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Clare Haru Crowston, *Credit, Fashion, Sex: Economies of Regard in Old Regime France*. Durham, N.C. and London: Duke University Press, 2013. xix + 424 pp. Tables, illustrations, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$99.95 (hb). ISBN-10: 0822355280. \$27.95 (pb). ISBN-13: 978-0822355281.

Review Essay by Jeff Horn, Manhattan College

Clare Haru Crowston's ambitious second monograph considers credit, as "the common sense of the Old Regime" (p. 16). Primarily through the paired lenses of fashion and gender, Crowston argues convincingly that "credit was one of the most important concepts people had in Old Regime France to comprehend the dynamics of their lives" (p. 1). For Crowston, "when early modern French people invoked the term *crédit*, they more often meant an informal sort of influence and power than access to financial resources" (p. 2). Borrowing the term "economies of regard" from Avner Offer, Crowston emphasizes that "credit had putative equivalencies in favor, money, personal connections, and intellectual influence" (p. 22).^[1] Exploring these themes has led Crowston to write a "big book" in potential impact, both methodologically and in terms of her conclusions.

A few words about the book itself: with financial support from the Florence Gould Foundation and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's Campus Research Board, Duke University Press has produced a handsome volume at a quite reasonable paperback price. Crowston's text features 26 well-chosen illustrations. It is a rare pleasure to see a full-length monograph with 54 pages of notes and a competent index in today's publishing environment.

In seven dense yet wide-ranging chapters plus an introduction and conclusion, Crowston explains how credit exemplified the concept of "economies of regard" and the long-running problems with the credit system. She delineates the "Intertwined Circuits of Credit, Fashion, and Sex" (chapter three's subtitle) and how credit functioned in eighteenth-century Paris's fashionable clothing trades. Chapters five and six examine how fashion merchants, most notably Rose Bertin, Marie-Antoinette's "Minister of Fashion," managed their credit and engaged in "Self-Fashioning and the Politics of Credit" (chapter six's subtitle), before considering the gendered roles store credit played in growing consumption of goods within marriage. The conclusion puts additional theoretical cards on the table and hints at the long-lasting significance of credit in French and European culture.

Methodologically, this book melds different approaches. Crowston creatively deploys an impressive roster of published sources from novels and plays to correspondence and memoirs to the periodical press and pamphlets. Linguistic investigation of terms found in research databases, including Gale-Cengage's *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online*, the Project for American and French Research on the Treasury of the French Language (ARTFL), Gallica, and Googlebooks (with their shortcomings for research purposes forthrightly admitted), support her arguments (pp. 17-18, 24-25, 325, 356-57, 382). Crowston's work is based on a "broad, rather than in-depth coverage of sources from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries," and she admits that she "cannot claim the level of critical reading of complex texts that has been the norm for cultural and intellectual history" (p. 17). Crowston also constructed a database of fashion merchants' account books and bankruptcy statements analyzed by the University of Illinois's Statistics Office (pp. 17-18). This database provides the evidentiary basis for some of chapter four and most of chapter five (pp. 171-79, 197-243). The first archival reference comes in chapter four (p. 147, n. 21). From there, Crowston relies heavily on her archival findings. As a result, although the first half of the book is based on sufficient primary sources, the second half is more original, more satisfying, and more convincing.

The introduction and the first three substantive chapters set forth Crowston's interpretation of the interaction of fashion and credit. Women became "expert practitioners of credit" (p. 2) in the century after 1660. Crowston seeks to establish credit as "a viable analytical category for explaining the currents of influence running through political institutions" (p. 17) from the old regime through the revolutionary decade and well into the nineteenth century by considering credit as one of the "economies of regard." Chapter one's exploration of credit's role in various institutions and aspects of social relations leads to an admittedly idiosyncratic exposition of critiques of the crisis in the credit system (p. 57) in chapter two and, then, to "performances of credibility" revolving around credit, fashion, and sex (p. 98) in chapter three. Crowston recognizes that fashion and credit's "social boundaries" "were clearly limited to a small elite," yet she contends that "such processes also subsumed the everyday lives and experiences of ordinary people" (pp. 137, 50-54). Anecdotes taken from the lives of Roger de Bussy-Rabutin (pp. 20-23, 31-33), the duc de Saint-Simon (pp. 25-31), Madame de Sévigné (pp. 43-49), Madame du Pompadour (pp. 87-92), and Jean Donneau de Visé (pp. 107-17) spice the account, but as support for rather far-reaching claims, the evidence is thin. In the first half of the book, Crowston's examples raise almost as many questions as they answer, in large measure because of insufficient attention to the broader economic context of credit (to be discussed below) that might have allowed her to demonstrate her insights into the intertwining of credit and fashion more convincingly.

