

**DAVID BOOY, ED., THE NOTEBOOKS OF
NEHEMIAH WALLINGTON, 1618-1654: A
SELECTION**

Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007, 372 pp., ISBN 978-0-7546-5186-4,
£60.00.

By Erin Sullivan

Over the course of thirty-five years, Nehemiah Wallington wrote more than 20,000 pages about his experiences as a Puritan artisan in seventeenth-century London. In his papers, which filled fifty notebooks, he explored his thoughts concerning both his own life and the public events he lived through, including plague outbreaks, local fires, and England's Civil War. For a historical period in which few personal accounts of daily life survive, and virtually none written by a member of the working classes, Wallington's notebooks offer rare and valuable insight into the private world of one seventeenth-century turner.

Given the scarcity of such resources, it is surprising that, until now, no critical edition of the notebooks has been published. Historians interested in using Wallington's writings as source material have either had to glean quotations from Paul Seaver's 1985 study, *Wallington's World*, or to journey to one of the four libraries in England and America that now own the seven surviving notebooks. The considerable time and money required to carry out such research has meant that few scholars have taken advantage of the rich information contained in Wallington's writings, and so David Booy's new edition of the notebooks comes as a long-awaited and much appreciated contribution to early modern scholarship. For the first time, the vast majority of Wallington's writings can be examined at once, in a comprehensive edition that includes a helpful introduction and detailed index. As with other major diarists of the century, historians can now consult Wallington's writings swiftly for commentary on a wide variety of topics, ranging from sex and suicide to churchgoing and children. There is little doubt that this edition will be of tremendous value to early modern scholars, both in their research and their teaching.

It would be wrong, however, to suggest that the virtue of Booy's work lies simply in making Wallington's notebooks accessible. Much scholarly attention has gone into the creation of this edition, and Booy's dedication to contextualizing and explicating Wallington's deeply religious writing shows on virtually every page. He has gone to great lengths to trace the Biblical quotations, proverbs, and contemporary writings that Wallington drew from as he wrote, and his careful work vividly demonstrates the degree to which religious ideas and language permeated every aspect of early modern culture.

In his introduction, Booy incorporates his previous research on spiritual autobiography to good effect, offering insight into the generic conventions of Puritan life-writings that shape Wallington's work. As an editor, he occasionally intervenes more than is necessary, smoothing out Wallington's irregular syntax with added pronouns and articles, but on the whole he approaches the notebooks with a lightness of touch that allows Wallington's unique voice to come through. Ideally, this much-needed edition would have included Wallington's writings in full, but Booy does a good job of siphoning off repetitive sections without disrupting the continuity of the notebooks. Some omissions will leave readers wondering what has been left out, but hopefully such interest will lead to an unabridged second edition in coming years.

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