

## Reviews

**Ronni Baer, with Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr. and Annetje Boersma, *Gerrit Dou, 1613–1675: Master Painter in the Age of Rembrandt*, ed. Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr., National Gallery of Art, Washington, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2000, pp. 159, hb. £30; ISBN: 0 300 08369 6**

In 1826, John Smith wrote that Gerrit Dou produced ‘the most perfect specimens that ever came from the easel of a painter’. At that time Dou was as celebrated as Jan Vermeer is today; indeed, Dou’s fall in favour with the critics took place at exactly the moment of Vermeer’s rise. By the 1920s and 1930s this changed climate of opinion made it possible for the Alte Pinakothek in Munich to sell four of Dou’s largest and most important pictures. These were *The Quack* and the *Lady at her Toilet* both now in the Boijmans Museum at Rotterdam, the *Self-portrait* now in Kansas City, and *The Hermit* now in Washington. This reversal of critical fortune is compellingly charted by Arthur Wheelock in an essay, ‘Dou’s reputation’, included in the catalogue of the exhibition of the artist’s work recently held at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, Dulwich Picture Gallery, London, and the Mauritshuis at The Hague. Dou’s rehabilitation now seems assured – not least because of Ronni Baer’s catalogue, which provides a much-needed reappraisal of one of the most important but shamefully neglected artists of the period, whose work has been plundered in recent years by iconographers, but now gets the art historical attention it deserves. Baer’s catalogue entries provide a great deal of new information and very full accounts of the history of each work; she whets the appetite for a full-scale monograph on the artist.

From Dou’s lifetime onwards his work was admired for its astonishing illusionism, but, with the invention of photography, it came to be seen as literal and meretricious. Paradoxically, the use that Vermeer made of the camera obscura appeared merely mechanical in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and it was not until people became familiar with the photographic image that they truly appreciated the extent of his artifice. Visual technologies change with bewildering speed, and Dou’s multi-figure compositions, such as *The Quack*, now have a surprising resemblance to digitally generated imagery. Crisply-defined figures are placed next to equally precisely described objects, rather as in a film where gladiators and tigers can be manoeuvred within a simulated Colosseum, but the separate parts do not quite cohere. Dou’s solution to this

was the creation of a distinctive type of composition in which a stone arch, often decorated with a bas-relief, acts as a precisely focused frame for the figure or figures, while details placed further back in space are painted with a softer, blurred focus which soothes the eye – Dou's technique may be meticulous but it is not uniform. Startling differences between foreground and background are to be seen in the Liechtenstein *Violin Player* (no. 20), and the privately owned *Wine Cellar* (no. 23). Numerous pentimenti are also evident, as in the *Artist in his Studio* (no. 1) where a bust of Vitellius is painted on top of the blue tablecloth; Dou's willingness to change his mind while he worked would repay more attention.

The selection of works in the catalogue understandably emphasizes Dou's self-portraits and the most ambitious of his genre subjects. But there is a surprising absence of one of Dou's most successful and often repeated themes: the kitchen-maids who lean seductively through arched openings holding jugs, bunches of grapes, birdcages, baskets, copper pans, candles or lanterns (sometimes in unlikely combination), although the scintillating *Grocery Shop* (no. 35) could be seen as a development from this type. Nor were any of Dou's much more rare depictions of the male or female nude included. The paintings were chosen with care regarding condition, although the Washington *Hermit* (no. 34) has deep bitumen cracks, and the Sudeley Castle *Man writing* (no. 4) is obscured by old varnish. A useful chapter on Dou's paint technique is provided by Annetje Boersma, largely focused on the Mauritshuis *Young Mother* (no. 21) and Boijmans Museum *Woman at her Toilet* (no. 32). More research along these lines would illuminate the complexity of Dou's working methods. For example, the Minneapolis *Hermit praying* of 1670 (no. 33) reveals a delicacy of touch and transparency of pigment that is completely unlike the opaque and smooth application of paint in Dou's work in the 1630s, and makes one question the conventional wisdom that his way of working was merely laborious.

