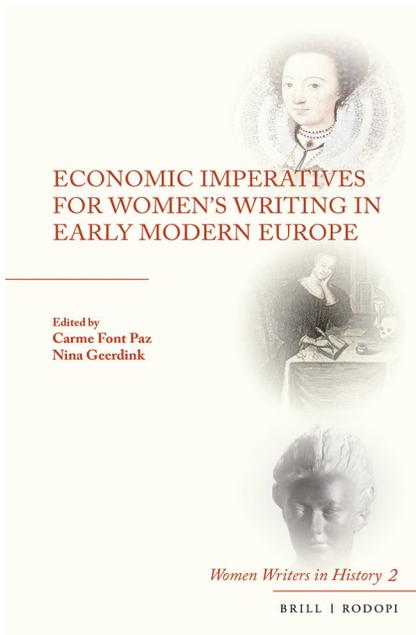


## Review

Carme Font Paz and Nina Geerdink (eds.), *Economic Imperatives for Women's Writing in Early Modern Europe*, Leiden, Brill/Rodopi, 2018, 262 pp. ISBN 9789004382992.



This collection of essays on the economic opportunities and constraints faced by early modern women writers ranges widely in terms of time and place. The essays discuss women from the Low Countries, England, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, and Spain, whose writings date from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Reading them together makes clear that women faced obstacles to their careers as professional writers that were strikingly similar, no matter when or where they lived or what they wrote. Individuals as different as the Venetian Luisa Bergalli Gozzi (1703-1779) and the Danish-Norwegian Dorothe Engelbretsdatter (1634-1716) had to overcome the same patriarchal injunctions against female writing and decide how to position themselves in relation to an evolving and unstable literary marketplace.

In their introduction to the collection, Carme Font Paz and Nina Geerdink make a convincing case for approaching women's

writing from the perspective of 'economic imperatives', by which they mean 'the business of writing' (xi). Profit, they argue, should be taken seriously as a motive for creative production. As they rightly note, economic motives have sometimes been ignored or used to discredit women's writing, although much recent scholarly energy has been devoted to studying early modern women's professional careers. Situated in the related fields of literary studies, gender studies, social studies, book history, and material culture, this collection explores 'how economic factors impinged on women's literary output and how the realisation that their writing was subject to commercial exchange affected their self-representation as authors' (10).

Women who made their living as writers were considered exceptional throughout the period, but such a representation was not in touch with reality. All over Europe, women writers made money by relying on patronage and manuscript and print publication, often simultaneously. In the face of these complications, Font Paz and Geerdink argue, women became 'actors of change and creativity' in the literary marketplace (13). Naturally, social and economic circumstances varied by country and changed over time, but a recurring theme in this book is the struggle and ingenuity with which women of different social classes and nationalities attempted to make the best of unstable economic and professional circumstances.

Most essays focus on the lives of one or two women writers. By contrast, Suzan van Dijk looks at French male-authored 'bio-bibliographical compilations' (16) that discuss the careers of women writers, while Nieves Baranda provides a cogent overview of Spanish women writers in the literary marketplace more broadly, including playwrights, poets, novelists, and even nuns who wrote to support their order. Other essays that stand out are Irene Zanini-Cordi's exploration of the remarkable life of poet, translator, journalist-editor, and queen's librarian Eleonora de Fonseca Pimentel (1752-1799) and Marianne D'Ezio's analysis of the turn to translation by Charlotte Lennox (1730-1804). Nina Geerdink gives a thoughtful account of the life of Elisabeth Hoofman (1664-1736), with particular focus on Hoofman's deliberate responses to the ups and downs of her social circumstances by altering her relationship to patronage and publication, an aspect of her career that Hoofman shares with other women writers discussed in the book.

It has to be said that the collection as a whole is somewhat uneven in terms of the quality of the essays. In addition, it appears the press did not provide sufficient editing support to catch certain stylistic infelicities and eliminate awkwardness in some of the writing. For those who are already well versed in the works of the women writers discussed, a number of the essays may not contain much new information. The focus on economics and profit means that many contributors concentrate on giving biographical accounts. When writers are not well known, this may be necessary, but it also left me longing for more in-depth analysis of these women's works and for more theoretically innovative readings. All the same, this collection is valuable for turning attention to market forces and economic aspects of authorship and for enabling comparative or transnational analysis. Essay collections are too frequently used as repositories of single essays; reading this entire book can allow us to arrive at tentative conclusions about economic and cultural climates for female authorship in different countries and time periods, showing the value of moving beyond limited considerations of women writers of one country and time period only.

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