

chronicle histories is critiqued by Kastan as a method of determining the genre of Shakespeare's history plays.⁴ Most disappointing is this volume's failure to engage Kastan's provocative argument that Shakespeare's history plays "have a unique and determinate shape that emerges organically from the playwright's sense of the shape of history itself."⁵

This book must therefore be judged a mixed success. Individual essays are well worth consulting, and future critics will ignore them at their peril. As an attempt to chart a new (traditional) direction, however, the collection does not succeed. Questions about the history play as a genre have *not* been slighted, contrary to the editor's claim; the difficulty is that the authors of this volume do not attend to the criticism that has addressed those questions. John Velz is right that the critical balance has swung in favor of different questions entirely, but those who would direct the conversation to other concerns must pay better attention to what has already been said.

Shakespeare's Political Pageant: Essays in Literature and Politics. Edited by JOSEPH ALULIS and VICKIE SULLIVAN. Lanham, MD, and London: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996. Pp. xii + 276. \$64.50 cloth, \$24.95 paper.

Reviewed by IAN MACINNES

Shakespeare's Political Pageant is not part of the new-historicist approach to politics characterized by works like Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield's well-known *Political Shakespeare* (1985). As Joseph Alulis and Vickie Sullivan make clear in their short preface, the contributors to this collection are using the word *politics* in the broad sense of political philosophy. Their theoretical interest in politics is appropriate, since most of them teach in political-science departments.¹ Unlike new historicists or cultural materialists, these contributors "look to Shakespeare for guidance in the articulation of . . . perennial human questions" (viii). They distinguish their approach from older scholarship on Shakespeare's politics by refusing to attribute Shakespeare's own views to any single character in the plays. Not surprisingly, however, they all consider Shakespeare himself to be a profound political philosopher. To this approach can be attributed both the strengths and weaknesses of this well-written collection.

The philosophical orientation of the contributors is constantly apparent. Often the vocabulary itself recalls classical philosophy. Like philosophers, some of the contributors use the word *good* as a noun, speaking of "the good." This vocabulary lends itself to unequivocal statements like this one from Joseph Alulis's essay on *As You Like It*: "In turning her thoughts to love in the fullest sense of the idea, Rosalind turns to what is the preeminent good available to her and, perhaps, the preeminent good available to any human being as such" (42). The contributors also reveal their philosophical bent by identifying particular characters as political philosophers. At its best, the philosophical temperament of these essays leads to statements that almost stand by themselves. Paul Cantor, the only professional literary scholar of the group, locates the

⁴ See Kastan, *Shakespeare and the Shapes of Time*, 14–16 and 40–41.

⁵ Kastan, *Shakespeare and the Shapes of Time*, 41.

¹ Approximately ten out of the twelve contributors are professors of political science. Something of the nature of the collection's emphasis can be discerned from an odd difference between the title on the cover of the paperback edition and that on its title page. The subtitle on the cover reads "*Essays in Politics & Literature*," while that on the title page reads "*Essays in Literature and Politics*."

tragedy of *King Lear* in the compromises that politics requires. According to Cantor, the play reminds us that “man is a composite being, a perplexing mixture of body and spirit. It is precisely for this reason that human beings require political life: to deal with the problems created by the tension between body and spirit. Neither animals nor angels require politics” (196).

In representing politics as an uneasy reconciliation of opposites, Cantor’s statement could serve as an epigram for the rest of the collection. Binary oppositions structure almost all the essays, although the terms of the opposition differ from essay to essay. For David Lowenthal *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* depicts a struggle between reason and imagination. For Barbara Tovey, writing on *Measure for Measure*, the conflict is between wisdom and the obligations of political rule.² For Christopher Colmo, King John struggles with commodity versus honor, and for Timothy Fuller, Macbeth’s tragedy results from an imbalance between thought and action. For most of the contributors, the oppositions they discover are assumed to be immutable. Even if in some cases the words used carry the flavor of Shakespeare’s England, the ideas themselves are supposed to transcend the historical. As Dennis Bathory says, in his essay on *Coriolanus*, the play’s “powerful lessons . . . are no less important for contemporary audiences” (238). One of the exceptions to this ahistorical interpretive strategy is Pamela Jensen’s interesting essay on the role of Venice in *Othello*. To explain why Shakespeare might have set the play in the Venetian Republic, Jensen carefully delineates the early modern reputation of Venice as a non-military state (unlike Rome). In Venice martial valor is marginal, like Othello himself, and thus not an outlet for masculine self-definition. This essay is also structured by a binary opposition, but one not easily defined or translated to the twentieth century.