For obvious reasons, the catalogue concentrates on works that are certain to have been painted by Dou, so the recent reattribution of some of Adriaen van Gaesbeek is not discussed, nor the problems raised by Dou's imitators. It is more unexpected that hardly any attention is given to the crucial three years that Dou spent in Rembrandt's Leiden studio, especially since Arthur Wheelock (who has nurtured the exhibition and edited the catalogue) has written cogently elsewhere on the continuing controversies over what Rembrandt may or may not have painted. The beautiful *Anna and the blind Tobit* in the National Gallery, London, was exhibited in the major Rembrandt exhibition of 1991–92 as 'attributed to Gerrit Dou' but has since been returned to Rembrandt by the gallery; the present catalogue would have been a good forum to discuss this problem.

Despite the small size of Dou's works, they commanded huge prices in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. On 10 April 1780, Alleyne Fitzherbert wrote to the Duke of Rutland that he had bought a picture by Dou (Belvoir Castle; not included in the exhibition) on the duke's behalf for the high price of £300 which he described as 'a monstrous pennyworth'. Dou painted on small panels but this did not limit the monetary value of his work among early collectors; in this case size does not matter. Nor did it restrict his intellectual and pictorial ambitions, which, on the evidence assembled here, far exceeded any other Dutch genre painter of the period.

Peter Davidson (ed.), *The Poems and Translations of Sir Richard Fanshawe*, 2 vols, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997, ISBN: 0 19 811737 X

Sir Richard Fanshawe is one of the many Civil War poets who would still deserve a place in the Dictionary of National Biography, even had he never written a line. A prominent Royalist who travelled extensively with the court throughout much of the Civil Wars, Fanshawe also spent much time overseas, serving in his maturity as England's ambassador to Portugal, then to Spain. These successive backdrops of war and diplomacy can be seen to have influenced his choice of subject-matter, both in his original work and in the many translations for which his linguistic dexterity qualified him; and this magisterial edition of his literary remains – imaginative, epistolary, pamphleteering – enhances his vivid engagement with the times.

This, the first collected edition, is much larger in scope than the previous standard edition of Fanshawe (ed. N. W. Bawcutt, 1964) and we are given, with one exception, all of Fanshawe's surviving literary works. Volume I contains his early poems from manuscript: translations of verse from Boethius, selected *Odes* from Horace and epigrams from Martial, a Buchanan-inspired rendition of Psalm 45, baroque sonnets from the Spanish, and a few pieces of original occasional verse. Fanshawe's translation of Guarini's *Il Pastor Fido* is omitted, since it already figures in a previous Oxford edition, but we are given the other poems added to the 1648 edition of the work. This overtly political compilation also includes a 'summary Discourse of the Civill Warres of Rome, extracted out of the best Latine writers in Prose and Verse'.

This was followed in 1652 by Fanshawe's *Selected parts of Horace, Prince of Lyricks*, and in 1658 by a Latin pastoral comedy in which Fanshawe creatively responded to Guarini's model, *La fida pastora*. The volume concludes with the political address *A message from his highnesse the Prince of Wales ... delivered ... in a Councill of War at Corke* (1648) and eight letters: published here for the first time, these include two to his wife Ann Fanshawe (whose Memoirs were edited by John Loftis in 1979) and one to John Evelyn. Volume II reflects the Hispanic and Portuguese interests of Fanshawe's latter years. His best-known work, the full English translation of Luis de Camões's epic poem *The Lusiad*, describing Vasco da Gama's discovery of the sea-route to India around the coast of Africa, is supplemented by his translation of parts of the same poem into Latin and some Latin epitaphs. Also included are Fanshawe's translations of dramas from the Spanish court, the lengthy dramatic romance *Querer por solo querer* and *Fiestas de Aranjuez*, masque-like presentations performed before Philip IV in 1623.

