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The Ashgate Research Companion to Popular Culture in Early Modern England

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'better sorts', and risks caricaturing and stereotyping quotidian habits and practices. This was a culture which knew, after all, when a herring 'was not well broiled'.

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Work

Mark Netzloff

Labour History and Early Modern Studies

In 1696, Gregory King compiled the first statistical analysis of the population of England. Dividing the nation according to a hierarchical list of titles and occupations, he provided estimates of the number, income and expenses of each group. As reflected in King's analysis, early modern culture was inevitably centred on *popular* culture in the sense of an emerging concern with the productive capabilities of the population itself. A discussion of the early modern period's attitudes towards work is especially pertinent because it was in this era that figures like King began to conceptualise what we would now term as the labour theory of value. As King calculated, the nation's power was contingent on the productive work of its population. 'Work' was therefore not solely confined to the actual labour of specific social groups. Even those elite segments that by definition did not engage in manual labour – temporal lords, knights and gentlemen – were included in the chart as contributing to the 'work' of the nation.[1]

King's chart offers a vivid example of the central place of labour in early modern English culture. As Tom Rutter has insightfully argued, one of the distinctive aspects of the early modern idea of work is that this category began to take on a more encompassing and theoretical aspect: it thereby represented not only one's actual work but also served as a model – of 'vocation' – that included all forms of social labour.[2] Drawing on Rutter's observation, this essay will similarly expand the purview of work so as to address the varied forms of early modern labour. While some of the analysis will be devoted to expected figures and groups, such as urban artisanal workers, servants and apprentices, it will also be extended to include two often overlooked labour contexts that contributed significantly to changing nations of work in the period: labourers in the countryside, where the disruptive effects of capitalism first appeared, and labourers in England's new colonies, which emerged as an extension of the crises of labour affecting the nation.

In addition, the essay will complicate the association of labour with class and status through an analysis of the intellectual labour of increasingly professionalised writers. The status of literary work was often contingent on its differentiation from the dominant

1 King's chart is reproduced in Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), pp. 32–3.

2 Tom Rutter, *Work and Play on the Shakespearean Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 3.

artisanal model of urban labour. The fact that many forms of productive labour are seldom thought of as 'work' reflects some of the abiding legacies of this period, which witnessed an unprecedented separation of labour from capital, a process that had devastating effects on the social position of labourers in early modern society. King's chart gives shape to the logic of capital by dividing the population into 'productive' and 'unproductive' groups, responsible for either 'increasing the wealth of the kingdom' or 'decreasing the wealth of the kingdom'. His calculations conclude with the stunning pronouncement that 2,825,000 people, or 51 per cent of a population of 5.5 million, did not contribute to the common wealth of the nation. While the model of work as vocation offered a means for membership in a national community, this paradigm was at the same time one of exclusion, witnessed by the fact that King's list of unproductive labour encompasses not only the destitute poor (cottagers and paupers, gypsies and vagrants) but also day labourers, servants, mariners and soldiers. The unprecedented capital expansion of this period was predicated by more rigidly defined forms of exclusion; and for many labouring groups, the inability to gain access to capital and the erosion of many of their customary rights and protections were interconnected parts of the same process.

Even the most conservative historical assessments have emphasised the declining position of labourers and the poor in the early modern era. Given the place of the sixteenth century as a pivotal stage in the early history of capitalism, the overarching and structural erosion of the rights and protections of labour illustrates the forms of displacement attendant to an era of capital expansion. As Marxist economic historians such as Robert Brenner and Ellen Wood have recognised, critical attention to commercial expansion alone has often overlooked the class conflicts and material conditions that made possible any production of surplus.[3] The early modern period witnessed an ongoing crisis of labour. Although statistical estimates have been a matter of dispute, real wages fell by at least 28 per cent over the course of the sixteenth century, and may have declined by more than 50 per cent according to some accounts.[4] At the same time, demographic changes in population exacerbated problems of unemployment and scarcity of resources: 20 per cent of labourers comprised a surplus labour pool, a number which swelled to 50 per cent unemployment in times of crisis.[5] As I will discuss later, problems of overpopulation and unemployment were motivating factors for colonial projects, which thought of new markets not only as ways to revitalise English industries, especially the cloth trade, but also as outlets for exporting surplus labourers.

Given the labour problems that pervaded the early modern period, it is striking that the topic has garnered relatively little critical attention. Some of the groundbreaking studies of the topic date from the early twentieth century, as represented by the work of R.H. Tawney and L.C. Knights, among others.[6] Significantly, this earlier criticism was avowedly Marxist, both in methodology and in terms of the political sympathies of this generation of socialist and progressive intellectuals. One reason for the subsequent neglect of the topic was the correlation of labour history with Marxist criticism, which suffered a backlash in post-war Anglo-American academia. Eric Kerridge, for instance, began his study of the early modern

3 See especially Robert Brenner, 'The Origins of Capitalist Development: A Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism', *New Left Review* 104 (July–August 1977), 25–92 and Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1999).

4 Steve Rappaport, *Worlds within Worlds: Structures of Life in Sixteenth-Century London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 150–51.

5 E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541–1871: A Reconstruction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 531–2.

