

*More than a Province of the Mind*

**Johanna Archbald** (National Library of Ireland)

A review of

**Richard B. Sher**, *The Enlightenment and the Book: Scottish Authors and their Publishers in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Ireland, and America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), ISBN: 0-226-75252-6, xxvi+815pp.

Richard B. Sher opens this work with a defining statement that the Scottish Enlightenment would be unimaginable apart from its published texts. It is the role of the publisher which is examined in this book as the central pillar in the architecture of eighteenth-century book culture. Sher has previously argued that a tolerant established church and an outstanding university, both led by the same group of distinguished men of letters, were instrumental in creating an atmosphere highly conducive to enlightened thought and culture. *The Enlightenment and the Book* serves to bolster these arguments by looking at the publishing opportunities afforded to these men which was the major vehicle for the protagonists of the Scottish Enlightenment to express themselves in print and therefore expose their ideas to an international audience. At its heart, this book examines the relationship between author and publisher, highlighting the importance of the latter as an influential actor, not only on the production and distribution of texts, but sometimes as collaborator or instigator on an intellectual level. Sher's approach could be considered a 'book history'; one where the publisher is acknowledged as the link between the commercial side of the book trade (banks, agents, booksellers, customers) and the producers and manufactures of the trade (authors, printers, illustrators, binders). The scope of Sher's research is emphasised by the book's solid empirical foundation; a database containing information about 115 Scottish authors who published 360 books during the period 1746-1800 and several complementary tables of this information detailing the physical size, print run, and reprints in subject categories which allow for extensive comparison.

This work is divided into three parts, each dealing with an element of the Scottish Enlightenment book trade in the Atlantic World. The first part deals with the importance of print in the Scottish Enlightenment and the technical processes of authorship, book production and publication, with particular emphasis on the bibliographic and physical make-up of editions. Using detailed analysis of the private and business correspondence of authors and publishers along with the physical evidence relating to the size and format of the primary texts, Sher builds a picture of a complicated process of author image creation, through prefaces and bibliographic formats, and the professionalisation of authorship, through the payment of generous copy money. Throughout these processes the publishers and their personal relationships to each other and their Scottish authors are discussed, with publishers being shown to have taken on the role of patron by providing authors with personal services, including hospitality and social support. These functions are regarded as a crucial factor in the success of Scottish Enlightenment publishing along with the publishers' personal interest in the spread of Enlightenment ideas and the intellectual reputation of Scotland.

Part two brings the argument from the Scottish to the British stage with an examination of the London-Edinburgh publishing axis. Sher highlights the deep Scottish penetration of the London market which stemmed from common social and religious backgrounds, further fostered by marriage, apprenticeships and partnerships, both formal and informal. From the quantitative analysis of table 2 in the appendix it is clear that as far as new books of the Scottish Enlightenment were concerned, the cities of London and

Edinburgh were at the publishing forefront. About two-thirds of the Edinburgh titles in the study can be linked with London through co-publication or the role of selling agent. Such evidence usually found in imprints indicates that various strategies of co-publication and collaboration were common and successful ventures in the period. Though collaboration was not unusual in this period, the level of large intercity co-publication networks developed between Edinburgh and London publishers were quite extraordinary, particularly in light of the normally guarded attitude of London publishers towards copyright and reprints. The largest firm involved in the 360 editions of the study was the London firm of Andrew Millar continued by Cadell, and then Cadell & Davies with the Edinburgh firm founded by Alexander Kincaid, and continued by William Creech, second in terms of imprints related to Scottish Enlightenment authors. The fortunes of each of these firms and many other contemporaries are examined by Sher and what emerges is a two stage process; in the first instance the five founding booksellers of the Scottish Enlightenment (Millar, Strahan, Hamilton, Balfour and Kincaid) published and promoted new work by Scottish authors from the mid-eighteenth century using London and Edinburgh as their bases of operation; in the second the foundations of Scottish Enlightenment publishing were broadened to include some English booksellers based in London who increased competition for manuscripts and further bolstered the image of the author by the rising copy money paid to authors. Sher also points out that the 1774 judgment on literary property did not have the disastrous effect as has previously been presumed (28, 352-56, 399).

The Atlantic context of Sher's argument is detailed in part three. The Dublin reprint trade (the second city in the British Empire in terms of politics and publishing in this period) played an influential role in disseminating the books of the Scottish Enlightenment to a wider readership due to their ability to avoid copyright payments and lower production costs. The competition from reprints, particularly those from Dublin, likely forced the London booksellers to speed up their publication of cheaper octavo editions of major quarto works to stop the Irish reprints from flooding the English and American markets, though their penetration of the latter was quite extensive. Beyond Ireland, the influence of Irish-trained book trade personnel who emigrated to America was also critical as they brought with them a knowledge of the economic and social impact of good cheap reprints. Sher's analysis follows the careers of several Irish and Scottish booksellers who entered the American market such as Dubliner Mathew Carey and the Scottish booksellers Thomas Dobson and William Young who variously copied and eventually 'Americanised' reprinted texts to become not only Atlantic agents of the Scottish Enlightenment but vehicles for an emerging American Enlightenment.

As a whole this work is very articulate and illuminates the importance of author-publisher relations as well as the importance of an Atlantic perspective for the eighteenth-century book trade. It also highlights the importance of peripheral cities such as Dublin and Philadelphia as print centres. John Feather once provocatively argued that English provincial printers, and to some extent the provincial print centres of the British Empire, were left with little more than 'the scraps from the London table' (*The Provincial Book Trade in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1985), 120). Sher's detailed and considered analysis of the reprint culture of this period exposes this assessment as over-simplified at best, as reprints played an important economic and social role in the dissemination of Enlightenment texts and ideas and in the development of a widening Atlantic book trade.

Finally, it is appropriate to note the significant physical characteristics of this book as any book historian would. The organisation of the text and the extensive appendices allows for the text to be accessed as a vital reference tool as well as a very interesting read, and the lavish illustrations add further to the impact of the arguments. Priced at only \$40/£25 this book is very good value, even for the almost 100 pages of appendices alone! For these features as well as the scope of the work, both publisher and author should be commended.