Review of Jean E. Howard and Scott Cutler Shershow (eds) *Marxist Shakespeares*

With refreshing frankness this collection of essays names Karl Marx in its title, but its index discloses a surprising avoidance of ideas associated with him: socialism is mentioned only once, in the context of Jacques Derrida's alleged distaste for it, and class is dealt with in three contiguous pages of the introduction in which Howard and Shershow argue that "'class' relations cannot be considered to possess a priority in the colloquial sense, a greater immediacy or practical relevance to any and all human situations" (p. 7). The ground is thus cleared of old-fashioned economic determinism and attention given to matters which, as the index shows, receive greater attention: Gustav Flaubert comes up on 5 pages, and Pierre Bourdieu towers over all with 19 pages spread over 2 essays. Howard and Shershow open the collection with an introduction to its principles and a summary of each essay. This is not to be a return to old Marxism but rather a twenty-first century effort to push its boundaries "by ongoing engagement with feminism, cultural studies, and non-Marxist forms of historicism" (p. 3). Strictly speaking, of course, this was a late-twentieth century effort: the review copy was received in November 2000 but dated 2001. Ten of the twelve contributors work in the United States, and hence had no need to beat the United Kingdom's Research Assessment Exercize millenarian deadline.

As Howard and Shershow see it, recent critical thinking has promoted such excessive scepticism towards master narratives that many can no longer see the bigger pictures of connection between local, national, and international developments and of epochal historical change. The editors acknowledge two of Marx's doctrinal errors: the labour theory of value, and the inevitable degradation of the working class as capital accumulates in fewer and fewer hands. On the former the editors equivocate that it "has been 'proven wrong' by subsequent economists" (p. 4, unexplained scare quotation marks theirs) but in any case, they argue, Marx did not really mean it. Appropriated from Adam Smith and David Ricardo, the labour theory of value was not so much a scientific discovery as a literary device for "simultaneously parodying the strategies of conventional economic theory and producing a positive vision of his own" (p. 5). Marx certainly overworked the joke if *Capital* 's volumes of calculation served merely to extend a parody, although Leonard Jackson, who also thought marginal utility a better explanation than the labour theory of value, took a similar approach in making the rather more plausible (but still far-fetched) claim that *Capital* is in the tradition of epic poems, neglected since Milton, in which the proletarian worker is the hero and the labour theory of value just a metaphor (Jackson 1994, 94-104). Concerning the degradation of the working class, Howard and Shershow point out that it was organized labour, inspired by Marx, that improved the lot of the working class in the twentieth-century -- he spiked his own prediction, one might say -- and that in any case misery has moved to the sweatshops of the developing world.

Instead of workers and class struggles, Howard and Shershow’s introduction focusses on subjects and paradigms, and their Marxism is but one of a family of "knowledge-making paradigms" including feminism, anti-racism, and post-structuralism (p. 6). Their view comes close to, but never reaches, a Foucauldian inversion of the commonsense relationship between things and discourses in which people are the spoken, not the
speakers, of discourses, and they acknowledge that this is a version of the vexed base/superstructure argument. In summarizing Richard Halpern's book *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation* they endorse his view that we need to consider "humanist pedagogy or sixteenth-century poetic styles as instruments in the production of differently skilled and socialized subjects" suited to the new economy which was "coming into being" (p. 7). This is not so much an example of the superstructure displaying autonomy -- Howard and Shershow, like most Marxists, readily accept that -- as the superstructure leading the economic transformation. In their "move away from a base-driven, bottom-up model of historical development" (p. 8) the danger here is surely that of the base being created by the superstructure (in colloquial terms, capitalism being put into practice because it seemed like a good idea) and this takes us back to old-fashioned ideas-driven (that is, idealistic) criticism. In the event, these issues do not matter greatly to the arguments that follow in the contributors' essays, half of which have little obvious connection to Marxism.

