Margaret Loftus Ranald, *Shakespeare & His Social Context: Essays in Osmotic Knowledge and Literary Interpretation*. New York: AMS Press, 1987. Pp. 288.

Shakespeare & His Social Context, by Margaret Ranald, reproduces her articles, published over some twenty-five years, surveying Shakespeare's reliance on a "shared background of knowledge and assumptions" hypothetically typical of his day (xi). This osmotic knowledge includes the information, the moral and behavioral assumptions, and the shared identity and religion of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. To expose this cultural frame of reference, Ranald draws on semiotics, matrimonial law, precepts of feminine behavior, manners and mores, ritual, the rules of siege warfare, and the laws of chivalry.

The book is organized in four parts: The Pathway into Marriage; The Way of Wifely Behavior; Women Without Power; and Men Who Lose Power. The first and largest part surveys the comedies, identifying *All's Well* as a precursor to the late romances. Part Two examines *Errors*, *Shrew*, and "The Indiscretions of Desdemona," linking these comedies and *Othello* through socially-perceived roles for women in wooing, wedding, and wifely behavior. Part Three allies Lucrece and "three historical ladies," Ranald's label for representative stages in female life: maid, wife, and widow. Part Four engages the dichotomy of masculine power and feminine powerlessness in an examination of *Richard II* and *Macbeth*, focussing on the inverted ritual in the degradation of Richard and the divestiture in *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Timon of Athens*, and *Henry VIII*.

Part I reveals Shakespeare's dependence on the fundamental impediments to marriage in Elizabethan law and custom. Though she denies him "revolutionary credentials," Ranald concludes that Shakespeare's comedies indicate "his appreciation of women as teachers of love, as partners in marriage, and above all as friendly equals and companions" (239). In the histories and tragedies, however, she affirms that Shakespeare's feminine characters revert to more traditional roles to become systemic victims of masculine power. Clothed in words, Shakespeare's comic heroines stand at the moral centre of the action. Conversely, women in the tragedies, and those male figures construed as essentially feminine, resort to words as expression and confirmation of their frustration and powerlessness.

"The education of young men into love-worthiness," Ranald observes, "is a pervasive theme of Shakespeare's comedies" (51). Even in *The Two Gentlemen* Ranald finds Julia at the moral centre of the action, for she functions as "expositor, commentator, servant, go-between and above all else as educator" (56). In *Merchant*, she identifies Portia similarly as the "moral, educative centre of the play" (61), whose dual mission is to save Antonio from death while defining the limits of friendship and love. Increasingly, Ranald finds Shakespeare interprets marriage as a basis for mutuality, tolerance, and reciprocity.

In Part Two, Ranald examines social convention in *Errors*, arguing that Shakespeare establishes his own pattern for marriage comedies: a matrimonial relationship is

challenged by an independent woman. The woman usually accommodates her outward conduct to that of the man, but she shows such freedom of spirit that roles and attitudes are redefined in a marriage evolving toward mutuality and companionship. As expected, *The Shrew* exemplifies the formula. In it, Ranald finds an amalgam of two approaches to taming: falconry and the conduct books of Elizabethan England.

Next, Ranald reminds us that *Othello's* theme of love and marriage is traditionally the province of comedy, and the mistaken cuckold, the jealous husband, and the January-May marriage belong to farce rather than Italianate revenge tragedy (135). Ranald then assesses Desdemona's conduct against the behavior of the Elizabethan ideal woman. Like the comic heroines preceding her, she demonstrates self-confidence and enterprise, qualities counter to the traditional Elizabethan code of ideal feminine behavior. Ranald argues that an understanding of Elizabethan conventions of female behavior indicates Desdemona's partial responsibility for the tragic resolution.

