A common complaint regarding modern museums is that they present relatively few objects. Curators could, however, take inspiration from other kinds of display described here, which are as historically specific as, say, re-created laboratories. There are, for example, the dense displays created by instrument manufacturers for world expositions, as described by Richard Kremer, in his chapter on the United States Centennial Exhibition, and by Peggy Kidwell and Amy Ackerberg-Hastings, as part of their chapter on the various contexts of slide rule display. Even the most humble instruments could be made aesthetically pleasing when arranged, en masse, in geometric patterns. Inga Elmqvist Söderlund likewise shows how instruments could be displayed as enticing commodities and objects of desire in seventeenth-century frontispieces.

In different contexts instruments can be objects of ridicule, as Ingrid Jendrzejewski's chapter on seventeenth-century theatrical productions reminds us. The telescope quickly moved from novelty requiring exposition to recognized resource for metaphor and humour, symbolizing deception, lack of perspective or failure in particular social roles. '[M]ost characters who carried telescopes on the seventeenth-century stage were not meant to be taken seriously' (p. 179). Jendrzejewski's examples range from mentions of instruments to stage directions requiring their manipulation. It would be fascinating to know more: were real or imitation instruments used and were they readily recognized? A very different set of 'props' are discussed in the short contribution from Ileana Chinnici, Donatella Randazzo and Fausto Casi on the 1963 film of *The Leopard*, which featured antique instruments once owned by Prince Giulio Fabrizio Tomasi.

Given the visual and material focus, it is good that each chapter is well illustrated. Collectively the images are suggestive of changes over time and the broad ways in which the theme can be interpreted. They form a provocative source that, along with the case studies, can be put to use by scholars interested in the history of science, scientific instruments, material culture, museums and the history of science in public. It joins a growing literature that reveals a desire to bring such studies together for their mutual benefit.

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Charles Mollan (ed.), **William Parsons, 3rd Earl of Rosse: Astronomy and the Castle in Nineteenth-Century Ireland**. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014. Pp. xxii + 368. ISBN 978-0-7190-9144-5. £70.00 (hardback).
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In 1845 William Parsons, the third Earl of Rosse, constructed his seventy-two-inch reflector, known as the Leviathan, at Birr Castle, Co. Offaly, in the centre of Ireland. The primary purpose of the telescope was to study the nature of nebulae and discover if these could be resolved as clusters of stars. The telescope was to remain the largest telescope in the world until 1917. This book, the first comprehensive biography of the third earl, seeks to place his life and telescope in their political, social, intellectual and cultural contexts. The edited volume can be divided roughly into two sections; the first looks at the history of the Parsons family and then focuses on the life of the third earl in an Irish context, while the second section concentrates on the earl's contribution to science and the wider scientific world he inhabited.

The opening section of the book seeks to trace the history of the Parsons family and provide a background to the earl beyond his famous telescope. The first chapter (Alison and William Parsons), dealing with the Parsons family's ancestry, is largely genealogical. The second chapter (Trevor Weekes) is a speculative account of the origins of the earl's interest in astronomy. A welcome addition is the third chapter – divided into three sections – which focuses on the third earl's wife, Mary. David Davison's contribution provides an interesting and informative account of the countess's interest in photography. These opening chapters are rather lengthy but will be of local interest.

Chapters 4 (Margaret Hogan) and 5 (Andrew Shields), which are well researched and written, largely focus on Irish politics. Chapter 4, which is a local-history study, outlines the earl's role in the preservation of law and order in King's County (the current Co. Offaly), his political life as an MP and his wider intellectual connections, as seen by his membership of the British Association for the Advancement of Science and his chancellorship of Trinity College Dublin. This chapter also poses some interesting and yet-to-be-answered questions about the earl's role in relief efforts during the Great Famine, 1845–1849. Chapter 5 gives an assessment of the second and third earls' politics and provides those unfamiliar with Irish history with a good introduction to this turbulent period. Shields delivers an overview of the political rationale behind the union of Britain and Ireland in 1800. The second earl's conversion from sceptic to supporter of the union is discussed within the wider political context of Catholic emancipation and the fears it instilled in the minority Protestant population in Ireland. Shields also successfully intertwines the rising sectarianism of the period with the third earl's desire for Catholic Emancipation and subsequent rejection of O'Connell's campaign for the repeal of the union, to explain the third earl's political career. A chapter by the book's editor, Charles Mollan, highlights the earl's engineering interests and gives an overview of the construction of the great telescope.

The second section of the book makes some significant contributions to our understanding of the third earl, his scientific discoveries and his connections to various scientific institutions. It is this section which will be of most interest to students of nineteenth-century Irish astronomy. Wolfgang Steinicke provides the reader with an accessible account of the various discoveries made at Birr and how these fitted into the wider astronomical discourse of the period. A chapter by Allan Chapman, on independent astronomical research in nineteenth-century Ireland, places the observations at Birr in a wider Irish context. This is followed by Simon Schaffer's insightful chapter on the third earl's connections to various scientific institutions across the British Isles. Schaffer succeeds in demonstrating the role that institutions such as the British Association for the Advancement of Science and the Royal Irish Academy played in the promotion of Rosse's scientific and engineering endeavours. It also highlights that nineteenth-century Irish science can and must be understood as part of a wider British Isles phenomenon.

This is a collaborative work between members of the Birr Scientific and Heritage Foundation, Irish historians, astronomers and historians of science, with several quite distinct audiences in view. The chapters by Irish historians (Hogan, Shields) provide an engaging and insightful overview of the earl's life in nineteenth-century Ireland, as do those on his astronomical observations and scientific associations (Steinicke, Chapman, Schaffer). Other contributions seem to be directed more at a general, popular and local readership whose interests would extend to the wider Parsons family and its estate. If this is the intended audience then the book's price is a considerable deterrent. That said, this book is a welcome addition to our understanding of astronomy in nineteenth-century Ireland, but a more concise rendering would have allowed greater scope to investigate the wider scientific culture in which the earl's astronomical observations took place.

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Ben Marsden, Hazel Hutchison and Ralph O'Connor (eds.), **Uncommon Contexts: Encounters between Science and Literature, 1800–1914**. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2013. Pp. xiii + 239. ISBN 978-1-84893-362-0. £60.00 (hardback).
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Initiated by Gillian Beer's magisterial *Darwin's Plots* (1983), a rising tide of discontent with C.P. Snow's 1959 division of literature and science into two cultures has crested in the last two decades into a wave of studies of literature and science as part of one culture. Bringing together historians