Peter Stallybrass's "'Well grubbed, old mole': Marx, *Hamlet*, and the (un)fixing of representation" reads like a reworking of an argument about apparel made for a different occasion, to judge by the astute but not pursued observations on the suit of armour and the nightshirt worn by the ghost of Hamlet's father (pp. 24, 27). No logical progression links important observations that Hamlet calls the ghost a mole, derogating a king and a father, and that like Hamlet, Louis Bonaparte was conscious of his impressive forebear. The editors have left contributors' grammar as they found it, even when a sentence lacks a main verb as in "Hamlet, the dead father, no longer king and royal Dane but mole and pioneer" (p. 25). The "unfixing" of Stallybrass's title refers to the way that the past is repeated in new forms in the present (all events occur "the first time as tragedy, the second as farce") and in particular how our acknowledgement of this transformation should unsettle present certainties. In Derridean style, or by inadvertence, Stallybrass's rhetorical form mirrors his argument, so that on page 28 we read "Yet that unfixing itself depends upon repetition" and 30 lines later "Yet unfixing itself depends upon repetition . . .". Perhaps a longer interval is needed for a repetition to yield meaning.

The important point made by Richard Halpern in "An impure history of ghosts: Derrida, Marx, Shakespeare" was given away in the editors' introduction: Derrida's *Specters of Marx* rejects so much of Marx that what remains is banal. Derrida's aim was to remove from Marxism all that led to "the totalitarian monstrosity" (p. 35), which filtering Halpern facetiously compares to a Stalinist purge and, seriously, to the case of Hamlet who wants to purify the memory of his father. Hamlet's Senior cannot have been all goodness, of course, else he would have no "foul crimes" needing to be "burnt and purged away" (*Hamlet* 1.5.12-13), so until his memory (in the sense of reputation) is purified he might stand merely as one more instance of rot in the Danish court. Just as Hamlet's effort to check the veracity of the ghost's story defers action, so obsessional cavilling over "onto-theological remnants" in Marx's legacy holds back critical commitment to political action, and indeed Derrida is hoisted with his own petard in seeking to purge Marx's legacy since he elsewhere (within and without *Specters of Marx*) asserts the value of heterogeneity, the pure mixed with the impure. Those wishing to mock modern literary theory might exploit Halpern's painfully convoluted discussion of the distinction between "impurely impure history" and "purely impure history" as treated by Max Stirner, Marx, and Derrida (p. 38-39), but elsewhere this essay is a model of clarity. An example is Halpern's argument (p. 44-46) that Yorick's
skull is like the ghost in being a father figure who comes back from the dead and whose identity is questionable, since Hamlet has only the gravedigger's word that it is Yorick. But the skull differs from the ghost in significant ways: it cannot see but is seen, whereas, as Derrida pointed out, the visored ghost sees without necessarily being seen, it cannot speak for itself as the ghost can, and its edges are well-defined (being the hard inside of a man) whereas the ghost's edges are fuzzy. This last point can be phrased as the awkward question 'is the armour part of the ghost or worn by it?' We might note in passing that Kenneth Branagh's decision to connect the skull with its former owner via the distinctive teeth of Ken Dodd in his film of Hamlet (Branagh 1996) removed the skull's anonymity which for Halpern is part of the object's power. The ghost/skull exo/endo-skeleton four-term homology can be flipped the other way around too: the ghost's armour lends the insubstantial spirit an incorruptibility which Hamlet prizes, and the apparently permanent skull is in fact rotting away, producing a smell which offends Hamlet. The death's-head serves as a useful metaphor for the bald, obstinate, reality of the "sum of productive forces, capital funds, and social forms of intercourse" (p. 48) which are only hard, permanent, reality to those who fail to critique them properly. It is not enough, Halpern reminds Derrida, as Marx reminded Stirner, to simply 'do something': you have to combine action with theory to appreciate that, for example, seizing the wealth in the world's banks would only capture useless paper which has no value outside the system of exchange which gives it meaning. In this sense, and counter-intuitively, hard reality is plausibly a product of discourse, once you realize the dialectic nature of social processes.

