

W. A. Kelly and G. Trentacosti, eds. *The Book in the Low Countries*

W. A. Kelly and G. Trentacosti, eds. *The Book in the Low Countries*. Edinburgh: Merchiston Publishing, 2015. viii, 182 p., ill. ISBN 9780956613622. Price not available (paperback).

The Book in the Low Countries features seven essays elaborating on topics and themes discussed at a Scottish Centre for the Book seminar held in April 2010 at the National Library of Scotland. With support from the London-based Culture Department of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, this seminar broadly addressed Flemish and Dutch book history from the manuscript era to the present day. The contents of this volume, however, treat specific aspects of book production and trade in the Low Countries that have impacted European book history in general, as well as the evolution of reading habits and text containers and transmission in the present day.

With so much scholarly territory covered within its pages, this book's title almost too modestly represents its contents which transcend the book in the Low Countries. Arranged chronologically, the first five contributions explore topics as diverse as the manuscript and early book trade in the Low Countries, typography of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century theatre programs, the publication of academic theses and almanacs in the Low Countries in the seventeenth century, and the fin-de-siècle Boer book trade in South Africa. The concluding two essays shift focus from the book trade and types of publications to reader attitudes towards e-books and literary publishing in a global marketplace. One might argue that the latter essays do not seem to belong in a volume ostensibly devoted to the history of the book in Flanders and the Netherlands, yet the preceding contributions lay compelling groundwork to support these later pieces, leaving the reader with an overall impression about how present-day attitudes about the significance of books and reading are rooted in the ways books were created, traded, and treated in the past.

The Book in the Low Countries represents yet another commendable volume in Merchiston Press's Books about Books series. While its title may seem specialized, its contents are relevant to anyone researching European book history and readership. One of the outstanding features of this collection is its exploration of scholarly and popular literature production, and how attitudes about textual reception are reinforced by the printer's art as well as the sometimes brutal cunning of publishers. Another aspect reinforcing this volume's relevance and usability is the sheer number and exceptional quality of illustrations reproduced in it. All in all, *The Book in the Low Countries* is an important contribution to book studies. It is sure to be a widely-consulted resource for European book scholarship for decades.

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