land as wealth in potential’ (p. 117). Through pairing the poetry of John Philips, Alexander Pope, and James Thomson with agricultural proposals developed in the same time, Alff shows that georgic poems ‘undertook projection in the general sense that they superimposed on reality idealized visions of Britain’s heartland’ (p. 118). While they did not necessarily glorify projection, these poems often approved of agricultural production and culture.

This ‘constructive attitude’ towards projection was not universal in British literature, as indicated by the harsher treatment of projectors by satirists. Jonathan Swift in particular offered a memorable critic of projectors in *Gulliver’s Travels*, mocking not only the projects themselves, but the rhetorical language used by projectors. While not the first to critique the rise of projectors, Swift created a protagonist who acts as a projector himself in the context of his journey. While visiting Lagado, Gulliver encounters the Academy of Projectors, whose members were occupied with a number of ‘ridiculous experiments’. Swift’s fictional projectors, just like their real-life counterparts, ‘were virtually unanimous in pledging that their enterprises would further the common good’ (p. 159). Anti-project sentiment routinely manifested itself in other works as ‘stock caricatures guilty of professing ambitions beyond their moral ambit and material means’ (p. 165).

While a literary study, *The Wreckage of Intentions* has much to offer historians. First, through a close study of proposals, Alff shows the specific types of rhetoric used to convince audiences about the legitimacy of projects. Evoking actor-network theory, he demonstrates that the success of a project depended on a number of interrelated factors, which often had little to do with its potential value. Through examining poetry and attire, he shows the cultural impacts of these projects on greater British society. The end result is a rich account of social, economic and agricultural improvement ventures, giving the reader a peek into the era that Daniel Defoe called the ‘Projecting Age’.

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In *The Experimental Imagination: Literary Knowledge and Science in the British Enlightenment*, literary theorist Tita Chico brings a fresh approach to the thorny problem of assessing the nature of science in the Enlightenment period, and in particular the history of its relationships with other areas of enquiry. Her fundamental premise, firmly stated at several stages throughout the book, is that ‘science is a literary trope’ (p. 5). This challenging argument is apparently based on her discovery of the much-discussed notion that early experimenters relied on metaphor to describe new phenomena. Science, she insists, is a product of literary imagination, even though it now surpasses literature in social status. She sets out her case in five chapters. First she focuses on the literary imagery deployed by men such as Robert Boyle and Robert Hooke in texts that are now broadly conceptualized as scientific. Next she turns to satires on science in plays and journals, before considering in the final three chapters how scientific communities were formulated through dialogic instruction, political visions and aesthetics.

Inevitably, any scholar venturing into this vexed terrain must pay close attention to words that have been rendered exceptionally slippery by their changes in meaning over the centuries. In the very first paragraph, Chico rather undermines her entire project by using the anachronistic term ‘scientist’ as a label for people in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A few pages later, she elaborates her own interpretation of ‘natural philosophy’, explaining that she will use the term to cover both experimental and observational science (theory construction remains unmentioned). It could, she continues, mean astronomy or microscopy or mathematics – an assertion that ignores the period’s own distinctions between natural philosophy, natural history and
mathematics. Throughout her book, Chico reiterates the significance of ‘literariness’. Rather like falling back on ‘scientist’, this seems to me to assume in advance precisely the distinction whose history she is trying to trace. Today’s scientific texts are full of figurative imagery – genetic engineering, black holes, flavoured quarks – while some modernist authors (William Faulkner in The Sound and the Fury (1929), for example) deliberately aim to provide unmediated responses to the world, as if they were Baconian observers.

For historians of science, one virtue of this book is that, as a specialist in literature, Chico analyses works that lie outside their normal repertoire. Although the obvious candidates – Margaret Cavendish, Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift – are all knowledgeably discussed, too are some less familiar names. For example, to support her emphasis on gender as a keyword (claimed to be based on Raymond Williams), she discusses Eliza Haywood’s novel Eovaat (1736) about a deposed Lockean queen who is handed a sacred telescope enabling her to perceive the grim reality of her deceptive suitor. As well as exploring the connotations of Sir Nicholas Gimcrack, who features in Thomas Shadwell’s The Virtuoso (1676), Chico also examines a female stereotype – the coquette, as exemplified by Haywood’s lead character in The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless and in Mr Spectator’s dream about the microscopic dissection of Lady Credit’s heart and brain. And although Anon is not in the index, s/he wrote an erotic poem about two sisters who purloin their father’s microscope to carry out some intimate examinations on each other and their sleeping brother.

Chico’s central chapter is ostensibly on education through dialogue, although its title – ‘Scientific seduction’ – correctly suggests that her emphasis is on the reinforcement and construction of gender roles. She has chosen to analyse in some detail two texts that were translated by English women from foreign languages – Apha Behn’s version of the French Conversation on the Plurality of Worlds (1688) and Elizabeth Carter’s more faithful translation of the Italian Newtonianism for the Ladies (1739). These are both intriguing books, and Chico’s commentaries are interesting, but they seem odd choices to highlight in a scholarly study of Great Britain. Her justification for this decision is that they were widely read, but as she points out, home-based writers were also creating their own genre of educational dialogue. Rather than setting up soft-porn conversations between silver-tongued aristocrats and sharp-tongued women, they were locating their protagonists within domestic situations. For instance, through his condescending instructions to his sister Euphrosyne, Benjamin Martin’s Cleonicus reinforces male superiority, but also implies that if even a woman can understand these new ideas, then so too can a man.

This national contrast in approaches surely merits further exploration as an important aspect of the many distinguishing features between the various manifestations of the Enlightenment in Europe and its divided offshore island – for, despite its title, Chico’s study concerns England, not Britain. Many of her examples refer to the period before the Act of Union in 1707, and she makes no attempt to explore the substantial differences between intellectual life in Edinburgh and London during her period. Other inaccuracies include placing Newton’s last home in Winchester, promoting Thomas Sprat to Bishop of Rochester some twenty years too early, and calling James Hodgson the Astronomer Royal.

Chico’s The Experimental Imagination is solidly researched with an extensive bibliography, and it includes sensitive discussions of some fascinating Enlightenment prose and poetry.

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The Spirit of Inquiry sets out to reveal the role of the Cambridge Philosophical Society in the making of Cambridge as a core centre of science and its indelible influence on modern science.