In "Looking well to linens: Women and cultural production in Othello and Shakespeare's England" Dympna Callaghan reports that in a "murderous frenzy" Shakespeare adapter Mary Lamb stabbed her mother to death with sewing scissors. Callaghan makes no further use of this salacious titbit beyond claiming that it is an example of "the far from straightforward relation between women's production -- both material and cultural -- and canonical writing, especially Shakespeare's" (p. 53-54). What is this complex relation? Callaghan is not saying, although the "absolute distinction between aesthetic and productive labor is . . . one which certainly post-dates the Renaissance" (p. 78-79). One is tempted to cry "never too soon!", since writing is indeed more important than needlework. Shakespeare's Othello is greatly concerned with textiles (the fatal handkerchief, and Desdemona's wedding/winding sheets) which are cultural rather than simply practical products, the latter of course being less valuable then as now. As with Stallybrass's essay, the editorial hand is here so light that inconsistent spelling (aesthetic/esthetic, p. 56) passes uncorrected. Othello is mesmerized by unalienated female production in the making of the handkerchief ("A sybil . . . in her prophetic fury . . . the worms were hallowed" 3.4.70-73) and the handkerchief was circulated amongst women, from its female maker to Othello's mother to Desdemona. Callaghan neglects to mention that Othello later provides an alternative provenance ("an antique token / My father gave my mother" 5.2.223-4) which might be an authorial slip or, perhaps more interestingly, Othello's rewriting of the object's history in the light of its role in the unfolding disaster.

Callaghan rightly denies the handkerchief a connection with Marx's notion of commodity fetishism, which she takes to be "the erasure of the human energy that has wrought an object so that it seems to have an entirely independent existence" (p. 77). This is not commodity fetishism but close to Marx's notion of alienation, the way that human labour is congealed (not erased) in capital which, existing independently of the
labourer, is turned upon her. Callaghan wants to say something about the making of Desdemona's handkerchief, but manages only "The female labor that produces the object is 'mystified', however, in that it involves intense psychic rather than manual labor; the literally mysterious inspiration inherent in the creative rather than mechanical processes of production" (p. 77). Student readers are advised not to emulate Callaghan's misuse of the semicolon, which cannot legally join sentence fragments. Contrary to Callaghan's implication, Marx thought the fetishizing of material objects such as handkerchiefs quite reasonable since these have particularities which matter to the individual owner. A commodity however is a material object which has had its particularities effaced (the notional 'barrel of oil' traded in world markets stands for any such barrel) and to fetishize one of those, which is what Marx meant by commodity fetishism, is indeed unreasonable since it means fetishizing an abstraction: exchange value. Callaghan's mistake is a common one whose irony Stallybrass has elsewhere explored (Stallybrass 1998, 183-86). The claim about 'commodity fetishism' is Callaghan's only explicitly Marxist point, and it being wrong suggests that this essay was pragmatically adapted for the present volume rather than being part of an "ongoing engagement" with Marxism as the editors claim in the introduction.

In "'Judicious oeillades': Supervising marital property in The Merry Wives of Windsor" Natasha Korda reads the play as a story of household management which shows how an internalized system of surveillance ensures that the wives are competent administrators of the private domestic sphere, thus freeing the men to immerse themselves in the public sphere. Thus the needs of emergent capitalism are met. In this Korda sees Foucault's idea of "coercive self-discipline" (p. 89) but it is surely rather late to seek there a way forward for Marxist-feminism. Foucault's histories of gender and sexual identity are now severely challenged on all fronts, as in Joseph Cady's demonstration of the availability of an explicitly homosexual identity in the Renaissance (Cady 1992). In Shakespeare After Theory David Scott Kastan acutely observed the tendency of English Studies to acquire new theories just as their home disciplines abandon them, and wittily attributed it to thrift: we economize by purchasing our theory books in second hand bookstores (Kastan 1999, 225n11). Korda reads the play's opening as an important dispute over jurisdiction: if Shallow makes Falstaff's behaviour "a Star Chamber matter" (1.1.1-2) the local authorities would be undermined. Explaining the old-fashioned ways of dealing with wrongdoers, another of this volume's sentences without a main verb slips in: "Or perhaps even the turmoil and humiliation of a public shaming ritual, commonly used to punish disorderly households and undisciplined housewives in the period" (p. 88). The objects the merry wives use to humiliate Falstaff (a buck-basket, a cowl-staff, and dirty linens) are just the objects which were used in public shaming rituals of unruly wives and these, and his disguise as "the fat woman of Brainford", effeminize Falstaff for his intrusion into the feminine jurisdiction. The play highlight wives' managerial role in the household only to withdraw it from view as something not needing to be closely looked into because they are diligent.

