



Early Modern Debts: 1550–1700. Laura Kolb and George Oppitz-Trotman, eds. Palgrave Studies in Literature, Culture and Economics. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. xvi + 416 pp. €114.39.

Early Modern Debts examines the “lives and writing of early modern people” (4) and offers an interesting and detailed picture of credit and debt relations in early modern Europe. The volume, appropriately published in the series Palgrave Studies in Literature, Culture and Economics, is the result of a collective endeavor by several historians, literary scholars, and philosophers. The book deals with the issue of early modern debt and credit from a particularly broad perspective and addresses a range of questions of both a theoretical and practical nature, echoing the various backgrounds of the authors.

As stated in the very first pages, the volume celebrates Craig Muldrew and his successful research in *The Economy of Obligation* (1997), which acts as the main source of inspiration for the editors. In fact, they openly claim that the book aims to offer “both a look back to and a look beyond *The Economy of Obligation*, breaking new paths for the study of early modern debts” (9). It is certainly an ambitious task, considering the influence of Muldrew’s ideas on scholars of credit relations in preindustrial societies (including on the writer of this review). *Early Modern Debts* does a good job in this regard from at least three perspectives. First, the book stresses the ubiquity of credit and contains a range of views on debt relations in the early modern period. Second, it highlights the importance of the “cultivation of credit” through social relationships. Third, through an almost constant dialogue between archival documentation, poems, novels, and plays, it shows the pervasiveness of credit relations in the lives of individuals.

The book sheds light on different aspects of credit and debt relations in the early modern period, such as the forms these relations assumed, the language they implied, and their effects on the culture and everyday lives of individuals. It is divided into four parts, each corresponding to a different macro-theme. The first section focuses on the household dimension and investigates how debt affected social and interclass relations and vice versa. The second part centers on the development of credit-worthy institutions and systems as a consequence of the expansion of long-distance trades. The third part offers a theoretical analysis of the concept of credit and the language used by individuals to reconcile short-term debts with long-term interests in friendship and affection. The last section comprises a single paper written, not by chance, by Craig Muldrew, which analyzes how credit affected English society and the “transformation in the nature of the self.” Muldrew highlights a tension between an inwardly and externally regulated self, whereby the former seems to prevail. The reader is guided through a highly interesting analysis, a long-term journey from Menocchio’s Friuli to modern England. It is the perfect conclusion for the volume.

The editors claim that “*Early Modern Debts* throws new light on the beginnings of an epoch characterized by debt of a ubiquity and magnitude unknown to any other society in history, an era of borrowed time” (15). I am not convinced that the book really talks about the “beginnings of an epoch,” but it is surely interesting—and very much appreciated—that it describes several kinds of credit relations, the contexts in which they took place, and their importance in the everyday lives of individuals belonging to a diverse social milieu.

The wide geographical and chronological openness of the book is perhaps one of its most interesting features. I enjoyed reading about the variety of credit systems as well as discovering the diverse meanings and logics of credit. On a few occasions, the essays tended to digress from the core theme of the book, which could be rather confusing. However, the authors often managed to provide vivid descriptions of individuals and their lives in the early modern period, illustrating the central role played by credit and debt relations. From this point of view, the persistent link between archival documentation and literature is certainly an added value.

To sum up, this edited volume is an important contribution that should be read by all economic historians of financial markets, as it offers an interesting view of cultural aspects that are often overlooked by the literature on the topic.

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Good Tidings Made Visible: Re-enactments of the Nativity from the Middle Ages to the Present. Lenke Kovács and Francesc Massip, eds.

Problemata Literaria 90. Kassel: Edition Reichenberger, 2020. xii + 312 pp. €43.

Good Tidings Made Visible aptly opens with an extract from the Gospel of Luke in which the angel appears to the shepherds and songs of praise are offered to God. This musical example is one of many interdisciplinary performances and spectacles considered in the collection. As Peter Cocozzella puts it in the book’s preface: “The scholars assembled within the precincts of this book challenge us to probe into the matrix of drama or, as the case may be, into the wellspring of a communal celebration born of the Christian liturgy and kindred expressions of devotional practice” (1). The broad generic scope is one of many enriching aspects of *Good Tidings* that make this collection especially useful for a range of readers, students as well as specialist scholars in the field of medieval performance.

The book is divided into three sections, each with three essays. In the first section, “Foretelling and Announcing the Advent of the Messiah,” the focus is on different representations of rejoicing at the birth of Jesus. In the book’s second section, singing, dancing, and laughing at the Christ Child are explored from a range of geographic locations, from the German-speaking territories to Valencia. Affect is at the heart of