

Shakespeare, Revenge Tragedy and Early Modern Law: Vindictive Justice.
Derek Dunne.

Early Modern Literature in History. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. ix + 230 pp. \$95.

Derek Dunne's *Shakespeare, Revenge Tragedy and Early Modern Law* sets out to demonstrate that the "crisis of justice" staged in many early modern revenge tragedies "reflects in a very real sense a concurrent crisis in the legal system of early modern England" (2). This concurrent crisis has to do with the immense growth in legal business over the course of the period, a change that put enormous pressure on the legal system. Dunne argues that the plays he discusses in the book are "structured around the same principles of participation, equity and justice that early modern English law prided itself on" (12) and, with the exceptions of *Hamlet* and, to some extent, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, rather than rejecting the law, revenge tragedy can offer new ways of looking at the law. A close focus on revenge tragedy allows Dunne to consider the specific ways revenge tragedy interrogates aspects of early modern law.

The first chapter offers an overview of the early modern justice system, centering on criminal prosecution and jury trial. Dunne makes the helpful point that while criticism has tended to see law and revenge as opposites, this was not the case in legal practice. Revenge, or vindication, was a significant aspect of justice in the period and, for Dunne, recalling the vindictive aspect of justice opens up different ways of looking at the representation of revenge in the theater. The following chapters take up specific plays, addressing particular aspects of early modern law important to each of them. Dunne's discussion of *The Spanish Tragedy* shows that the play offers a "sustained engagement with legal discourse" (34) that goes beyond the conventional position that Hieronimo only turns to revenge when the law fails. Rather, his quest for revenge is structured by the legal practice of the period—from gathering evidence to the parody of a trial scene in the final moments of the play. Turning to *Titus Andronicus*, Dunne argues that the play's "assault on the senses" (68) indicates an interest in problems related to "interpreting evidence based on sensory perception" (68) and these problems are tied to worries about the effectiveness of juries in early modern courts.

Marston's *Antonio's Revenge* treats revenge as collective action that is linked to the kind of social protest enacted by riots in the period. This counters the commonplace that revenge is private rather than public, individual rather than social. *Hamlet*, in contrast to the plays in the earlier chapter, consistently rejects the kind of political and legal engagements that Dunne has been outlining, marginalizing political questions and representing Hamlet's revenge as more exclusively personal. In the chapter about Chettle's *Tragedy of Hoffman*, Dunne uses this relatively obscure play's engagement with what he sees as the general concerns of revenge tragedy to assert that "the collocation of revenge and collective action in the genre of revenge tragedy is more than coincidental" (136–37). Turning to *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Dunne argues that while

the play does have topical resonance (specifically, the duke's manipulation of the law appears to Dunne as a reflection of conflicts over royal prerogative), the "collectivity that characterized other revenge tragedies in this study is largely absent" (139). He concludes the chapter by describing the play as "post-participatory" because it does not offer "a subtle and meaningful critique of contemporary socio-legal issues" (160). The book's brief conclusion sums up the argument and concludes by stating "English revenge tragedy acts as an index of early modern citizens' fractious relationship with their legal system" (166).

Dunne's central point that revenge tragedy is more engaged with early modern legal practice—specifically the participatory nature of justice—than has typically been allowed is a useful corrective to criticism that sets law and revenge at opposite poles. At the same time, the book's narrow focus excludes plays relevant to questions about justice that would illuminate both Dunne's general argument and the largely unquestioned definition of revenge tragedy that the book depends on. Dunne's book opens up questions about the theater's engagement with the law that extend well beyond the confines of revenge tragedy.

Edward Gieskes, *University of South Carolina*

Shakespeare on Page and Stage: Selected Essays. Stanley Wells.

Ed. Paul Edmondson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. viii + 486 pp. \$29.95.

When one publishes as much on varied Shakespearean topics as Stanley Wells has done, one might wonder if a number of the essays, buried here or there in festschrifts or specialized collections, may occasionally be lost to view. This volume offers a sensible solution. The essays it contains are those that Wells himself wished to include, covering a range of his special interests: Shakespearean influences, essays on particular works, Shakespeare in the theater, and Shakespeare's text. The book also coincides, as we learn from the volume's editor, Paul Edmondson, with the cheering news of Wells's having been knighted this year by Queen Elizabeth II. This is a fitting tribute to a man who, to an extraordinary degree, has been the embodiment in the United Kingdom of broad-based, incisive criticism and enlightened editorship in the world of Shakespeare studies.

The volume is no mere honorific tribute to a great academic statesman. In it we learn of Shakespeare as a man of the European Renaissance, reaching well beyond the bounds of England in his reading of classical authors and his collaborations with such University Wits as Marlowe, Nashe, and Peele. An essay on "Tales from Shakespeare" explores the surprisingly extensive influence of Charles and Mary Lamb, along with Thomas and Henrietta Bowdler, Mary Seymour, and others, in introducing young