With chapter four, Crowston's approach shifts. In the course of her delineation of the function of credit in the female fashion industry, the analysis deepens by relying on archival sources where she is on much surer ground. Evoking Jan de Vries's "industrious revolution" (p. 143) and examining the guilds' role in the production and sale of fashionable clothing,[2] Crowston asserts that after 1760, the *marchandes de mode* emerged as "a new type of entrepreneur—both creative genius and artisanal worker" (p. 169). In chapter five, fashion merchants, especially Rose Bertin, again take center stage through the statistical analysis of account books. This chapter provides concrete evidence for many of Crowston's arguments and will surely be among the lasting achievements of the book. The consideration of Bertin's business relations and personal connection with Marie-Antoinette in chapter six has been heralded by Crowston's many presentations and publications on the subject, but the fully realized version was worth the wait.[3] Her assertion based on fashion that the monarchy was progressively "discredited" rather than "desacralized" will surely be controversial (pp. 281-82). Chapter seven's discussion of an "informal system of trade credit" accentuates "the way women operated in the interstices of the law" and "their active participation in economic exchange" (p. 314). Crowston reiterates her claim that an interdisciplinary consideration of credit reveals "the workings of power in human society" (p. 317) before declaring that there was "something particularly Old Regime" about this version of credit and that "1600 to 1850 represented a high point in the cultural salience of credit, particularly with regard to nonmaterial uses of the word" (p. 325).

Given the talents and specific knowledge of my fellow reviewers, my comments highlight the economics involved in Crowston's analysis of the "economies of regard" embodied by female fashion merchants. I emphasize the importance of production to understanding credit, even in the non-material sense stressed by Crowston. I also attempt to place some of Crowston's claims into broader context. I am convinced that credit—in the sense used by Crowston and pioneered by Craig Muldrew and Natacha Coquery—was a major factor in many aspects of old regime French society and that women experienced credit in different ways than men.[4] I am also persuaded that fashion merchants illustrate certain aspects of the gendered workings of credit in exemplary fashion. That said, a number of Crowston's claims require further elucidation.

First, it must be observed that versions of "credit" closely related to Crowston's have been deployed to consider the process of technological development and transfer.[5] Credit has also been a major aspect of studies of early modern entrepreneurship.[6] Fashion merchants—both male and female—blended artistry and business and were reliant on well-heeled patrons, but they were far from unique. The

marchandes de mode comprised only a small fraction of the fashionable clothing trades (and only in a few places). Many other guild masters were involved. In addition, jewelers, gold- and silver-smiths, gun-makers, along with the famed entrepreneurs of the royal manufactures, among many others also had to take account of the fickle whims of fashion. This dependence on fashion was noticeable from the 1660s, at least a century before Crowston suggests that the consuming public truly noticed the *marchands de mode* (p. 141).^[7] Acknowledging the “expertise” of other entrepreneurs and commercial actors, equally dependent on credit and involved in fashion, would have avoided some of the book’s more exaggerated claims and made for a more persuasive general argument about the role of credit in French economy and society.

From my own research, I can attest that a great deal of relevant material about the role of the state in regulating the various guilds involved in fashion and the similarities and differences in the position of women in diverse places and trades can be found in series F12 in the Archives Nationales in Paris.^[8] Looking at series C and BB in departmental archives, as she did in her first book,^[9] would have allowed Crowston to make a far more convincing case for the impact of credit outside of the world of elites (and female merchants certainly counted as elites within French society as a whole) and could have filled in a number of evidentiary gaps. To take just one example, the mention of Jean-Baptiste Colbert and French mercantilism (pp. 104–06) is far too brief and leaves the reader with numerous questions regarding the impact of government action on the fashion sector. A number of other instances where more research would have helped to clarify matters include pp. 16, 50–54, 59, 98–99, 104–06, 139–41, 145, and 158. These vital series go completely uncited. This evidence might also have helped Crowston to clarify the social and economic bases of her depictions of the “popular classes” and the process by which various forms of expertise were developed. In short, although this is already a lengthy work, more attention to economic context is necessary to sustain some of Crowston’s central claims, especially in the first half of the book before she begins to deploy her archival research.

