But all in all, these are minor flaws, and do not seriously impair the value of this compelling and important book. Not the least of its many merits is the way it sensitizes the reader to the sort of connections Merback draws so persuasively and provokes further reflection about art, spectacle, law, and religion. While preparing this review, I happened on an illustration in the legal statutes governing the city of Cortona, in central Italy, depicting the punishment for sodomy: the condemned man is shown hanging by his feet, upside down, in the flames that burn him alive—a humiliating and dehumanizing (as well as especially painful) punishment, and one which (minus the added torment of fire) Merback says was typically reserved for Jews (188-189). Here, pace my earlier remarks about the distinction between Italian and northern visual culture, is an image that links the two, and in so doing suggests a visual rhyme between sexual and religious deviance. These harsh images, like the cruel realities to which they refer, are not for the faint of heart or weak of stomach; but they signify too much to be ignored. Mitchell Merback has faced them with unflinching clarity, both intellectual and moral, and we should all be grateful for the delicacy, wisdom, and insight with which he has treated this troubling topic.


Harington once wrote that “of all the Cases I haue loued the Dative” (158); and throughout his life he was an inveterate bestower of individualized copies of his works to friends, relations, nobles, and royals. To Jason Scott-Warren has occurred the happy idea of studying Harington’s career through these donated texts. The critic perhaps overstates the surprise that an audience of the twenty-first century will experience at the consistently “self-interested” (16) nature of gifts in the period, not least Harington’s. But there are good stories to be told and critical insight to be derived from this
approach. As it turns out, Scott-Warren offers only minor advances in understanding of his author’s masterworks, but some real gains with minor works.

With the most familiar of Harington’s literary productions, the translation of Ariosto’s *Orlando*, the major finding is that Harington rewrites some elements of the poem in terms familiar to his readership and, in his version of Ariosto’s biography, reworks the Italian sources to stress the “mercenary and careerist” (41) elements in the life. This is plausible without being striking. Much the same is true of the critic’s handling of Harington’s brilliant but often desperately obscure *Metamorphosis of Ajax*, where Scott-Warren has little to add to Elizabeth Donno’s commentary in her fine edition of 1962. Neither here nor there is his contention that “[t]he value of the privy to gentlemen is that it will, by removing noxious odours, permit them to ‘keep house,’ to exercise that hospitality which was an important gentlemanly virtue and which was, as Felicity Heal has pointed out, a rather easier matter for Catholics—who still believed that indiscriminate charity brought spiritual rewards—than for Protestants” (94). This seems rather distant from the line-by-line coruscations of the *Metamorphosis*.

Much stronger is the fourth chapter, “the heart of this study” (23) as the critic notes in his Introduction. Here Scott-Warren examines in fruitful detail “probably the most elaborate of Harington’s gift-books to have survived”: a “lavishly customized” (99) text in the Cambridge University Library that includes 52 of Harington’s epigrams and was a gift to the author’s mother-in-law. Drawing upon Star Chamber testimony from a suit between Harington and his brother-in-law, the critic argues that “it is impossible not to see the anticipated death of Lady Rogers [the mother-in-law] and the dispersal of her property as the primary context” of the personalized collection of epigrams (128). Scott-Warren writes that “[w]e take” the brother-in-law’s “1604 claims about Harington seriously, we are dealing with someone who consults with a physician over the life-expectancy of a sick relative, who steals from that relative in the last days of her life, and who tries to prevent the knowledge of her death from getting out until
he has been through all of her papers and destroyed those which run counter to his claim upon her goods.” This testimony has been noticed before in the scholarly literature, but never developed into a case for Harington’s avaricious manipulation of the older lady. Without question the legal records have bearing on the unique presentation volume, though some students will conclude that Harington, assuming that his mother-in-law was as aware as he was and we are of the long tradition of mother-in-law jokes and inheritance-scrounging satires, was having some fun along with her, rather than simply exploiting the woman. He was joshing her, playing at the legacy-hunter in a way he expected her to recognize and find amusing—and, he may have hoped, irresistible. This disagreement noted, certainly Scott-Warren has drawn attention to an exemplar of some of Harington’s *Epigrams* that can usefully complicate our readings of these poems—and perhaps of others as well. The method will reward further application.

By far the strongest pages in this monograph treat some of the political letters to and from Harington that were published in the late eighteenth century by Henry Harington in his *Nugae Antiquae*. Historians frequently quote these remarkable documents as evidence for the great disappointment that attended James’ accession to the throne. Scott-Warren argues that personal concerns may qualify, even underlie, a satiric presentation of the Jacobean scene: “The description of the reeling court at Theobalds ends with references to the labours of sober statesmen . . . implying that the writer is one of their ilk, like them undervalued in a topsy-turvy world. And Thomas Howard predicates his criticism of the times on the question of whether Harington, learned in languages but behind in youth and fashion, will find favour. Given Howard’s position, the letter should perhaps be read as an anxious avowal of the writer’s inability to sue on his client’s behalf” (203). So all of us need to be far more careful in drawing upon these captivating letters, which may have had intentions in their day not immediately obvious to scholars trawling for quotations. This is illuminating historical criticism that makes Scott-Warren’s *Book as Gift* a
real contribution to students of the early seventeenth-century English court scene.


Feminist Studies has predictably gone the way of scholarly vogues: opportunism. Who is not jumping on the feminist bandwagon these days? Senior men scholars, who heretofore never deigned to include a woman author on their syllabi, are now editing entire anthologies of women’s writings. Keen to expand their publications’ list with trendy, politically correct titles, enterprising scholars of both sexes are now sharing by-lines with “name” feminist scholars.

This odd collection of essays assembled by Barbara Smith and Ursula Appelt (academics with apparently no prior record in feminist scholarship) is a case in point. Despite the presence of several prominent scholars, Write or Be Written is ultimately a feebly conceived project based on ill informed historical assumptions. Over some 250 pages of analysis, Smith and Appelt’s book offers as many as twelve essays on the subject of cultural constraints against women and against women writers as reflected in the work of Englishwomen poets during the early-modern period. What constitutes “early modern” in their view is anyone’s guess, as the book’s title surprisingly fails to supply the dates of the collection’s timeframe; nor is temporal coverage specified by Appelt in her introduction. The essays, so uniformly brief as to suggest editorial truncation, address four large units: I. Strategies and Contexts (Pamela Hammons on Katherine Austen; Anne Russell on Aphra Behn; Margaret Ezell on Damaris Masham); II. Poetic Conventions and Traditions (Clare Kinney on Mary Wroth; Jacqueline Pearson on “the female body and the country house”; and Margaret Hannay on women writers’ uses of psalm literature); III. Negotiating Power