

Legal Reform in English Renaissance Literature. Virginia Lee Strain. Edinburgh Critical Studies in Renaissance Culture. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018. x + 230 pp. £75.

There may have been a time in the distant history of humanist scholarship when it was possible not to think about literary production in relation to the law. As early as the sixteenth century, however, this interdisciplinary intellectual work was acknowledged because it seemed foolish and self-defeating; to mix law and literature was to abandon one's true calling (the law) for an inferior and useless practice (literature). In his letter "To the Gentlemen Students of Both Universities," Thomas Nashe lamented: "It is a common practice now a daies, amongst a sort of shifting companions, that runne through every arte and thrive by none, to leave the trade of *Noverint* [law-writer] whereto they were borne, and busie themselves with the endeavours of Art" (preface to Robert Green, *Menaphon* [ca. 1589]). In the last several decades, however, this call to professional purity has been met with abundant scholarship by humanists and lawyers that simply refuses this artificially imposed separation.

Virginia Lee Strain's new book is among those studying the deep tissues connecting these two disciplines. As Strain is quite aware, it hardly seems possible to see the word *reform* in a title related to the English Renaissance and not think of the spiritual Reformation and of the political reforms attendant on the changes in the monarchy. But one of Strain's purposes is precisely to shift our perception of this keyword; the spiritual implications are not the only, or even the primary, associations: "Instead, the senses 'to renew,' 'to restore,' 'to rebuild, repair,' 'to amend or impose by alteration in form, arrangement, or composition,' 'to revise, edit,' and 'to correct errors or remove defects' resonated with Tudor populations" (5). Drawing on the social pervasiveness of these abundant conceptions of reform, Strain demonstrates the ways legal professionals and literary artists were encouraged by English culture to consider themselves restorers of the nation. While legal professionals might have given us philosophical arguments that relied on rhetorical finesse, literary artists gave us aesthetic arguments that embedded legal criticism within their representations. Both groups turned language arts and genres into legal critiques, positioning themselves as social revisionists and rebuilders of early modern law.

Strain turns away from what she characterizes as works that represent law as coercive and subjugating in order to investigate the "rhetorical and representational practices that were used to monitor English law" (1) and to ameliorate law's inherent vulnerability to corruption and coercion. An analysis of book 5 of the *Faerie Queene* introduces Strain's recurring theme that governance is a form of sustained reformation that demands "consistent, insistent, endless attention" (33); the full sense of *reform* allows her to weave rich connections among legal and literary texts, actions, and philosophers. Among these, the festivities of the Inns of Court helped mold and demonstrate the literary inventiveness

and political elasticity that were essential magisterial virtues; Donne's *Satyres* and (at least) four Shakespearean comedies (*The Merchant of Venice*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Comedy of Errors*, and *Measure for Measure*) represent the cultural anxiety over the application of statute laws (which were seen as "snaring" subjects) and interrogate the often satirized Elizabethan pardon designed to absolve the ensnared; *Measure for Measure's* irresolutions (especially those regarding the Duke and Elbow) invoke both the cyclical itinerancy of the assizes and their reliance on character as part of adjudication; and *The Winter's Tale's* exploitation of the culturally widespread figure of the oracle of the law, especially in Paulina and Camillo, counters the Crown's efforts to extend sovereign power.

This is an erudite study and a significant contribution to our understanding of the often submerged ways law and literature have always spoken to and about each other. English Renaissance scholars in particular will appreciate the comprehensiveness of Strain's argument. In it, and in a particularly timely perception, the law emerges as a variable thing in need of sustained reformation not so much to produce new, socially progressive regulations as to prevent it from deteriorating into the desires of one man or group of men. It is constantly being monitored and reformed by legal theorists (Francis Bacon is a prominent figure here). But, as Strain also makes evident, it is at the same time constantly being restored and rebuilt in the work of literary magistrates and aesthetic reformers.

Karen J. Cunningham, *University of California, Los Angeles*
doi:10.1017/rqx.2019.477

The Art of Law in Shakespeare. Paul Raffield.
Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2017. xvi + 276 pp. £80.

The Art of Law in Shakespeare focuses on the mutual development of imagery, language, and tropes used in the early modern English drama and in the common law, primarily during the reign of King James I. The book uses law—in its rhetorical formation and written explorations—and drama as mutually influencing, and so each chapter examines a key topic that has relevance to both an area of common law (often a specific case, event, or legal writing is discussed) and a Shakespeare play (*Love's Labour's Lost*, *Macbeth*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Tempest*). Rather than only zero in on the explicitly legal moments in a play—like trials, prison scenes, or portrayals of individual lawyers—Raffield's approach is often more global, which sets this book apart from previous scholarship. The book highlights the writings of Elizabethan and Jacobean legal thinkers—most notably Sir John Fortescue, Sir John Davies, and Sir Edward Coke—and brings in a range of diverse legal treatises, individual judgments, parliamentary decisions, and other forms of common law's expansive language. The