

If there is any limitation, it is that some economic factors – such as the importance of mineral extraction, smuggling, and trade networks after 1960 – received less sustained attention. Additionally, while the book offers insights into the role of international actors in today's crisis, more information about global geopolitical interests would have complemented the final chapters.

Nonetheless, *Fractured Pasts on Lake Kivu's Borderlands* makes a significant contribution to African history, borderland studies, and postcolonial analysis. It provides a compelling counterpoint to prevalent narratives of division and hostility among communities around Lake Kivu, reminding us that their history is not just a record of conflicts, but also of kinships, trade, adaptation, and negotiation. This book is an essential resource for historians, political scientists, and anyone with an interest in the Great Lakes region.

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Joseph Harley, *At Home with the Poor. Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in England, c. 1650-1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2024). 256 pp. ISBN 9781526160843.

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In *At Home with the Poor*, Joseph Harley presents a unique and meticulous analysis of the material culture of poor households in Great Britain between 1650 and 1850. Drawing on an exceptionally diverse range of sources – including probate inventories, writings of the poor, contemporary images, artefacts, account books, and wills – Harley provides an unprecedented insight into the homes of the British poor during two centuries marked by the Industrial Revolution and profound changes in consumer culture. Previous studies have largely focused on middle-class and elite consumption patterns, often assuming that sources on the poor were too scarce for meaningful analysis or that the poor owned little beyond bare necessities. Harley convincingly challenges these assumptions, demonstrating that the poor actively shaped their domestic environments and participated in consumer markets. By shifting the focus of material culture studies beyond wealthier households, he argues for a more inclusive understanding of consumption in the past.

The book is based on a dataset of 2,400 probate inventories spanning from 1622 to 1841, collected from 505 English parishes across seven counties. While Harley acknowledges certain limitations, this broad scope allows for comparing the material culture of the poor across different regions of Great Britain. The diverse range of inventories, drawn up when individuals were elderly or receiving poor relief, provides a surprisingly vivid picture of both valuable and mundane objects in their households. These have been complemented by over 2,100 personal narratives from the poor. Although (auto)biographical documents such as diaries were rarely written with the intention of describing material culture, they occasionally offer unique glimpses into the function and emotional significance of objects within poor homes. While the probate inventories form the quantitative backbone of Harley's research, it is through these diaries, biographies, and autobiographies that he truly brings the homes of the poor to life.

By integrating these diverse sources, Harley persuasively argues that the poor, despite their limited means, actively shaped their domestic spaces. His argument gains force through a step-by-step analysis of their dwellings, rooms, and possessions, which unfolds as a guided tour through the cottages of poor British consumers in the long eighteenth century. Each chapter begins with a quantitative analysis of the probate inventories before delving into contextual evidence, painting a detailed picture of the poor sitting around a coal- or wood-fired hearth after a long day of labor, seated on an assortment of mismatched chairs and stools, before retiring to often shared beds. While such depictions may seem romanticized, Harley does an excellent job of illustrating the precarious nature of poor lives. Accidents, illness, or poor decision-making could rapidly turn a modestly comfortable existence into one of extreme hardship, further highlighting the great diversity in the experiences of poor consumers both geographically and over time. In doing so, he definitively challenges traditional notions that the poor were passive consumers, instead revealing them to be remarkably resourceful in shaping their domestic environments.

While Harley acknowledges that future research should focus more on the informal economies in which the poor participated, he already provides valuable insights into the inventive ways they acquired consumer goods. Throughout the book, we encounter individuals pawning wedding rings, purchasing tea paraphernalia in prosperous times only to sell them during hardship, and even borrowing musical instruments for entertainment. In this way, Harley illustrates how the

poor moved through different phases of prosperity and poverty, yet found ways to participate in consumer markets at every stage.

At the same time, while Harley convincingly demonstrates that the poor actively shaped their domestic environments, his analysis remains primarily descriptive rather than deeply theoretical. A stronger engagement with concepts such as Pierre Bourdieu's notion of symbolic capital could have enriched the discussion by exploring whether certain possessions carried social significance beyond their economic value. Did poor individuals acquire certain goods not just for practical use, but rather to assert dignity or convey their status within their communities? While Harley vividly reconstructs the material world of the poor, a deeper exploration of the social meanings attached to these possessions would have added another interpretative layer to his findings.

Extending his main argument, Harley contends that the growing demand for consumer goods among the poor – a group long considered economically marginal – played a significant role in the Industrial Revolution. While he does not settle the enduring debate over whether demand or supply was the primary driver of industrialization, his analysis of the poor as active and expanding consumers adds a crucial piece to the puzzle. Ultimately, Harley challenges historians of material culture to take the poor and their consumer behavior more seriously, dismissing the notion that sources are lacking and highlighting their significance as participants in the consumer markets of the long eighteenth century.

Overall, *At Home with the Poor* is a landmark study based on an exceptional set of sources. It is essential reading for anyone interested in the daily life and material culture of the poor in Northwestern Europe before, during, and after the Industrial Revolution.

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Caroline Fowler, *Slavery and the Invention of Dutch Art* (Durham (NC): Duke University Press, 2025). 176 pp. ISBN 9781478031321.

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Absences are telling. This is the analytical thread running through *Slavery and the Invention of Dutch Art*. Caroline Fowler's central argument is that the "transubstantiation of personhood into property" (p. 2) – the