Barbara E. Bowen's "The rape of Jesus: Aemilia Lanyer's Lucrece" hangs a reading of Christ's passion being like a rape -- for its victim but also in the subject positions offered to the reader -- on Lanyer's quotation of just four words ("no excuse nor end") from Shakespeare's The Rape of Lucrece. In Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum (1611), Lanyer "recovers" (that is, invents) the words of Pilate's wife as she exhorts Pilate not to kill Jesus with a clever argument: it would be a sin greater than Eve's of eating the fruit and
so would end male supremacy which was the punishment for eating. Killing Jesus, she says, would be a sin with "no excuse nor end", which couplet Lanyer puts at the end of a stanza (832), just as Shakespeare does when Tarquin contemplates his proposed rape in *Lucrece* (line 238). By offering the male reader the new experience of feeling what it is like to be Christ, not his torturer, Lanyer gets the male reader to think about being raped. Lanyer declares that she will not write about shallow surface beauty ("those matchless colors Red and White") lacking in real virtue which "doe draw but dangers and disgrace", and in this Bowen sees a loose allusion to the opening moment of Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece* when Collatine unwisely praises "the unmatched red and white"of his wife's complexion. Bowen claims that Lanyer here rejects Shakespeare's association of beauty with danger: "By quoting -- and contesting -- the first appearance of the colors in *Lucrece*, Lanyer signals her oppositional reading of Shakespeare's poem and its project of displaying the woman's raped body" (p. 123). The near-quotation is there for all to see, but where is the opposition? Lanyer appears rather to be saying the same thing as Shakespeare: good looks invite their own spoilage. Bowen remains optimistic. Lanyer lists women whose outward beauty brought their downfall because her project is to rewrite this "masculinist rhetoric" by quoting Tarquin's reasons not to rape Lucrece (a sin without "excuse or end") in the context of Christ's Passion. This gives "a language in which women can be loved without being objectified", which language is based on "the celebration of Christ's body on the cross" (p. 124) and provides a way for male readers to understand the hidden pain of rape and for female readers to feel politically empowered by this recognition of their bodies and their subjectivity.

Bringing the reader back to recognizable Marxism is Walter Cohen's "The undiscovered country: Shakespeare and mercantile geography" which has the modest aim of showing that the three phases of overseas trade which occurred in Shakespeare's lifetime are reflected in the concerns and locations of the drama. The early plays are about England and Renaissance Italy, the later ones become more global and return to the ancient Mediterranean (p. 135). In making such a useful generalizing statement Cohen demonstrates the power of thinking big, a practice upon which recent historicism has frowned. Only momentarily does Cohen overplay his hand in claiming that *The Tempest* "seems to dramatize . . . directly" (p. 148) the English national project to colonize Virginia; "directly" is too strong a word for it. Shakespeare's attitude to imperialism is not clear and Cohen reads in *King John* and *Henry 5* doubts about, and in *Troilus and Cressida* strong denunciation of, imperial war. *The Tempest*, of course, can be argued either way. Cohen is not claiming that mercantile expansion is the key to the canon, only that it has been under-appreciated, and the insights offered here give plenty of support to his claim. Cohen ends with an economic consideration which is picked up in the next essay: Shakespeare's company benefited from a crown monopoly which protected them from free trade, and even the development of commerce with America, not crown-protected, was not free trade since it depended on slave labour (pp. 155-5).

