

living. . . . Chaucer's Pardoner's Prologue and Tale present a challenge to those ideas because ubiquity suggests no attachment to a place" (209–10).

In just over two hundred pages, Goldie offers a richly capacious and wide-ranging account of late medieval ideas of space. While the alternating chapters on literature and science risked shoehorning hermeneutically one into the other, Goldie is careful to demonstrate how literary texts and scientific ideas, while often crossing one another's paths, first and foremost worked within their own conceptual precincts. The book is a study in the history of concepts, but it occasionally does not fulfil what it promises will be its focus on "the more everyday and earth-bound areas that people encounter, sense, and apprehend, and through which they move" (1). In his discussion of Kempe's *Book*, for example, Goldie misses the extent to which Kempe's imaginary is deeply interwoven with her home town of Bishop's Lynn. "Two of the most distinctive features of her impressions of King's Lynn, or Bishop's Lynn as it was then known, are that she records only the buildings and hardly mentions any other physical features of the town. She also rarely details the relationships among buildings, locations, or other items in terms of time, distance, steps, or any other measure" (111). While Goldie is right to note the significance of St. Margaret's to Kempe, he misses the opportunity afforded by an assessment of the fabric of Lynn to Kempe's situated being. "Thow schalt ben etyn and knawyn of the pepul of the world as any raton knawyth the stockfysch," Christ tells Kempe in book one of the *Book*. Directly opposite the east wall of the Chapel of Saint John, where Kempe prayed in St. Margaret's was a shop and *celda* known as "Le Fyssshehou," reminding us that during the winter months, stockfish was the main foodstuff being imported into Lynn. Here, then, is another form of "estral" spatial imagining, in which Kempe's spiritual biography discovers its vocabularies in the very streets of her hometown.

Regardless, *Scribes of Space* is a rich and fascinating study; if we have indeed returned to the "spatial turn," on the evidence of Goldie's excellent book, there is much that remains to be learned.

Stephen Kelly 
Queen's University Belfast.
s.p.kelly@qub.ac.uk

GABRIEL PAQUETTE. *The European Seaborne Empires: From the Thirty Years' War to the Age of Revolutions*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019. Pp. 312. \$35.00 (cloth).
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In the West, we still have trouble seeing the former empires of our respective nations objectively. Gabriel Paquette's history of European maritime empires from roughly 1620 to 1820 fills a gap. Designed as an introductory overview for students and scholars new to the subject, his volume is a tour de force and immensely readable. He begins by setting out the factors that enabled a mere handful of countries on the western edge of Europe to run huge swathes of the globe by 1800. At the outset of his period, Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, England, and France were bit players compared to the massive terrestrial empires of the Ottomans, Mughals, Aztecs, and Qing dynasty, among others. Although the world economic system was centered on Asia until at least 1750, western European nations accumulated enormous power through their seaborne empires, heralding globalization.

Paquette's approach in *The European Seaborne Empires* is partly chronological and partly thematic. This generally works well, although Stuart history is condensed to the point of ambiguity. He takes his survey to the end of the Seven Years' War in 1763 and then considers six themes: political and legal institutions, political economy, coerced and voluntary migration,

slavery and other labor regimes, the creation of creole societies, and the role of collaboration and resistance in shaping seaborne empires. He concludes by analyzing the breaking away of European colonies in the Americas, and the resulting effect worldwide. Useful maps help the reader to follow his narrative, although supporting illustrations are of disappointing quality.

As Paquette sifts through competing explanations for aspects of European colonization, he draws on the latest scholarship to debunk myths and correct errors. National stereotypes have long distorted imperial histories. Paquette points out that despite England's claims to have built an empire founded on liberty in contrast to the alleged barbarism of Spanish rule in the Americas, no empire could function without systemic violence and exploitation; and the American Revolution was not a "nationalist" revolt. He also emphasizes that subjugation was never a complete process in the colonies. Due to scant funds, insufficient soldiers, huge distances, and the myriad forms of resistance encountered, Europeans were often limited to the margins of lands over which they claimed hegemony. And since "the tentacles of European states were rather stubby before the early eighteenth century" (181), early colonizing efforts allowed lawless groups like pirates to infiltrate and thrive.

Non-Europeans were hardly passive bystanders or helpless victims in the colonization process; the unilateral imposition of power was impracticable, so European and indigenous institutions often existed side by side. Violence was always an option for invading Europeans, but for the most part, the colonizing process proceeded by negotiation and collaboration—still the case during the Age of Revolutions. Paquette reminds us that the business model of the Dutch East India Company was premised on intra-Asian trade; that the massive land-based empires of Eurasia first tolerated European maritime activity for the benefits it brought; that Europeans needed Asian rulers, not the other way around; and that in America and Africa, the Portuguese relied on European go-betweens who went native. In colonies, the balance of influence meant that Europeans often acculturated to indigenous societies. Colonizers administered laws, institutions, and policies that differed from those in Europe, accommodating local practices and accepting hybrid legal regimes. Syncretic religious practices emerged thanks to the interaction of different cultures. Interestingly, in Spanish America, the Inquisition extended to social practices like bigamy, helping to enforce a vision of a well-ordered society.

