Metropolitan Tragedy: Genre, Justice, and the City in Early Modern England.
Marissa Greenberg.
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Marissa Greenberg's subject is early modern London as represented in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century tragic drama. Both familiar texts and understudied archival documents are used to illustrate her thesis that early modern English tragedy was an "urban genre" (6). For socially and politically engaged London-based authors, tragedy offered a medium through which to articulate the trauma of "social upheaval, personal injury, collective suffering, and infrastructural ruin" during a period of unprecedented "demographic and topographical expansion" and "heightened tensions between the city and the Crown" (5). How tragic dramatic writing shaped the popular imagination is examined in four chapters devoted to four subgenres of tragedy: domestic tragedy, revenge tragedy, tyrant tragedy, and Christian tragedy.

In a dazzling first chapter on *Two Lamentable Tragedies* and *A Warning for Fair Women*, two examples of domestic or homiletic tragedy, Greenberg argues that such narratives contribute to a fantasy of London as a "legible and self-policing cityscape" (46). Like John Stow's *A Survey of London*, the plays incorporate precise descriptions of civic spaces to achieve "place-realism" (35), which transforms London's

"nondescript nooks and crannies into distinct sites of deterrence" (31). For audiences rattled by the influx of new faces, such stories could have offered a degree of comfort, even security. The second chapter examines revenge tragedy's resistance to the English Crown's imperial ambitions (47). Through the staging of "*translatio metropolitae*, or translation of the metropolis" (48), Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* tells a history of London by way of Rome, a history that is at once marred by violence and rebellion and safeguarded by the inclusion of the commons' voices. The chapter concludes with a fascinating discussion of the ritual of placing traitors' heads on London Bridge (70–75).

The third chapter, on Philip Massinger's tyrant tragedy *The Roman Actor*, ushers readers into the age of James I and Charles I. Performed in 1626 and published in 1629, Massinger's play depicts the downfall of Domitian. While the emperor's assassination recalls the execution of Charles I outside the Banqueting House, it does not so much build a political argument justifying rebellion against tyrant-kings as expose a "fundamental flaw in the theory of tragedy in early modern England" (78). Citing Ellen MacKay's discussion of "persecutorial poetics" (81), Greenberg takes a close look at English interpretations of Aristotle's catharsis and traces the rise of a discourse that compares catharsis to "corporeal correction" (84). The final chapter, on *Samson Agonistes*, explores Milton's depiction of "Londinium as pandemonium" (114). Written five years after the Great Fire of London of 1666 (109), Milton's dramatic poem underscores the moral corruption and broken-down social relations of his city through poetic irresolution or "tragic *mis*measure" (124, original emphasis), a technique that attempts to simultaneously acknowledge the people's trauma and challenge the more passive citizens to moral action.

As befitting an interdisciplinary project that combines literary history, urban geography, and historical phenomenology, the book is filled with fresh and lively descriptions of tragic vistas too numerous to name. To re-create London's legal geography from original sources, Greenberg quotes the likes of Simon Ford (9, 122, 134), whose scratches of verse on the Great Fire of London appear to have been deservedly overshadowed by Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, and Frederic Gerschow, the secretary to the Duke of Stettin-Pomerania, who quaintly noted in his 1602 diary entry that "near the end of the [London] bridge . . . were stuck up the heads of 30 gentlemen" traitors (70). These are little-known persons, even to specialists, yet their reflections influenced the more mainstream literary representations of London. Greenberg displays the same intellectual curiosity and generosity toward living writers as seen in the book's many meaningful engagements with literary scholars and historians, such as Jean E. Howard, Julie Sanders, Bruce R. Smith, Henry S. Turner, Paul Griffiths, and many others, who have shaped the fields of cultural geography, historical phenomenology, historical formalism, and social history. This book will be of interest to those working in the aforementioned fields, but it will also delight anyone who is curious about the early modern history of London, a city that beguiled locals and visitors alike with fantasies of economic opportunity, political freedom, and moral reformation — fantasies crafted by

Shakespeare, Massinger, Milton, and countless anonymous authors responding to London's ever-changing landscape.

Penelope Geng, *Macalester College*