The above list shows how the bulk of Fanshawe's work is translation in some form. Brushed aside as derivative in content, feared as difficult to edit, translations have often been badly served by editors of Tudor and Stuart verse, and this has had predictable effects on the canon. Fanshawe has tended to be perceived as a very minor poet, someone whose diplomatic activities were far more significant than his writing: an unfairly brusque dismissal of his technical skill and imaginative felicity, but a lot to do with his preference for translation. Nevertheless, his time may now have come. A reassessment of translation's importance has been among the benign effects that the rediscovery of early modern women's writing has had on the Renaissance literary canon – which may in turn promote a recognition that some male writers, as well, preferred the translator's modest and facilitating role. Likewise, translation studies

and comparative literature are increasingly part of the menu for students of English literature, even at undergraduate level.

This edition, therefore, is timely for several reasons; and Peter Davidson, also the compiler of the recent anthology of Civil War verse, *Poetry and Revolution* (1999), brings to it a polyglot learning to match and enhance Fanshawe's own. The commentary is sensitive, alert to useful analogy and exemplary in knowing where to stop: for instance, in the commentary discussing the possible influence of Fanshawe's translation of Horace's *Ode IV : 4* upon Marvell's 'Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland'. The edition also reassures by its intimate understanding of manuscript circulation and its mechanisms. This is a dimension largely lacking in several earlier Oxford editions of Caroline and Civil War poets – one could cite Hugh Trevor-Roper and J. A. W. Bennett's *The poems of Richard Corbett* – but one which, thanks to the intervening work of scholars like Harold Love, Mary Hobbs, Arthur Marotti, Henry Woudhuysen and Davidson himself, is more available to present-day editors than ever before. Fanshawe has benefited, in the end, from being left uncollected so long.

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**C. B. Herrup**, *A House in Gross Disorder: Sex, Law, and the Second Earl of Castlehaven*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. xvi + 216, hb. £18.99, ISBN: 0195125185

The unedifying story of Mervin Touchet, Second Earl of Castlehaven, is familiar to most scholars of the period, at least in outline. On 25 April 1631 the Earl was tried and convicted of aiding and abetting the rape of his wife by one servant, and of sodomy with another. The episode sounds like a sordid postscript to the Jacobean age, and the more puritanical Charles I responded with loathing and disgust. As Cynthia Herrup demonstrates, Charles played a significant part in securing the trial and condemnation of the Earl, and it was his personal revulsion that led him to reject all appeals for a reprieve or pardon.

Herrup's tale is both a detective story and an extended essay on the wider significance and symbolism of a story that was retold, with numerous adaptations, for over a century thereafter. She skilfully evaluates the mass of often contradictory evidence, for the facts are much less clear than is generally supposed. Castlehaven denied the charges, accusing his wife, son, daughter-in-law, and servants of an outrageous conspiracy to destroy him, and stood by his story even on the scaffold. The jury of peers contained many doubters; they voted 26–1 to convict him of rape, but by only a narrow majority (15–12) on the sodomy charge. The evidence was far from conclusive; one servant confessed to attempting to rape the countess, and another confessed to homosexual actions with the Earl, but both insisted there had not been the physical penetration by which the crimes were defined under the law. In effect, the King and his law officers pushed the peers into widening the legal definition of sodomy, and persuaded them to believe the word of the countess (who refused to testify in court) against the denials of the earl and his servant. Herrup's own conclusion is essentially a verdict of 'not proven'. Joseph Mead's shrewd comment, that Castlehaven was probably guilty of similar and equally heinous crimes, but not of the two on which he

