***Forms of Justice***

*Subha Mukherji*

**Regina Mara Schwartz, *Loving Justice, Living Shakespeare* (Oxford University Press, 2016) (ISBN 978‐0‐19‐879521‐6), xii + 147 pp.**

**Marissa Greenberg, *Metropolitan Tragedy: Genre, Justice, and the City in Early Modern England* (University of Toronto Press, 2015) (ISBN 978-1-4426-4880-7), xvi + 232 pp.**

In her last testament, *Paradiso*, the philosopher Gillian Rose asserts ‘a refusal to adopt or affirm the opposition between law and love which has so marred the development of Christian theology’, and, by implication, Western thought about justice.[[1]](#footnote-1) It is in this courageous, revisionist tradition that Regina Schwartz’s impassioned book *Loving Justice, Living Shakespeare* positions itself, and in turn locates Shakespeare’s works, as it issues a clarion call for the integration of ethics and affect in creative as well as critical practice. But it is also an invitation to live a larger life, to operate in an economy of plenitude, not of scarcity, and to rethink the particulars of love in an age of suspicion and hardening insularity. Its agenda is unabashedly one of healing: healing a rupture between loving and judging, the personal and the political, textual and social practice, and between being critical and being human. And its central claim is that Shakespeare shows us how to do this: not through any resounding moral abstraction or impersonal doctrine of moral good, but through dramatising specific human encounters and relations that invite us to recalibrate the ‘justice imaginary’ we inhabit (p. 6). For it is in our negotiation of the need and worthiness of the other – Rose calls it ‘loveability’, and Schwartz ‘intrinsic value’ (p. 7), to be contrasted with desert or merit – that we exercise justice, or fail to be just;[[2]](#footnote-2) it is in laying ourselves open to the risk of encounter that we practice equity, and bring truth into dialogue with love. When, in securing protective walls around our own selves and interests at times of crisis, we refuse to engage with the reality of the other or to respond to their questioning, we miscarry quotidian justice and degrade the original gift of love by robbing another’s dignity. Implicit in Schwartz’s narrative - which begins with a deeply personal experience of care and ends with a daringly comparative analysis of Shakespeare’s Julietand Bizet’s Carmen – is the inextricability of capacious living, loving and reading.

There is a peculiar synchronicity about these interrelations. I have been reading *Loving Justice* at a café at the Piazza Pretoria in Palermo, with the hum of life circling around me, and the statue of the Genio di Palermo right in front, diverting my gaze. Yet as I try to re-focus myself and return to the book, the sculpture turns out not to be a distraction but a strange, if challenging, objective correlative of the sentiment Schwartz begins with – the exhortation in the Hebrew Bible to love the alien, extended by the New Testament into an extension to love the enemy (Chapter II, ‘The Law of Love’). For the Genio - the *genius loci* and protective deity of Palermo (along with its patron saint, Rosalia) – is an elderly, bearded man who nurses a serpent at his breast, coiled around him in a gesture of familiarity. The iconography makes him an emblematic personification of the city itself, with its long history of plurality, exchange, and inclusiveness. The Genio exists in several representations across the city, dating back to the period between the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries. The snake has been variously interpreted - including an identification of it with Scipio Africanus, the Roman general helped by Palermitans in a war against Hannibal’s army, in thanks for which Scipio donated a *conca doro* (golden basin) to the city; the fertile basin on which Palermo stands was named the *conca doro* by the Arabs. But in almost all versions of the myth, the serpent is the other, the stranger, who is welcomed, housed and fed by this enchanting city to which foreigners have always been drawn, whether as traders, invaders, conquerers, travellers or refugees. But from guest to host or parasite is one small step, as Derrida reminds us (in his essay ‘Of Hospitality’), and welcoming the other has ever had its ambiguities, its inseparability from anxieties about making the self vulnerable. And so the Genio di Palermo has a tough motto on the basin that cradles the statue in Piazza Pretoria: *Panormus conca aurea suos devorat alienos nutrit*, which translates as follows: ‘Palermo (all-port), golden basin, devours its own and nourishes foreigners’. A particularly difficult inscription, this, in our times, when Palermo is fashioning its own identity as the capital of the most diverse, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and receptive part of a country dangerously veering towards building rather than breaking walls. But it is also heaving with immigrants arriving at its harbours, placing demands on love, hospitality and resources. Thus, while this symbol of benevolent hybridity with its unassimilable adage is specific to Sicily, it is also synecdochic of the ambivalent world we live in, and resonant of the mixed affects it throws at us; not entirely unlike the plays Schwartz chooses as her examples. Love, like justice, is a difficult gift; and they both entail an absolute command. Schwartz is aware of this (pp. 35, 32).