6 R.H. Tawney, *The Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century* (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1912); L.C. Knights, *Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1937).

agrarian economy, published in 1969, by dismissing Tawney's earlier study of the very same topic due to its 'harmful prejudice' against capitalism.[7]

Historical discussions of early modern labour inevitably evoke the question of whether occupational status entailed a kind of class identity. Social historians have generally resisted addressing class as a concept relevant for the early modern period. This approach argues that 'class' as we know it was solely a product of the industrial revolution, and that it is only after this point, with the creation of a landless population of wage labourers in the factory system, in which broader class categories such as that of a 'working class' began to emerge. Peter Laslett, for example, asserts that early modern England was a 'one-class system' because economic production was generally limited to the household: due to the immediacy and quasi-familial setting of labour, work denoted not so much status as function. As a result, early moderns did not think of themselves 'in terms of classes that rise, conflict and fall'.[8] Laslett's model does helpfully orient discussions of labour to the domestic setting of economic production. And while feminists have critiqued Laslett's argument, one should note that he is far from nostalgic about the social formation of domestic labour that preceded industrialisation.[9] Indeed, in recent years materialist feminist critics have expanded on aspects of Laslett's discussion, and some of the richest analyses of early modern work are those specifically dealing with domestic labour.[10]

Other social historians of Laslett's generation similarly focused their analysis on 'status' groups rather than classes. Status, seen as a more neutral and descriptive term, was thereby opposed to 'class' with its associations with Marxist histories of labour. Influenced by Max Weber, these social historians turned to status as a category through which to better understand social connections and community identifications that did not always correlate with economic position in a deterministic manner.[11] Despite the positive effects of this revisionist project, there were some key limitations to this analysis. As seen in the work of Lawrence Stone, discussions of 'status groups' were often limited to elite segments of the population.[12] While the focus on gentry and aristocratic subjects and their jockeying for social position provided a fine case study of status-based identities, it was less successful in analysing the relation of these elite populations to economic production. But as more recent criticism has addressed, even elite groups that by definition did not 'work' nonetheless served an important role in the economic developments of the period. In terms of the agrarian roots of English capitalism, it is now generally recognised that the traditional landowning class embraced these changes as much as their socially mobile tenants. In the

7 Eric Kerridge, *Agrarian Problems in the Sixteenth Century and After* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1969), p. 15.

8 Laslett, *The World We Have Lost*, p. 37.

9 Ibid., p. 3. For a critique of Laslett, see Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse, 'Family History', in *The Imaginary Puritan: Literature, Intellectual Labor, and the Origins of Personal Life* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 69–88.

10 Among other recent sources, see Natasha Korda, *Shakespeare's Domestic Economies* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002) and Wendy Wall, *Staging Domesticity: Household Work and English Identity in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

11 Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (New York: Bedminster, 1968), pp. 302–7. Among discussions of the advantages of classifications of 'status' over 'class', see Lawrence Stone, 'Social Mobility in England, 1500–1700', *Past and Present* 33 (1966), 16–55; Alan Everitt, 'Social Mobility in Early Modern England', *Past and Present* 33 (1966), 56–73; and Jonathan Barry, 'Introduction' to Jonathan Barry and Christopher Brooks eds, *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550–1800* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1994), pp. 1–27.

12 Armstrong and Tennenhouse, 'Family History', p. 75.

context of colonialism, elite investors formed a core constituency in joint-stock companies.[13] Many of the colonial projects of this era bore this imprint in terms of their efforts to model colonial society on feudal hierarchies that were increasingly under threat in England.[14]

The work of revisionist social historians from the 1960s through the 1980s had a profound influence on the comparable neglect of labour history in New Historicist literary studies from the 1980s and 1990s, many of which similarly disavowed the intellectual legacies of Marxism. Stephen Greenblatt, for instance, implied that Marxist theory was somehow programmatic in form, an orthodoxy that limited analysis.[15] David Scott Kastan set a critical precedent by arguing that 'the language of class relations applied to the social formation of early modern England is an anachronism'.[16] Just as Kastan grounded his observation with reference to the earlier work of social historians, subsequent literary studies have often cited Kastan in similarly dismissing the relevance of class.[17] However, in his original comment Kastan actually complicates this rejection of class by acknowledging that the early modern period nonetheless showed power dynamics that produced comparable effects *as* class.[18] These social historians and literary critics preferred status to class because it offered a vocabulary for analysing questions of power, patronage and social mobility without necessary reference to labour and economic production. It is no coincidence that so much New Historicist criticism of this earlier generation focused on the court as a privileged site of literary production, for example, rather than texts produced in the context of civic or artisanal communities.

But another problem with this dismissal of class is that it loses sight of how class operates most powerfully and immediately in terms of the impact of economic forces on the consciousness and self-identification of individual subjects. This is also the most elusive register for class, due to the ubiquitous failure of subjects to recognise the shaping effects of labour and economic production. But, to draw on the phrasing of E.P. Thompson, identifying instances of 'class struggle' in the early modern period is not predicated on a stable, monolithic and anachronistically modern sense of class consciousness.[19] One of the most influential critical frameworks applied to early modern forms of 'class struggle' has been Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque.[20] A particularly valuable aspect of this model is that it provides a heuristic category for focusing specifically on manifestations of popular culture in the period. Nonetheless, the carnivalesque is often relegated to a marginal position: as a licensed festive period that effectively contains social discontent, for instance, or as an anarchic principle that rarely effects social change through protest.[21] The efforts

[13] On elite investors in colonial projects, see Theodore K. Rabb, *Enterprise and Empire: Merchant and Gentry Investment in the Expansion of England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967) and Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London's Overseas Traders, 1550–1653* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

[14] On colonial feudalism, see Mark Netzloff, 'Writing Britain from the Margins: Scottish, Welsh, and Irish Projects for American Colonization', *Prose Studies* 25 (2002), 1–24.