Paquette describes how landscapes were transformed as colonizers introduced new animals and cleared land for crops. In New England, early settlers consumed firewood at a spectacular rate to survive harsh winters: a typical household consumed an acre of forest each year. Colonial endeavor did produce some incipient environmentalism, but Europeans' study of botany, astronomy, and mineralogy was firmly pressed into the service of empire; the English even used sports to win over native elites and keep settlers in check.

Throughout, Paquette remains scrupulously even-handed. This is evident in his treatment of transatlantic slave trade. Enslaved Africans were a key export from 1440s. Although slavery had existed in Africa, the entry of European merchants galvanized it into a major trade that would stretch from the Pacific coast of Peru to the Indian Ocean ports of South Asia. The stigmas attached to slavery and other forms of forced labor (indentured servants, convicts) reinforced the subordinate position of colonies within the system of empire.

This survey is backed up with detailed statistics, often yielding little-known insights. For instance, in 1640 there were more English slaves in North Africa than there were African slaves under English control in the Caribbean; by the eighteenth century the Jesuits owned more slaves than did any other institution or family in the Americas; half the ships servicing Madras in the 1740s were Indian-owned; the British parliament delayed the passing of the act abolishing the slave trade to allow the final purchase of the more than 13,000 male slaves from West Africa who helped fight Napoleon; and, in 1832, free people of color owned about a fifth of all Jamaica's slaves.

As Paquette notes, though empire was marked by the violent imposition of authority, the results were not always what was intended; heterogeneity may even have helped colonies to

exist longer. In his epilogue, he considers how what seemed to be a contraction of empire during the Age of Revolutions just set the stage for a new phase of formal and informal empire after the 1820s. Overseas territory remained a major component of metropolitan economies. Britain now aped Napoleon in its treatment of colonial possessions and exported staggering amounts of guns into West Africa long after the slave trade ended. The inequalities these empires shaped remain pressing issues today; Paquette offers an excellent entry point for understanding maritime empires and their legacy.

Margarette Lincoln 
 Goldsmiths, University of London
m.lincoln@gold.ac.uk

KATE RETFORD. *The Conversation Piece: Making Modern Art in Eighteenth-Century Britain*. The Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017. Pp. 440. \$55.00 (cloth).
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For eighteenth-century British painters, one of the most important consequences of the nation's growing prosperity, fueled by empire and industry, was the creation of new modes of art. Prominent among these new genres was the conversation piece: pictures of convivial groups of people, often recognizable individuals, painted on a relatively small scale but with abundant detail. Despite the importance of this format to both the cultural history of the period and the careers of artists such as William Hogarth, no modern scholarly monograph existed until now. Kate Retford's magisterial *The Conversation Piece* therefore fills a major gap in the existing literature.

Previous to the publication of this book, the standard reference remained Sacheverell Sitwell's 1936 *Conversation Pieces: A Survey of English Domestic Portraits and Their Painters*. More recently, feminist scholars have brought fresh insights to the genre; highlights include an important essay by Shearer West ("The Public Nature of Private Life: The Conversation Piece and the Fragmented Family," *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 18, no. 2 [1995]: 153–72) and a foundational chapter on patriarchy and inheritance in Marcia Pointon's *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (1998). But, as Retford rightly observes in her introduction, the field was still lacking a comprehensive survey. That lack has now been amply redressed, in a book that combines lucid, lively text with copious illustrations, featuring 235 plates, 180 of which are in color.

Particularly impressive is the book's structure. By taking a thematic approach, Retford combines the scope of a survey with in-depth analysis of specific case studies. The latter is especially important given the complexity of these images: these multi-figure narratives often commemorate (or paper over) the sitters' specific social circumstances, using a wealth of props, supporting characters, and visual in-jokes. Each of the major figures in the field—such as William Hogarth, Arthur Devis, and Johan Zoffany—gets his due, without turning the book into a chronological march or a string of artist's biographies.

The first part of the book situates the genre in mid-eighteenth-century culture. Chapter 1 traces its origins in the convivial atmosphere of artistic clubs and then explores the relationship between this novel mode, focused on the present day, and the traditional hierarchy of genres, which favored history painting. Chapter 2 considers themes of talk and performance, with Retford arguing persuasively that these figures are not stiff or awkward, as is often said, but rather deliberately, performatively polite. The final chapter in this part engages "conversation" in its broadest contemporaneous sense, meaning a specific community or way of life. It