It is in this context that we need to understand the urgency and fervour of her use of Shakespeare, not least of the play of *Sir Thomas More*. The additions by Hand D here, credibly ascribed to Shakespeare, offer a haunting portrayal of ‘wretched strangers,/Their poor babes at their backs and their poor luggage,/Plodding to the ports and coasts for transportation’[[3]](#footnote-3): lines more vivid than ever in our historical moment, when the increasingly familiar figure of the stranger arriving at shores unknown with their poor luggage and terrified babes evokes a tangle of intense feelings. But Shakespeare puts the ‘stranger’s case’ eloquently, as the play turns anxieties about foreigners on their head and asks the xenophobic mobs of London to consider a scenario where they ‘must needs be strangers’, and rethink their ‘mountainish inhumanity’. At moments such as this, Schwartz hears – and makes us hear in turn – an echo of the Biblical injunction to love the stranger, for the one who resists, fears and alienates was ‘once a stranger in the land of Egypt’ (p. 50; Deuteronomy 10:19 and Leviticus, 19:34). She argues that *King Lear* explores how to love the stranger and *Romeo and Juliet* takes up the question of loving the enemy (Chapter III, ‘The Power of Love’).

Yet Shakespeare understood the difficulty of such love in more inward and more unflinching terms, than purely the uncompromising ferocity of the love command. Schwartz’s sensitive suggestion that in *Lear*, all inadequate understandings of justice are pared away ‘until only an implied vision, albeit extremely frail, is left’ (p. 39), is in tune with the play’s simultaneous and principled refusal of both formal solace and metaphysical despair; its bleak affirmation of the capacities of the human fibre. The fiction of the play, containing many failures of judgment with tragic results, speaks to Schwartz’s consciously Shakespearean refutation of some of the qualities we routinely value and observe in our hermeneutic and adjudicatory practices, whether out of a sense of duty or out of disciplinary cautiousness: the bland neutrality of universal rights, an infinite and sceptical relativism, a monolithic and literal equality, the logic of fair distribution, and the indecorum of love in the Kantian moral law of impartiality that has seeped into the very pores of liberal modernity. But violation and failure of justice are distinct, involving different agencies: this distinction is somewhat elided. For instance, poetic justice – which could be seen to be an aesthetic equivalent of ‘natural law’ - is violated by the play itself (as Dr. Johnson protested), but its relation to the moral and juridical failures by characters within the play-world is inverse, and its purpose is resolutely mimetic - effected through an ethically pointed harrowing of the tragic form: both its magnitude and its comforts. Schwartz lists of the concepts of justice that the play ‘[chronicles] the violation of’ - ‘distribution, retribution, restoration, and the kind of justice associated with natural law, positive law, the rule of the strong, virtue ethics, charity, equity, and *ordo amoris*’ (p. 39). But are these equivalents in the play’s juridical economy? Some of these are valid and valued but agents in the play fail to sustain them; others are flouted by the play itself and exposed to be the stuff of false comfort or piety. The play’s ‘unique vision of justice’, gleaned out of this wreckage, does not consistently reject ‘retribution’, for instance, quite in the same way as it does ‘distribution’. The ‘authentic love’ that Schwartz shows Lear discovering (p. 48) is comprehensive, complex and challenging, and very far from feel-good; it includes primal rage, and the pain that legitimises it. It even accommodates the impulse to avenge – the sentiment this book rightly shows *Hamlet* critiquing. Just as empathy must not be sentimentalised as emotional identification though it must accommodate ‘fellow-feeling’ - as Schwartz explores in a deeply interesting section on ‘the relation of feeling to justice’ - the ‘remedial’ impulse must not be solely identified with sympathy (p. 41): ‘remedy’ is as much a love-word as a plot-word and a revenge-word. Remember Duke Vincentio in *Measure for Measure* - ‘A remedy presents itself’ (3.1.198) – followed shortly by his speech on the kind of justice he relishes dealing in:

Craft against vice I must apply:  
With Angelo to-night shall lie  
His old betrothed but despised;  
So disguise shall, by the disguised,  
Pay with falsehood false exacting,  
And perform an old contracting. (3.2.277-82)[[4]](#footnote-4)