[15] Stephen Greenblatt, 'Towards a Poetics of Culture', in *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 147.

[16] David Scott Kastan, *Shakespeare after Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 149.

[17] See, for example, Ronda Arab, *Manly Mechanicals on the Early Modern Stage* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 2011), p. 20.

[18] Kastan, *Shakespeare after Theory*, p. 150.

[19] E.P. Thompson, 'Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class Struggle without Class?', *Social History* 3 (1978), 133–65.

[20] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984).

[21] As Michelle O'Callaghan notes, viewing the carnivalesque solely as part of 'plebeian' culture also deflects attention away from the extent to which 'popular' culture traverses the boundaries of elite and subordinate social groups. '"Thomas the Scholar" versus "John the Sculler": Defining Popular Culture in the Early Seventeenth Century', in Matthew Dimmock and Andrew Hadfield eds, *Literature and Popular Culture in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p. 50. Peter Burke's canonical

of subordinate classes to articulate political grievances is therefore cast solely as a mode of disorder or social inversion, rather than a desperate – and at times effective – means for combating political neglect and economic deprivation.

Another context in which forms of class protest and critique have been underanalysed is in the work of social historians on early modern London. Despite the value of this impressive body of criticism, these studies have overstated the case for the seemingly remarkable stability of the city due to the rarity of wide-scale protests throughout the period.[22] What is overlooked, however, is the extent to which these political disturbances stemmed from underlying economic causes. As E.P. Thompson argued in reference to the 'moral economy' of popular uprisings, these collective efforts, however unruly in form, were provoked by specific unaddressed grievances, including dearth, lack of poor relief and the unequal effects of free trade.[23] Thompson's work on the time-discipline imposed by capitalist production provides another useful framework for analysing the relation of the carnivalesque to changing models of work.[24] The increasingly draconian work-regime mandated under such measures as the Statute of Artificers, which will be discussed shortly, rendered any non-productive activity as transgressive: festivity was therefore no longer a culturally sanctioned occasion but instead a subversive threat to the order of the disciplinary society that began to emerge in the period, one that Foucault has analysed as grounded in a correlation of docile productive workers with increasing profitability.[25]

Urban Labour

Discussions of labour in early modern England often limit their attention to the urban environment of London. For social historians, this focus is not particularly surprising, given the rapid growth of London from a small city of 50,000 at the beginning of the Tudor dynasty to a sprawling metropolis of 120,000 in 1603.[26] The most rapid expansion took place in the second half of the sixteenth century, when London's population increased from 70,000 to 150,000.[27] This period of intense urbanisation is also of central interest to literary historians, particularly those analysing the emergence of the public theatre in this period. One effect of the growth of market relations in urban London was a consequent degree of social mobility, albeit mostly among landed and mercantile elites. As Holinshed noted, merchants 'often change estate with gentlemen, as gentlemen do with them, by mutuall conversion of the one into the other'.[28]

Because many studies have concentrated solely on elite segments of urban society, other forms of urban labour have been comparatively neglected. Bruce Robbins's analysis of the role of the serving class in Victorian England set a precedent for a number of recent studies

analysis of popular culture similarly recognised the 'two-way traffic' between 'great' and 'little' traditions. *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (1978; Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p. 50 and *passim*.

[22] Ian Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 9, 11; Rappaport, *Worlds within Worlds*, pp. 8, 19.

[23] E.P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', *Past and Present* 50 (1971), 76–136.

[24] E.P. Thompson, 'Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism', *Past and Present* 38 (1967), 56–97.

[25] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 1979), pp. 25, 206, 219–21.

[26] Rappaport, *Worlds within Worlds*, p. 61.

[27] Ibid., p. 64.

[28] Raphael Holinshed, *The Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (London, 1587), p. 163.

of servants in early modern culture.[29] Servants were a given feature of domestic work, comprising part of an estimated 29 per cent of households in the period.[30] As David Evett has argued, relations of service were a prominent fixture in early modern culture due to the fact that most individuals served as a master or servant at some point in their lives.[31] Many servants – between one-quarter to one-third of the total – were born into the gentry, and their placement in extra-familial households served to cement family alliances and pave the way for future patronage and advancement.[32] Servants were typically young, with around 60 per cent of subjects between the ages of 18 to 24 placed in household service.[33] There were nonetheless some important changes affecting the profile of servants in this period. Servants were increasingly likely to be younger and female, with their placement in service stemming more from economic necessity than familial alliance or social advancement. Their terms of service tended to be shorter and more likely based on contractual bond. The rise of 'free labour' in the servant market, in other words, also rendered their position more acutely vulnerable.[34]

The role of servants reinforces Peter Laslett's emphasis on the domestic setting of much economic production in the period. Servants were often linked with apprentices as domestic dependants in households. Apprentices comprised more than 10 per cent of London's population in this period, forming 'the largest and certainly the least privileged of the livery companies' social groups'.[35] Apprenticeship served as the linchpin for the urban artisanal economy, providing the structured path for the training and recruitment into membership of London's classes of 'citizens'.[36] The number of apprentices increased along with London's overall growth in the period, rising by 27 per cent to reach an overall population of around 15,000 apprentices in the city.[37] As a result, this group suffered the same problems of economic displacement and underemployment as the rest of the population, with an estimated 60 per cent of apprentices not fully employed during the crisis years of the 1590s.[38] Journeymen artisans formed another large constituency in the urban economy. Workers who were officially members of a livery company following the completion of their apprenticeships, journeymen were defined as those who did not possess sufficient capital to set up their own shop.[39] Their prominence revealed some of the paradoxes of early modern free labour: even as workers could increasingly take on a trade other than the craft in which they were apprenticed, this was a mobility often based on necessity as they were relegated to a position of wage labour in the service of others.