The argument of Richard Wilson's "The management of mirth: Shakespeare via Bourdieu" is the familiar Marxist one that Shakespeare's drama seeks to deny its commercial origins. Wilson starts far from London, in the playhouse at Knowsley near Liverpool and with the Yorkshire company of players that toured the Dales with Shakespeare's *Pericles* and, Wilson claims, his *King Lear* in 1609. Wilson does not cite an authority for his assertion about the Yorkshire players, so readers unfamiliar with
this interesting corner of Shakespeare studies are left without a lead, and given the
impression that the "Kinge Lere" played by Cholmeley's men must have been
Shakespeare's when in fact it might as easily have been the anonymous chronicle
history of King Leir printed in 1605 (Sisson 1942). Continuing to resist the centrifugal
pull of London, Wilson moves further away still to consider the English players touring
in Europe and he agrees with Jerzy Limon that continental aristocrats made generous
patrons, providing money and, perhaps importantly, the use of period costumes to
which clung a lingering aura from their original owners who were the kind of men now
represented -- in the same clothing -- by the actors (p. 161). For this attractive
argument about the charisma of authentic clothing Wilson draws upon the chapter
"Awe and Wonder" in Stephen Greenblatt's Learning to Curse (Greenblatt 1990) which
has since been strongly criticized for bending the facts about Cardinal Wolsey's hat to
suit the argument (Barton 1991; Lee 1995). Nonetheless, Wilson makes a new and
persuasive claim about the drama's avoidance of its commercial realities:

In Shakespeare's ideal theatre it is a noble patron who welcomes the trouper, chooses
the play to be "preferred" (Dream 4.2.34), provides the "rabble" with "glistening apparel"
(The Tempest 4.1.37, 193 SD), and underwrites the production by commanding his
"usual manager of mirth" to "[s]tir up the youth . . . to merriments" (Dream 1.1.12). (p.
162)

Having rejected the vulgar Freudianism of Meredith Skura's explanation that
Shakespeare's stage-fright made him feel like a child, and that he compulsively relived
that feeling through the analogous master-servant relationship, Wilson offers one
based on the work of Pierre Bourdieu which in parts is incomprehensible. What can be
learnt from the claim that "... all social practices are organized as spaces of objective
relationships endowed with greater or lesser autonomy in interaction with other fields,
and crucially those of power and money" (p. 165)? Strike the words "organized as
spaces of" and this assertion gains a purchase on meaning but at the cost of becoming
banal, and apparently the organizing of spaces (which sounds like the chief claim on an
ambitious caretaker's résumé) is the crux of Bourdieu's insight. Shakespeare's strategy
is to make the playhouse audience feel like they are intimates of the nobles in their
privates houses, and hence the prologue in Henry 5 flatters the audience as "gentles
all". David Scott Kastan has already followed this point to a still more illuminating
insight: the prologue also wants princes to act and monarchs to watch, which would be
representation turned into simple presentation (Kastan 1999, 126). In The Tempest,
Wilson argues, Shakespeare finally admits that patronage is not freedom. In asking to
be released from his bonds, aristocratic Prospero is asking to be relieved of his
responsibility as a dramatic patron on agreement that his audience will behave with
aristocratic magnanimity and will free art from their economic control and accord it the
status of a free-floating aesthetic. The drama, then, is where the pernicious notion of
the aesthetic as a self-contained world of cultural value came from. Scott Cutler
Shershow, discussed below, argues the same point.

