

remain firmly committed to these notions. Dawson even-handedly assesses strengths and shortcomings of *both* these conflicting views.

There is much pleasure in this book. Alexander Leggatt wonderfully compares legendary Canadian indecisiveness (evident perhaps in the question mark in this collection's title) with the characteristic Shakespearean 'refusal to take sides' that Keats called 'negative capability'. In addition to enjoying the droll doings of Canadian anti-Stratfordians as chronicled by Paul Yachnin and Brent E. Whitted in the essay 'Canadian Bacon', I was delighted to learn that on 2 July 1951, a mulberry tree, 'purportedly a scion of the true Shakespearean root', was ceremoniously planted in the Trinity College quadrangle at the University of Toronto (Makaryk 21). And I rejoiced to be informed that 'in 1990, a Canadian living in Oxford set the speech record for reciting Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy' (24 seconds) (38). Both as a thought-provoking cultural critique and as a treasury of delectable information, this book is outstanding.

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Leon Craig. *Of Philosophers and Kings: Political Philosophy in Shakespeare's Macbeth and King Lear*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001. Pp 480.

This is not another book by a professional Shakespearean. Leon Craig is a long-time professor of political philosophy and the author of a well-known book on Plato's *Republic*. This effort is the culmination of 'some two decades of studying and teaching Shakespeare ... in seminars with graduate students.' The result, Craig frankly admits, is an 'old-fashioned book' that espouses 'old-fashioned views about literature' (11). I'm not sure this is the best description of a big, ambitious, provocative, and sometimes unwieldy book that uses Shakespeare as the launching pad for investigations into all sorts of things, from the nature of Time to healthy sexuality. It has the feel of a graduate seminar on Shakespeare led by a generous, broadly educated, and unusually insightful, if sometimes quirky, professor.

Craig begins his study of *Macbeth* and *Lear* (he treats several other plays more briefly) in a decidedly up-to-date fashion – with an account of his critical 'method'. Concern with epistemological questions currently dominates the

study of literature, and Craig's fine introductory chapter bows to this relatively new critical custom. While he announces that he will 'ignore most post-modern criticism since it tends to be overtly historicist and ideological' (286, note 31), Craig poses and answers several of the most pressing questions for contemporary scholars: are Shakespeare's characters to be understood as fully developed human beings? Are his plays intended to be primarily educational or entertaining? Do they deserve (and reward) the scrutiny afforded by close *reading* or were they meant to be enjoyed in the theater? And perhaps most importantly, are Shakespeare's plays really 'for all time' or are they best understood in historical context? To these and other questions, Craig provides patient, thoughtful, and non-polemical answers that will be of interest not only to readers (and viewers) of Shakespeare's plays, but to thoughtful readers of literature generally. Craig's answers are perhaps best summarized by citing his overarching thesis: 'Shakespeare is as great a philosopher as he is a poet' (4). While such bold and sweeping statements might alarm some readers, Craig means by 'philosophy' not the possession of a settled doctrine which provides answers to the most fundamental questions, but rather the careful *consideration* of matters of enduring interest to human beings. Shakespeare, in other words, is a thoughtful author of thought-provoking plays. He aims, so Craig contends, to 'seduce' his readers 'to engage in ... [the] distinctly human (and thus humanizing) activity of thinking, thereby experiencing philosophy first-hand' (12).

This is a broad thesis, and Craig's efforts to defend it may prove frustrating to those expecting a more conventional treatment of Shakespeare's plays. His chapter on *Macbeth* in particular is difficult and sometimes downright confusing, due no doubt in part to the exceedingly broad scope of Craig's concerns. The chapter might usefully be divided into two basic parts. First, Craig entertains the two big (and related) questions prompted by the play: (1) what does Shakespeare think of Macbeth's Machiavellian politics? and (2) does Shakespeare think there is natural support for goodness and morality in the world? Craig's answers to these questions are hardly novel (not much; yes), but he is scrupulous in treating the most thoughtful objections to them and wisely credits Shakespeare with a nuanced appreciation of all the complexities involved. Of special note in this regard is Craig's astute analysis of Rosse, a successful Machiavellian with a good conscience. Second, Craig entertains the more general claim that *Macbeth* is a philosophic play – 'Shakespeare's most metaphysically ambitious ... dramatic creation' (26) – which often involves Craig's own reflections on matters he believes Shakespeare intended his audience to puzzle over. In effect, we get two different kinds of investigations in this chapter: Craig on *Macbeth* and Craig on perennial philosophic ques-

tions. The results in both cases can be exhilarating, but a good deal of patience is required as Craig does not neatly separate or compartmentalize his dual agenda.

