Amanda Bailey. *Of Bondage: Debt, Property, and Personhood in Early Modern England.*
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In recent years the scope of research on early modern English literature, particularly drama, has expanded to include studies in politics, law, commerce, and colonization. Brilliantly exemplified here in Amanda Bailey's work on the legal character of the debt bond and its social effects, such comprehensive treatment opens new fields of investigation to readers of plays and students of theater. The debt bond, also referred to under variable circumstances as the sealed bond, the conditional debt bond, and the penal debt bond, was a legal document setting out the terms of a loan that did not require interest on principal until the loan was paid, but rather the forfeit of the debtor's property if the loan was not repaid by the date it was due. As Bailey shows, this could include not only such items as land and chattels, but also the body of the debtor, who could be imprisoned until the debt was discharged (1–3, 6–7, 30). Philip Henslowe, the manager of the Rose and then the Globe theaters in Bankside, financed many of his productions by negotiating debt bonds with the players in his companies (32–35). While in prison, the playwrights Dekker and Middleton repaid their debts with profits from their writing (123), but many less gifted debtors so incarcerated died (119). These practices rendered highly complex the idea of "self-possession"; the debtor's body was like a "promissory note," its worth tied to its "redeemability." They made "conditional" the "liberty of all English bodies," that is, dependent upon their fulfilling legal obligations (17). The figures are impressive: debt cases adjudicated in 1560 numbered 10,556; in 1640 they had increased to 57,468 (1n4). It is against this sinister background that Bailey comments on six plays, including Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens*, Middleton's *A Trick to Catch an Old One*, and Massinger's *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*.

The Merchant of Venice effectively establishes two economies: one governed by human commerce, the other by divine dispensation. The action of the play shows that what Shylock owns he cannot have (64) — this near paradox turns on the significance of blood. As Bailey indicates, the pound of flesh that Shylock the creditor may take from Antonio his debtor by virtue of the bond securing Antonio's person cannot include a "jot" of Antonio's blood. This blood is the ink that writes the debtor Antonio's "contract with God," makes Christ the "Ur-creditor," and transforms all Christians into "usufructs" (67–68).

Michaelmas Term dramatizes that debt bonds were frequently conditional: a penalty was exacted if the condition written into the bond, typically that the loan should be repaid at a particular time, was not met (79–80). Here the borrower is Easy, whom the lender Quomodo has released from debt; Easy owes nothing. However, when Quomodo seeks retroactively to reinstate Easy's indebtedness by claiming that the memorandum instituting the release is invalid because he signed it in "jest," he is thwarted by the judge, who, invoking the concept of obligation as it is construed in *Slade's Case* (1602), refuses to listen to Quomodo's pleading and defers to the binding significance of his signature on the memorandum. These final scenes establish that in order for the bond to signify "across time and space," the "link" between the person of the signer and his hand on a document has to be "severed." The signer as evidenced in his hand thus becomes "an interchangeable bearer of universal will," his "empirical self a contingent variable" (93–95).

In *The Custom of the Country*, bondage engages the practice of slavery. Its heroes Arnoldo and Rutilio are in debt; each becomes a sex slave to his respective mistress. Providing a broader perspective on the institution of slavery, Bailey considers its commercial character in the context of trade in indentured servants, particularly those transported to Virginia who needed to borrow to cover their fare and provisions. This created a "web of dependency" that in practice proved socially constructive: the master forgave his servant's debt, while the servant deferred to his master's will (101–02). The character of debt changed accordingly. Debt was not figured in terms of "distributive justice" but rather "proportionate reciprocity"; this is not achieved by a return of what has been borrowed but rather a forgiveness of what is owed, thus creating the basis for a social harmony.

Of Bondage is a conceptually challenging book. Providing readers with insight into theater's representation of contemporary commerce and more particularly its construction by elements in contemporary and evolving law, it opens new perspectives on some very old scenes. In its exposition of the law of debt in a period of considerable economic development, it is to be highly recommended.

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