Left-wing Shakespearians with an interest in literary theory and history are prone to
fractionalist disagreement, but opposition to the Globe reconstruction on Bankside
signally unites them. In reviewing Crystal Bartolovich's essay "Shakespeare's Globe" I
must declare an interest, being a paid employee of the education department of the
project, and hence menshevik among left-wing Shakespearians. Bartolovich considers
the Bankside theatre's 1997 production of Henry 5, which she calls "arguably the most
overtly 'nationalistic' and Anglophilic text in the Shakespearean canon" (p. 179). Or rather, Bartolovich considers a promotional leaflet claiming that the play "celebrates the English language as a great instrument of inspiration and communication" (p. 180). There is no emphasis on "instrument" in the pamphlet, and Bartolovich is less than scrupulous in neglecting to mention that she added it (Globe Communications Department 1997, 1.) The same leaflet promotes a run of Welcome Msomi's Umabatha: The Zulu Macbeth at the Globe, surely placing the Globe's artistic directorate nearer to Nelson Mandela (whose enthusiastic endorsement of Umabatha is quoted) than to Peregrine Worsthorne, as Bartolovich claims. Having called Henry 5 "arguably" nationalistic and Anglophilic, Bartolovich wisely elects to make the opposite argument, that the play exposes rather than conceals the contradictory and arbitrary nature of nationalist identifications and the contingency of imperialist projects launched in their names. Bartolovich's rhetoric implies that those working at Shakespeare's Globe are not sophisticated enough to grasp this, but since she quotes Andrew Gurr's text of the play to substantiate her argument it would have been only fair to mention that this renowned teacher of postcolonial literature and theory chaired the academic advisory committee of the Globe for twenty years, led the team of scholars advising on the design and facilities of the theatre, and was, when this book appeared, still the director of Globe research. Because Shakespeare is the national cultural icon, Bartolovich thinks that deconstructing him (even in the mildest sense of showing that he was not a lone writer but one of a team) necessarily deconstructs the nation of which he is an icon. This is misplaced effort, since a collaborative 'Shakespeare effect' (giving due place to the input of fellow writers, actors, printers, and editors) might do just as well as the national icon. Although it is true that "... there could have been no 'Shakespeare' without a vast multiplicity of labors -- including cultural and linguistic practices -- not all of which are localizable in 'England'" (p. 201), this interdependence can easily be overstated. Among these distant collaborators Bartolovich includes the Spanish whose American gold, extracted by 'Indian' miners, helped Elizabeth balance her budget. We might here also include the inventor of the wheel, to whom Tamburlaine and Titus Andronicus owe their chariots, but there is a point beyond which the stressing of causal interconnectedness becomes a debilitating universalism implying an overarching and binding force underwriting all human action. An historicism of global and local effects need not ignore the universal appropriation of labour, but nor need it exclude another determinant of cultural production, the first performance conditions, which the Globe project's working theatre can help explore.

Continuing the theme of global Shakespeare, Denise Albanese's "The Shakespeare film and the Americanization of culture" claims that the most important battle about Shakespeare is being conducted outside academia as market forces take over something that, rather regressively, has been thought a purely aesthetic domain untouched by money. In the old style is Kenneth Branagh's Hamlet (Branagh 1996), a regressive British import to the American market, and in the new is Baz Luhrmann's progressive and indigenously American Romeo + Juliet (Luhrmann 1996). Where Laurence Olivier was artistically self-conscious in his film-making, Shakespeare films are now conservatively realistic, claims Albanese, and Branagh's performance in Hamlet exemplified what Theodor Adorno called "regressive fetishization": set pieces to get an affective response, not sustained integration with a narrative (p. 212). Luhrmann filmed in Mexico, and reviewers cannot entirely be blamed for taking this location for Miami or Venice Beach since the film uses real ethnic issues only as knowing gestures to global diversity and to counterbalance the restrained (and decidedly unLatin)
performances of the leads. Thus devotional images become, in the film, trashy knick-knacks at which the knowing viewer laughs (p. 219). These objects are not really taken at face value (Juliet is not really a devout Catholic, despite all the angels and crosses around her) and neither is Shakespeare; both are essentially alien and kitsch in the film. Luhrmann's repeated and deliberate clashes between text and referent, such as the play's "swords" being guns, "might stand in for the collision between 'Shakespearean' esthetics and those of cinematic commodity culture" and in thus privileging the visual over the spoken, which often is delivered as though prosaic and banal even when high poetry, the film "insists on a new American identity for Shakespeare" (pp. 221-2). Albanese finds this preferable to Al Pacino's Anglophilic search for Shakespeare amongst English scholars and institutions in Looking for Richard (Pacino 1996), although I would have thought Pacino's unflattering camera angles and cutting when interviewing Barbara Everett and Emrys Jones indicate a playful undermining of English cultural authority. Although Albanese prefers the cultural appropriation of Luhrmann's Americanized Romeo + Juliet, its ironical and kitsch treatment of ethnicity show that Roland Barthes's insistence that ironical distance is "the basis of an oppositional political practice" needs to be reevaluated now that irony is a tool utilized in the sales forces of capitalism (p. 224).

