too. Indeed, La Vopa frames Thomas as a fence-straddler of sorts, not only in regards to masculine sensibility, but also in relation to women's intellectualism. Such a strategy had its critics. Denis Diderot dismissed Thomas's work in "On Women" (1772), arguing Thomas's lack of rigorous sexual passion contributes to a misunderstanding of women's abilities. Thus, Diderot adopted a "clinical voice," La Vopa claims, to connect poetical metaphors of the mind with medical frameworks of the body. This medico-poetic language enabled Diderot to rationalize women's imaginations as "potentially anarchic … . fantas[ies]" tied to hysterical systems, while men are capable of a poetical-scientific form of imagination through which they can grapple with abstract thought as they concretize their genius (260). La Vopa ends with Louise D'Épinay's playful work, suggesting that she refashioned a "gender-neutral" vision of reason that may trouble contemporary feminists, but that registered initially as progressive (297).

The organization of the book underscores the diverse audience La Vopa essays to engage, from gender studies scholars to historians and literary critics, across the English Channel and time periods. La Vopa's greatest strength lies in his deft demonstration of how an interdisciplinary reexamination of this archive is much overdue in eighteenth-century studies. I am not as certain that scholars of gender studies will find the study as impactful. As La Vopa hints himself, some feminist scholars may be resistant to his work, specifically his claim that feminism has dulled its edge, "losing its purposefulness as a political movement" (5). La Vopa cites concern as to "whether feminist constructionism can accomplish its purpose if it continues to use the categories 'men' and 'women'" (6). But this focus seems dated, while comments regarding feminism as a political movement, though published in 2017, already struggle to hold against the realities of our present and most recent histories. Indeed, a quick glance at the bibliography reveals that a majority of La Vopa's feminist citations stem from the 1980s and 1990s. While La Vopa nods briefly to more intersectional scholarship (such as postcolonialism), he decries much of its application to eighteenth-century history as an "abuse," claiming especially that he finds the work of "some feminist literary scholars … woefully ignorant," though he does not cite which studies he finds objectionable, or offer concrete evidence (9). Certain readers may find these claims sitting uncomfortably within the book's touted critical framework, but the study may yet appeal to readers looking to enter this charged methodological debate.

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Rhodri Lewis. *Hamlet and the Vision of Darkness*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017. Pp. 392. $39.95 (cloth).
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In *Hamlet and the Vision of Darkness*, Rhodri Lewis argues that Shakespeare's most famous play should be understood as a violent repudiation of practically every tenet of Renaissance humanism. Aristotle, Cicero, Boethius, Erasmus, and many others, Lewis contends, are permitted to haunt the words spoken in Shakespeare's Denmark only so that the ghosts of these thinkers can finally be laid to rest once and for all. Hamlet himself is presented as a bricolage of this intellectual hall of fame, whose befuddled articulations of conventional wisdoms work precisely to lay bare the toxic nonsensicality and ultimate futility of the mainstream of sixteenth-century intelligence. The author of *Hamlet* is, then, for Lewis, a "boldly contrarian" affirmer of dramatic poetry's ability to subvert "the fictions and artifices through which humankind seeks to make sense of itself," fictions that attempt to conceal a humanity that is inherently bestial, selfish, clueless, and anti-humanist (303). It is an original take on what must be the most written-about play in literary critical history, and the result is an erudite yet absorbing book that is as refreshingly unwilling to patronize the possibilities of Shakespeare's learning as it is willing to uphold the status of his creative genius.

Books entirely devoted to *Hamlet* have become something of their own mini-genre. The most famous are probably Stephen Greenblatt's *Hamlet in Purgatory* (2001) and Margreta de Grazia's *Hamlet without Hamlet* (2007). It is the latter book that Lewis chooses to pit his own against, titling his introduction "Hamlet within *Hamlet*." Like de Grazia, Lewis wishes to strip away from *Hamlet* criticism the ahistorical sentimentality that began with the Romantics; but unlike her, he does not believe such a move necessitates any marginalization of the play's protagonist: "*Hamlet* can be read as a profound meditation on the nature of human individuality without relying on conceptual frameworks drawn from the eighteenth, nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries" (5–6). Lewis's methodology is a seemingly orthodox historicist one, but it is exercised on a play which he implies has not been historicized enough, or, at least, not historicized in the right way. Whereas de Grazia's contextual markers were political and dynastic ones, Lewis's are the familiar territory of the intellectual historian: "the textual contours of the psychological, rhetorical, and moral-political theorizing that lay at the heart of sixteenth-century humanism" (6). The acuity and intricacy with which Lewis navigates these textual contours sometimes means that questions of theatricality and dramaturgy have to be put on the back burner, but, throughout, Lewis manages to successfully bring into collision historical rigor with critical insight.