This smacks of phonetic revenge and comedic ordering – eye for eye and tooth for tooth – and anticipates his smug judicial assertion at the finale of the play: ‘Like doth quit like, and measure still for measure’ (5.1.411). This is exactly the calculus that Schwartz says Shakespeare rejects: no wonder this legally obsessed play is his last comedy before he returned to the form in his final tragicomic romances: by this time the genre had been transformed, having been filtered through the great tragedies. But *Lear* places the vengeful instinct in a context of savage pain – witness Lear’s fantasy of justice in the Quarto mock-trial (3.6.16-52), leading to an eviscerating impulse: ‘let them anatomise Regan and see what breeds about her heart’ (F, 3.6.33-4; Q, 3.6.70-71). But his vengefulness surely cannot be pinned down to the ‘onset of his madness’ (p. 112)? The repaired and restored Lear vows that anyone who tries to part him and Cordelia will be ‘[devoured]’ by the ‘good years’, ‘flesh and fell’, before he can make them weep – ‘We’ll see ’em starve first’ (F, 5.3.24);[[5]](#footnote-5) at the tenderest moment with the dead Cordelia, Lear declares, ‘I killed the slave that was a-hanging thee’ (F, 5.3.248; Q, 5.3.267). The Folio play comes out of a reaction to the sentimental providentialism of the old chronicle play of Leir, where piety pre-empts the psychic reality of unassimilable grief.[[6]](#footnote-6) But it is the Quarto that offers the alternative trial that Lear sets up on the heath, in a violent attempt to redress the world’s violation of equity; equity was by no means reserved for the ‘landed nobility’ as the book suggests (p. 76), but that only lends force to the play’s inset staging of a radical appellate jurisdiction organized by the dispossessed few. These optative visions of justice are not frail but fierce, and in the context they feel right, as responses to mad-making grief and loss – like Titus’ absurd laughter in T*itus Andronicus*. This is a play that does not only challenge the assumed indecorum of love, but also its decorum - not to dilute but to test it by these admixtures. It does not so much heal as it probes the wound, testing its resources. If these unassimilables of love were addressed head-on, they would not detract from Schwartz’s reading, but complicate it productively. The serpent coiled around the Genio is the uncanny other, both friend and foe; the old man Palermo is *hostis* – both host and enemy; like our unaccommodable feelings and resistant instincts. But the avoidance – perhaps unseeing - is itself curiously moving: a window, perhaps, on the author’s own dream of justice, and of the love that seeks it ‘unmixed with baser matter’, as Hamlet might say (*Hamlet*, 1.5.104). In a joyful, inventive and moving story-telling workshop in Palermo in September - *Stories in Transit V* – the story of the Genio was variously rewritten collectively by migrant teenagers, but the motto was taken out.[[7]](#footnote-7) But isn’t purity itself proved a fantasy by *Lear*, whether it pertains to feeling or form, both of which impact on judgment? Like Staretz Silouan, whom Gillian Rose quotes in her epigraph to *Love’s Work*, the play seems to dare us: ‘Keep your mind in hell, and despair not’.

Loving the enemy, however, might be a way out of Hell - not only personal but social chaos. The book offers a fresh reading of *Romeo and Juliet* as a parable of the political force of a love that is fully directed to the other, that can reframe the foe and embrace him, healing social rifts through its own ecstatic extremity. But a further idea is planted in this chapter, which resonates through the rest of the book: loving without evidence, and in excess of it (p. 55). This makes Juliet’s love sound like faith – the kind of faith that Richard Hooker calls ‘certainty of adherence’, defined against the ‘certainty of evidence’.[[8]](#footnote-8) The necessary disproportion of such an affect points the way to the heart of the fourth chapter on ‘The Economics of Love’, where the gift of love is shown to be assailed by the economics of reciprocity in *The Merchant of Venice*. This discussion opens up Shakespeare’s awareness of the deep vexation of contract which dominates social concepts of justice, and even of love; and of the dubiousness of a promise based not on trust but on law, drawing on authority rather than faith as its guarantor. Schwartz’s analysis of how the play pushes commensuration and measurability to a literalist parody in Shylock’s ‘bond’, and then to a further parody of literal interpretation in Portia’s legal revenge on him, taps right into the intersection between diverse theological and legal traditions. Her reflection on the price of reducing life and love to economic calculus, however, evokes moments of affective ambiguity as much as critical clarity: when Portia says to Bassanio that since he is ‘dear-bought’, she will ‘love [him] dear’ (3.2.313), the contractual language is at once a sign of vulnerability and manipulative strategy, as with Helena’s transactional economy in *All’s Well that Ends Well* – at once potent and poignant. Shakespeare understood the deep mischief of ‘dear’ – Bertram in that play swears in court that ‘if’ Helena ‘can make [him] know’ her improbable claims ‘clearly’, he ‘will love her dearly, ever, ever dearly’ (5.3.316-16). Bassanio’s vocabulary is indeed laced with commerce, as Schwartz points out (p. 80), but the double-entendres are contronymic and cut both ways: Portia is ‘a lady richly left’ – left enviably rich, as well as desolately abandoned to her riches. If this chapter’s readings were fully extended to the internal conflicts of what Theodore Leinwand calls ‘affective economies’, how might that inflect the notion of ‘price’, or indeed of ‘economic thinking’?[[9]](#footnote-9) Would the equation of Antonio’s love for Bassanio with Bassanio’s for Portia (p. 82) still hold? Antonio operates in two economies: he manages risk by calculation when he invests in trade – ‘[his] ventures are not in one bottom trusted’ – but in love, he practises a reckless plenitude and hazards all: ‘My purse, my person, my extremest means/Lie all unlocked to your occasions’ (1.1.42; 1.1.138-39). This love the play does not need to ‘long for’ (p. 84); it is available, but dissolved into abjection by the asymmetries of affect. Again, the binaries get blurred in an impure world.