In her depiction of the historiography of political economy, I believe that Crowston has set up a straw man (pp. 54–55). She read one strand of scholarly consideration of political economy—those who take an approach drawn mostly from intellectual history—and confused it for the whole. Her claim that historians of political economy ignore the fact that “many French men and women thought about and experienced the domains of economy, society, politics, and culture as overlapping and inseparable” (p. 2) is untenable. Crowston herself cites Daryl Hafter, Philippe Minard, William Reddy, Michael Sonensher, and Alessandro Stanziani. Robert Forster, Christopher H. Johnson, David Landes, Gwynne Lewis, Leonard Rosenband, and David Kammerling Smith, to name just a few, along with a host of French authors, none cited in the bibliography, might also be mentioned.^[10] I also missed the foundational works on credit by John Bosher and Joel Félix.^[11] In short, Crowston’s interdisciplinary approach is neither ground-breaking nor fully grounded in the historiography. Similar lacunae appear in relationship to many other economic topics such as mercantilism (pp. 105–06), the purchase of *biens nationaux* (p. 379), the role of fashion during the French Revolution (p. 312), the wave of bankruptcies in 1787 in the wake of the Anglo-French Commercial Treaty that surely affected Rose Bertin’s finances (pp. 197ff), and so on.

Although I am convinced that “multiple, intersecting economies of regard operated in Old Regime France” and I agree with Crowston about the salience and significance of “economies of power,” “economies of trust and affection,” “economies of prestige and renown,” “economies of desire,” “economies of money,” and “economies of information and publicity” (p. 316), I believe that an important part of the story has not been given due attention, namely production. Fashion merchants created and used information networks and skillfully manipulated credit in its myriad forms, but, in the end, even “economies of regard” had to gaze *at* something tangible. Fashion merchants depended on their expertise in design and in matters related to credit to acquire and satisfy clients. Yet, as Crowston has demonstrated so ably, they were paid primarily (when they were paid!) for the labor involved in producing or modifying goods. They functioned as merchants selling the goods of others or

commissioning others to perform certain tasks, but, as Crowston herself recognizes, even more fundamentally, they were skilled artisans who created fashionable goods for wealthy customers. Fashion and credit were informal means of assessing value and wielding power (p. 124), but we cannot forget that they were also means to an end. The purpose of credit was to allow a fashion merchant to make or adorn a piece of clothing stylishly and to be able to continue to perform these tasks in the future.

Production surely mattered more to credit networks and the performance of fashion than it appears in *Credit, Fashion, Sex*. Crowston notes in passing the appearance of a new color (p. 115), falling prices for most fabrics (p. 144), the stagnation of wages for seamstresses (p. 176), subcontracting and renting *corporate* privileges (pp. 149-50), and the role of “false workers” (p. 147), but the difficulties not just of acquiring raw materials, but raw materials of appropriate quality and quantity, managing a skilled labor force, frequent recourse to the illicit economy for materials and skilled labor, and keeping the supply chain operating also depended on credit in the sense developed by Crowston. It should also be noted that having raw materials and labor available in the proper quantities and qualities at the proper times in the production process was one of the greatest challenges to an entrepreneur’s credit. Were these activities also gendered and in the same fashion (pun intended)? It would be fascinating to know and surely relates to the broader point about credit she seeks to make. Crowston does discuss the willingness of suppliers to continue to work with debt-ridden fashion merchants, but suppliers are treated as adjuncts of the merchants rather than as entrepreneurs whose credit relations focused on production (pp. 172-73, 210, 233ff). The decisions to emphasize the non-material aspects of credit and to downplay the supply side of credit’s role in production represent a significant set of missed opportunities and set up an artificial divide between production and exchange.

My review suggests that *Credit, Fashion, Sex* raises a number of important issues that call for fuller treatment, either by Crowston herself, her students, or by others working in the field. For example, the state’s multifaceted roles in fostering gendered credit networks require far more attention. Administrative encouragement of *hauts seigneurs* to allow women to hold the *maîtrise* in a wide variety of trades in a large number of privileged enclaves scattered across the realm dates from the late-seventeenth century. Readers might also like to know why Paris and Rouen were the only French cities to have female-only guilds before 1776 as well as how rare the existence of *marchandes de mode* were within the French guild system. Crowston should be lauded for taking on a big topic with many facets. As the very existence of this *H-France Forum* suggests, we will be talking about credit for quite some time to come.

NOTES

[1] Avner Offer, “Between the Gift and the Market: The Economy of Regard,” *Economic History Review* 50, no. 3 (1997): 450-76.

