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# A review of "Labor and Writing in Early Modern England, 1567-1667" by Laurie Ellinghausen

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labor Bowes invested in writing this much-needed and interesting biography of Richard Brathwait.

Laurie Ellinghausen. *Labor and Writing in Early Modern England, 1567-1667*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008. ix + 155 pp. + 5 illustrations. \$99.95.  
Review by JULIE D. CAMPBELL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY.

In this study, Ellinghausen examines the careers of the non-aristocratic authors, Isabella Whitney, Thomas Nashe, Ben Jonson, John Taylor, and George Wither. For each of these figures, Ellinghausen discusses his/her identification with labor and what that means for the rhetorical poses that each assumes. Noting that Whitney identifies as a poor maidservant, Nashe as a day laborer, Jonson as a blacksmith, Taylor as a waterman, and that Wither generally celebrates the virtue of his labor, she argues that these positions allow them “to negotiate restrictions” and re-frame them “as a platform for authority” (5). Making frequent reference to Marxist views, Ellinghausen contends that all of these authors are “situated within a broad and complicated transition from pseudo-feudal custom to systems of social organization that support and are supported by capitalism” and that their careers are “important indices of cultural transition in process” (15).

The key notions that Ellinghausen seeks to illustrate are that privileging the virtues of labor creates a new paradigm in the writing of early modern England and that through observing this development one may have a better understanding of the social shift taking place. To develop these ideas, she builds on the work of scholars such as Richard Helgerson and Raymond Williams by examining each writer’s self-presentation and “alignment” regarding social relations. In the process, she explores the historical context for each figure and provides close readings of his/her work.

Beginning with Whitney, Ellinghausen notes that although in *The Copy of a Letter . . . by a Yonge Gentilwoman: to her Unconstant Lover* (1567) Whitney engages in “the rhetoric of novelty” as she inserts a female voice into the debate about lovers and “caters to readers’ tastes by experimenting with popular mid-Tudor genres,” she also “presents readers with the less familiar viewpoint of a woman for-

saken *economically*” (19). Regarding *A Sweet Nosegay* (1573), Ellinghausen asserts that the “marginal, vagrant status” that Whitney adopts in it is “a major departure from the more conventional voice she uses in *The Copy*” (20). She notes that “when Whitney fashions herself as an unemployed maidservant, she specifically aligns herself with a group that was prone to prostitution in cultural imagination as well as in fact” (20). Examining elements of the historical context, including the 1563 Statute of Artificers, which led to the arrest of masterless men and women, and the unemployment issues facing maidservants, due to the increasing population of London, Ellinghausen suggests that Whitney “harnesses the questions of sexuality and property that maidservants raised to compose her own narrative of intellectual labor” (23). Through a close reading of the *Nosegay*, Ellinghausen traces the “commodity logic” present in Whitney’s work and Whitney’s self-presentation as an outsider.

With Nashe, Ellinghausen demonstrates how a “nominally elite” university man comes “to voice a poor, embittered learned man who makes a bargain with the devil” (37) in *Pierce Pennilesse* (1592). She points out that Nashe’s life illustrates the story “of a frustrated scholar *cum* writer for pay—one who is compelled to adjust to a new socioeconomic reality” (38). Focusing on the anonymously authored plays in the *Parnassus*, comedies performed as Christmas plays between 1597 and 1601 at Cambridge, she examines the plays’ central theme, “the economic tribulations of scholars after graduation,” and discusses how the plays “use Nashe’s example to stage a collective consideration of the place of scholarly labor in the late Tudor commonwealth” (39). Moreover, she looks at the historical context in which Nashe and his fellow scholars were seeking occupations, examining issues of primogeniture as well as the prospects and salaries for schoolmasters and church officials. She illustrates how both the *Parnassus* plays and Nashe’s own writings “allow reflection” on the institution of the university and “its unfulfilled promises” (62).