As John Michael Archer has shown in his recent work, the category of the 'citizen' offers a productive framework for analysing the workings of class in early modern London.[40] A

[29] Bruce Robbins, *The Servant's Hand: English Fiction from Below* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986). Among recent studies of early modern servants, see Mark Thornton Burnett, *Masters and Servants in English Renaissance Drama and Culture: Authority and Obedience* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1997); David Evett, *Discourses of Service in Shakespeare's England* (New York: Palgrave, 2005); Judith Weil, *Service and Dependency in Shakespeare's Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[30] Burnett, *Masters and Servants*, p. 1.

[31] Evett, *Discourses of Service*, p. 22.

[32] Keith Wrightson, *English Society, 1580–1680* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 12.

[33] Ann Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 3.

[34] Evett, *Discourses of Service*, p. 22; Weil, *Service and Dependency*, pp. 12–13.

[35] Rappaport, *Worlds within Worlds*, p. 232.

[36] One-eighth of apprentices hailed from families of gentry rank, reflecting the porous boundaries between landed and mercantile wealth. Wrightson, *English Society*, p. 12.

[37] Rappaport, *Worlds within Worlds*, pp. 11, 109.

[38] Burnett, *Masters and Servants*, p. 16; Rappaport, *Worlds within Worlds*, p. 311.

[39] Burnett, *Masters and Servants*, p. 54.

[40] John Michael Archer, *Citizen Shakespeare: Freemen and Aliens in the Language of the Plays* (New York: Palgrave, 2005).

citizen was narrowly defined as someone who had completed the terms of apprenticeship, thereby becoming 'free' through membership in one of the city's traditional livery companies. Citizens comprised one of the chief constituencies of an early modern 'middling sort'. In Sir Thomas Smith's fourfold classification of English society, they formed a third category, below gentlemen and the gentry but above 'the fourth sort of men which do not rule'. Smith defined this latter group as a '*proletarii*' comprised of 'day labourers, poor husbandmen, yea merchants or retailers which have no free land, copyholders, and all artificers'. These propertyless masses, Smith concludes, 'have no voice nor authority in our commonwealth and no account is made of them, but only to be ruled and not to rule other'.[41] Smith's comment reflects the period's increasing separation of capital from labour: after all, relegation to the fourth class stemmed not from one's occupation but instead lack of property or wealth valued at 40 shillings. The precarious status of apprentices and journeymen additionally reveals the underside of the period's apparent social mobility, illustrating the ease with which the middling sort could join the ranks of the underclass. The numbers of this fourth sort swelled over the course of the seventeenth century: in Gregory King's enumeration of the nation's social groups in 1688, he estimated the number of 'labouring people and out servants' at 1,275,000; the second largest group (after rural cottagers and paupers), they comprised over 23 per cent of the entire population.[42]

In response to the instabilities of the nation's labour market, the English state began to assert its authority by mandating standard terms for service and wages. In doing so, they seized control over an economic sphere of production that traditionally had been delegated to civic institutions and individual householders. The most important development in this regard came with the passage of the Statute of Artificers (1563), a set of regulations that remained in place for 250 years.[43] The Statute of Artificers possessed such an abiding legacy because it successfully drew together and codified a disparate set of labour laws dating back to the mid-fourteenth-century Statute of Labourers. One of its chief innovations was that it enacted a centralised state control over the labour market and assumed some of the powers previously allotted to urban guilds and livery companies.[44] The reach of the Statute was nearly universal, as it affected all those between the ages of 12 to 60 who possessed property worth less than £40 and placed them collectively under forms of service. The terms mandated by the Statute reflect the generally conservative position of the English state, which attempted to mitigate the most disruptive forms of social change. The Statute therefore limited the mobility of labour, stipulating that all bonds of service must be at least four years in duration. It also levied heavy penalties for servants leaving their masters, who were to be imprisoned, 'whipped and used as a vagabunde'.[45] Similar penalties were exacted for day labourers, with any who left employment before finishing contracted work subjected to a month's imprisonment and fined the exorbitant amount of £4. Given these terms, it is only fitting that the Statute has been characterised as 'the most powerful instrument devised for degrading and impoverishing the English labourer'.[46]

[41] Sir Thomas Smith, *De Republica Anglorum*, ed. Mary Dewar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 76. Smith does allot minor functions to this group, however, conceding that they could serve as jurors or church wardens.

[42] Gregory King, cited in Laslett, *The World We Have Lost*, pp. 32–3.

[43] Joan Lane, *Apprenticeship in England, 1600–1914* (London: UCL Press, 1996), p. 2; also see M.G. Davies, *The Enforcement of English Apprenticeship: A Study in Applied Mercantilism, 1563–1642* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956).

[44] Lane, *Apprenticeship in England*, p. 3.

