

scholars. It is a must-read for students of immigration and immigration law and institutional development. Well-written, insightful, and smart, this book is a solid piece of scholarly work that furthers an understanding of institutions, the highest U.S. federal courts, judicial decision making, and historical and contemporary immigration laws and policies.

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*Poetry of the Law: From Chaucer to the Present.* By David Kader and Michael Stanford, eds. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010. 234 pp. \$22.00 paper.

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In *Poetry of the Law*, Kader and Stanford have produced an anthology of 100 law-themed poems spanning six centuries, arranged chronologically from Chaucer to the present day. The poems are organized into six distinct categories: lawyers and judges, citizens in the legal system, historical trials, punishment, exploring legal concepts, and applying legal metaphors to nonlegal subjects. Most entries are contributed by poets who are nonlawyers, although many of the selected early poets were practicing lawyers or had been legal scholars: for example, Edgar Lee Masters, Charles Reznikoff, Roy Fuller, Brad Leithauser, Lawrence Joseph, Martín Espada, Seth Abramson, and John Donne. Notably, these include eighteenth-century English judge, jurist, and professor Sir William Blackstone, whose *Commentaries on the Laws of England* inspired the drafters of the U.S. Declaration of Independence. He studied the classics, logic, and poetry before embarking on a legal career, and *The Lawyer's Farewell to His Muse* was written after entry to the Middle Temple Inn of Court; the poem eulogizes his earlier aesthetic pursuits against the noisy, grubby world of law with its "tedious forms," "wrangling courts," "selfish faction," and other hallmarks of legal practice (pp. 36–9). John Donne's *Satire 2* portrays the fictional poet-turned-lawyer Coscus as an abuser of the magic of his poetic abilities in order to manipulate law for personal gain; he castigates the poet turned "professional" as "more shameless [than] carted whores" (pp. 16–19). Chaucer's "Sergeant of the Lawe" from *The Canterbury Tales* depicts a dapper, educated lawyer who is similarly preoccupied with self-enrichment, only in this instance to comic effect (p. 1).

There are various poems about controversial legal cases. *John Brown's Body* by Stephen Vincent Benét describes the capture, trial, and execution of radical American abolitionist John Brown (pp. 97–102). Langston Hughes's single verse *The Town of Scottsboro*

refers to a protracted miscarriage of justice relating to a group of African American males, sentenced to death after being wrongly accused of rape in the 1930s (p. 106). Muriel Rukeyser in *The Trial* depicts the highly politicized 1921 case of Italian immigrants Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti (pp. 112–14). Martín Espada's *Mi Vida: Wings of Fright* expresses the frustration of the legal aid lawyer thwarted in his efforts to prevent the eviction of communities of illegal immigrants from various properties in New England, "like the fortune-teller . . . [having] a bookshelf of prophecy but a cabinet empty of cures" (pp. 174, 175). In Edgar Lee Masters's *Butch Weldy*, the maimed victim of an industrial accident is denied compensation due to corporate influence and the complicity of the judiciary (p. 78). In each instance, the poetic articulation enhances the power of narrative and reveals its capacity for being the conduit through which readers are able to attune their sensibilities to recognize justice and injustice (Shaw 2009:214).

Various witty and serious poems about judges, lawyers, witnesses, and the nature of law are included. Anthony Hecht's poem *Death the Judge* portrays justice as "blind as a bat," contrasted with Alan Dugan's *Defendant* on the following page, which presents a chilling portrait of justice as spiteful and sadistic (pp. 124, 125). *The Woods in New Jersey* by Robert Hass evokes the idea that moral and political values have more influence on judicial rulings than precedent or reason (p. 151). Rudyard Kipling refers to the "lissom reeds" bending in the breeze in *The Reeds of Runnymede*; a reference to the sealing of the Magna Carta following the English barons' revolt against the hitherto inflexible King John (pp. 76, 77). Famous poems and poets feature, for example, Oscar Wilde's meditation on capital punishment in *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* and John Greenleaf Whittier's *The Gallows* (pp. 74, 59–62). Romantic poet William Wordsworth, in *Sonnets upon the Punishment of Death*, contrarily mounts a spirited defense of the death penalty (pp. 48–51). Percy Bysshe Shelley writes bitterly of his unsuccessful court battle to retain custody of his children in *To the Lord Chancellor* (pp. 53–5). Also included is W. H. Auden's breathless continuation of a single metaphor in *Law Like Love*, and William Shakespeare's *Sonnets 35* and *49* suggest the ways in which a spurned lover is turned into an advocate against himself (pp. 10–11, 108–9).

There are few anthologies of legal verse, and *Poetry of the Law* is the first significant compilation of law-related poems to be published in the United States. The collection has a special place in any personal or institutional law library because not only is it an entertaining read but also an invaluable lyrical historical record of key legal cases, characters, and commentary. *Poetry of the Law* probes, challenges, and teases out the underlying uncertainties hidden within the detail of the life of law and significantly, it also illustrates

the capacity of the poem to reach into the very core of our essential human connectedness.

**Reference**

Shaw, Julia J. A. (2009) "Law and Literature: From the Margins to the Middle," 9  
*Contemporary Issues in Law* 209-32.