Against the economics of ‘mutual benefit’, Schwartz posits not only the gratuity of grace but also the surplus of unconditional forgiveness in human affairs. The pitfalls of conditional forgiveness are shown also to be perils of proportion in the imagination of justice. But, as Jacques Derrida and Vladimir Jankelevitch are shown to have admitted, such radically free forgiveness is almost an impossible condition for humans. In a surprising and unconventional move, Schwartz diverges from these thinkers in her fifth chapter (‘The Forgiveness of Love’) to suggest that conditional forgiveness may be the precise agent for reconciling unconditional love with the *work* of reparative justice. And here is the further edge to her advocacy of an economics of forgiveness after all, but one that is defined and legitimised by relationality: the productiveness of rebuke, rather than retribution, as an agent of restoration. Levinas meets Leviticus in her striking reading of *Hamlet* in terms of rebuke as a threshold of recognition, acknowledgement and communication, where justice stirs, and ‘comes into being’ (p. 97). The spectre of an edgeless, soft-centred love is vanquished. The closet scene is analysed as Hamlet’s shriving of Gertrude in an act of vigilance, of restorative love watching over justice. Expanding out from her reading of Ro*meo and Juliet*, she brings social justice in dialogue with a closer encounter – that between offender and victim. The Shakespearean theatre is shown to offer the possibility of attunement to the other as a basis for forgiveness which exceeds the offence, but rebuke ensures responsibility in responding to the unknowable other. As moral recognition is cut loose from factual knowledge, does the twinning of violence and redress raise further questions about the ethics of response vis-à-vis its epistemic content? Joshua Oppenheimer’s film, *The Look of Silence* (2014), posits the silent gaze rather than ‘[speaking] daggers’ as its moral tool as it follows optician Adi’s face-to-face meetings with the killers of his brother in the Indonesian genocide of 1955-56 (*Hamlet,* 3.2.396); as he looks his patients in the eye, care quickens into confrontation, and confrontation into a glimmer of redemption, as words fall away. How do articulate rebuke and resonant silence interact in Shakespeare? Does the resurrected Hermione’s silence to her husband, or Virgilia’s to Coriolanus, or Isabella’s to the Duke’s proposal, negotiate the dynamic between rebuke, recognition and absolution? This chapter’s unpacking of the unavoidable temporality of forgiveness – its sequential position – in relation to remorse and apology in Christian as well as Judaic traditions is curiously suggestive for the drama of forgiveness not only in life but in art. It raises fresh questions, for example, about what counts as repentance in post-Reformation culture: one wants to ask why Marlowe’s Dr. Faustus is not forgiven, and what that has to do with the foregrounded generic character of the play – a ‘Tragedy’. It complicates the lack of divine forgiveness of the transgressive scholar – so many times on the brink of formal contrition in the play, and yet so often slipping back – in the light of the Thomist idea that forgiveness could almost precede and prompt remorse. In a purely Shakespearean context, Schwartz connects the ‘time of narrative’ to the *process* of reparation. This rings true – if a live Hermione had been sprung on Leontes as Hero is on Claudio in *Much Ado about Nothing*, almost instantly after the injury, the recognition would have lacked authenticity, the agents would have lacked absorption and readiness. But prolongation, held up in the book as ‘the friend … of injury’ (pp. 101-03), can also be a space for perverse retardation – whether either Leontes or Hermione needed sixteen years is questionable, but the aesthetic agenda of the tragicomic plot certainly did, for its own impact. Joseph’s elaborate and long tests of his errant brothers, a narrative fascinatingly used here, is full of false trials, like Edgar’s trial of his already grief-crazed and freshly blind father on Dover Cliff. Prospero does indeed create the time for his ‘victimisers’ to ‘experience remorse’: but this is also the retardation that ensures productive wonder. The analysis brings up the question of the relation between generic affiliations and judicial paradigms, and what love has got to do with it.