[45] *Statute of Artificers* (1563), in R.H. Tawney and Eileen Power eds, *Tudor Economic Documents* (London: Longmans, Green, 1924), vol. 1, p. 341.

[46] Quoted in Maurice Dodd, *Studies in the Development of Capitalism* (New York: International Publishers, 1947), p. 233.

One of the paradoxes of the Statute of Artificers is that in criminalising the mobility of labour, it inadvertently brought about the very conditions it attempted to forestall: because any labourer who left service or travelled to find work was placed among a criminal class of vagabonds, the number of vagrants skyrocketed as more workers were potentially subsumed under its jurisdiction; ironically, rather than keeping workers in their place, the statute turned them (in legal terms) into vagrants. Historians have often argued that the fear of vagrancy was overstated in early modern culture by pointing to the relatively small statistical size of this group.[47] But the cultural implications of vagrancy extended beyond a mere demographic base. The threat of vagrancy was that it reflected a general breakdown of a social order grounded on a hierarchical classification of work. As Richard Halpern insightfully argued, in their ability 'to mimic the quality of capital itself' through their ceaseless circulation and breakdown of traditional feudal boundaries, vagrants served as a 'nightmarishly exaggerated image of *modernity*'.[48] Contemporaries similarly thought of vagrancy as a new threat that reflected profound transformations to society. William Harrison's *Description of England* not only estimated a large population – 10,000 – but also saw vagrancy as a recent development that marked a break from a more tranquil past: 'It is not yet full threescore years since this trade began.'[49]

Vagrants additionally gained a prominence belied by their numbers due to the extent to which they generated numerous textual images, particularly in the popular genre of 'cony-catching' pamphlets. Linda Woodbridge has traced how this literary genre helped to shape cultural attitudes to the poor, perpetuating stereotypes of vagrants as a well-organised criminal class with distinct cultural mores and possessing a secretive 'cant' language.[50] The evidence found in early modern court records actively counters any argument imputing a professionalisation of crime or distinct subculture of vagrants in the period; most of those prosecuted for vagrancy were in fact merely isolated, displaced individuals travelling to mete out some form of survival. But the genre did facilitate the professionalisation of *writing*: authors such as Robert Greene and Thomas Dekker established their own careers through a pamphlet literature that offered an ambivalent, comic assessment of the social effects of the increasing urbanisation of London. The criminal games described in these texts depend upon an environment of anonymity and nearly animalistic competitive market relations. Moreover, as seen in a text like Dekker's *Lantern and Candlelight*, the erosion of old social codes and class hierarchies was linked to the blurring of boundaries of country and city, signalled by the disruptive effects of socially and geographically mobile vagrants.[51]

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[47] Steve Rappaport offers the lowest figure, estimating that vagrants represented less than one-fifth of 1 per cent of the general population. *Worlds within Worlds*, p. 5. In the fullest account of early modern vagrancy, A.L. Beier gives a more reliable figure of 16,000–20,000 across the nation. *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England, 1560–1640* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 15. Beier's estimates are close to those of early modern observers such as William Harrison.

[48] Richard Halpern, *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation: English Renaissance Culture and the Genealogy of Capital* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 74, emphasis in original.

[49] William Harrison, *The Description of England* (1577), ed. Georges Edelen (Washington, DC: Dover, 1968), pp. 183–4.

[50] Linda Woodbridge, *Vagrancy, Homelessness, and English Renaissance Literature* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

[51] Thomas Dekker, *Lantern and Candlelight* (1608), ed. Viviana Comensoli (Toronto: Publications of the Barnabe Riche Society, 2007).

Rural Labour and Agrarian Capitalism

Exclusive attention to London has obscured the interrelations between the metropolis and other provincial commercial hubs and market towns throughout England. The labour market was one of the chief conduits that connected London with other regions, as the city's growth was fuelled by migration from the rest of the country, with an estimated 3,750 migrants arriving each year, mostly from distant and rural areas of England.[52] The travel of migrants to London was driven not only by new venues of opportunity in the rapidly expanding city but also by the deteriorating status of labourers in the English countryside.[53] Early modern forms of capital formation were not based solely in the expanding markets of London but rather had their foundations in structural changes to the agrarian economy.

Early modern England has often served as a case study for analysing the early, formative stages of capitalist development in the period. This tradition dates back to Marx's closing section from the first volume of *Capital* on 'the primitive accumulation of capital'.[54] Marx located capital formation in terms of changing relations of landownership, tenure, economic production and labour in the English countryside. The early modern period therefore served as a transitional period, a time of increased profitability and capital extraction predicated by a process of social stratification and displacement that created the conditions for mass industrialisation in the following two centuries. As Robert Brenner has argued, 'It was indeed, ... an agricultural revolution, based on the emergence of capitalist class relations in the countryside, which made it possible for England to become the first nation to experience industrialization.'[55]

The vast majority of tenants (around 80 per cent) possessed their lands through customary tenure.[56] But the protections allotted through customary tenure were progressively weakened over the course of the period. Landlords could increasingly raise rents, increase entry fines when land was transferred or inherited, alter boundaries through new surveys and even challenge tenants' title to the land itself. As a result, half of customary tenants, or roughly 40 per cent of those working the land, lacked security over tenure and were vulnerable to eviction.[57] It is telling that roughly the same percentage of the rural population (40 per cent) was displaced from agriculture and moved into manufacturing industries by the end of the seventeenth century.[58] Agricultural work became increasingly unsustainable for smallholding tenants, with wages for agrarian labourers declining by 50 per cent from 1450 to 1600.[59] At the same time, agriculture became a much more profitable enterprise for a class of capitalist tenants and large landowners, with the prices for agricultural goods rising by 600 per cent over the period.[60]

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[52] Rappaport, *Worlds within Worlds*, pp. 76, 77, 81.

