

Juliann Vitullo and Diane Wolfthal, eds. *Money, Morality, and Culture in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*.

Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010. xiii + 246 pp. index. illus. bibl. \$99.99. ISBN: 978-0-7546-6407-0.

As the title of this volume would suggest, its various essays — all focused on the often tense relationship between a rapidly developing monetary economy and spheres of concern about ethical and moral matters — covers plenty of ground: temporally, from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries; spatially, across England, France, Italy, and the Low Countries; and disciplinarily, including history, art history, English and Italian literature, and musicology. The essays with more of a literary focus discuss such topics as class conflict and eventual reconciliation in four of the late medieval English Townley plays (Robert S. Sturges), the uncertainty and instability of value in Thomas Middleton and William Rowley's early seventeenth-century English play *The Changeling* in relation to mercantilist trade matters (Bradley D. Ryner), and the prostitute as representative of market forces in the Italian Pietro Aretino's sixteenth-century prose text *Ragionamenti* (Ian Frederick Moulton). The two essays that assume an art historical perspective consider visual representations of the Humiliati religious order (also commissioners of art) and the order's ultimate inability to reconcile market with devotional motives (Julia I. Miller and Laurie Taylor-Mitchell), and a growing conception of virtuous wealth as represented in images of "money fools," showers of coins, and merchants and their wives (Juliann Vitullo and Diane Wolfthal). The essays employing more of a historical perspective examine the figure of Judas as a key link between usury and the status of outsider (Giacomo Todeschini), the ambivalent position of Flemish moneychangers (James M. Murray), and the motives of the French philanthropist Abigail Mathieu (Kathleen Ashley). Finally, the sole musicological essay examines the development of mensural notation theory of late medieval music in relation to monetary principles in writers such as Nicole Oresme (Michael Long). The range of material is indeed impressive — there is plenty to learn outside of one's own discipline, whatever it may be. Moreover, the essays are generally well-researched and well-argued. But the collection's broad scope makes less successful the overall purpose of the volume — to trace transformations in relations between money and morality — primarily because there are several elements to consider within this historical relation, each of which could be the focus of such a collection.

Vitullo and Wolfthal claim that despite the great range of topics, the essays "collectively demonstrate that the dramatic shift occasioned by the new mercantile

economy crossed cultural and political boundaries” (4). This assertion is not controversial: few would consider the emergent mercantile economy to be an isolated phenomenon, whether economically, politically, or culturally. But a later claim in the introduction is more problematic and points to some of the difficulties arising from the collection’s scope: “We have traced how Europeans accommodated capitalism step by step, slowly adjusting to the idea that wealth could be acceptable to God, in fact, could benefit Christian society” (9). The problems with this declaration are manifold. First, rather than a “step by step” tracing of changing attitudes toward money, we merely get glimpses of various manifestations of the conflict within different historical, geographic and topical contexts. Second, not all essays find reconciliation between the economic and moral spheres. For example, Miller and Mitchell conclude that “ultimately the Humiliati were unable to reconcile their religious ideals and a precarious monastic identity with their financial success” (129). Finally, and most importantly, not all of the essays are about the right use of wealth. Some essays focus instead on the topics of usury (Todeschini), equity among economic participants (Sturges), and problems of valuation (Ryner, Long). Each of these topics warrants a study in itself. Overall, the collection is more successful in its parts than in the whole. Several of the essays are part of longer, book-length projects, which I could imagine will be important contributions to this larger topic. But while the collection boasts an impressive range of geography, topics and disciplines, it ultimately covers too much ground in its attempt to shed light on the fraught and complex relations between economy and morality in this key transitional period of European history.

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