stood trial, may well come close to the truth. Mead's remark also throws light on Herrup's main problematic: how to explain the rare execution of a peer when the evidence against him was both disputed and deficient? Part of her answer lies in Castlehaven's marginal and isolated position, for peers, like humble villagers, needed a network of supportive friends for protection against damaging rumours. Castlehaven had played almost no part in public life, and had only a distant relationship with the King. His Irish estates and wavering religion left him exposed to suggestions of popery and still worse, atheism. He had few friends to rescue him when he needed many. For what damned him, Herrup demonstrates, was less the specific charges against him than the lawyers' depiction of a man who had long and willingly subverted the most fundamental values of the patriarchal order. The Earl, they alleged, had betrayed his gender, family and caste at every turn. He had given lands and riches to low-born servants, and fostered adulterous liaisons with his countess and with Lady Audley, his fifteen-year-old daughter-in-law who was estranged from his son, who in turn was estranged from the earl. Most shocking of all, he had wanted Lady Audley to bear an illegitimate child to divert the inheritance and title away from the line of his own son. Castlehaven had thus deliberately corrupted the honour of his womenfolk and fostered riotous disorder and waste within his household, seriously compromising the honour of the aristocracy itself. In his defence, the Earl alleged treachery and conspiracy, branding his wife and Lady Audley promiscuous and malicious, his son murderously embittered, his servants grasping and disloyal. But this version, even if true, also depicted a totally dysfunctional household and was almost as damaging as the prosecution case. By his own admission Castlehaven had totally failed to maintain order over his family, servants, or economic affairs. The prosecution argued that the depravity of the Earl's whole way of life demanded a conviction, regardless of the deficiencies of the evidence. The jurors were shocked by what they heard, and the Earl's truculent denials ruled out any possibility of royal clemency. And yet his defence clearly unsettled some of his peers. Fears over unfaithful wives, disobedient children, and dishonest servants were common features of the patriarchal psyche, and some early libels on the case indeed presented it as the black comedy of a cuckolded husband, deceived and destroyed by his treacherous and unfaithful wife. Herrup's analysis of the jurors' individual verdicts adds a further twist to the tale: of those still living in 1642, most who had voted to convict on the sodomy charge supported the King, while most who had voted for acquittal opposed him. It is not hard to see how unease about the King's insistence on his own way, regardless of the letter of law, might feed into wider anxieties about the direction of royal policy in the period of personal rule. While there will never be a definitive resolution of the criminal charges against Castlehaven, Cynthia Herrup has provided us with a definitive deconstruction of their social, cultural and political significance.

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**Bernard Capp**

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Aidan Clarke, *Prelude to Restoration in Ireland: The End of the Commonwealth, 1659–1660*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. xii + 376, hb. £37.50, ISBN: 05216506615

A new book by Aidan Clarke, one of Ireland's finest early modern historians, is to be welcomed almost without reservation. This, his latest work, is a detailed political study of a crucial period in the history not only of Ireland but also of the British Isles; and Professor Clarke handles the complex source material with his usual consummate skill. After an initial chapter on Ireland under the Protectorate, the first part of the book explores the instability which gripped Ireland after the forced retirement of the Protectoral lord lieutenant, Henry Cromwell, in May 1659, and identifies the reasons why the Irish Parliament politicians decided to support the opportunist coup mounted by a group of army officers in December 1659. This coup in turn led to the formation of a General Convention in the spring of 1660, with 158 members being elected in 106 constituencies across Ireland, which justified its autonomy from the Rump with reference to the now defunct Irish Parliament. In March and April 1660 the Convention implemented its own programme of domestic reform, concentrating on justice, trade, religion and, above all, the continuation of the Cromwellian land settlement. It was also able to provide a strong platform from which to start negotiations with Charles II once events in England had made the Restoration inevitable. As well as providing the first narrative account of the 'end of the commonwealth' in Ireland, the book also analyses the social and political processes involved, and, in a chapter which will prove of enormous use to other researchers, gives brief biographies of the 138 known members of the Convention, explaining their various backgrounds and kinship networks, and the reasons for the apparent unity of the Irish Protestant community amid the changes and chances of mid-seventeenth century Ireland.

