Fred B. Tromly. *Fathers and Sons in Shakespeare: The Debt Never Promised.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010. xv + 360 pp. index. append. illus. $65. ISBN: 978–0–8020–9961–7.

The argument in Tromly's study of fathers and sons in selected Shakespearean histories and tragedies runs as follows: the fathers expect obedience from their sons; the sons, consciously respecting this patriarchal code but unconsciously yearning for autonomy, follow a complex plot of compliance that invariably involves a rescue of the father undermined by an act of defiance or even betrayal. The subtitle of the introduction, "Ambivalence, Rescue, and Revenge," captures this process. As established in the preface and introductory chapter, early modern patriarchal discourses define the demands of the play's fathers while twentieth-century psychology clarifies the responses of the sons.

Chapter 1 concerns the didactic texts that articulate the reciprocal responsibilities of parents and children. Tromly's sources are broad, ranging from Cicero to Locke, from Erasmus to Montaigne, and from homilies, catechisms, and the Geneva Bible to didactic works by Tyndale, Cleaver, Gough et al. The chapter covers topics that receive attention throughout the book: the father's dominant role in public and private spheres, established father-son rituals, the language of dominance and obedience (duty, bond, indebtedness). Although he touches on the rival discourse for sons found in humanist treatises (which he briefly applies to Prince Hamlet), Tromly finds the sons' resistance largely a product of youthful insubordination.

Chapters 2 to 7 each focus on a single play (*1 Henry VI*, *Richard II*, *1 Henry IV*, *2 Henry IV*, *Hamlet*, and *King Lear* respectively); in each Tromly covers the sources and secondary literature (with both, he argues, offering a simplified father-son narrative). He traces filial responses to paternal demands as a complex mixture of compliance and subversion — an unconscious resistance that ironically is imbrued with the son's imitation of the very paternal behavior he is attempting to resist. Father-son reconciliations are missing or qualified by closing acts of defiance (e.g., Hal's freeing of the Douglas in *1 Henry IV*, Hamlet's bequeathing of Denmark to Fortinbras, and Edgar's deception of the blind Gloucester).

The final chapters break pattern, with chapter 8 covering *Macbeth* and the romances, where father-son plots no longer dominate, and chapter 9, "Biographical Coda," establishing intriguing parallels between the plays and Shakespeare's relationship with his own father.

Tromly's argument is augmented by extensive discussion of the secondary literature. He is critical of historical studies, finding them overly reliant on the didactic literature and consequently neglectful of the psychological complexity which troubles early modern prescriptive certainties. However, he is generously attentive to the many studies that touch on various aspects of his analysis, maintaining a running conversation with his colleagues, largely in his fifty pages of notes.

What also enriches his argument is his reliance on close textual analysis; he parses many passages for metaphorical, rhetorical, and character patterns, juxtaposing them to other passages, to their sources, and to the didactic texts.

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Notable examples include the debate in *1 Henry VI* (4.5) between Lord Talbot and his son concerning their different understandings of honor (46–54); Henry's deathbed scene in *2 Henry IV* (4.5), termed by Tromly "probably the most sustained and subtle depiction of a father and son in all of Shakespeare" (132, 132–45); the subterranean imagery in *Hamlet* (171–74); and a discussion of Lear's limited understanding of "bonds" (191–95).

The problem with the book lies in its basic methodology. Tromly almost never discusses Shakespeare's fathers and sons as early modern dramatic constructions. Instead, coherence and consistency are crucial, and they must be sought and found in the characters' psyche. Although he offers some perceptive distinctions between early modern character and twentieth-century psychology (including a nicely dismissive discussion of the Oedipal Hamlet), he insists on a psychological etiology for the actions of the characters that does not fit early modern dramaturgy. He attempts to patch lacunae that adhere even to portrayals such as Hamlet's with explanations that he acknowledges are invisible in the text (3, 245, for instance). To take examples from the *Hamlet* chapter alone: "It seems likely that much of Hamlet's animus has been displaced" (168); "As Hamlet presumably senses when he addresses the Ghost" (173), and after the encounter, "in retrospect Hamlet cannot but feel he has been treated in a disrespectful manner" (170); his report to Horatio about the pirate encounter is an unconscious fabrication, due to his suffering "a sort of dissociational disorder" (178). In sum, "We can see Hal, Hamlet, and Edgar as a progression in which the son assumes increasingly complex disguises in order to release more deeply repressed emotions toward his progenitor" (199). It is Tromly's attempt to supply these "deeply repressed" and obliquely expressed emotions that weakens an otherwise solid contribution to recent studies on the early modern family and masculinities, one that in its broad-ranging clarity would enhance undergraduate and graduate libraries.

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