The very ease with which many of the contributors to this volume describe the central conflicts of the plays may work against them for particular readers. While the essays are extremely lucid and well supported, their results may not always be surprising. Readers of *Shakespeare Quarterly* will almost certainly be familiar with many of the major claims voiced by the contributors. Very occasionally the authors understate the obvious. Tim Spiekerman’s otherwise illuminating essay on Prince Hal, for instance, begins by asserting that “Parts 1 and 2 of Shakespeare’s *Henry IV* are just as concerned with Hal, the man who will be king, as they are with King Henry IV himself” (103). In other places some of the essays tend to oversimplify the complex influences on Shakespeare’s political thought, with tantalizing effect. Vickie Sullivan uses Machiavelli extensively, as well as the theory of instrumentality, to describe Henry’s manipulations in *Henry V*, but the long critical history of Shakespeare and Machiavelli finds its way mostly into her excellent notes. Michael Zuckert, whose narration of the conflict between Portia and Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice* is well paced and exciting, calls his essay “The New Medea.” Yet apart from observing some fascinating parallels between the play and Ovid’s version of the story, he does little to investigate the significance of the myth of Medea for an early modern English audience.

At the same time, however, the contributors’ willingness to leave complex sources and cultural material aside leads to one of the greatest strengths of the collection. The essays all devote much space to close reading, and most of it is extremely sensitive and perceptive. Some of this close reading helps fit difficult passages into a convincing retelling of the plot, as Zuckert does for *The Merchant of Venice*. Other contributors bring together diverse passages, showing how each fits into a single paradigm, as Sullivan does for *Henry V* and Davis for *Macbeth*. In every case the close reading is beautifully subordinated to the major claim of the essay. Because the contributors unify so many

² To the degree that Tovey is discussing the conflict between the exact requirements of the law and the possibility of extenuating circumstances, the Renaissance terms for her opposition might be *justice* and *equity*.

diverse details, anyone who teaches these plays or directs them on stage will appreciate this collection's emphasis on formal coherence. While the broad philosophical approach of the book may frustrate some readers, the critics it brings together have produced some very successful essays.

Fat King, Lean Beggar: Representations of Poverty in the Age of Shakespeare.

By William C. Carroll. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996. Pp. xvi + 237. \$37.50 cloth.

Reviewed by DARYL W. PALMER

When, precisely, did representation get so fat? Perhaps Mikhail Bakhtin was right. Perhaps Rabelais was the beginning and we are his progeny. I think of the first chapter of *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, when the narrator explains, with a nod toward his protagonist's genealogy, that there are those things "*qui plus sont delectable quand plus souvent sont redictz*."¹ Gargantua was one of those things, and so, according to William Carroll in *Fat King, Lean Beggar*, was the figure of the beggar in early modern England. Having digested the great feast of social and economic history that purports to account for the condition of the poor in the period, Carroll shares this research in ways that illuminate his principal aim of identifying a series of competing representational strategies that exploit "beggar" as sign.

Opportunists dominate Carroll's London, their actions revealing a mixture of motives but mostly "economic self-interest" (61). These men took advantage of the discourse of poverty by hatching brave schemes that would turn the beggar into a commodity. In this spirit Robert Hitchcock proposed that the regiment of the poor be organized into a national fishing fleet with herring as its prize (53–55). Thomas Harman followed in Rabelais's footsteps and published *The Caveat for Common Cursetors*, a collection of rogue portraits that promised its readers a glimpse of underworld machinations. For Carroll, Bedlam and Bridewell institutionalized the motives behind these diverse schemes. Although it never had more than fifteen to twenty patients at a time, Bedlam grew in the popular imagination because it linked poverty with madness (see 101 and 108). In Bridewell, formerly a palace of Henry VIII, the walls of the fat king served to confine the lean beggar—and a host of others. Over the years, as Carroll shows, "Bridewell was a royal palace, a house of correction and job training, a harsh prison, a place of torture, a favored site for non-noble political prisoners, a theater, a granary, a mill, a warehouse, and a desirable rental space; for a brief time, it was also a whorehouse and 'a common taphouse of stronge beere'" (120–21). Representation got fat on prison food.

A skeptical ventriloquist, Carroll's Shakespeare invokes the sixteenth-century equation of masterless men and rebellion in *2 Henry VI* by making beggars both the objects of satire and the source of genuine threats to the government. Carroll links the meeting between Henry and Simpcox to the later conjunction of King Lear and Edgar, suggesting that "both scenes reveal the monarch's inability to 'read' an inversion of his own image" (154). In the figures of Christopher Sly and Autolycus, Carroll identifies two sympathetic versions of Simpcox. The peddler, like the tinker, "was thus a loose cannon on the economic ship: unregulated, mobile, transgressive" (159). Sly and Autolycus delight us because they "adapted to rather than rebelled

¹ François Rabelais, *La Vie Très Horrificque Du Grand Gargantua Pere De Pantagruel in Oeuvres Completes*, ed. Pierre Jourda, 2 vols. (Paris: Editions Garnier Freres, 1962), 1:11.