I must begin this review by declaring a bias. In his preface John Feather notes that over a century of research has given us ‘lists of names, trades, places, and dates,’ but ‘no attempt ... to flesh out these bare bones of knowledge.’ ‘Such a synthesis ... is difficult even now,’ he writes, but concludes ‘yet I do not believe that the attempt is premature’ (p. xi). I, on the other hand, do believe that the attempt is premature, given the present state of scattered, but fast-accelerating research on the provincial trade, and that any book which attempts a comprehensive description of that trade on the basis of the evidence currently available will either be terminally tentative, or filled with ill-substantiated conclusions. Some of the conclusions of this far from tentative book I will describe below, but first a specific example of prematurity. The one pre-eminent source for all work on the eighteenth-century book trade is now the *Eighteenth-Century Short-Title Catalogue* (ESTC) which was always open to enquiries since serious work began in 1977 and which became available for convenient computer search early in 1982. In his ‘Note on Sources’ Feather regrets that the ESTC became available only when his book, published in 1985, ‘was in the final stages of preparation for the press’ (p. xiv). Other reviewers have wondered whether Feather could not have managed to make some use of the ESTC, albeit in ‘the final stages’; a more fundamental question is: was it sensible to undertake such a book at all knowing that the ESTC (and much other local basic research) was under way, and to plan to publish it before these essential tools were available?

The book itself is a slight one, its text covering just 124 pages divided into six chapters and a two-page conclusion. The first chapter, ‘London and the Country,’ sets out the legal and political framework within which the provincial trade developed during the century. It describes how the powerful and cohesive London trade managed to maintain its virtual monopoly on book publishing and to limit the burgeoning provincial trade to little more than an elaborate distribution network for London wares, even after the lapsing of the Licensing Act in 1695 had allowed the spread of printing into the English provinces, and the Copyright Act of 1710 had seemingly ended perpetual copyright.

This is safe and well-travelled territory, but Feather’s much longer second chapter, ‘A Century of Growth,’ breaks new ground. In it he not only makes the obvious point that there were vastly more printing houses and booksellers in the English provinces in 1800 than in 1700, but also touches briefly on literally dozens of complex, related issues like book trade bankruptcies, the geographical spread of early provincial newspapers, or the differences between shopkeeping, stallholding, and itinerant booksellers. Given that, on Feather’s own testimony, ‘newspaper printing in the first half of the century is the only aspect of the whole provincial trade which has been properly researched’ (p. 17), it is not surprising that his isolated examples, while fascinating, often seem less obviously typical to the reader than to Feather himself. When, referring to the anonymous itinerant traders, he writes that ‘the
shopkeepers were always the majority in the book trade' (p. 13), we really wonder how he knows. When he supports the judgment that 'the picture ... was not generally gloomy despite [an unusually high number of] individual failures' in the last quarter of the century by citing three booksellers who died well-off and a fourth who 'called himself a gentleman' in his will (p. 30), we scarcely know what to conclude.

Chapter 3, 'The Market for Books,' with its subsections on the 'Educational,' 'Practical,' 'Religious,' and 'Leisure' markets, paints 'the broad outlines of a picture of the book buyers, and of the books which we know they bought and read' (p. 33). Apart from what has been turned up by Kaufman and others on book clubs and circulating libraries, there is still a sad lack of specific evidence and most of what is supplied here, such as the fact that Stanhope's *Christian Pattern* went through more than twenty (London) editions in thirty years, is about the general market for books rather than any specifically provincial market.

The chapter on 'The Distribution System' which covers not only transport and local distribution, but also advertising and the infinitely complex subject of wholesaling and trade discounts is fascinating, but cries out for more research at every turn. An example is Feather's tracing of the 268 titles advertised in four London and five provincial papers in January 1780 (pp. 48 ff.), which demonstrates that fewer than 14 percent of the titles were advertised in the provinces, and fewer than 8 percent in the provinces alone. Unfortunately, a single sample may prove to be quite atypical and is no help in determining trends. Ironically, in a chapter on distribution, Feather seems not to have recorded what different ads said about where particular titles could be had. Similarly, the main evidence which Feather cites on trade discounts and pricing relates to the highly unusual case of an Oxford University Press book being marketed through London. The resulting picture is wildly at odds with what we know from the Bennet-Clements notebook and needs re-examining.

The two long, concluding chapters on 'The Bookselling Business' and 'The Printing Office' analyze premises, stock and equipment, personnel, and in the case of the printers, the variety of printing done. The results, for a book which set out to solve the problem of 'how those living outside London obtained their books' (p. x), is disappointing since it transpires that the provincial printers printed almost nothing but newspapers, jobbing work, ballads, and chapbooks, and that many if not most of the provincial 'booksellers' were in fact stationers and newsagents who also stocked a few books.

The work ends with seven appendices containing the inventories of a bankrupt bookseller's books, a stationer's paper stock, and a printer's printing equipment, geographical analyses of the subscribers' lists of three provincial books, and a list of the 316 provincial towns and cities in which members of the book trade are recorded in the *Universal British Directory* (1794). The end notes are copious but infuriating since there is no alphabetical list of works cited, and the references frequently resort to 'op. cit.' for works cited earlier and some not cited at all. The two indexes are very full and useful, though one page of text I checked (45) had two omissions (Clavell and Starkey) and one misnumbering (William London).

There are also errors to be corrected in the text of the work. New Style dating
began in 1752, not 1753 (p. xv). Gent's comment about there being no printers at 'Chester, Liverpool, Whitehaven, Preston, Kendal, and Leeds' (p. 28) relates not to 1724 but to 1714 and was false even then; Gent was forgetting Samuel Terry with whom he himself sought work the next year. Ballads and chapbooks were produced in the provinces not because London 'could not meet the demand' (p. 40), but because they were hard to copyright, within the limited capacity of provincial printers, and could be marketed without London help. James Leake, the Bath bookseller was not the son of the bookseller John Leake 'whose family business could trace its history back to the reign of Elizabeth I' (p. 88), but of the printer John Leake. And England was not at war with France in 1700 (p. 123).

In sum, this is a useful but very preliminary study of the eighteenth-century provincial book trade. It is all we have, but it must be used with great caution throughout and supplemented constantly with reference not only to the ESTC, but also to the research findings now regularly flowing in from every shire's end.

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For several years past Robin Myers and Michael Harris have organized an annual conference in London to consider various aspects of the history of books and the book trade. These meetings have always attracted a high level of attendance, and an equally high level of contribution, the papers often being the first public presentation of the results of important research. The papers from previous meetings have been published by Oxford Polytechnic Press, but they were unable to continue this practice, and Chadwyck-Healey, publisher of Publishing History, has stepped into the breach.

These are the papers from the 1984 conference, and, as the title suggests, they are primarily concerned with the history of the book trade as a trade. Three of them are directly related to the Stationers' Company, the corporate body which dominated the London book trade for some two hundred years from the middle of the sixteenth to the middle of the eighteenth centuries. Robin Myers, the Company's Archivist, gives a useful list and account of the Company's records, the most important single archival source for the historian of the book trade in Britain. She is too modest, for no such systematic account would have been possible without the invaluable work which she herself has done at Stationers' Hall in recent years. Michael Turner is concerned with the use of such records, both printed and manuscript, in the compilation of a directory of the book trade for the first part of the nineteenth century. He shows, in passing, how the Company retained its importance long after it is gener-