These questions are not to doubt the learning, ardor and commitment of this book, but to indicate the scope and resonance of its lucid but compressed argument, both in terms of Shakespeare’s works, and of early modern literature; and yes, perhaps a longing to see these pregnant ideas tested out yet more strenuously, more extensively and over rougher terrain. That longing is a testimony to the provocative resonance of *Loving Justice, Living Shakespeare* against a progressively emaciated and utilitarian idea of justice. This is an important, urgent and humane book which affirms the theatre’s role as an alternative jurisdiction to political thought and legal practice or discourse. It should be of immense interest to historians of literature, theology and the law, as well as to philosophers of ethics.

\*\*\*

If questions of genre are implicit and somewhat understated in Schwartz’s book, they are at the heart of Marissa Greenberg’s *Metropolitan Tragedy: Genre, Justice and the City in Early Modern England*. Through a set of astute, sprightly, historically informed and theoretically adventurous close readings of selected judicial plays in relation to their urban context, Greenberg argues that London in its full, fluid, vital complexity did not only provide material for city comedy but for a specific kind of tragedy – one that was shaped by metropolitan justice and its sense of place, and which entwined performance and punishment through urban placement. The chapters focus on an unusual, engaging and cannily identified range of dramatic subgenres: domestic tragedy, revenge tragedy, ‘tyrant tragedy’ in Stuart England, and what Milton called ‘that sort of Dramatic Poem which is call’d Tragedy’, in the shape of Milton’s *Samson Agonistes*. The book attempts to unearth the historically available responses to tragedy by drawing on an impressive range of historical sources, both dramatic, and non-dramatic – including crime reports, political pamphlets, religious tracts, plays and accounts of the Great Fire - and suggestively brings into dialogue tragedy as lived experience and tragedy as genre. In doing so, it contributes fresh insights to the understanding of London literature in relation to urban geography, and succeeds in establishing its larger claim about ‘the imbrication of genre and experience’ (p. 17). But the place of the judiciary in this mapping is less clear in some chapters and analyses than in others.

Domestic tragedy, in particular, bears out Greenberg’s thesis about the centrality of urban sensibility and experience to theatrical tragedy; because this genre is heavily invested in contemporary legal events, the link between the juridical, the theatrical and the metropolitan are clearly visible and productive. One need only think of an iconic scene in the anonymous 1590s play based on a contemporary scandal, *A Warning for Fair Women*, where Anne Sanders, city merchant George Saunders’s wife, sits at the threshold of her marital home when she encounters wealthy Captain George Browne, her prospective seducer and murderer of her husband: what ensues is adultery, murder, trial and execution. Various urban and often mercantile occupations impinge on the lives, crimes and fates of the protagonists – from palmistry to tailoring, from judging to punishing to shriving. This is one of the plays Greenberg addresses, and it serves her well in providing a perfect example of the city acting as a space where ‘genre and justice’ overlap’ (p. 10). It is a generically self-aware play which begins with the figure of ‘Tragedie’, declaring: ‘My Sceane is London, native and your owne’ (l. 95) - thus playing to understood relations and assumed familiarities. The entwining of performance and punishment is engagingly explored in the first chapter, which focuses on this play together with *Two Lamentable Tragedies* to establish the ‘fantasy of the metropolis as an effective force of justice’ (p. 42) – whether through a thinly disguising Italian location or a vividly localized London neighbourhood such as Shooters Hill.