Historicism has dominated Renaissance studies for so long that an entire generation has been trained to always historicize. It is thus genuinely surprising to read Kiernan Ryan's claim in "Measure for Measure: Marxism before Marx" that too much rooting in the minutiae of the past makes us forget that there can be utopian dreaming, albeit in an inchoate form, in the literary texts. Measure for Measure would seem to sustain Foucault's account, given in Discipline and Punish (Foucault 1977), of the transition from spectacular punishment to secret surveillance as the source of power, and Ryan outlines the standard leftist Foucauldian reading popularized by Jonathan Dollimore (Dollimore 1985) only to reject it. Ryan returns to Walter Pater's insight that the play elicits from its audiences a yearning for poetical justice better than that perceivable by the characters in the play, which reading makes Barnadine central in escaping the power structures of Vienna by not recognising them (p. 236-37). Over against Barnadine's covert subversion of Vienna's power system are Isabella's overt resistance and Escalus's imploring of Angelo to put himself in Claudio's shoes and realize the hypocrisy of judging a man for that which he himself is guilty of. The law, as Pompey notes, is a construct made by the rulers, not a given (being a bawd is a lawful trade "If the law would allow it" 2.1.218), and mercy in such a society emerges as a symptom not a cure since it can only be dispensed once someone has been made to need it by falling foul of an unjust law (p. 240-41) Thus the play, like its characters, uses overt and covert means to demystify mercy as a sustainer of oppression and reveal hierarchy's relation to oppression. The latter is achieved by the theme of doubles -- Angelo as the Duke's alter ego, and the couples Angelo/Mariana, Claudio/Juliet, Lucio/Kate, and Elbow/wife -- several of which undergo repeated substitution and paralleling throughout the play: Angelo for Duke, Escalus for Angelo in the trial of Pompey, Mariana for Isabella in bed, Mariana's maidenhead for Claudio's head, Ragozine's head for Claudio's head, Ragozine's head for Barnadine's head, and Pompey's trade for executioner. Ryan observes that this substitution/exchange principle respects no class boundaries (all succumb to it) and that it is matched by repetitions and symmetries in the language such as the closing chiasmus "What's mine is yours, and what is yours is mine". Thus difference is cut across by likeness and "the grounds of incongruity dissolve" (p. 243). This is persuasive, but one cannot help wishing there were an
example of exchange across a class boundary (as happens in the city comedies of Shakespeare's contemporaries) to dissolve the grounds of hierarchy more effectively.

The final essay in this collection is "Shakespeare beyond Shakespeare" by co-editor Scott Cutler Shershow, and it is conceptually the most difficult and most rewarding. Shershow argues that the transcultural 'Shakespeare' emerged within the solution of a particular religious and economic dilemma of the early modern period which was the constant injunction that Christians be thrifty and yet give things away. Early modern Protestantism encapsulated this dichotomy in the coexistence of the doctrine of free grace with the doctrine of justification by success which epitomized an investment/return economy. The biblical parable of the talents was the central interpretative puzzle in this regard since it appears to advocate usury and, worse still, the careful preserver loses all and the usurer gains more. This is hardly Christian charity. But if 'talent' means an abstract natural ability, rather than a unit of currency, the problem is eased, and indeed this creative redefinition to suit an interpretation of the parable is where we get our modern word 'talent' (p. 252). For expertly teasing out the problematic underlying this etymology, and explaining its importance, Shershow is to be thanked.