Professor Clarke's strength lies in his concentration on the detail of a narrow period, allowing the complexities to be appreciated, without trying to impose a simplified structure or analysis onto unyielding evidence. This approach is to be applauded in an age of sweeping generalisations, counter-factual theories and facile conclusions. Yet this tight focus is also the chief flaw in the book. The year from May 1659 to May 1660 cannot be studied in isolation. In his opening chapter, which summarises the situation in Ireland in the previous twenty years, Clarke assumes that throughout this period the Irish Parliament, representing a form of self-determination, was the constitutional ideal among the Protestant politicians, who resented the 'token representation in a union parliament at Westminster, where members from Ireland and Scotland were outnumbered, almost seven to one, by the representatives of English and Welsh constituencies'. In fact, most Irish Protestants embraced the Cromwellian Protectorate, recognising that they would benefit not only from the land settlement, but also from moves towards economic and political union, including provisions for Irish representatives to sit in the Westminster parliament. In the mid-1650s calls for formal union legislation came from the Irish Protestants, not from imperialist Englishmen; the Irish MPs at Westminster found they could punch above their weight by voting as a bloc in support of such controversial measures as the Humble Petition and Advice of 1657; and it was this almost unanimous support for the Protectorate which led to calls (by the English Commonwealthsmen) for the Irish MPs to be excluded from the commons in 1659. The change of Irish Protestant attitudes – from support of the union to

separatism under the Convention – was thus a dramatic *volte face*. Individual politicians had completely reversed their opinions in a matter of months. The architects of the Great Convention, Lord Broghill and Sir Charles Coote, and the returning officer, Dr Dudley Loftus, had all been ardent supporters of the Protectoral union. Nineteen former Westminster MPs now sat in the General Convention under a very different political banner. Their change of heart needs to be explained, but this book leaves the problem apparently unnoticed, and unaddressed. This is a missed opportunity, as the sudden switch in ideological polarity makes the year from 1659 to 1660 all the more significant in the course of Irish history, and a recognition of this fact would make this study even more valuable to the serious historian.

Leaving such cavils aside, this book will undoubtedly become the definitive account of a neglected episode in Irish history. Furthermore, such a study has implications far beyond its strict chronological and geographical remit, especially in providing an Irish dimension to a period which has attracted so much attention in England and Scotland; and it is a model of how a ‘British’ context can be included without distorting the main focus on the internal politics of Ireland. The book also has wider social and economic implications, not least in giving us an account of the individual members of the Convention, which provides a valuable insight into the social and mental world of the Irish Protestants, who, for a few brief months in early 1660, were bold enough to ‘set up for themselves’.

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Julian Goodare and Michael Lynch (eds), *The Reign of James VI*, East Linton, Tuckwell Press, 2000, pp. xii + 292, pb. £16.99, ISBN: 1862320950

There have been many biographies of James VI, from the anonymous *Historie of King James the Sext* of the 1590s through Sir William Sanderson’s of 1656 to D. H. Willson’s published three hundred years later. Some would add Maurice Lee’s more recent (1990) *Great Britain’s Solomon* to this list, but this is more a series of penetrating articles about James than a modern biography, for which we will probably have to wait till Jenny Wormald completes her work in progress. In the mean-time, Julian Goodare and Professor Michael Lynch have provided this multi-authored series of essays on James and his reign, to which Wormald is herself a contributor.

The editors, either individually or as partners, are responsible for six of the fourteen chapters, which supplies an element of continuity to the work as a whole. Their contributions tend to address the political issues that James confronted, though often with particular focus, as upon the Highlands or the Borders. Roderick J. Lyall, Professor of English Literature at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, provides an interdisciplinary component with a piece on what he calls ‘the sixteenth-century crisis’. Ruth Grant writes on James’s relations with one of the king’s early favourites, Francis Gordon, earl of Huntley; Maureen M. Meikle manages to rescue James’s queen, Anna, from her many detractors; Grant G. Simpson shows how James’s letters could be exploited more thoroughly as a source than they have been, and Aonghus Mackechnie veers away from the king to look at his architects, but we return to James himself in Alan R. Macdonald’s study of his relations with the kirk up to 1618. The book concludes with

Sharon Adams's examination of the way James dealt with the south-west of Scotland, and Wormald's own, beautifully written, study of James through his poetry.

