

Michelle M. Dowd and Natasha Korda, Ed.
Working Subjects in Early Modern English Drama
Farnham: Ashgate, 2011. xiii+291p.
£65 hardback
ISBN: 9781409410775

This collection of essays on work and workers on the early modern stage is a pleasure to read. The volume is concerned with the process whereby changing economic conditions, the shift from a feudal to a proto-capitalist economy, led to an expanding and less formal labour economy and the emergence of work as constitutive of subjectivity. Since London's open-air theatres introduced the occupation of 'professional player', this space was ideally suited to explore the cultural issues at the heart of working life and how it shaped identity. The volume begins with two essays exploring Thomas Decker's *Shoemaker's Holiday*, a play that has hitherto attracted most critical attention for its exploration of workers on the stage, and proceeds to explore such pertinent topics as alien labour, with its attendant social tensions; the staging of domestic work and the staging of witches, specifically in relation to the gendered division of labour; the global trade in which England participated, specifically colonial labour, and travel (a word that also indicated 'travail') to distant lands. A range of texts are considered, for example alongside Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Jonson's *The Alchemist* are less well-known plays, progress entertainments and civic pageants. Two essays in this collection deserve special mention: Ronda Arab on *Kempe's Nine Daies Wonder* and Holly Dugan on Perfumers in early modern drama. Arab explores early modern attitudes to masculinity and the male player, a figure often condemned as idle and effeminate; the perfumer (often an alien man or English woman) too was accused of idleness and Dugan reveals the cultural anxieties surrounding exotic scents. Although aimed at a scholarly readership this collection should be of interest to any serious advanced undergraduate student or intelligent general reader.

Joan Fitzpatrick