In Part Three, Ranald examines the vocabulary and practices of siege warfare in *The Rape of Lucrece* where Lucrece is a citadel of honor, both her own and her husband's. Her defence of the citadel is based, Ranald finds, on legal and quasi-legal imperatives: "knighthood and gentility, the obligation of office, the laws of morality, holy human law, and matrimonial law" (164). Lucrece's description of Troy acts as a paradigm of the action, "pulling together the central concepts of rape, treachery, siege, and the helplessness of women in a world of masculine power" (168). This reading enables Ranald to introduce three of Shakespeare's historical feminine characters: Margaret of Anjou, Constance of Brittany, and Katherine of Aragon. In plays portraying men as the action principle and women as passive, nurturing and docile, each woman is victimized by a masculine drive to power. Shakespeare portrays cruel Margaret as a violation of stereo-typical femininity, Constance as a maternal figure of lamentation and Katherine as a sacrifice for the future of a greater England.

In Part Four, "The Degradation of Richard II," Ranald demonstrates that Shakespeare draws on rituals of chivalric, military, and ecclesiastical degradation for the inverted rite of Richard's discoronation (192). She finds a counterpart to Richard's ritual degradation in at least four other Shakespearean plays, most notably *Lear*, where the theme of stripping encompasses both divestiture and development of self-knowledge. Ranald identifies similar degradation in *Timon*, where, reduced to the lowest quality of existence, Timon reaches a "nihilistic conclusion in the centre of his own private hell" (230). While the significance of clothing imagery in *Macbeth* has long been recognized, Ranald finds in it an index of Macbeth's moral state, and determines that clothing and unclothing form a clearly-defined pattern through which major characters undergo a process of reduction.

As a source of information about English social law and chivalric and ecclesiastical ceremony, *Shakespeare & His Social Context* is an invaluable reference. Moreover, as a moderate examination of marital practices, social attitudes, and the role of women in Shakespeare's drama, it represents the best of recent feminine scholarship. In readable, attractive prose, Ranald explicates the arcane wordings of

Elizabethan law, courtesy and behavior handbooks, and fine distinctions between professional terms. Unfortunately, her coordination of articles written over decades is occasionally arbitrary, as Ranald struggles to integrate materials as diverse as imagery in tragedy, "plaints" in *Lucrece*, and the nature of powerlessness. Inevitably, an imbalance occurs, for Part One occupies almost half the text, moving eclectically through the comedies, especially the lyrical. Part Two, in returning to beginnings and examining *Errors* and *The Shrew*, is reminiscent of a flash-back. *Lucrece* and *Desdemona* share similarities, to be sure, but there is a giant step for woman between *The Rape of Lucrece* and *Othello*. The fourth part, a catch-all for men who lose power, argues strenuously for analogy between loss of power by men and the contemporary powerlessness of women but seems basically an add-on rather than a completion. Occasionally, too, "osmotic knowledge" becomes simply a convenient rationalization for feminist thematics without a contemporary political agenda. At other times, it relies unrealistically on the hypothetical understanding of the average Elizabethan.

Ranald's collection rewards close study, however, if only for Part One, for her rehabilitation of *All's Well* and *Lucrece*, and for her examination of representative women and the degradation of men without power. Supporting generally-accepted moderate interpretations of Shakespeare's plays, *Shakespeare & His Social Context* demonstrates the indispensability of a knowledge of Elizabethan civil law and contract, particularly matrimonial law, and the manners and mores associated with relations between the sexes in the dramatist's day.

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Claude V. Palisca. *Humanism in Italian Renaissance Musical Thought*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987. Pp. xiii, 471.

Occasionally, the scholarly community celebrates the appearance of a truly significant and magisterial study written by an acknowledged specialist—in this case, the publication of Claude Palisca's monograph on musical humanism. The book caps a life-long engagement with music discourse from the fifteenth to the early seventeenth centuries. And the result is a virtuoso performance, a recreation of the issues by means of the meticulous investigation of primary sources. This is evident in the myriad citations presented throughout the book, citations in which the original languages have parallel-column translation into English. The citations are there not so much to demonstrate Palisca's humanistic erudition (which of course they do) but rather to illustrate points raised in the text itself. There is thus a continuous narrative, although context and investigative apparatus are not always correlated from chapter to chapter.

The Preface is a preface to Chapter One, the *exordium* proper, "Introduction: An Italian Renaissance in Music?" In these sections we read that attempts to explain