One of the benefits of a cooperative work of this sort is that it enables scholars to concentrate on aspects of a period or a person's life where they have full command of the sources. These are sometimes so voluminous, even for the early modern period, that they are beyond the ability of any one mind to grasp. But there are liabilities to such an approach, one of them being that, whatever the skills of the editors, the result can be a patchwork, parts of which may clash with other parts, thus leading to a confusing perception of the period or person as a whole. In the words of the editors, there are many images of James 'with which to conjure'. Wormald concludes her essay (as well as James's life and the book) with a very clear image: that 'at least when the aged king looked back, he could look back on a reign which had been in many ways such a triumphant success – a success the extent of which we are [at] last getting closer to appreciating, as the source of it, the great political ability of a Scottish king, is increasingly recognised'. While Wormald's words that precede this verdict prepare us for it, the rest of the work does not. In the opening pages the editors refer to a balance sheet of success and failure still to be compiled. It is understandable why the essay on James's poetry was put at the end. It does, after all take us to the end of James's life, but my advice to readers is to read it first, because it also looks at James's precocious poetry, written in his teens, and it encompasses the reign and the man as no other contribution. The other essays can then be read with an eye on this final assessment.

Waiting in the wings of any judgment on James are the questions of whether he left an impossible legacy to his son or whether Charles was primarily responsible for the conflict of the late 1630s and the civil wars that followed. Here it should be remarked that throughout the book it is recognised that James operated, even before 1603, in a 'British context'. Goodare even asserts that England had little more control over Ireland before 1602 than over Scotland. But there is ambivalence about what James's responsibility was for the upheaval. By 1606, it is argued by Macdonald, the king had a teenage rebel on his hands in the form of the church. Moreover, Adams asserts that many of the issues of Charles's reign stemmed from the precedents set by James, who tended to shelve problems rather than deal with them. Yet it is also said that this, in itself, was no mean feat, and what Charles did was escalate the process leading to conflict.

We will probably never have definitive answers to these questions, but as the debate proceeds, this set of essays will inform all who seek to fathom the complexities of this cultured, clever, if sometimes crude, king.

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M. Perceval-Maxwell

**Craig Muldrew**, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England*, London, Macmillan Press, 1998, pp. xxvii + 453, hb. £47.50, ISBN: 0333625714

This is a wonderful book. Craig Muldrew's re-examination of credit should provoke a redefinition of the way we should think about early modern history. His is a large book in four parts. In the first the author identifies a major expansion in the ownership of goods between the 1550s and 1580. As one would expect, such new standards

of material comfort were concentrated in the homes of successful farmers and tradesmen, rather than those of the labouring poor. Most goods were bought on credit, and involved long-drawn-out bargains, initiated in the urban market-place, but also, increasingly, in shops. The huge increase in buying and selling that accompanied economic expansion produced a dense network of middlemen operating within a new 'market culture'. Bargains were made orally, witnesses were the most important form of security. Tradesmen used account books only infrequently (65), many households continually overspent and most conflated domestic and trading accounts. An ingenious attempt to estimate the number of purchases in King's Lynn demonstrates that this relatively modest town of some two thousand households made about 642,000 separate purchases per year, which translates to a relatively low level of economic activity. There was plenty of time for negotiation and socialising as part of early modern business, which was just as well, since conversation to establish the credit and reputation of all parties to a transaction was the very stuff of this 'economy of obligation'. Since the supply of money failed to keep pace with the demand for it, cash formed less than one in ten of all exchanges (100) and was used in relatively unusual circumstances. All households were thus bound up in a complex mesh of credit relationships, usually informal agreements based on trust. Even though lending money (at interest) was done, increasingly, on bonds, such informal credit arrangements remained the dominant mode of exchange throughout our period.

The second part of the book explores this 'culture of credit'. Essentially the growth of credit placed the question of trust, and the enforcement of bargains and contracts centre stage. The Protestant religion's 'emphasis on faith was mirrored by an increasing emphasis on trust within everyday social relations' (132) that were perceived to be increasingly necessary when credit networks were growing ever more complex. For the middling sort, trust in God and neighbours, 'credit' rather than capital accumulation, was at the foundation of their economic activities. Every member of a community should live soberly, lend modestly and preserve their reputation and order in their household. Moral lapses and defamation were therefore serious matters and prosecuted ever more vigorously in the courts.

