

about the travails of these women. As the Convertite did not retrain sex workers, women hesitated to join them, for they required severing relationships with men they loved, and there was no replacement of earning potential.

McGough's book is also about the treatment of disease. Guaiacum, known as Holy Wood in Italy, was ground into sawdust and soaked in water, then boiled and reduced. The foam was then dried and used as a medicine. However, while the disease was considered curable, university-trained physicians viewed it as a moral failing and attached great stigma to it, a deterrent to patients needing treatment. Moreover, they blamed their patients if treatment failed, or suspected witchcraft if natural remedies proved ineffective. Popular healers were more accessible, and self-treatment was even more attractive because it assured anonymity.

The most unique aspect of McGough's work involves her comparisons of early modern Venice with Africa in the twenty-first century. People in both settings were guided by religious authorities as well as practitioners of witchcraft. Guilt-ridden, they sought to hide their afflictions because of the stigma, allowing the disease to thrive. Furthermore, stigma got in the way of mapping out a course of planned prevention. For Africa there is still time to overcome such obstacles, and McGough's fascinating study of sexual contagion and treatment in Venice is an instructive means of understanding how societal attitudes can shape the course of disease.

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Paul A. Elliott, *Enlightenment, Modernity and Science: Geographies of Scientific Culture and Improvement in Georgian England* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), pp. xii + 363, £54.50, hardback, ISBN: 978-1-84885-366-9.

There has been quite a lot of research on the scientific culture of the English provinces in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, and the time may be right for a summing-up. In the last couple of decades, the pioneering work of Roy Porter, Margaret Jacob, and Larry Stewart has inspired several local studies. A fair amount has now been learned about institutions in such commercial centres as Manchester and Birmingham, about the work of itinerant lecturers in towns like Bath and Norwich, about the scientific contents of periodicals and newspapers, and about the trade in scientific instruments. Paul A. Elliott's book goes some way toward the goal of organising all of this information, though it falls short of a comprehensive synthesis.

Each of Elliott's chapters is focused on a different site of scientific activity in the period, including the home, the school, the garden, the county town, and the Masonic lodge. He acknowledges what has been written on the historical geography of Enlightenment science by Charles Withers, David Livingstone, Vladimir Janković, and Miles Ogborn. He also alludes to the 'spatial turn' in the sociology of scientific knowledge, but without engaging substantially with theoretical issues. Instead, he covers fairly concrete practices, like domestic architecture, the layout of gardens, and urban planning. The focus on a series of locations is a good device to organise his summaries of historians' work and to integrate the results of his own archival studies. He provides ample references to the scholarly literature and to selected primary sources, which will add to the book's value.

Elliott succeeds in showing how his chosen sites were connected to wider networks through which printed materials, instruments, and specimens were circulated. Discussing the household as a place of scientific activity, he mentions books that taught botany, meteorology, and chemistry to women and children. He shows how natural history collections in private houses evolved into public museums in Lichfield and Darlington. He tells of itinerant lecturers who brought their shows into middle-class homes, and of

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the learned societies in towns like Spalding, Derby, and Birmingham that began as domestic gatherings. The chapter on Dissenting academies notes how influential were the works of such writers as Joseph Priestley, Isaac Watts, and Philip Doddridge, whose pedagogical ideas were shaped by their experience in those institutions; and in two chapters on botanical gardens, Elliott links European-wide debates about classification and nomenclature to the horticultural practices adopted in particular English towns.

At several points, Elliott uses his own archival research to add detail to the overall picture. His previous book on Derby informs the chapter on Erasmus Darwin's botanical gardens, and that on the significance of county towns. Another chapter presents a case study of Nottingham, describing the importance of learned societies, visiting lecturers, and local Dissenting clergy in sustaining the scientific culture of that town. The final chapter sketches the career of Abraham Bennet, a Derbyshire clergyman, electrician, and meteorologist. Elliott shows that Bennet's scientific work was nurtured by connections to the aristocratic Cavendish and Russell families, and to experimenters in Birmingham, Manchester, and London. At the same time, it was specifically rooted in the climatic and geological peculiarities of the Peak District, and in the concerns of the local lead-mining industry.

The book is enriched by nearly fifty illustrations, including maps and plans, though one wishes for more originality in the choice of a cover image. (The over-familiar Joseph Wright, again!) Strong as it is on specific information, it is weaker on the level of interpretation. The passages in which Elliott summarises the perspectives of other historians are hampered by a wooden prose style and a tendency to avoid taking sides on contentious issues; for example the role of freemasonry in Enlightenment scientific institutions. This limits the book's analytical bite. There are also too many sentences that cry out for the attention of a rigorous copyeditor, which it seems the publisher did not provide.

Nonetheless, the book will be valued for its coverage of recent scholarship, its original contributions to the field, and its stimulus to further thought about the geography of science in Enlightenment England.

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Daniel Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*, Louis Landa and David Roberts (eds), Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. xxxvii + 265, £8.99, paperback, ISBN: 978-0-19-957283-0.

'Oh! Death, Death, Death!' screams a woman from the window of a house near Cornhill. No neighbours stir and the street is deserted save for the book's narrator. What does he do? Noting a chill in his blood, the man then simply continues his journey through the City of London streets. This book is a fascinating record of trying to cope during the capital's last plague epidemic of 1665.

Daniel Defoe was only around five years old during the Great Plague that claimed nearly 100,000 lives. This makes *A Journal of the Plague Year*, originally published in 1722, an imaginative reconstruction. Its shadowy narrator, known only as 'H.F.', seeks to record the terrifying progress of a disease that had no known cause and therefore no known cure. Defoe uses his skills as a journalist, novelist and Londoner to knit together evidence with storytelling. In doing so, he presents a vivid picture of a plague epidemic, but also the mean streets of seventeenth-century London. Some inhabitants are shown to be brave and caring, but many are understandably plain scared, confused and desperate. The most sensational and wicked acts tend to be reported as hearsay with the weekly bills of mortality acting as sobering anchors of evidence.

It ought to be noted that 'H.F.' is not the easiest of companions. 'As I said before,' 'I