The second chapter offers a fascinating counter-model for the traditional narrative of *translatio imperii* for the period’s Roman plays, by reading *Titus Andronicus* as an example of revenge tragedy’s project of a *translatio metropolitae* by means of a return to Rome. This, it argues, becomes evident ‘when we shift the object of study from textual citation to embodied performance’ (p. 48). While *polis* in ‘the ancient world’ (p. 48) did not connote ‘an urban setting’ or necessarily (or even often) concern ‘urban issues’, as assumed by this book (pp. 53; 108-09), but primarily carried the sense of a citizen state,[[10]](#footnote-10) the interpretation of the violent repetition of revenge as an enactment of ‘the movements of urban life, both formal ceremony and improvised activity’, is provocative (p. 55). The suggestion that this makes it possible for law and order return to the city through the experience of performance is welcome and salutary (given the book’s overall association of justice with catastrophe or punishment), though its precise relation to the larger argument connecting law with the ‘tragic returns’ of revenge (p. 49) could have been clearer. The textual and the physical, the thematic and the performative, are in tense and fertile dialogue in the play: perhaps it is time to go beyond a ‘shift’ to a syncretic approach which registers and makes sense of their dynamic. This chapter vivifies the civic pageantry and tragic violence of Shakespeare’s London, but it does so at a price that the play neither pays nor owes; for *Titus* combines the specificities of ‘Rome’ as imagined by the early moderns with the particularities of space and affect in London in the 1590s. Besides, Lavinia’s rape and Bassianus’ murder both take place in the ‘unfrequented plots’ (at once literary and geographical) of ‘vast and gloomy woods’, and are already acts of revenge (at once poetic and political); witness Titus’ lament as the arm-less Lavinia struggles to inscribe her fate in sand by ‘quoting’ with stumps her nephew’s copy of *The Metamorphoses*: ‘(O, had we never, never hunted there!),/Pattern’d by that the poet here describes,/By nature made for murthers and for rapes’ (4.1.53; 2.1.115; 4.1.50; 56-8).[[11]](#footnote-11) Such entwinements - of nature and nurture, city and forest, savage and crafted, text and body - stretch the claim that in this play ‘the intersection of the form of revenge tragedy and the performance dynamics generated onstage takes place in an explicitly and insistently urban setting’ (p. 53): the return to the city motif here functions differently from, say, the recursive movements of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, or even *The Tempest*. ‘Shakespeare’s representations of the spaces and activities of the *polis* … render Rome a correlative to London’ (p. 69) is a claim that is at once useful and too neat; Stow and Ovid jostle with each other in the textual and theatrical economies of this play; the humanist school-room is as ‘present’ as a location here as London Bridge with its display of traitors’ heads. The meditation on ‘motion and emotions’, meanwhile, indicates what the book does at its best, recovering available responses suggested, shaped and made recognisable by the theatre (pp. 62-3).

Tragic tyranny and tyrant tragedy are the protagonists of the third chapter, which focuses on Philip Massinger’s *The Roman Actor* (performed 1626, published 1629) to move forward into the Caroline theatre and Stuart London. Greenberg suggests that ‘defences of the stage present theatrical tragedy … as a source of “actual” tragedy in the metropolis (p. 77), and proceeds to examine Massinger’s representation of tragedy and tyranny. She reads the toppling of Emperor Domitian, his transition ‘from a figure for catharsis to its object’ (p. 78), as a refiguring of the execution of Charles I as a scathing critique of tragedy’s own tyranny over the metropolis: an authority deployed to achieve the ameliorative ends of genre. This chapter is an effective reconsideration of the ‘flaw in the theory of tragedy in early modern England’ (p. 78) through the theatre’s critical engagement with it.

In the intriguing and original final chapter, Greenberg attends to poetic form in order to identify ‘auricular failure’ as the tool through which Milton comments the loss of measure in material, moral and civic life in *Samson Agonistes*. The ‘cacophony of a ruined metropolis’ is shown to provide ‘a sense of tragic *mis*measure’ to explores urban catastrophe (p. 124). The gesture towards Milton’s Greek inheritance is less persuasive than the lively connection with the ‘rough music’ of London, though a more informed appreciation of Milton’s engagement with Greek texts, and the texts that mediated and shaped this legacy for the early moderns, could have brought alive the dialogue between the local habitation and the universal elements of the tragic genre.[[12]](#footnote-12) But the reading of Samson’s razing of the temple is read as an analogy of the Great Fire of 1666, with Gaza being a figure for London, is deftly done, and lends force to the proposal that this dramatic poem demands ‘a spatially local reading’, attuned to sensory experience, to unpack the resonances of ‘the discourse of tragedy in the metropolis’ (p. 137).