To gain a better understanding of what scholars have called Jonson’s “anti-materialism,” Ellinghausen places “discourses of writing and theater and of labor into dialogue with one another” (64). She notes that Jonson may have embraced metaphors of labor in his writing, but he also “spent his career disassociating himself from the very

degree of people in which he once worked” (65). She points out that although his attitudes may “appear at odds with each other,” they do indeed “intersect with changing early modern discourses concerning social mobility, vocation, and authorship” (65). Surveying Jonson’s work and historical context, Ellinghausen explores the status and practices of brick-layers in early modern London, Jonson’s treatment of Vulcan as a character (in “An Execration upon Vulcan”), and his derision of Inigo Jones’ labor. She ultimately suggests that, “Given his proximity to labor in all its forms, the language of labor becomes the best way of capturing process and developing an incipient sense of authorship as a vocation” for Jonson (92).

Noting that Taylor’s practices in his career reflect his admiration and imitation of Jonson, Ellinghausen suggests that Taylor’s approach is, however, “more political” (94). She argues that an understanding of the revolutionary context is key for Taylor and offers detailed readings of his work that show how it partakes of the “explosion of print that attended the intense political debates surrounding monarchy, religion, and governance in the mid-seventeenth century” (94). In Taylor’s case, Ellinghausen posits that “authorial self-presentation becomes bound up in pressing questions concerning the fate of the commonwealth itself” (94).

Finally, regarding her choice of Wither to conclude her study, Ellinghausen remarks that Milton would have in some ways been a more likely subject, but that she chooses Wither, “due to his alleged role in the history of intellectual property” (121). She examines the situation in which Wither contended with the Stationer’s Company concerning the royal patent granted to his *Hymnes and Songs of the Church* (1622-1623), noting that during this process he had “numerous opportunities to assert his writing as not only property, but as *labor*” (121). In particular, she points out that in *The Schollers Purgatory* (c. 1625), dedicated to “honest stationers,” Wither mounts an elaborate defense that might be summarized, “I am an author, and that is to say I am a worker” (122). Ellinghausen notes that this legal skirmish showcases an historical moment in that it “brings to fruition a sense of author-as-laborer that is informed by religious and cultural discourses that encouraged such thinking” (122), and she then compares various aspects of Wither’s experience with those of the previously addressed

writers. She concludes this chapter and her study with a discussion of the permutations of the notions of “public” and “private” during this period in England, suggesting that “the careers of laboring writers show that the public is not simply an antithesis of or a reaction against the private—it is a positive, deliberate stance that early modern changes in economic organization, social organization, and religion helped make possible” (139).

In *Labor and Writing in Early Modern England, 1567-1667*, Ellinghausen presents insightful commentary on the evolution of writing as a profession. She does an admirable job of considering this group of writers’ relationships with labor and what those conditions meant regarding their rhetorical positioning and careers. The examples that she presents will no doubt spark scholars’ interest in examining the cases of other writers from the period in a similar fashion. Her book will especially be of interest to literary historians, as well as to those who would like to know more about the careers of these specific authors.

Tamara Harvey. *Figuring Modesty in Feminist Discourse Across the Americas, 1633-1700*. Hampshire, England., 2008. 163 pp. +1 illustration. \$99.95. Review by NANCY MOHRLOCK BUNKER, MACON STATE COLLEGE.

When the concept of modesty, i.e., virtue, is applied to seventeenth-century women, specifically women who engage in public discourse and who reject forms of modesty that are essentially about shame and veiling female bodies, the expectation to “keep due measure” regarding one’s conduct takes new forms (1). Tamara Harvey’s *Figuring Modesty in Feminine Discourse Across the Americas, 1633-1700* explores the writings of Euro-American authors Anne Bradstreet, Anne Hutchinson, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, and Marie de l’Incarnation, women whose functionalist treatments of the body provide a fresh and reframed modesty. Each in her own distinct way speaks to the paradoxes and limits placed on public women. Exploring their “discipline, practice and embodied efforts” (2), Harvey shows that these women “fundamentally engage the debates of the time while shifting characteristics of the body in ways that challenge symbolic readings of the body” (13). Importantly, the works serve as correctives for