

The chapter on Milton is most disappointing here. Though it runs to little more than thirty pages, Milton's name does not really appear until ten pages in. In a study that concerns itself with commemoration of the dead, one hoped to see discussion of "Lycidas," but instead we get an extended discussion of several of the prose works. Although they are of course important, in the context of a book that deals mostly with poetry (Skelton, Shakespeare, Marvell), one would have liked a bit more consistency here. *Paradise Lost* is eventually addressed, and McCoy's analysis of the closing books of the epic is lucid and helpful. Ultimately, "*Paradise Lost* . . . affirms one of the Reformation's fundamental premises: there is no sacred space." This statement, one of the most important in McCoy's study, provides a link to other important works such as Eamon Duffy's *Stripping the Altars*. Had this chapter in McCoy's book more carefully examined the idea of sacred space in Milton's work, it would have had, I think, more relevance to McCoy's overall study.

The final chapter (the book lacks a "conclusion" as such) looks at Andrew Marvell and the Restoration. After Milton's death "civil idolatry seemed to be making comeback," and plans were afoot to re-bury Charles I in St. George's Chapel. Christopher Wren's and others' designs for the monument are welcome illustrations. The chapter's point is to contrast Milton's approach to sacred kingship with Marvell's.

If there is one major criticism of this book, it is its length. The text of the study comes in at 156 pages, while almost 50 pages are given to notes. The chapter on Milton, in particular, is at times superficial, and the chapters are at times disconnected, reading as a series of lectures loosely given under the same umbrella theme. Concluding remarks would have helped to make the connections and bring the reader in from the rain. Nevertheless, this is a solid study of an important issue in our field.

Luke Wilson. *Theaters of Intention: Drama and the Law in Early Modern England*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000. x +

362 pp. + 13 illus. \$55.00. Review by DOUGLAS BRUSTER, THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN.

Most Shakespeareans would freely acknowledge that the majority of the surviving information about Shakespeare's life derives from his pursuit of and exposure to the law. Most recognize the names of some notorious legal cases of the era: Hales v. Petit, for instance, or the Overbury affair. And the legal wranglings at the heart of *Henry V* and *The Merchant of Venice*, to name only these two plays, invariably produce useful material for class discussion. Yet at the same time that many scholars will concede the importance of legal matters and codes in early modern society and its literary representations, there obtains a general lack of familiarity with the topic. Shakespeareans will thus confess themselves, like Warwick, to be "no wiser than a daw" in "these nice sharp quilllets of the law" (*1H6* 2.4.17-8).

Luke Wilson's *Theaters of Intention: Drama and the Law in Early Modern England* will go a long way toward educating the field on the legal contexts that shaped and enriched early modern drama. It is a learned and wide-ranging study that simultaneously makes the case for the law's foundational importance to the drama of this time, and gives us a variety of languages for understanding that importance. Wilson's primary argument is that "During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries . . . the theater absorbed and redeployed representations of human action developed in the English common law over the long course of its history;" these developments "produced and satisfied a demand for a sophisticated language of intentional action, [a language which] became instrumental in parallel developments in the theater's increasing ability to produce representations of human beings acting out routines of practical reasoning" (4).

Wilson demonstrates the intellectual overlap between drama and the law in six substantial, interrelated chapters following his book's useful introduction. Each of these chapters advances a significant argument that deserves more attention than can be granted here. The brief chapter summaries that follow, then, are not meant to

diminish that significance, but instead to convey the range of what the book makes available.

In chapter 1, “*Hamlet, Hales v Petit*, and the Hysteresis of Action,” Wilson takes up what is arguably Shakespeare’s most legalistic play and argues that, for this tragedy, “The ‘problem of action’ . . . is less a matter of how it is possible to act than of how it is possible to account for one’s actions after the fact; and like other Renaissance actors, on stage and off, Hamlet conceives such explanations primarily in terms of intention” (39). Wilson adduces several legal cases from the era to show how both law and drama faced “problems in the representation of action” (50). The second chapter here, “Ben Jonson and the Law of Contract,” moves from criminal to contract law in examining the role of *assumpsit* in Ben Jonson’s works. Noting that *assumpsit* “had in the beginning referred to an actual taking in hand, but . . . had come to designate the promise of which that taking in hand was both sign and consequence” (97), Wilson explores the ways in which this legal conception of promises undergirded Jonson’s thinking about contracts, theater, and theatrical contracts.

The potentially economic structures of contractual thinking unfold in Wilson’s third chapter, “Commodities and Contracts,” which centers on *Bartholomew Fair* and offers a variety of contexts—the “Great Contract” of 1610, wardship, fetishism, and gift theory—to illuminate this notoriously unruly play. Chapter 4, “Promissory Performances,” treats the links between promise and performance, first through an examination of theatrical labor and *The Tempest*, then in *Timon of Athens*, where, Wilson argues, “Timon’s characterological incompleteness, his disastrous failure to master the temporal aspect of exchange, and Shakespeare’s own compositional predicaments . . . are all closely related” (178). Wilson’s next chapter, “Contracting Damnation,” examines several social and legal documents concerning witchcraft as a prelude to analysis of performances—theatrical and contractual alike—in Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* and Barnes’s *Devil’s Charter*. The book’s sixth and final chapter, “Nobodies That Matter,” is its most playful. Here Wilson takes up the longstanding trope of “nobody” as actor—as in, for

instance, Odysseus's joke on Polyphemus in the ninth book of Homer's epic—as a means of unpacking various changes in the representation of identity and action in the early modern theater. Wilson provides what should be history's most extensive reading of the anonymous play *Nobody and Somebody* before turning to Desdemona's famous answer to Emilia's pressing question: "O, who hath done this deed?"

If there is a weakness in this book it has to do with difficulties that are built into the topic. The law is notoriously obscure when it comes to words: in its attempt at precision the law often, as Jonson said of Spenser, writes "no language." Thus it can be challenging to read continuously about matters of, for instance, "assumpsit," "deodand," and "nonfeasance." But to Wilson's credit, he takes great pains to clarify what are essentially issues of tremendous complexity, all the time asking us to see that it is precisely this complexity that drew playwrights to legal thinking and expression in the first place.

This is a provocative book, one that may well repay repeated consultation. For its insight into questions of agency and action alone, it deserves serious consideration from those within and without the field of early modern studies. Its focus on the drama will prove particularly helpful to those interested in issues of performance and politics in the theaters of other places and times.

Gigliola Pagano de Divitiis. *English Merchants in Seventeenth-Century Italy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. xv + 202 pp. \$59.95. Review by JAMES PATERSON, UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY.

The title of Pagano de Divitiis's *English Merchants in Seventeenth-Century Italy* is frankly a misnomer. It promises a study of the English mercantile community in Italy, perhaps something along the lines of M.C. Engels's *Merchants, Interlopers, Seamen and Corsairs* (1997) or Daniel Goffman's *Britons in the Ottoman Empire, 1642-1660* (1998). But while Engels studies the Flemish mercantile