The challenge this book sets itself is to identify a productive intersection between law, the tragic genre, and London as a metropolis. It is the relation between its three constitutive elements that seems at times less than organic. The centrality of disciplinary sites such as The Tower of London to the status of London as a royal chamber, and their imaginative and actual overlap with sites of civic pageantry, are well argued. But ‘places of justice in early modern London’ (p. 15) were far more various than places of punishment might suggest: these included not only gallows and scaffolds but Westminster, the Inns of Court, Inns of Chancery, the legal areas of London, prisons, taverns, and indeed even the household – as domestic tragedies such as Heywood’s *A Woman Killed with Kindness* shows, the house can become a site of both transgression and punishment, as well as a ground-plot for related judicial operations such as surveillance, detection and evidence-collection. The self-policing metropolis – the focus of the book’s argument – is only separated porously from the self-policing household, as the location of Anne Sanders’s encounter with temptation on the threshold between home and city shows. Theatrical culture defines ‘law’ – and indeed ‘justice’ - in terms that are significantly less narrow than this book’s parameters might suggest. This makes the selection of texts look less than inevitable: why, when Heywood’s *An Apology for Actors* is rightly and repeatedly used in exploring early modern tragic theory, is his *Woman Killed* – arguably one of the best known domestic tragedies of the period, and one centrally concerned with adjudication - not addressed? Its brand of home-grownness has to do with domestic oeconomy, the social geography of the household, a crime and a punishment located in a country house and a ‘manor seven mile off’ (scene xiii, 166), and the intangibles of a very English class-system spanning town and country, rather than with ‘metropolitan catastrophe’ (p. 46), urban knowingness or the conflicts and changes of London society or topography.[[13]](#footnote-13) Symptomatic is a statement such as this, comparing a domestic tragedy and a tract on acting by possibly the most famous author of a domestic tragedy, bringing together unlikes and omitting the obvious comparison: ‘Significantly, both *A Warning for Fair Women* and Heywood’s *An Apology for Actors* take London as the explicit or implicit venue for theatrical tragedy’ (p. 86). The paragraph claims as much as concedes that though the well-known example of tragic efficacy, in *Apology*, of the woman of Lyn having her conscience caught by the ‘mousetrap’ of a play is located ‘in Lynn, a provincial town in Norfolk’, ‘yet … London remains the point of reference for Heywood’s tribute to the theatre as a definitive institution of the metropolis’ (pp. 86-7). Perhaps what might have made it possible to avoid such selection and stretching is an adjustment of terminology and parameters.

Justice has its own range of genres, too, and calls for a wider understanding, if only to sharpen the focus on the specific affiliations that law shares with tragedy. The law was not just an agent of discipline and tyranny but also resolved conflicts, orchestrated solutions and sometimes reconciled adversaries. Its comedic telos is both ironized and enacted in the drama of the time; it is both the object of satire and of play, and a principle of emplotment variously adopted, adapted and assailed: from Lording Barry’s romp of a play, *Law Tricks*, to Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure*, the genres of law are as plural as the genres of drama; comedy-as-genre provided as much of a framework by which ‘writers, readers, and playgoers might register and respond to’ the experiences of crime and punishment, as ‘tragedy-as-genre’ is said to do (p. 10). While this book’s focus on tragedy is partly meant to be corrective of the current critical orthodoxy which is perhaps partial to city-comedy as the genre that is recognised as being manifestly urban, the book’s own thesis would have gained in nuance if the wider generic context and scope of legal action and judicial structures of thinking had been accommodated. Justice also has its variety of locales: while legal London was undoubtedly a productive hub for cultural artefacts emerging from, and addressing it, the law travelled to other parts of the country, in assize courts held in town-halls and market-places, not to say local church courts. Thomas Arden was very much a Kent man and those accused of his murder were indicted and arraigned in the Faversham Abbey Hall. Despite the claim of Chapter 1 (in relation to *Warning*), that the precision of drama’s locating of the *revelation* of crime in London, irrespective of the *site* of its commission, makes domestic tragedies metropolitan, *Arden* *of Faversham* turns a middle class house in Kent into the labyrinthine site of both the crime and its discovery.It is the Faversham Borough Records Archive that holds the bulk of the legal documentation from the murder trial, as Patricia Hyde’s monumental book has detailed.[[14]](#footnote-14) The ‘court’ itself, while increasingly centralised, was still also a metaphor and a moveable feast, as legal historian John Baker has demonstrated.[[15]](#footnote-15) The early modern theatre had an intuitive understanding of this, and of the dangers of over-placing justice.