[53] London also drew elite and more prosperous migrants: more than 90 per cent of London merchants and 75 per cent of Lord Mayors were born outside of the city. Wrightson, *English Society*, p. 12.

[54] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume One*, trans. Ben Fowkes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), pp. 873–913.

[55] Robert Brenner, 'Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe', in T.H. Aston and C.H.E. Philpin eds, *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 54.

[56] John E. Martin, *Feudalism to Capitalism: Peasant and Landlord in English Agrarian Development* (London: Macmillan, 1983), p. 128.

[57] Ibid., p. 128.

[58] Brenner, 'Agrarian Class Structure', p. 52.

[59] See Richard Lachmann, *Capitalists in Spite of Themselves: Elite Conflict and Economic Transitions in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 191; Stephen Bending and Andrew McRae eds, *The Writing of Rural England 1500–1800* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), p. xvi.

[60] Martin, *Feudalism to Capitalism*, p. 131.

The early modern era witnessed a separation of labour from capital in the English countryside. Practices of enclosure, of converting arable land worked by tenants into enclosed pasture, served to depopulate the countryside and ensure that the most profitable holdings were the lands requiring the least amount of productive labour. Enclosure was not unique to the period, but it did occur most rapidly at this time, with nearly half (47.6 per cent) of the land enclosed after the Reformation transferred in the seventeenth century.[61] Although enclosure was the most visible marker of the changes affecting the English countryside, there were other developments that further eroded the rights traditionally held by customary tenants. In particular, the legal protections allotted tenants were increasingly undermined: because copyhold tenure was secured through entry in the legal records of individual manors, these manors began to assert their autonomy from rival authorities such as clerical courts and royal judges. Some landlords even began to boycott their own manorial courts, leaving tenants with no legal recourse for appealing changes to tenure.[62] These policies facilitated a massive concentration of wealth: by the end of the seventeenth century, English landlords controlled 70–75 per cent of cultivated land in England.[63] The process accelerated even further in the eighteenth century, with half of cultivated land owned by 5,000 families and one-quarter of all land in the possession of only 400 families.[64]

This monopoly over landownership was accomplished through an erosion of the rights and protections of customary tenants, who were consequently driven into market-based leases.[65] These changes effectively split the population of rural labourers and pitted their interests against one another: while a small number were able to expand their holdings and advance their social position, the vast majority were left susceptible to eviction and landlessness. John Norden's *The Surveyor's Dialogue* offers a vivid illustration of the social chasm that emerged among the population of smallholding tenants.[66] The text addresses a socially mobile audience of freeholding tenants, who are advised on ways to advance their position through adopting marked-based leases. Readers are also offered rudimentary instructions on techniques for land improvement as well as the increasingly professionalised and technical skills of surveying. In the text's dialogues, a tenant farmer initially resistant to these changes ultimately embraces technical and market-based innovations, even declaring an interest in becoming a surveyor himself and thereby moving from a traditional role of tenant to the mobile figure of the professionalised 'expert mediator'.[67]

The Work of Literary Professionalism

The emerging figure of the professional author exemplifies the increasing complexity of definitions of work in the early modern period. Many early modern writers steadfastly refused to see their writing in terms of 'work', instead presenting their literary pursuits as a leisurely activity conferred by their gentlemanly status. J.W. Saunders's influential

61 Lachmann, *Capitalists in Spite of Themselves*, p. 174.
62 Ibid., p. 173.
63 Brenner, 'Agrarian Class Structure', p. 48.
64 Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 60.
65 Robert Brenner, 'Agrarian Roots of European Capitalism', in Aston and Philpin eds, *The Brenner Debate*, p. 214; 'Agrarian Class Structure', p. 47.
66 *John Norden's* The Surveyor's Dialogue *(1618): A Critical Edition*, ed. Mark Netzloff (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).
67 This term is taken from Eric Ash, *Power, Knowledge, and Expertise in Early Modern England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

argument regarding the 'stigma of print' emphasised that many writers wrote for coterie circulation rather than publication, which was associated with the market activities of social inferiors, and were often forced to distance themselves from any works that did in fact make their way into print.[68] But while this model accounts for elite figures such as Sir Philip Sidney, it ignores the impact of writers emerging from socially mobile backgrounds of commercial and artisanal families. Richard Helgerson's analysis of early modern definitions of a literary career stressed not only the classical precedents that writers appropriated as 'self-crowned laureates' but also the ways that they increasingly accommodated themselves to market forces.[69]

As Laurie Ellinghausen has argued, literary writers emphasised their lack of place within traditional structures of labour, calling attention to the materiality of their work as well as their own social dislocation and economic dispossession.[70] George Gascoigne, often held to be the first 'professional' writer in early modern England, depicts the circuitous path leading to his own literary career in similar terms in the poem 'Gascoigne's Woodmanship'. Gascoigne presents himself in the traditional role of domestic retainer, as a 'woodman' (hunter) in domestic service to his aristocratic addressee.[71] Having missed hitting a doe, he uses his errant shot as the occasion for reflecting on his missed vocational opportunities as scholar, lawyer, courtier and soldier. His ultimate career path, as writer, takes shape only as a final option when all other paths have been blocked; it is, moreover, not a recognisable vocation but instead only a hypothetical possibility, which he represents at the poem's conclusion by imagining the writing of the poem itself as enacting a belated, imaginary success in which his aim is finally true.