The new interpretation of the parable split the temporal world, where a talent is money, usury is forbidden, and charity encouraged, from the spiritual world where a talent is a god-given ability, increase-by-use is permitted, and charity does not apply. Thus began the sealing off of the aesthetic domain, but its freedom leaked into the temporal domain and it became acceptable to increase one's temporal capital and absolutely imperative to increase one's spiritual capital, especially by reading and writing spiritual texts. What happened in the spiritual domain was used metaphorically for what happened in the temporal domain, and both senses of the verb 'to utter' (to say, and to sell) were tainted by non-productive profiteering by the exploitation of price differentials. 'To utter' came to mean 'to speak dishonestly' and in response was invented the ideal of the generous author giving his work freely to the world, for which claim Shershow cites Heminges and Condell's "what he thought, he uttered" in the preliminaries to the 1623 Folio of Shakespeare (p. 257). I find no support in OED or elsewhere for this sense of uttering as lying, and find more convincing Andrew Murphy's reading of Heminges and Condell's use of 'utter' as a link between speaking and publishing (OED utter v.1 2c), their book making up for the absent dead author (Murphy 1999, 125-25).

Critics have argued that The Merchant of Venice implicitly advocates a synthesis of capitalism with generosity (the Christians are clearly doing trade, but they also spend freely), but Shershow thinks that Shakespeare is contrasting pre-capitalist hoarding (by Shylock) with new capitalist activism which puts money into circulation and hence is a good thing. Moreover, the play speciously associates giving all with ultimate return, just the Geneva bible's glosses enjoined readers to give without thought of return and in the same breath promised return in the form of spiritual capital (p. 259). Lear's belated determination to relieve the poor depends on uneven distribution else there would be no poor to receive it (p. 261), which point Kiernan Ryan reached from the same evidence (p. 240-41) and this is one of the disappointingly rare occasions when two essays in this volume are mutually sustaining. Another such point of contact is the concern to historicize the bourgeois determination to treat the aesthetic realm as independent and unsullied by monetary concerns, a concern expressed here and in the chapters by Wilson and Albanese. Such internal dialogue is a powerful justification for
this kind of thematized volume by multiple authors, and that there is so little might
indicate that overtly Marxist approaches remain marginal; the editors appear to have
accepted material only tangential to the topic.

This volume represents a range of approaches considerably wider than one might
expect from its title. More than half the essays (those of Halpern, Korda, Cohen,
Wilson, Ryan, and Shershow) are clearly written and proceed by logical progression
from theoretical premisses and textual evidence to meaningful conclusions. That the
others do not, because the theory is so dense as to be unintelligible even to the
sympathetic, or the evidence is overstretched or ignored, is perhaps a fair price to pay.
Callaghan's dropping of commodity fetishism into the argument and Albanese's
characterizing Branagh's performance style using Adorno's phrase "regressive
fetishization" look like token gestures towards the book's theme, whereas Bowen's
dignified silence on matters Marxist seems like a principled rejection of Procrusteanism
in order to be free to outline a sophisticated literary argument about Lanyer's poem.
Disappointingly, only Halpern, Ryan, and Shershow move beyond Marxist critical
readings to undertake self-reflexive consideration of the state of Marxist cultural and
literary theory and the possibilities for its development.

A few grammatical slips I have already mentioned, and there are also misspelled
names. On page 278 Scott McMillin becomes McMillan (irritating for him, no doubt, but
still recognizable) and on page ix Richard Dutton becomes Dalton, a more serious
anabaptism. The bibliography shows signs of being collated by computer from records
created by people who did not agree on minor details such as the need to cite
Shakespeare Quarterly issue numbers. (The journal's continuous pagination through
each volume makes this datum redundant, of course.) There is also a marvellously
terse and cryptic bibliographical entry of "Essex ROD/B3/3/208 no.14" which would
doubtless fetch exactly the right document if only one knew to whom it should be
recited, and there is a misquoted Internet URL on page 279 whose slashes should lean
forwards. These twitches aside the editors works is of high quality, and most
importantly they have ensured that almost all the complex assertions and difficult ideas
are scrupulously keyed to efficient author-date bibliography.

Works Cited


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