The larger aim of the book is to relocate tragedy ‘in its rightful place as an urban genre’, deriving its tragic energies from the metropolis in transition (5). While the author is aware of the ‘polysemy’ of her two main terms – ‘metropolis’ and ‘tragedy’ (p. 6) - this radical claim for ‘early modern English tragedy’ seems sweeping (p. 6): there are many tragedies which feature urban settings that are incidental rather than constitutive, and many others that are not set in the metropolis – whether it is London or London in disguise, and are not about metropolitan crises and upheavals: think *Macbeth*. On a smaller scale, the claim that domestic tragedy takes the metropolis as its scene does not seem consistently tenable either: think *Arden*. On the latter, the claim that though the murder happens in Faversham, several attempts are made on Arden’s life on the route between London and Faversham, that London is really not that far from Faversham, and that therefore this is really a London play (p. 36), seems strained, and does injustice to the book’s considerable research and its bold readings. That theatrical tragedy is ‘productive of the metropolis’ (6) is an interesting but distinct claim, and the seams between these related arguments is sometimes slippery, like the definitions of what Greenberg repeatedly and emphatically identifies her ‘eponymous terms’. One would have liked a fuller exploration of the polysemy too. For instance, the suggestion that ‘for scholars of urban geography, history and literature, *metropolitan* and its cognate *metropolis* refer to the physical *metre*, or measurement, of the *polis* as a built environment’ is novel and fascinating. But given that the etymology of *metro* in the word goes back to Greek *mētēr*, meaning ‘mother’ (as opposed to Greek *metron* = measure), it would have been interesting to know the basis of this suggestion, and how it relates to the more familiar and well-traced sense of the *metropolis* as a mother-state or founding citizen-state. Passing suggestions such as these are tantalising, but there are missed opportunities, especially where such hints are grounded but unfamiliar. The strongest parts of the book, for this reader at least, are not so much the grand narratives as the intricate, contextualized readings of particular texts – ranging from obvious suspects such as *A Warning for Fair Women* to surprising ones such as Milton’s *Samson Agonistes*. But the intuition that the experiences of urban crime, historical change, suffering and loss found a distinctive tragic focus, and that the drama of justice and punishment had a shaping power over the dramatic representation of these phenomena, is provocative, and argued with verve and subtlety. This study restores to visibility a form – judicial metropolitan tragedy – which has been somewhat eclipsed in critical history by our attention to the form that took over – city comedy. Local vexations notwithstanding, this is a valuable and provocative study at the generative crossroads between cultural practice and literary form.

1. Gillian Rose, *Paradiso* (Menard Press: London, 1999), p. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Gillian Rose, *Love’s Work* (NYRB Books: New York, 2011, first published 1995), p. 105. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Sir Thomas More*, addition by Hand D, credibly ascribed to Shakespeare. Cf. Alfred Pollard, *Shakespeare’s Hand in the Play of Sir Thomas More* (1923). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. All references to Shakespeare’s works are to *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. by G.

   Blakemore Evans, (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997, 2nd edn.; first published 1974), unless otherwise specified. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Note the Folio’s alteration of the Quarto’s more pious thought, ‘the good shall devour them…’ (5.3.24). All references to *King Lear* are to *King Lear: A Parallel Text Edition*, ed. by René Weis (Longman: Harlow, 1993). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *The True Chronicle History of King Leir* (London, 1605) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. This was part of a project created by Marina Warner; the Palermo workshops were co-organized with Valentina Castagna and in partnership with the Museo delle Marionette of Palermo:

   https://www.museodellemarionette.it/index.php?option=com\_content&view=article&id=1143&catid=90&Itemid=822&lang=en [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Richard Hooker, ‘Of the Certainty and Perpetuity of Faith in the Elect,’ sermon preached in 1585, but published in 1612, in ‘A Learned and Comfortable Sermon Of the Certainty and Perpetuity of Faith in the Elect. Especially of the Prophet Habakkuk’s Faith’, in *Tractates and Sermons*. *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker: Books 1-*5, Gen. ed. W. Speed Hill, Vol. 5. ed. Laetitia Yeandle (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 69–82 **(71).** [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Theodore Leinwand, *Theatre, Finance and Society in Early Modern England* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1999), ‘Introduction’, pp. 1-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. There is an established body of work on this, mainly in classics. For a start, see Paul Cartledge, *Democracy: A Life* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2016), esp. pp. 15, 37-9, 316, for what is possibly the fullest study of the trajectory of the word *polis*. As Cartledge demonstrates, translating it as ‘city’, or even ‘city-state’, is potentially misleading: ‘citizens were the *polis*, a notion reflected in the ancient political terminology’. Hence his warning against the ‘unwanted anachronistic associations of “city”’ (pp. 37-8). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. ‘Quote’ could mean both ‘to mark’, and to ‘refer to’ – bringing together Lavinia’s physical use of Ovid, and Shakespeare’s literary act of allusion. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The question of what associations Greek tragedy brought along with it to the Renaissance has been the subject of a great deal of recent probing. See, e.g., Tania Demetriou and Tanya Pollard, eds, *Milton, Drama and Greek Texts* (Routledge: London, 2017), a book that came out after *Metropolitan Tragedy*, but is instructive on earlier studies as well as sources. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Quotations refer to Thomas Heywood, *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, ed. Brian Scobie (New Mermaids: London, 1985; 1991 reprint). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Patricia Hyde, *Thomas Arden in Faversham: The Man Behind the Myth* (The Faversham Society: Faversham, 1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. J.H. Baker, ‘The Changing Concept of a Court’, in J,H. Baker, *The Legal profession and the Common Law*  (The Hambledon Press: London, 1986), pp. 153-69. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)