Review

Mark R.M. Towsey, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment: Books and their Readers in Provincial Scotland, 1750-1820*. Leiden: Brill, 2010. Pp. 361. ISBN 978-90-04-18432-9. EUR €101.00.

Mark Towsey's *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment: Books and their Readers in Provincial Scotland, 1750-1820* is a welcome addition to the study of the Scottish Enlightenment and book history. By examining library catalogues, borrowers' lists, diaries, commonplace books, letters, and marginalia, Towsey not only paints a detailed picture of provincial Scottish reading and borrowing patterns, but also provides a well-thought analysis of how men and women engaged with Scottish Enlightenment texts.

First and foremost, Towsey should be commended for taking on the daunting task of closely examining and cross-referencing over four hundred library records. By researching such a comprehensive set of sources, Towsey has been able to cast his net wide and draw some valuable broad conclusions. One of the greatest achievements of his work is its ability to convincingly argue that Scots all over Scotland, of varying class and social standing, were aware of and indeed engaged with the intellectual pursuits of the *literati* in Scotland's capital. Indeed, he demonstrates persuasively that women, in particular, successfully used enlightenment texts to engage in the public sphere.

Structurally, Towsey's monograph is divided into two parts. The first, 'Encountering the Enlightenment', analyzes the different types of libraries found in eighteenth century provincial Scotland, which books they held, how often

individual books were borrowed, and by whom. The chapters of this section are organized by the types of libraries found in provincial Scotland during this period: private, subscription, circulating, religious, and endowed.

As well as using empirical evidence to argue that provincial Scots read, or at least owned or borrowed, Scottish Enlightenment texts, Towsey also uses this section to make the compelling argument that libraries were not only institutions for the collecting and lending of books, but played varying civic roles. Subscriptions libraries, for instance, 'were essentially private clubs', with an exclusive set of members (p. 58). They functioned not only as institutions for buying and lending books, but also as arenas for the improvement of their members' politeness and sociability. In fact, many members had their own private libraries and only used the subscription libraries for their associational benefits. Circulating libraries, in contrast, were moneymaking endeavors, which were open to a much wider population, and thus had a very different collection of books. By tackling each type of library individually, Towsey is able to draw conclusions regarding reading based on the books available and the environment in which they were collected and read, rather than simply examining the number of times they were borrowed.

While the first section is empirically impressive, the second section, 'Experiencing the Enlightenment', is more interpretive and analytical, yet based on much fewer sources. Here Towsey closely examines entries made in diaries, commonplace books, letters, and marginalia in order to understand why provincial Scots read books associated with the Scottish Enlightenment, and how they connected with the texts they read. The chapters focus specifically on how enlightenment texts helped individuals improve themselves in line with enlightenment ideals, construct their own national identity, and interact with common sense philosophy.

The most interesting chapter, at least according to this reviewer, deals with the texts provincial Scots used to inform their national identity. Towsey's research suggests that provincial Scots continued to read Scottish history and works written in vernacular Scots, even though the literati promoted an Anglo-British identity. While they engaged with the enlightenment texts, they still made use of the cultural and historical literature of Scotland. This suggests that while provincial Scots read and interacted with the texts of the Edinburgh literati, they still practiced individual agency when it came to which books they read. They regularly challenged enlightenment texts and did not succumb to Anglicization in the manner that one might assume when reading other works on the Scottish Enlightenment, centered specifically on Edinburgh.

It is important to note, however, that while Towsey has written a comprehensive history, he has not exhausted the subject for future historians. He has not, for instance, discussed newspapers, broadsides, or pamphlets. Although they are mentioned and discussed in passing, these, along with novels and poetry, are not given sufficient attention in comparison to the historical and philosophical works written by the Edinburgh literati. Towsey also avoids examining readers in metropolitan areas such as Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Aberdeen. It would have been interesting to see if provincial readers differed from readers in the more metropolitan areas of Scotland, who may or may not have been associated with the Edinburgh literati. That being said, Mark Towsey's book should be given a space on the bookshelves of each university, and be visited frequently by students of the Scottish Enlightenment. It is not only impressively researched, but also analytically rich.

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