Despite such emphasis on trust and the cultivation of appropriate and trustworthy behaviour, and as is already well known from the work of Chris Brooks, economic expansion not only multiplied credit transactions but produced a mounting tide of debt-related litigation. Whereas central courts saw an expansion in business generated by the use of formal credit instruments, Muldrew shows that there was, in fact, a parallel rise in litigation in local borough courts seeking to enforce oral agreements. Such litigation increased sharply after 1560 and was, predictably, most common in the 1580s. In the third part of the book, Muldrew estimates that over one million actions were being initiated locally in the 1580s, thereafter real rates of litigation declined as individuals became more adept at managing new levels of credit. Not surprisingly, then, going to law was experienced by virtually everybody. Although, as one would expect, the wealthy had more litigation pending and were more likely to take cases further, in a community like King's Lynn, even aged paupers sued their neighbours for outstanding debts.

Wealth then was essentially your credit. Quite contrary to assumptions made by many historians about the importance of material accumulation, in essence the accumulation of credit, 'social capital' if you like, was what really counted. It was for this reason that moral judgements about household virtue became increasingly important

at this time (274). Dramatic loss of credit, common given the poor accounting methods and brittle credit networks meant, as many have observed, relatively high rates of formal bankruptcy, rates which do not account for those who ran away rather than face public ruin (285) or who settled debts informally (294). Given the shortage of specie tradesmen borrowed money from relatives to meet pressing financial obligations, and worried constantly about debts (296). Financial failure was not just bad luck, it was linked with moral decline and loss of reputation by neighbours. Since wealth was a 'continual process of ethical judgment about credit' (303) this book has important implications for the study of the distribution of wealth and poverty. Forgiveness of debts to the poor, an ethical imperative, was argues Muldrew a far greater contribution to their material survival than either charity or the poor law (305). The burden of debt forgiveness, however, gave an extra impetus to campaigns to improve the behaviour of the poor, and thus 'reduce the extent of redistribution' and stabilise communal credit networks. Under this schema, the poor laws were an attempt to provide a minimum income and also thereby reduce the credit burden represented by the poor (310–11).

The last part of the book argues that there was something of a crisis of trust in this first phase of commercial expansion which helped in the development of the British state. Honesty and the spiritual authority of oaths was no longer enough to enforce commercial obligations, so that growth of credit produced a new desire to use the law and state authority to enforce promises. Experience indicated that men would not necessarily keep their word, contractual relations had to be enforced at law. After the early eighteenth century, legal changes in the law of bankruptcy, and the growth of companies and banks, reduced the emphasis on the individual morality of particular tradesmen, but 'from 1540 to the early eighteenth century, the authority of the state grew because of the demand on the part of private civil disputants who required a reservoir of authority to mediate and resolve their many disputes' (331).

Muldrew's book should not be accepted uncritically. Some of his statistics, notably his estimates of the number of transactions, are clearly heroic, and subject to large margins of error. It is odd, too, that pawn-brokers receive little treatment in a book about credit. The importance of debt-forgiveness to the economy of the poor should not be contrasted to the amounts given in charity or via the poor law, since the target groups were not usually the same. There is some repetition of content, too, and one found oneself wondering about the definition of 'litigation' given that the bulk of local actions seem to have been little more than threatening notes to creditors (202). Such criticisms do scant justice to the implicit challenges that the book throws down. Debates on the standard of living, for example, are clearly misconceived if what mattered was less the purchasing power of money wages than the credit and reputation that an income might generate. 'Respectable' poor would survive. Again, did the religious fervour found in the early seventeenth century have material rather than spiritual roots? Historians have long been familiar with the ubiquity of credit in early modern economies but Muldrew's achievement is to place it centre stage in English social and economic history. In today's RAE parlance, a genuinely 'five star book'.

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**Jeremy Boulton**