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Lupić, Ivan. Subject of Advice: Drama and Counsel from More to Shakespeare

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[See table of contents](#)

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Lupić, Ivan.

Subject of Advice: Drama and Counsel from More to Shakespeare.

Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, in cooperation with Folger Shakespeare Library, 2019. Pp. 260. ISBN 978-0812251609 (hardcover) US\$59.95.

Counsel was a political, moral, and ethical category, as well as a dramatic conceit within early modern drama, but critics have not assessed its significance sufficiently. In his excellent book, Ivan Lupić writes eloquently about the discrepancy between counsel as a shaping element of drama and the period's response to counsel's creative power in dramatic composition: "counsel in the Renaissance is alive and dead at once: both taken into account and ignored, both dismissed and repeatedly sought." His aim is to examine in detail this "contradictory response" (25) by analyzing a diverse body of evidence, from minutiae found in less-known manuscripts and printed drama, to familiar plays by Shakespeare and Marlowe. This book demonstrates that it is hard to "dismiss" counsel's contribution to the crafting of styles and the subjects in early modern drama. As Lupić points out throughout his cogently argued, crisply written, and comprehensively researched book, the shaping and the performance of early modern selfhood depended upon personal and political conditions that the world required of an individual; moreover, identity fashioning seldom took place fully without the benefit of a counsel. The complex relationship between the counselling agent and the subject of advice is the site of what Lupić calls the "counseling scene[]" (7) in early modern drama. Such scenes are the foundation of popular plays written for commercial theatre; they also expose the boundaries between drama and theatre. The depth of historical and literary research is not only broad in scope, ranging across genres and languages, but it is also enriched by creative and original close readings. Lupić's gift as a critic and literary historiographer, as well as a historian of drama, lies in his extraordinary ability to align literary history with cross-generic analysis (for instance, how the epic benefitted from drama), and to show how texts that have never been interpreted alongside each other reveal the hitherto untapped richness of meaning when they are analyzed simultaneously. Page after page, Lupić brings out surprises from his tireless search in the archives that produce extraordinary connections between texts and ideas. He brings into dialogue less-known plays: *Thomas of Woodstock*, *The True Chronicle History of King*

Leir, and Shakespeare's *Richard II*. The point he makes is not merely that these were precursors to the better-known plays by Shakespeare, but that the rhetorical and intellectual interaction between these three texts, belonging to the same period, shows how the rhetoric and politics of counsel become the locus of their layered interactions. His original claims demonstrate that drama produces what one might call a poetics or a grammar of counsel, upon which theatre depended for its power to effect moral and political agency. In moments like these, as in the pages in which More's *Utopia* is read against the play of *Sir Thomas More*, Lupić shines as an authentic critic. His conclusions convincingly overshadow the New Historicist paradigm of self-fashioning—as a more general speculative discursive enterprise within the humanist culture—once practised by Stephen Greenblatt. When Lupić argues that “counsel needs to be considered from the perspective of drama and its history before being considered from the perspective of political history” (167), he claims that literature speaks more powerfully than history, that literature is history. At the same time, he also offers a counter argument to a study of historical drama against the background of political history.

The book is organized in five chapters. The first is concerned with a more general background of how counsel became a powerful creative piece in dramatic composition, largely using the Good Counsel in *Utopia* as a test case. From an analysis of good counsel in the introductory chapter, the book moves, in the second chapter, to an analysis of tyranny in a counsel within the arc that brings together the texts of George Buchanan's debates concerning tyrannical governments, especially the dialogic *De iure regni apud Scotos*, the early biblical play *John the Baptist*, and Buchanan's play *Jephtes*; the third chapter is devoted to *Gorboduc*. Lupić demonstrates that early historical plays made the most of the “purposes and problems” (83) posed by counsel which originated in written historical records. His criticism is most impressive when he builds unexpected connections between texts, which he treats as creative resources that enabled drama rather than contexts that align with drama.

The fourth chapter offers a rewarding and original interpretation of friendship, counsel, and power in Richard Edwards's *Damon and Pythias* read alongside Marlowe's *Edward II*. This chapter brims with rewarding and original insights, and with illuminating analyses that revise and challenge what queer early modern historiography has had to say about the queerness, friendship, and sovereignty of these two plays. Connections between texts and chapters are

made throughout the book, and the closing chapter connects with the previous by way of its emphasis on sexualization, this time of counsel and *parrhesia*, or divination. Shakespeare is the critical spine of this book. Early on, Lupić frames his discussion of counsel with references to *King Lear*. He has written an excellent chapter on *King John*, an early and neglected historical play. His analyses of *Henry IV* and *Julius Caesar* are probing and precise. Discussions of *Othello*, *Measure for Measure*, *Richard II*, and *Romeo and Juliet* demonstrate Lupić's critical sensibility and the ability to use details of historiography to craft an original argument. The closing pages on *Hamlet* are an impressive coda to an engaging book.

The subtitle indicates that the book is a study of early English drama and literature. Yet this engrossing study opens up new critical paths, stretching beyond English drama. This is a book of comparative literary history and historiography; it connects text and theatre within a wide early modern world of cross-linguistic exchange. The critical idiom and methodological approach are unique and refreshing, often polemical and consistently rewarding.

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Metlica, Alessandro.

Le seduzioni della pace. Giovan Battista Marino, le feste di corte e la Francia barocca.

Bologna: il Mulino, 2020. Pp. 346 + 21 colour ill. ISBN 978-8-8152-8762-5 (paperback) €29.

Alessandro Metlica's book has a very ambitious aim: contextualizing Giovan Battista Marino's *Adone* in the wider frame of baroque propaganda. The seventeenth century (the age of Absolutism) is a moment when political authority started investing massively not just in financing but in recruiting poets and artists whose work had the purpose of stupefying the crowds and conquering their favour. Baroque propaganda, however, involves not only poetry, painting, music, and theatre but also a vast series of courtly celebrations, ranging from ballets to tournaments to firework shows. All these artistic products are modelled on what Metlica defines as "a rhetoric of ostentation" (13) that aims