradox is only realised by putting the two books together; and it is something one would have liked to have seen explored.

The two books thus complement each other rather well. After all, Wheeler observes that his "financial and military revolutions ... initiated a cumulative, self-sustaining advance in military and government technologies whose repercussions have been felt in all aspects of British life", provoking and promoting "economic, political, and cultural changes" (pp. 9, 216). That these changes are better understood if one better understands the textual productions of the era and those who produced them is implicit in much of Christopher Hill's work and has been recently and forcibly argued by Kevin Sharpe, yet a gulf between historical and critical approaches to those events remains. The essays in the Summers and Peabworth volume, all by literary scholars, specifically claim to be "historically grounded" (p. 3); this surely reveals the extent to which literary scholars both desire the authoritative mantle of the historian and wish their work to be embraced by their colleagues in British Studies.

Professor Wheeler has not explored the cultural repercussions of the reforms he describes, but this is intended as an observation, not a criticism. He has done all seventeenth-century historians a great service in detailing the developments in military and government administration. His

numerous tables and figures detailing income and expenditure will eagerly be mined by seventeenth-century scholars and specialists in the history of government and finance. His work complements that of John Brewer and Michael Braddick, but is significant in its own right because it pushes the analysis of government finance back to the beginning of the seventeenth century and puts it firmly in the context of the administration of war-making. This war administration was the catalyst for the whole process of innovation and as Wheeler shows, contrary to Brewer's view, this process was triggered by the civil wars rather than the Glorious Revolution (NB pp. 11- 12, 20 and 197-98). In pointing out that he could have said more on some subjects, I hope I do not seem ungrateful for what he has said, since so much of it is very helpful.

However, having read the two books together, one cannot help but imagine a world in which scholars write histories that address not only the process of change but its impact as well -- and seek not only to interpret texts but to explain the wider forces that produced them, based on archival research as well as theoretically-informed intuitive readings. *Both* the historical and the critical approaches are, of course, equally legitimate and potentially fruitful; yet, in the words of an early-modern Danish university man, surely a marriage of the two "is a consummation devoutly to be wish'd."

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