

Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



Cormack, Bradin, Martha C. Nussbaum, and Richard Strier (eds.). Shakespeare and the Law: A Conversation among Disciplines and Professions

Mark Fortier

Volume 36, Number 3, Summer 2013

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1091035ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v36i3.20553>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Fortier, M. (2013). Review of [Cormack, Bradin, Martha C. Nussbaum, and Richard Strier (eds.). Shakespeare and the Law: A Conversation among Disciplines and Professions]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 36(3), 159–161. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v36i3.20553>

The volume arranges Russell's documents chronologically in four sections: "Lady Hoby"; "Lady Russell"; "A Courtier and a Parliament Woman" (Russell's own term); and "Elizabeth Russell, Dowager." Within each category are letters and the various other documents listed above. While this arrangement helps to clarify Russell's situation and preoccupations at different times of her life, the miscellaneity of the texts can resist consecutive reading. For this reason, the volume is likely to be most useful for reference and for the consultation of selected texts. Phillippy's annotations are detailed and thorough, and help to outline some of the very complex legal situations and personal connections. The editor helpfully adds a glossary of persons, a calendar of sources indicating the extremely wide range of manuscripts consulted, a bibliography, and an index. This volume will be of interest to scholars of early modern women's legal and economic positions, the practices of patronage, Protestant politics, and early modern funeral monuments. Taken together, the letters in the collection also offer a self-portrait of an energetic, active, often contradictory, and always outspoken woman.

ANNE RUSSELL, *Wilfrid Laurier University*

Cormack, Bradin, Martha C. Nussbaum, and Richard Strier (eds.).
Shakespeare and the Law: A Conversation among Disciplines and Professions.
 Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013. Pp. 335. ISBN 978-0-226-92493-9
 (hardcover) \$35.

Shakespeare and the Law, *Shakespeare and Law*, *The Law in Shakespeare*: these are titles of just a few recent collections in the flourishing field of law in relation to Shakespeare studies. To these we can add the volume under review, as it makes its entry into ever more crowded territory (especially where titles are concerned, it would appear). The collection is edited by faculty members at the University of Chicago; in part it functions as an advertisement for the history, quality, and centrality of work in law and literature that has been and continues to be undertaken at that university. This book may be a latecomer, but it has a long pedigree and is distinctive in the variety, quality, and renown of the contributors (several from the University of Chicago), beginning but not ending

with the editors. Contributors include the literary scholars Lorna Hutson, Constance Jordan, David Bevington, and Kathy Eden, the philosopher Stanley Cavell, the legal scholar and judge Richard Posner, and American Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer. This is a very august collection.

The result is high quality though not particularly ground-breaking. The choice of plays is telling: there are four pieces on *The Merchant of Venice* and three on *Measure for Measure*, the two workhorses of Shakespeare and law studies. Equity, often studied, is a recurring topic (though, disappointingly and surprisingly, I do not find David Bevington's contribution on equity in *Measure for Measure* particularly sophisticated). Bradin Cormack and Lorna Hutson expand ably on work that they have previously published in book form. Martha Nussbaum contributes a very engaging and deeply critical piece on *Julius Caesar*, although it perhaps is the essay that has the least to do—narrowly speaking—with law. Moreover, it is a pleasure to encounter new work by Kathy Eden. *Shakespeare and the Law* is in part, therefore, a highly accomplished collection of literary essays.

Most fascinating for me is the work by legal scholars and judges and the interdisciplinary exchanges between them and literary scholars. Most of us who work primarily in literary studies will find the contributions of the literary scholars collected here essentially familiar—their concerns, the kind of arguments they make, how they go about presenting them; less so will be what those who study law have to say. Richard Posner and Charles Fried provide concurring thoughts on the law as played out in the *Merchant of Venice*, bringing rigour to questions that literary scholars are likely to treat more confusedly and haphazardly. On the other hand, Judge Diane P. Wood's treatment of some of Shakespeare's plays will appear somewhat more facile to the literary scholar.

How work in law and literature is done by scholars coming from different disciplines and how those scholars can further the general understanding by talking to each other are important and ongoing questions. Are such conversations capable of raising the level of analysis and sophistication or are they the Shakespearean equivalent of talking about the weather? After reading the roundtable that ends this book, in which Nussbaum, Strier, Posner, and Breyer share their thoughts, I'd have to say the jury is still out. Justice Breyer was given the privilege of setting the parameters of the discussion and perhaps sets the wrong tone by saying that he chose *Hamlet*, *Measure for Measure*, and *As You Like It* because he likes them. Rather than a penetrating engagement among

different ways of understanding Shakespeare, the roundtable mainly becomes four discrete and cursory takes on three different plays. While there is a degree of interchange towards the end, and even some lively disagreement, the discussion fails to reach the full potential offered by such a meeting of minds. Given the need for deeper and fuller dialogue, this roundtable is a substantial disappointment.

However, the editors are more than astute enough to understand and remark on all the issues I have been raising: the inevitable repeated turn to certain plays; the substantial body of work already covering this field and its complexity; the difficulty of thinking and speaking outside disciplinary restraints; the multiplicity of possible approaches and the impossibility of comprehensiveness or definitiveness; the judiciousness of ending with questions rather than answers. As a consequence, anyone looking for a single volume to introduce them to Shakespeare and the law might rewardingly and aptly be steered to this work. The contributions are high quality, the questions asked are important. All who work in this field benefit from being prodded and inspired, here and elsewhere, to continue thinking about them.

MARK FORTIER, *University of Guelph*

Cecilia del Nacimiento.

***Journeys of a Mystic Soul in Poetry and Prose.* Intro. and prose trans. Kevin Donnelly. Poetry trans. Sandra Sider.**

The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: Toronto Series 18. Toronto: Iter Inc. / Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2012. Pp. xi, 548. ISBN 978-0-7727-2118-1 (paperback) \$37.

This volume, which offers an English translation of prose compositions and a bilingual selection of poems by the Spanish mystic Cecilia del Nacimiento, is a welcome addition to the series The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe. Cecilia (1570–1646) was the daughter of Antonio Sobrino, the secretary of the University of Valladolid, and Cecilia Morillas, a noted translator and artist of illuminated manuscripts. Cecilia and her sister, María, received an exceptional education for girls of their day: they studied painting, music, Latin, French,