

## Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



### Bailey, Amanda. Of Bondage: Debt, Property, and Personhood in Early Modern England

Mark Albert Johnston

Volume 38, numéro 2, printemps 2015

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1087516ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v38i2.25626>

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Éditeur(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (imprimé)

2293-7374 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Johnston, M. (2015). Compte rendu de [Bailey, Amanda. Of Bondage: Debt, Property, and Personhood in Early Modern England]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 38(2), 157–159.  
<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v38i2.25626>

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Hammons shows how printing and publicity were antithetical to Austen's interests as a woman writer as well as how manuscripts offered a prestigious niche in her world. This limited circulation she envisioned was a statement not on the quality of her writing, but on the context of her life and ambitions. The introduction necessarily draws on Austen's small but important circle of contemporary scholars, making much use of Sarah Ross's recent critical edition of *Book M* published in hardcover in 2011 as part of the Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies series. Hammons's *Book M: A London Widow's Life Writings* is a complement to Ross's edition, well-priced and beautifully prepared for classroom use.

JANICE LIEDL

Laurentian University

**Bailey, Amanda.**

***Of Bondage: Debt, Property, and Personhood in Early Modern England.***

Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013. Pp. x, 209. ISBN 978-0-8122-4516-5 (hardcover) \$55.

In her epilogue, Amanda Bailey explains how *Of Bondage* was originally intended as a study of slavery based on the presumption that specific historic and conceptual conditions permitted early modern men and women to construe certain persons as things, and that slaves were humans who gradually came to be regarded as forms of property. In the course of her investigation into the genealogy of bondage, Bailey recognized the insolvent debtor as the slave's symbolic and legal precursor, and realized that any inquiry into the history of priced persons must begin with the unique set of circumstances within sixteenth-century common law that increasingly subjected personhood to the domain of property. By the late sixteenth century in England, the bond had become the standard form for contractual agreements, and because the law recognized the borrower's body as collateral, an unsatisfied creditor could, without filing suit, proceed directly to the execution of a bond's terms by seizing the debtor's lands, goods, or person. As a result, at least as many early modern Londoners were imprisoned for debt as for crime, and debtors spent longer behind bars than the most serious criminal offenders. Defending the book's

focus on drama rather than on the more traditional discourses typically inflecting economic studies, Bailey initially builds on Mary Poovey's notion of money as a form of writing whose history has become naturalized, recommending the bond as a text whose utility is established in relation to other textual and social forms and that functions as both the enabling condition and the product of its interpretive communities. Examining in five chapters six plays that revolve around the common problem of owing money, Bailey strives to offer a series of local readings of how dramatic texts grapple with the problem of debt, while simultaneously tracking the shifting cultural representation of bondage from the late Elizabethan to Carolinian periods: taken together, the chapters expose a growing resignation toward, or at least the development of more formal modes of accommodating, the risks associated with borrowing.

In the first chapter, Bailey interprets the bond as an instrument for restoring social order, and imprisonment for forfeiture as a solution to—rather than a vehicle for exacting—revenge, in order to support her reading of Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* as a botched revenge tragedy. The book's second and most memorable chapter reminds us that the dramatic energy of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* is driven by the circumstances of a desperate debtor, and that forfeiture, rather than usury, constitutes the comedy's central concern. Demonstrating the play's participation in ongoing legal debates about partial and absolute possession of property, the ethics of (self) ownership, and—by overlaying the logic of economic contract onto the marriage contract in its second half—the transposition of the marriage bond into a debt bond, Bailey convincingly illuminates *Merchant's* preoccupation with the disjunctions between owing and owning refracted through the perspectives of the defaulted debtor and the unsatisfied creditor. The third and perhaps least accessible chapter addresses the tenuous nature of economic and generic satisfaction in Thomas Middleton's *Michaelmas Term* by associating the play's representation of bondage with the legal problems of proving consent and intent, the hermeneutics of which had been brought to the cultural fore by the watershed 1602 resolution of *Slade's Case*. Bailey's analysis here and in the previous chapter might have benefitted from engaging Heather Hirschfeld's reading of satisfaction as a nuanced standard of relational exchange informed by a nexus of legal, marital, economic, and penitential discourses. In chapter 4, Bailey ponders the theme of redemption in the relatively obscure play *The Custom of the Country* by situating the drama's interest in metaphorical and

literal bondage (it features scenes including colonial indenture and service in an all-male brothel) within the context of English servitude, arguing that while the play's setting in the exotic port city of Lisbon, known for its traffic in slaves, may capitalize on an audience's fascination with tales of captivity and self-sale abroad, the drama actually reflects the contours of a domestic culture of credit. If Shakespeare presents the temperate use of bonds as facilitating justice and advancing social harmony, then Fletcher and Massinger, Bailey reasons, apply the identical principle to moderate bonding outside England by exploring the uncertain boundary between coercion and consent. The book's fifth and final chapter examines representations of imprisonment for debt in Middleton's *A Trick to Catch the Old One* and Massinger's remake, *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*. Arguing a significant evolution in the culture of incarceration between the two plays, Bailey points to their shared depiction of penal confinement as liberating, as increasingly affording the debtor access to significant cultural capital. By the time Massinger's play was first performed, bonds that had for over a century been associated with the terrors of imprisonment were being viewed as foundational for productive commercial and civil success, and debt had become so naturalized that social ties were themselves being seen as a form of bondage.

Emerging from Bailey's innovative study of early modern economic bonds and their depiction in the drama are both the extent to which, in a period marked by massive increases in debt litigation, debt bondage constituted a bodily event staged at the centre of complex political, philosophical, and ethical conundrums about owing and owning, satisfaction and (self) possession, and the degree to which the early modern commercial theatre and its products owed their existences to, and were uniquely positioned to stage the emerging narratives of, borrowing and bondage. Ultimately construing the body as a new species of money, *Of Bondage* successfully sensitizes its reader to an early modern dramatic investment in expounding, through the theme of debt bondage, the evolving meanings of and vexed interconnections among property, liberty, and self-possession.

MARK ALBERT JOHNSTON

University of Windsor