As Gascoigne's poem reveals, literary work fit uneasily into available categories of labour, whether the artisanal work of civic livery companies or traditional professions such as law, the church or medicine. Several recent studies have examined literary writing in connection to artisanal labour and forms of knowledge.[72] However, as illustrated most memorably in Shakespeare's representation of Bottom and the 'rude mechanicals' of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the professionalism of literary writing was often established by distancing this work from its artisanal roots.[73] Nonetheless, the organisation of professional players into *companies* attests to how the civic structure for organising labour had an abiding influence on literary forms of work. Many playwrights came from livery backgrounds, such as John Webster, trained in the Merchant Taylors' Company.[74] Webster's social position reflects the extent to which company members increasingly practised trades other than the occupation in which they were raised and apprenticed.[75] The correlation of writers with emergent kinds of 'free labour' is reinforced in the form of the dramatic company itself, which bore more

68 J.W. Saunders, 'The Stigma of Print: A Note on the Social Bases of English Poetry', *Essays in Criticism* 1 (1951), 139–64.
69 Richard Helgerson, *Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton, and the Literary System* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983). For an engaging discussion of responses to the literary marketplace, see Alexandra Halasz, *The Marketplace of Print: Pamphlets and the Public Sphere in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
70 Laurie Ellinghausen, *Labor and Writing in Early Modern England, 1567–1667* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 7–8.
71 George Gascoigne, 'Gascoigne's Woodmanship', in *The Complete Works of George Gascoigne*, volume 1, ed. John W. Cunliffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907), pp. 348–52.
72 Paul Yachnin, *Stage-Wrights: Shakespeare, Jonson, Middleton, and the Making of Theatrical Value* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1997); Henry S. Turner, *The English Renaissance Stage: Geometry, Poetics, and the Practical Spatial Arts 1580–1630* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
73 Among other discussions of the rude mechanicals, see Annabel Patterson, 'Bottom's Up: Festive Theory in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*', *Renaissance Papers* (1988), 25–39.
74 Michelle Dowd, 'Shakespeare and Work', *Literature Compass* 7:3 (2010), 185–94 at p. 186.
75 Rappaport, *Worlds within Worlds*, p. 110.

resemblance to the innovative sharing of capital and risk of the joint-stock company than London's traditional liveries. Thomas Dekker's oft-cited reference to the theatre as 'your Poets Royal Exchange' not only locates theatrical work at the nexus of London's commercial life, a space where literary workers vie for the patronage of elite and popular audiences alike, but also correlates it with the Royal Exchange, one of the new sites built (in 1571) to facilitate international commerce.[76] The theatrical marketplace is thereby linked to 'the market' and the complex financial transactions of global capital.[77]

Colonial Labour

Over the past decade, several important critical studies have examined the interconnections between the commercial marketplace of the early modern theatre and England's increasing involvement in international networks of trade.[78] However, what has been relatively absent from these studies is attention to the effects of global trade on the condition of early modern labourers. Such elisions reproduce a modern, laissez view of 'the economy' as a free-standing set of institutions that operate according to an internal and self-organising logic. But Adam Smith's model of an 'invisible hand' directing economic affairs is a concept alien to the early modern period, a context in which labour and capital were not yet seen as antithetical social forces. As the economic historian Craig Muldrew has argued, borrowing on credit was an integral component of economic activity, one that was in fact employed by all classes. The period witnessed a movement away from informal credit mechanisms, founded on interpersonal trust and embedded in local social relations and obligations, leading to the dominance of an 'increasingly abstract, calculated, artificial credit of large-scale businesses' who were dependent on 'rationally determined future profitability' as well as 'the accumulated physical or monetary capital of an enterprise'.[79] The end result of this process was that capital no longer served a more limited role, as an instrument facilitating labour, but instead was increasingly separated from labour and achieved a newfound status as the end goal of economic exchange and central object of political economy.

'Free trade', in fact, was a contentious idea in the period, a minority opinion that was asserted against a number of customary and traditional protections.[80] Foundational to the emergence of global capital was the paradoxical dependence of 'free trade' on the expansion of unfree labour.[81] The national economy and foreign markets were inextricably connected in this process. The expansion of global trade and colonial settlement was fuelled by

[76] Thomas Dekker, *The Guls Hornbook and the Belman of London* (London, 1905), p. 47; for discussion of the Royal Exchange, see Mark Netzloff, *England's Internal Colonies: Class, Capital, and the Literature of Early Modern English Colonialism* (New York: Palgrave 2003), pp. 36–43.

[77] Among discussions, see especially Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550–1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) and Douglas Bruster, *Drama and the Market in the Age of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[78] Particularly noteworthy on this topic are Jonathan Gil Harris, *Sick Economies: Drama, Mercantilism and Disease in Shakespeare's England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2004) and Jyotsna Singh ed., *A Companion to the Global Renaissance* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell 2009), esp. Daniel Vitkus, 'The New Globalism: Transcultural Commerce, Global Systems Theory, and Spenser's Mammon', pp. 31–49.

