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Shakespeare the Renaissance Humanist: Moral Philosophy and His Plays. Anthony Raspa. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. x + 196 pp. \$95.

Andrew Cutrofello
Loyola University Chicago, acutrof@luc.edu

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Shakespeare the Renaissance Humanist: Moral Philosophy and His Plays.

Anthony Raspa.

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Anthony Raspa interprets several of Shakespeare's plays in light of English writings and translations by contemporaneous moral philosophers whose ideas, he claims, were sufficiently popular to constitute a kind of "street humanism" (1). Raspa's thesis, presented in chapter 1, is that Shakespeare drew on these ideas in ways that were self-explanatory to his contemporaries, but that are difficult for us to discern today because our thought is guided by a different set of metaphysical assumptions. This difficulty is exacerbated by critical representations of Renaissance humanism as the early modern equivalent of "modern materialist humanism" (16–17). To correct this misperception, Raspa turns to such figures as William Baldwin, Pierre de La Primaudaye, Pierre Charron, Philippe de Mornay, William Fulbecke, George Hakewill, Thomas Wright, and Stephen Batman, whose edition of John of Trevisa's translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus's *Proprietatibus Rerum* was "Shakespeare's encyclopedia," according to Jürgen Schäfer (33). Raspa is right to insist that his book is not a mere exercise in "source-hunting" (116). His comparisons of Shakespeare and the humanists work in both directions, as evidenced in an insightful discussion of three different conceptions of faith expressed by Titus, Aaron, and Lucius in *Titus Andronicus* (24–27).

In chapter 2, Raspa contrasts the way modern conceptions of evolution permeate Terrence Malick's film *The Tree of Life* with the way Renaissance conceptions of form and soul govern the speech and action of *King John* and *Hamlet*. When King John discerns the form of his deceased elder brother in Philip the Bastard, he isn't simply describing Philip's physiognomy or genetic inheritance; rather, or in addition, he is drawing on a thicker, more metaphysical conception of form that the Renaissance humanists derived from Aristotle and Aquinas. The specific sense of form as political "consensus" is gradually revealed in the play to be the antithesis to the "commodity" that Philip both rails against and courts (38–39). Raspa detects a similar opposition between representations of form/soul and dust in *Hamlet*.

Chapter 3, on *King Lear*, discusses Lear's invocation of Apollo, the god on whose temple, as the humanists noted, was adorned the phrase "Know Thy Selfe" (55). Both Lear and Gloucester are represented as classically tragic characters whose hamartia is self-ignorance. Raspa relates their figurative and literal blindness—and eventual painful insight—to humanistic debates about the virtues and/or vices of eyes. Eschewing pessimistic interpretations of the play, he argues that in it Shakespeare shows that evil is confined to human actions over which we have control. Edmund's final act of repentance illustrates Charron's idea that all humans have a natural disposition toward goodness (75). In chapter 4, Raspa argues that Macbeth's hamartia is not his ambition but his tendency to let his will be guided by his imagination rather than by his reason. He compares Macbeth to Hamlet, who like

Banquo fears the figments of his own imagination, and to Orsino, who knows that his image of Olivia is in part a product of his fancy. He also compares the witches' temptation of Macbeth to Satan's temptation of Eve in *Paradise Lost*, noting that everything the witches prophesy is prefigured in Macbeth's imagination, the locus of the play's dramatic unities.

Raspa's commitment to finding hamartias in Shakespeare's tragedies drives his reading of *Romeo and Juliet* in chapter 5. When Romeo first sees Juliet he realizes that his previous attraction to Rosaline had been purely physical. The two lovers' spiritual "communion" (103) ultimately serves as an instrument of "divine justice" (106), but they are unable to confront the worldly forces of fate and fortune that seemingly conspire against them. Various views about the human capacity or incapacity to resist these forces are voiced by Celia and Rosalind in *As You Like It*, and by Stefano, Ariel, and Prospero in *The Tempest*. In his final chapter, Raspa represents Ariel, Prospero, and Caliban as personifications, respectively, of spirit, reason, and body. Less familiarly, he closes with a lovely suggestion about Miranda's "wonderment" at the "brave new world" she has just discovered. It exemplifies "the wisdom that Charron recommends to the explorer": the insight that every newly discovered world is "a book of wisdom to another world yet undiscovered" (136–37).

Andrew Cutrofello, *Loyola University Chicago*