Craig's chapter on *Lear* begins in a much more straightforward and promising way: the play is 'profoundly misunderstood' because most everyone gets the title character wrong (112). Here we have a clear thesis and an obvious agenda: How is *Lear* misunderstood? Why did Shakespeare assure that he would be? How should King Lear (and thus *King Lear*) be understood? Following Harry Jaffa, Craig makes a compelling case that the opening act of the play is decisive and that it shows Lear to be a prudent politician with a rational plan to assure a peaceful transition of power upon his retirement. Craig is not entirely successful in explaining the failure of the plan – if he knows his favorite daughter so well, why doesn't he anticipate her response? – but his analysis of the political framework of the play is surefooted and cogent. In fact, Craig's attentiveness throughout this book to political considerations that might escape many in Shakespeare's audience is perhaps his greatest contribution and something for which he shows admirable talent. But as with his treatment of *Macbeth*, his treatment of *Lear* involves far more than politics. As many have observed, *Lear* is a play about Nature, and Craig shows us not only why *that* is so, but offers as well his own observations on questions generated by the text: why is the conventional disdain for children produced out of wedlock so historically prominent? Why do men and women have different views of sexual and familial relations (and, rather interestingly, crying)? And most generally, why do at least some conventions deserve to be called natural? Craig spends very little time discussing the causes of Lear's mental collapse – the result, he says at one point, of his 'having to confront the truth about his daughters and his own actions' (171) – which is surprising given his earlier emphasis on Lear's sobriety ('a rational, responsible, shrewd statesman' [113]). He does, however, spend a great deal of time on the meaning of Lear's suffering, and readers are given a hint about his conclusions when Craig refers to the 'strange lucidity of this madness' (159) and calls Lear 'sanely mad' (165). Still, readers may be surprised by Craig's ultimate judgement that Lear emerges from the 'revolution in his soul' (172) as a Socratic figure (Edgar is compared to Glaucon) who is capable of living 'beyond tragedy' and approaches, if he does not fully attain, a 'calm acceptance of fate' (187–8).

In his final chapter, Craig offers shorter interpretations of three more plays (*Othello*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *Measure for Measure*) in order to provide further evidence for his 'governing thesis' that Shakespeare is 'a philosophic writer' whose goal is to 'entice a potentially philosophic reader to engage in

the humanizing activity of thinking for the sheer satisfaction of understanding' (193). Shakespeare's relation to Plato links Craig's treatments of all three plays, and extended comments on the *Symposium* and the *Republic* inform a more general inquiry into the possibility of philosophic poetry. Craig's discussion of *Measure for Measure* is especially incisive. Like previous commentators, he sees the Duke as a philosopher, but notes the 'paradox at the center' of analyses that begin with this premise: 'Vienna is a political mess because its ruler is a philosopher, and Vienna is salvaged because its ruler is a philosopher' (384). Craig's attempt to resolve this paradox at one point gives rise to another: he claims that 'sexual decadence is the worst kind of decadence' (245) but thinks Lucio has been 'subject to more abuse by commentators than he deserves' and admits finding this 'rascal ... as engaging as Falstaff' (386, note 91). He concludes his essay on *Measure* with a provocative discussion of who is more blameworthy – the (sexual) tempter or the (sexually) tempted? – and wonders if orderly sexual expression is best achieved by restraining the former or the latter.

Extensive endnotes (269–392) round out Craig's ambitious work. As 'they are bound to distract a reader from the main line of the argument', Craig invites us 'to ignore them, at least initially'. But those unable to resist a premature peek will find copious references to Shakespeare scholarship (along with acknowledgments of debt, in particular to Paul Cantor and David Lowenthal), summaries of classic social and political thought (Plato, Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Nietzsche are favorites), and just plain interesting stuff ('were the bodies of the earth's entire human population fully compressed in the gravitational field of a "black hole", the resulting "solid matter" ... would scarcely fill *one fortieth of a tablespoon!* [313–14]). To the objection that far too much *already* interrupts the flow of Craig's argument, I'd counsel patience. This book is demanding, and best digested at a leisurely pace. But those willing to pause and reflect along with Craig will surely find it worth the effort.

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