

and Althusser as the theory's primary influence, Marlow holds that agency, while limited, is nevertheless possible.

Chapter 4 focuses on the way cultural materialist readings of Shakespeare can draw attention to the processes of historical-cultural production in order to levy criticism against current political developments. Since a primary goal of cultural materialism is to intervene in the reproduction of oppressive ideological systems, its readings "against the grain" of Shakespeare's texts aim to demonstrate how alternative political possibilities are visible in the plays. A frequent example here is Sinfeld's surprising "partial reading" of *Macbeth* as a representation of revolutionary possibility. Setting aside the play's ostensible point that Macbeth's regicide is the work of an ambitious tyrant, the fact that Macbeth can kill the king at all means that the sovereign is vulnerable to radical action. The political ramifications of this aspect of the cultural materialist project is that the conventional ways that Shakespeare is used to reproduce commonplaces about human nature and normative Western morality can be challenged by the very texts used to teach such lessons. The chapter ends with a look at how classroom practices based on cultural materialist theory can demonstrate this to students.

In the final chapter, Marlow offers a new cultural materialist reading of *Julius Caesar*. His "partial reading" places an early exchange between two of the people's tribunes and a cobbler alongside Brutus's ruminations on the impending murder of Caesar in a well-known second-act soliloquy. Reading "against the grain" of the play's bleak portrayal of ubiquitous political corruption, Marlow finds evidence of an argument for collective resistance, which he then offers as a possible guide to political action in post-Trump America and the post-Brexit UK. The reading is clear and capable, as is the book as a whole. While readers familiar with cultural materialism may find little new here (as much of the argument dates from the theory's heyday in the 1990s), for those seeking an introduction to cultural materialism this book will be an excellent place to start.

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*Shakespeare and Feminist Theory*. Marianne Novy.

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Marianne Novy's *Shakespeare and Feminist Theory* stands as part of a series on Shakespeare and Theory, edited by Evelyn Gajowski. Topics range broadly, from ecocriticism, to economics, to the posthuman. Gajowski notes that each volume is designed to define and explain each theory in clear detail; to introduce key terms, practitioners, and trajectories; to trace intersections between the theory's concerns and other societal circumstances; to establish the theory's role in Shakespeare studies; and to provide

resources for further investigation (ix). Primarily envisioned as a pedagogical tool and an aid for critical reflection, these books, including Novy's, condense significant complex thought and argument into valuable introductions to the theories that have shaped Shakespearean scholarship over the past several decades.

Novy's prose is so clear and accessible that some readers who are new to this subject may not recognize that many of the arguments she presents so cogently, such as French feminism and psychoanalytic criticism, came across initially as complicated and hard to decipher. Novy, however, distills these often dense presentations into paradigms and examples that reflect their sources accurately while offering the kind of contextualization that will help guide her readers. Her linguistic precision and the deceptive simplicity of her chapter titles ("Likeness and Difference," "Desire," "Marriage," "Motherhood," "Language," "Between Women," and "Work") belie her facility with extracting the core premises of these theoretical positions in order to place them in eloquent and illuminating dialogues. Her introduction of the terms underlying "likeness and difference," for instance, draws from a range of diversely important female voices, such as Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Carol Gilligan, and Susan Griffin (14), in order to discuss the alternative perspective offered by what she terms "equality (or humanist) feminism" and "difference (or gynocentric) feminism" (14). In this discussion, she raises pertinent issues such as gendered staging practices in Shakespeare's time and the influence of early modern political circumstances on the perspectives offered by playwright and audiences. As part of her exploration of these topics, she introduces innumerable relevant ideas presented by significant Shakespearean scholars, such as Lisa Jardine, Mario DiGangi, Stephen Greenblatt, and Dymphna Callaghan (15). Inevitably, the author condenses the works of these writers significantly, but provides sufficient information to guide her readers to the texts most congruent with their interests. While it seems likely that those most invested in these arguments will find such summaries reductive, Novy is surprisingly adept at synthesizing many lengthy arguments into the limited space available in a volume of this kind.

There are many useful sections in this book, but Novy's discussion of "Class: Ladies, Companions, Maids, Prostitutes" offers a particularly valuable overview of the relationships between women in Shakespeare's plays, which often confuse or disorient readers. As Novy notes, the categories referenced in these texts are often unclear in a modern context: "Many of Shakespeare's maidservants, such as Maria and Emilia, are ladies-in-waiting, also referred to as companions, a relationship in which the degree of subordination is often ambiguous, but the sharing of confidences is often dramatically marked" (130). After describing the kinds of interactions commonly occurring between such women in the plays, Novy further elaborates on a point that could be overlooked by typical readers: "Shakespearean plays that include women of markedly different classes who are not mistress and maid to each other often keep them apart" (133). She also reminds audiences that class distinctions are not always definitively delineated in these dramas, noting, for example, "As Michael Neill points out, there is no clear evidence

that Bianca is actually a prostitute or a courtesan" (136). Class remains a slippery concept in this period; however, its significance within feminist theory and its centrality within early modern texts make this discussion and its contiguous exploration of women and race particularly valuable.

The compression of texts inevitably leads to some confusions, such as the unexplained reference to Titania's purported pregnancy in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (126). Nonetheless, Novy offers an accounting of the subject that will prove useful to those wishing to gain an overview of this important topic.

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*Shakespeare's Legal Ecologies: Law and Distributed Selfhood.* Kevin Curran. Rethinking the Early Modern. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2017. x + 180 pp. \$34.95.

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In the early modern era, the law established a system of order to guide the way in which individuals navigated their lives, yet simultaneously this juridical framework became complicated in the performance of disorder, as we read the culture through its texts. Clarifying the dramatic and the poetic disorder, Kevin Curran, in his *Shakespeare's Legal Ecologies*, finds a way to investigate notions of identity through a clever engagement with law and literature. He examines an unassuming concept like selfhood to explore an intricate web of the law. Building on the scholarship of political theory and law and literature, this illuminating study of selfhood submits that Shakespeare offers a language of identity in his analysis of property in *Richard II*, the laws of hospitality in *The Merchant of Venice* and the Sonnets, the phenomenology of treason in *Macbeth*, and judgment in *Hamlet* and *The Winter's Tale*. Acknowledging the work of several law and literature scholars, Curran insists that his inquiry is grounded in "communal, collaborative, and distributive" notions of selfhood (8).

Chapter 1, "Property: Land Law and Selfhood in *Richard II*," explores how land law establishes the complex nature of material and nonmaterial things to develop connections to define selfhood in his theory of property. Extending Richard Helgerson's and Ernst Kantorowicz's ideas of the legal subject, Curran deploys different characters from the play and their relationship to property to demonstrate the evolution of not just personhood, but the property itself. Through shifts from John of Gaunt and Bullingbrook to Richard over the course of the drama, we witness an evolved understanding of "national belonging grounded in collectivity and obligation," a "political and personal identity," and the "gradual loss of property" (24). Using legal concepts from wills to waste, Curran demonstrates an inescapable connection between "our material world of people and things" (48).