Lewis organizes the main body of the book into two parts: "Chapters 1 and 2 lay the foundations on which chapters 3 to 5 build" (10). In chapter 1 he locates *Hamlet* within the discursive legacy of Cicero's *De officiis*. Cicero's connection between self-knowledge and acting —in which he states how human beings should, through true knowledge of their own selves, pick the most appropriate roles, just as actors do—is made paradigmatic of humanist moral-philosophical thinking on identity, and its variations are traced through figures as disparate as Hobbes, Montaigne, Sidney, and Tacitus. The latter three of these figures afford Lewis the opportunity to imply how the philosophical content he is explaining might have influenced Shakespeare directly, and moments from *Hamlet* permeate throughout the chapter to provide glimpses of what is to come in more detail later on.

Chapter 2 is the book's longest, and the premise here initially jars with what has come before. Here, Lewis assesses how *Hamlet* utilizes "the vocabulary and assumptions of hunting, fowling, falconry, and fishing" (43). Even if the chapter is slow to reveal its place within the book's broader argumentative framework, the journey through it is wonderfully absorbing. Lewis zooms in to seemingly unremarkable aspects of *Hamlet*'s language ("couple," "catch," "unkennel") and unpacks them in meticulous detail to show how they are part of a semantic field which pervades the play's psychological world. His point is that Shakespeare's Denmark is appetitive, cynegetic, and the antithesis of Cicero's moral-political vision.

Hostile accounts of Hamlet's character are nothing new (see, for instance, L. C. Knights' 1961 *An Approach to Hamlet*, with which Lewis' book has much in common), but the final three chapters of *Hamlet and the Vision of Darkness* present what must be the most rigorous and sustained attack to date. Using as a structuring principle Francis Bacon's division of human understanding into memory, imagination, and reason, Lewis subtitles these chapters "Hamlet as Historian," "Hamlet as Poet," and "Hamlet as Philosopher," only to demonstrate systematically how Hamlet is a laughably mediocre version of all three: he remembers the past as he wants to, with disregard for historical truth; his taste in poetry is outdated, and his own efforts are nonsensical; his private reflectiveness is no more than a collection of regurgitated maxims. This may sound overly provocative, contrarian even, and perhaps it is, but it is also convincing. As with the rest of the book, Lewis' exegesis here is underpinned by a wealth of textual surroundings, and it succeeds most when it offers illuminating examples of where in the intellectual-historical canon Shakespeare might have found some inspiration. Although at times the reader might feel that Lewis' attack on Hamlet is also an attack on *Hamlet*, the exact opposite is in fact true: Hamlet, Lewis wants to suggest, is *designedly* mediocre, because Shakespeare's target is "not just Hamlet," but also Cicero, Boethius, and "the conventions of humanism in the philosophical and religious round" (302–3). One might ask Lewis what happens to those audiences of *Hamlet* who do not share in Shakespeare's supposed learning, but it is a question, like others that might arise, that is ultimately eclipsed by Lewis's compelling vision of the play's dark world.

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Paula McDowell. *The Invention of the Oral: Print Commerce and Fugitive Voices in Eighteenth-Century Britain*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017. Pp. 368. $45 (cloth).
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In *The Invention of the Oral*, Paula McDowell performs close reading of literary works (both well-known and obscure) from the long eighteenth century, searching for the genesis of the modern understanding of "oral culture" (3). The historic English understanding of oral tradition had been that it was unreliable, uninformed, and likely dangerous. McDowell explains that it was understood in large part as a Roman Catholic religious discourse. By the late seventeenth century in the Protestant kingdom of England, Catholicism was associated with tyranny, savagery, and ignorance. Oral tradition was additionally coupled with so-called othered primitive societies: as McDowell writes, "without letters" (some ancient, others recently discovered), as well as other uncontrollable sectors of humanity, most notoriously "transgressively" oral women (33, 194). Information that originated and circulated orally was no more reliable than the old wives' tales propagated by women. In a society with not only a religious confession but also a legal system based on the oral as much as on the written, the uncharted media shift in which it found itself during the time period McDowell considers fostered fear and anxiety. McDowell daylights these tensions, brilliantly revealing their synergy.

McDowell analyzes print through both text and images. She opens the book with a nuanced dissection of William Hogarth's 1751 engraving, *Beer Street*, prominently featuring Billingsgate fishwives, avatars of oral culture, reading and singing a printed ballad about the source of their wares. In the background, a butcher reads a newspaper. For McDowell, this mundane scene is actually extraordinary. Hogarth depicted the very conjunction of modern print and oral tradition where the genteel intellectual culture based on books intersected the most common, vulgar, ignorant speech. An unintended consequence of this satirical image is a portrayal of the very nexus of print's transforming power in understanding, indeed inventing, oral culture. As the engraving shows, members of the common laboring class interacted not only via the oral, but also through print. Just as the fishwives occupied a liminal space both inside and outside the fishing industry, necessary yet despised, so too they inhabited a congruent space in popular culture, pervasive yet denigrated, spanning modes of both commerce and dissemination.

McDowell traces this transformation of the negative oral stereotype into a productive oral discourse through the agency of printed works debating and challenging orality. She unpacks the works of numerous authors (among them John Milton, Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift, John Henley, and Samuel Johnson); genres (such as poetry, novels, satire, news, and folklore);