[2] Jan de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[3] Clare Haru Crowston, “Credit and the Metanarrative of Modernity,” *French Historical Studies* 34, no. 1 (2011): 7-19; “Family Affairs: Wives, Credit, Consumption and the Law in Old Regime France,” in *Family, Gender and Law in Early Modern France*, eds. Suzanne Desan and Jeffrey Merrick (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), 62-100; “La reine et sa ‘ministre des modes’ : Genre, crédit et politique dans la France pré-révolutionnaire,” *Travail, genre et sociétés* 13 (2005): 75-94; “Women and the Multiple Meanings of Credit: The Financial Records of the Fashion Merchant, Rose Bertin,” *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History* 28 (2002): 335-344; and more than a dozen conference presentations and invited lectures given in both France and North America over the past

fifteen years. For the full list, see her c.v. available at: <http://www.history.illinois.edu/people/crowston>.

[4] Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (New York, N.Y.: St. Martin's, 1998) and Natacha Coquery, *Tenir boutique à Paris au XVIIIe siècle : Luxe et demi-luxe* (Paris: CTHS, 2011).

[5] See, for example, Gérard Béaur, Hubert Bonin, and Claire Lemerrier, eds., *Fraude, contrefaçon et contrebande de l'Antiquité à nos jours* (Geneva: Droz, 2006); Charles Coulston Gillispie, *Science and Polity in France: The End of the Old Regime* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980); J.R. Harris, *Industrial Espionage and Technology Transfer: Britain and France in the Eighteenth Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998); and Liliane Hilaire-Pérez, *L'invention technique au siècle des Lumières* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2000).

[6] An excellent introduction to this voluminous literature is David S. Landes, Joel Mokyr and William J. Baumol, eds., *The Invention of Enterprise: Entrepreneurship from Ancient Mesopotamia to Modern Times* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011).

[7] A starting point is Pierre Deyon and Philippe Guignet, "The royal manufactures and economic and technological progress in France before the industrial revolution," *Journal of European Economic History* 9 (1980): 611-32; and the articles collected in Liliane Hilaire-Pérez and Anne-Françoise Garçon, eds., *Les chemins de la nouveauté. Innover, inventer au regard de l'histoire* (Paris: Éditions du CTHS, 2003).

[8] Jeff Horn, *The Path Not Taken: French Industrialization in the Age of Revolution, 1750-1830* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006) and *Economic Development in Early Modern France: The Privilege of Liberty, 1650-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), forthcoming.

[9] Clare Haru Crowston, *Fabricating Women: The Seamstresses of Old Regime France, 1675-1791* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001).

[10] Robert Forster, *Merchants, Landlords, Magistrates: The Depont Family in Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins Press, 1980); Christopher H. Johnson, *The Life and Death of Industrial Languedoc, 1700-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); David S. Landes, *The Unbound Prometheus: Technological Change and Industrial Development in Western Europe from 1750 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969); Gwynne Lewis, *The Advent of Modern Capitalism in France 1770-1840: The Contribution of Pierre-François Tubeuf* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); Leonard N. Rosenband, *Papermaking in Eighteenth-Century France: Management, Labor and Revolution at the Montgolfier Mill, 1761-1805* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); and David Kammerling Smith, "Au bien du commerce": Economic Discourse and Visions of Society in France" (PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1995). Beyond Minard, whose work here is essential, influential French authors who might be cited include Charles Carrière, *Négociants marseillais au XVIIIe siècle. Contribution à l'étude des économies maritimes*, 2 vols. (Marseille: Institut historique de Provence, 1973); Gérard Gayot, *Les draps de Sedan 1646-1870* (Paris: Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales/Terres Ardennaises, 1998); Jean-Pierre Hirsch, *Les deux rêves du commerce. Entreprise et institution dans la région lilloise (1780-1860)* (Paris: Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1991); François Jarrige, *Au temps des « tueuses de bras ». Les bris de machines à l'aube de l'ère industrielle* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2009); Jean-Michel Minovez, *L'industrie invisible – Les draperies du Midi XVIIe-XXe siècles. Essai sur l'originalité d'une trajectoire* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2012); and Denis Woronoff, *L'Industrie sidérurgique en France pendant la Révolution et l'Empire* (Paris: Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1984).

[11] See John Bosher, "Huguenot Merchants and the Protestant International in the Seventeenth Century," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (1995): 77-102 and *The Canada Merchants 1713-1763* (Oxford, U.K.: Clarendon Press, 1987). Among Joel Félix's many contributions, see *Finances et politique au siècle des Lumières. Le ministère L'Averdy, 1763-1768* (Paris: Comité pour l'Histoire Economique et Financière de la France, 1999).

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