[79] Craig Muldrew, 'Interpreting the Market: The Ethics of Credit and Community Relations in Early Modern England', *Social History* 18 (1993), 163–83, at pp. 181, 182.

[80] Brenner analyses overseas traders as a political opposition in *Merchants and Revolution*.

[81] See Robert J. Steinfeld, *The Invention of Free Labour: The Employment Relation in English and American Law and Culture, 1350–1870* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

concerns over England's growing and restive underclass, with new colonial markets posited as a means for exporting the nation's surplus labour.[82] Moreover, in a domestic context, the erosion of the rights of labour that was effected in the colonies offered a precedent that, in a sense, returned home and was adopted as a solution for domestic crises of labour. One sees this development not only institutionally, with the spread of a workhouse economy in early modern England, but also in representational terms, as reflected in Jonson's reference to the workers of Bartholomew Fair as 'civil savages' populating an area likened to the 'Bermudas' and waiting to be discovered by a Columbus or Drake.[83]

In comparing Bartholomew Fair to Bermuda, Jonson is also invoking a more contemporary reference, one that would have resonated with his original audience: the recent history of a Virginia Company fleet that was shipwrecked on Bermuda while en route to the fledgling Virginia colony in 1610, an event that precipitated a notorious mutiny among the company's population of artisanal workers, who organised a months-long protest against their terms of service and the work conditions they (correctly) anticipated in the colonies. This protest is relevant for literary history due to the account written by William Strachey, a secretary to the Virginia Company, which was reworked in dramatic form in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and influenced the depiction of the labour issues that pervade this play.[84] The Bermuda Mutiny reflects the extent to which colonial settings made manifest the grievances of labour that were increasingly being marginalised in domestic contexts. The central role of labour in early colonial projects also stemmed from necessity, as seen in the writings of Captain John Smith, who drew on the colony's need for skilled artisans in order to fashion a new ethos of colonial labour and husbandry.[85] The history of labour in early modern England was therefore crucially a global history as well. Colonies served not only as an outlet for England's excess labour but also as a transatlantic breeding ground that produced more radical reassessments of the place of labour. One of the tragic paradoxes of this history is the extent to which expressions of colonial liberty occurred alongside the codification of institutions of slavery.[86] These ambivalent legacies reinforce the importance of the history of labour in early modern England, a site of development of so many of the keywords that continue to shape our definitions of modernity.

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[82] On colonial transportation, see Netzloff, *England's Internal Colonies*, pp. 91–134.

[83] Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair*, ed. G.R. Hibbard (London, 1977), 3.4.31; 2.6.70; 5.6.36.

[84] On Strachey and the labour contexts of Shakespeare's play, see Netzloff, *England's Internal Colonies*, pp. 110–11, 116–22, and 127–34.

[85] Ibid., pp. 114–21.

[86] Among other accounts, see Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race, Volume One: Racial Oppression and Social Control* (London: Verso, 1994) and *The Invention of the White Race, Volume Two: The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America* (London: Verso, 1997).

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Gendered Labour

Helen Smith

In an anonymous ballad, printed around 1660, a male speaker overhears the complaint of a housewife, who recounts scenes of daily drudgery, from cleaning and making a fire to preparing breakfast, lunch and dinner, caring for her children, knitting, spinning, sewing and washing (Figure 11.1).[1] Each stanza closes with a variation on the refrain, 'A womans work is never done', altered to most obviously comic effect in a stanza describing those conjugal labours 'which I cannot shun / Yet I could wish that Work were oftner done'. The ballad presents a model of marital femininity familiar to scholars of the period: the good housewife remains at home, constantly busy and focused on the needs of the family.

By turning to the evidence of ballads – 'one of the key components of popular culture',[2] and perhaps the form which does most to draw together the fields of practice, ritual, text and orality which Stuart Gillespie and Neil Rhodes identify as the competing domains of early modern popular literature – we can uncover a rich variety of attitudes towards women's labour. Some, including *A womans work*, detail domestic practices; others represent women's agricultural work; still more position women within the service and manufacturing trades of London. Brought into dialogue with the evidence of women's varied work commitments, these sources enrich our picture of women's participation in the formal and informal economies of early modern England, whilst drawing attention to the uneasy relationship between those kinds of women's work which formed the *subject* of popular texts and traditions, and those which went into the making and dissemination of the *objects* of popular culture.

Introducing the third edition of *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, Peter Burke suggests that studies of women's popular culture 'are still relatively sparse (compared with studies of women's work, for instance)', an assertion that implicitly divides 'culture'

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[1] *A womans work is never done* (London: John Andrews, [1660?]). Michelle Dowd notes that this ballad 'portrays women's daily tasks as diverse, time-consuming, and rigorous'. *Women's Work in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 2; whilst its refrain forms a leitmotif for Natasha Korda, *Labors Lost: Women's Work and the Early Modern English Stage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

[2] Matthew Dimmock and Andrew Hadfield, 'Introduction' to Matthew Dimmock and Andrew Hadfield eds, *Literature and Popular Culture in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 1–12, at p. 10. Stuart Gillespie and Neil Rhodes, 'Introduction' to Stuart Gillespie and Neil Rhodes eds, *Shakespeare and Elizabethan Popular Culture* (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006), pp. 1–17 at pp. 7–10. On ballads, see also Patricia Fumerton and Anita Guerrini eds, *Ballads and Broadsides in Britain, 1500–1800* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010).