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### Little, Katherine C. Transforming Work: Early Modern Pastoral and Late Medieval Poetry

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**Little, Katherine C.**

***Transforming Work: Early Modern Pastoral and Late Medieval Poetry.***

Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013. Pp. xi, 256. ISBN 978-0-268-03387-3 (paperback) \$38.

The title of Katherine Little's *Transforming Work* functions on multiple levels, alluding not only to how rural labour underwent substantial socio-economic change during the late medieval and early modern periods, while Protestant semiotics laboured to transform a Catholic symbolic in which rural work stood for penitential works, but also to Little's contending that medieval rural labour's radical potentials haunt the later development of the pastoral mode, a move that would retrace the literary lineage of the tradition. Little's book bridges the periodization divide by proposing that Renaissance pastoral is indebted not only to its classical antecedents but also to a late medieval convention of writing rural labour, informed by both ecclesiastical and plowman traditions. Little identifies and examines three major sixteenth-century historical shifts that shepherded new languages of labour into the medieval pastoral tradition: the rediscovery of the eclogue form; the problems of enclosure and the introduction of agrarian capitalism; and the Protestant Reformation and its redefinition of the Catholic correspondence between rural labour and good works.

Attuning her reader to the symbolic imagination into which sixteenth-century pastoral would later insinuate itself, Little begins with an exploration of the native tradition prior to these historical disruptions—the relatively coherent medieval approach to writing rural labour shared among the mystery cycles, estates satire, sermons, and Langland's *Piers Plowman*. Little argues that the medieval pastoral focuses on labour alone as the defining feature of rural life, and that to write rural labour in the period was to appropriate a complex, flexible set of meanings always freighted with a reformist, potentially radical, significance. For Little, the wide variety of medieval texts belonging to the tradition reinforces how the form never points merely to the literal but is inextricably bound to ideas about the ways in which society and the church should function: labour figures penance, the good deeds necessary for salvation, the proper functioning of the three estates, and the reform of the social world. Because figurations of this kind are never stable and can always be reversed, the medieval pastoral always carries a reformist, even radical, potential perhaps most explicitly realized in Langland's *Piers Plowman*.

Little turns in the next two chapters to the invention of the English eclogue in the sixteenth century, attributing the emergence of the form and its interest in shepherds to two literary events: the publication of Mantuan's *Eclogues* in 1498 and the first printing of Virgil's *Eclogues* in 1512, both of which became popular school texts. Little argues here for the importance to the development of the pastoral of early eclogues written in imitation of Virgil and Mantuan that some scholars dismiss as too medieval to be properly pastoral: Alexander Barclay's five eclogues written in 1513–14, and Barnabe Googe's eclogues (published in 1563). Reconsidering these "aesthetic failures" as crucial milestones, Little insists that it is precisely their contradictions and inconsistencies that reveal the ideological struggle marking the emergence of the "new" pastoral mode. Central to this novelty are a re-literalization of shepherds, who no longer function as symbolic priests (medieval ecclesiastical) or biblical shepherds (medieval nativity plays), and a simultaneous repression of the labour of the rural labourer in favour of activities like wrestling, feasting, or wooing, which carry no radical potential. Little directly ties these shifts in the symbolic imaginary to mid-sixteenth-century anti-enclosure controversies, which created a new language in which the shepherd becomes a figure for agrarian capitalism while the plowman evokes a traditional, three-estate social structure. The emergence of the early modern pastoral is thus characterized by contradiction: while the rural labourer is "real," his labour is not "real" enough to evoke concern; the separation of shepherding from productive manual labour encourages associations between shepherding and nobility; and, since the wealth of the countryside is no longer produced through labour, labourers can have no claim upon it. Little concludes that the pastoral mode served a crucial cultural function, disarming the critique of capitalism, with which discussions of sheep-keeping were so closely associated, by rewriting the transition to agrarian capitalism in almost entirely positive terms: self-sufficient shepherds now live a life of leisure in an idyllic English countryside.

Focusing in her fourth chapter on the *Piers Plowman* tradition haunting English pastoral from the outset, Little argues that the Reformation redefinition of work in relation to works, and the effects of that semiotic shift on the language of labour, made possible a "new" pastoral mode that both devalued rural labour and limited its symbolic range. The final two chapters provide close readings of Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar* and book 6 of his *Faerie Queene* respectively, illuminating how, while the former (typically considered the first

pastoral in English) consistently approaches labour from a medieval perspective, the latter's focus on the *otium* of the Arcadian tradition is conflicted, undermined by its depictions of the dark side of a labour-free countryside beset by the violence of brigandage and slavery. This "new" pastoral, symbolized by Spenser's Pastorella—a product of the court rather than the country—is a mode not only liberated from the countryside but perhaps its greatest threat.

Overall, Little offers readers a lucid and nuanced revisionist reading of the early modern pastoral's inseparability from the medieval tradition of writing rural labour that preceded it, thereby illuminating the social, political, and religious roots of a mode whose interests are often understood as primarily classist. The early chapters of Little's study eloquently set the stage for the insightful close readings of Spenser that follow, and her command of the material throughout is admirable. Although the author's engagement with early modern pastoral is somewhat limited, the real power of *Transforming Work* is generated by its elaborating a historical continuity for the pastoral, thereby deepening our critical comprehension of the various pressures that shaped and haunt a late medieval tradition's early modern transformations.

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### **Moxey, Keith.**

#### ***Visual Time: The Image in History.***

Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013. Pp. xiii, 207 + 28 ill. ISBN 978-8223-5369-0 (paperback) \$24.95.

In his *Visual Time: The Image in History*, Keith Moxey offers a series of short essays that, broadly speaking, explore the relationship of art historiography to the question of time. Divided into two parts, the book brings together Moxey's considerations over the last ten years or so of two important trends in recent art historiography that call into question certain received approaches to both the art object and how it is positioned in history. More specifically, the first half of the book is devoted to explorations of heterochrony as a possible antidote to the ultimately Eurocentric understanding of time that has governed art history since its inception as a discipline in the nineteenth century. The second