appealing study interested in the multiple and diverse representations of the complex relationships between fathers and daughters in the drama of the period.

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Hamlet and the Vision of Darkness. Rhodri Lewis.
Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017. xxii + 366 pp. $39.95.

The court of Denmark under Claudius, Rhodri Lewis argues, is obsessively devoted to the hunt in all its brutal violence and deception. Images from art history, including Piero di Cosimo's late fifteenth-century painting, "A Hunting Scene," make the point visually. Hamlet is of course appalled by what he sees, and longs to be no part of it, but he too is enveloped in the grim culture of carnage. It infects his mind and intensifies his innate disposition to disengage himself from a universe that, as in *King Lear*, leaves a thoughtful person overwhelmed by feelings of powerlessness and alienation. Hamlet searches for humanist and Roman ideals of identity, both public and personal, that can suggest some meaning in his tortured existence, only to find himself compelled to dismantle those hopes as unavailing.

To get at this uncomfortable truth about Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Lewis insists that we must attempt to "reconstruct aspects of sixteenth-century life as he is likely to have encountered them." Those aspects include "the materials, language, ideas, beliefs, assumptions, orthodoxies, and constraints with which he worked, and which he transforms through the demands of his dramatic art" (7). That Lewis undertakes this tall order with extraordinary learning and critical insight is plentifully evident in the book's wide range of engagements with the text. The central image cluster of hunting, fowling, falconry, and fishing invites us to consider how the theatrical idea of acting manifests itself not so much in displays of human reason and verisimilitude as in actions calculated to mislead one's predators or one's prey. Hamlet attaches himself variously to the roles of the historian, the poet, and the philosopher, vainly seeking by these explorations to escape from the unwelcome and ill-suited role of the revenger. His philosophizing is part of a self-deceiving ruse from which he emerges as "confused, self-indulgent, and frequently heedless," failing to take responsibility for his actions, becoming at last "a victim, a symptom, and an agent" of the decay he so vehemently deplores (12).

The details of Lewis's astute close reading of *Hamlet* are unfailingly rewarding. The metaphors of hunting and entrapment in the play are everywhere to be found, in the image of the mousetrap, in the reverberations of meaning in the verb *unkennel*, in Laertes's talk of having become "a woodcock to mine own springe," in Hamlet's discourse of "slings and arrows," in Hamlet's playful appropriation of the call of the falconer to his hawk in "Hillo, ho, ho," and much more. Hamlet's attempts to make sense of the past ("Must I remember?") are echoed in Horatio's fervent hope that he can truly record "How these

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things came about" and in Fortinbras's assertion of his "rights of memory." Hamlet's fascination with dramatic poetry and its performance seems calculated to establish his credentials as a critic. His presumed role as Shakespeare's intellectual "exposes not only the limitations of humanist philosophy, but the inadequacy of most attempts to supplant it at the cusp of the seventeenth century" (239). These explorations are endlessly productive, exciting, and original.

I take issue with this splendidly comprehensive study of *Hamlet* only when it interprets Hamlet's appropriation of providential language in act 5 as a "posturing" that "entails some magnificently black comedy" (37). Providence is, for Shakespeare, "the child of wishful or deluded thinking" (241). "Hamlet is the inhabitant of Elsinore most thoroughly mired in bullshit, about himself and about the world around him" (252). But are Hamlet's reflections on a "special providence in the fall of a sparrow" really nothing more than "some grammatically demanding pseudo-profundities worthy of Yoda" (291)? Yes, surely, Horatio is there to point out to us that the play's death toll is brought about by "cunning and forced cause." But perhaps Horatio's differing from the interpretation of his dearest friend is a powerful indication that Hamlet's story can finally be read in at least two ways: in the providential terms that Hamlet himself espouses, while also in the lament of the humanist for a story that is unrelievedly one of "carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts, / Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters." One could add that the story is also, in Fortinbras's view, a demonstration of how Machiavellian ruthlessness has served so often in human history to cut the Gordian knot that Hamlet finds so problematic and intrinsicate. Lewis has chosen to give us the dark side of the equation, while also insisting quite properly that he is not describing *Hamlet* as a work of nihilism (309). He has done so with extraordinary brilliance and learning. But must we approach Shakespeare as a dramatist whose passion for dialectic is so extraordinary who nonetheless aligns himself with only one side of his theatrical equation? A question to be asked.

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Milton, Materialism, and Embodiment: One First Matter All.
Kevin J. Donovan and Thomas Festa, eds.
Medieval and Renaissance Literary Studies. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2017. viii + 250 pp. $70.

This is a timely collection, insofar as it attempts to wed approaches characterizing recent studies of early modern embodiment to the study of Milton. Stephen Fallon's *Milton among the Philosophers* (1991) and John Rogers's *The Matter of Revolution* (1996) ostensibly initiated the conversation of Milton's materialist philosophy, which the essays in this collection seek to advance by harmonizing early modernity with the new materialism of Deleuze, Jane Bennett, and others. Such harmonization, of course, subtends

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