



Roeland Harms, Joad Raymond, and Jeroen Salman (eds.). *Not Dead Things: The Dissemination of Popular Print in England and Wales, Italy, and the Low Countries, 1500-1820*

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This essay collection derives in part from a memorable conference, “Pedlars, Pamphlets and the Popular Press (1600-1850),” held at the University of Utrecht in 2010. It focuses on the book trade as a “series of dynamic processes” (3) including, crucially, the distribution networks which enabled books to move between their originators and readers. The distances which books might travel, especially in the early modern period, are impressive, and these case studies demonstrate the vibrant connections between England and Wales, Italy, and the Dutch Republic. From a British perspective, it is good to see Wales included (it is too often neglected), though Scotland, which could have added useful comparative insights, is mentioned only in passing.

While the mainstream book trade has been studied reasonably thoroughly in the last half-century, the networks approach and the focus on itinerant traders – two unifying factors of this collection – are still relatively recent innovations, and are of exceptional value and interest. Also highly significant is the link between urbanization and literacy levels: the Dutch Republic was emphatically more urbanized, and more literate, than the rest of Europe. The editors’ choice of an unusually long timespan is eminently sensible, not least because they and their contributors demonstrate time and again the fundamental and enduring importance of the cultural milieu of itinerant book-trade people. The “culturally fraught” pedlars (10) must have been very aware, as perhaps were their customers, of their often ambivalent position in the urban social hierarchy, in a grey area between legal and illegal practices.

The volume’s emphasis on popular print is another defining factor. The editors explain that “popular” is not synonymous with “cheap” but is rather, and quite rightly, understood as “a relationship between texts and readers, a developing demotic and influential relationship that enabled books to play a part in political processes, and enabled an expanding readership to be addressed, and variously participate, in print culture” (13).



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Rosa Salzberg's essay examines print distribution and urban culture in Renaissance Italy and explains how pedlars connected print and oral culture. Jeroen Salman's work on the itinerant book trade is always groundbreaking; his essay on pedlars in the Netherlands (and their often volatile relations with the mainstream trade) is no exception. The distribution of prints in Italy during the eighteenth century is the topic of Alberto Milano's essay, while Jason Peacey discusses the infrastructure of news circulation in Civil War England. Essays by Sean Shesgreen, Karen Bowen, and Melissa Calaresu interestingly address the iconography of itinerant distribution. Kate Peters examines Quaker pamphlets in the 1650s; Joad Raymond and Joop W. Koopmans consider news distribution in England and Western Europe respectively. The discussion by Roeland Harms of the relationship between printed news and public opinion is supported by some impressive (and nicely presented) statistical analysis. J. G. L. Thijssen's focus is the first educational print series in the Netherlands in the early nineteenth century.

The volume concludes with a useful index of names, places and major topics, and six colour plates. The insights of all the contributors – a healthy mix of historians, literary scholars and art historians – interact very effectively (not always the case with essay collections) to illuminate the many and varied aspects of the itinerant trade in books. This is a most useful collection and is highly recommended.

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