

**shakespearean
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SC

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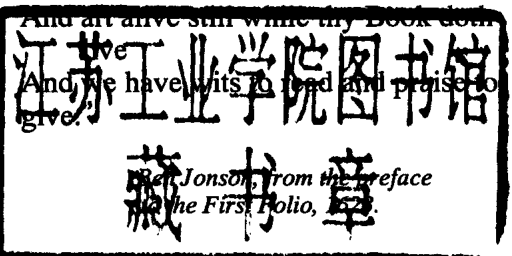
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1993**

shakespearean criticism

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And we have wits to read and praise to give."



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Volume 25

shakespearean criticism

Yearbook 1993

A Selection of the Year's Most Noteworthy Studies
of William Shakespeare's Plays and Poetry

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Preface

Shakespearean Criticism (SC) provides students, teachers, and other interested readers valuable insight into Shakespeare's plays and non-dramatic poems. Volumes 1 through 10 of the series offer a broad range of interpretations and effectively present a unique historical overview of the critical response to each Shakespearean work. A multiplicity of viewpoints derives from the nearly two hundred periodicals and books that are the sources for each volume of SC. The essays and excerpts document the critical reaction of scholars and commentators from the seventeenth century to the present day. Students and teachers at all levels of study can benefit from SC, whether they seek information for class discussions and written assignments, new perspectives on traditional issues, or the most noteworthy and innovative analyses of Shakespeare's artistry.

In 1990, SC began to trace the history of Shakespeare's plays on the stage and in important films. Volumes in this performance series include eyewitness reviews and retrospective evaluations of individual productions, comparisons of major interpretations, and discussions of staging issues. This series is designed to appeal to students and teachers of English drama, as well as to theater students and the general reader.

Scope of the Work

Beginning with Volume 13 in the series, SC publishes annually a selection of the most noteworthy contributions to Shakespearean scholarship published during the previous year. These essays, reprinted in their entirety, are chosen to address a wide audience, including advanced secondary school students, undergraduate and graduate students, and teachers. Each year an advisory board of distinguished scholars recommends approximately one hundred articles and books from among the hundreds of valuable essays that appeared in the previous year. From these recommendations, Gale editors select examples of innovative criticism that represent current or newly developing trends in Shakespearean scholarship. The forty essays in the present volume, SC 25, the 1993 Yearbook, provide the latest assessments of the Shakespeare canon.

Organization and Features of the SC Yearbook

For the benefit of the reader, essays are grouped together on the basis of the Shakespearean play or poem on which they focus. Thus, for example, an article which examines the relation between pastoralism and *The Winter's Tale* appears in the *Romances and Poems* section of the Yearbook. When there are essays which focus on plays in two or more genres or which discuss aspects of Shakespeare's work generally, these will appear in a separate section entitled *General Commentary*.

- A List of Plays and Poems covered in the series follows the Acknowledgments. This listing indicates which works are treated in existing or forthcoming volumes.
- Each piece of commentary is reprinted with the author's footnotes and is followed by a complete Bibliographical Citation.
- The SC Yearbook provides a Cumulative Index to Topics. This feature identifies the principal topics in the criticism and stage history of each work. The topics are arranged alphabetically, and the volume and initial page number are indicated for each essay or excerpt that offers innovative or ample commentary on that topic.

Citing from the *SC Yearbook*

Students who quote directly from *SC Yearbook* in written assignments may use the following general forms to footnote reprinted criticism. The first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted from books.

¹Michael Neill, "Unproper Beds: Race, Adultery, and the Hideous in *Othello*," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 40 (Winter 1989), 383-412; reprinted in *Shakespearean Criticism*, Vol. 13, *Yearbook 1989*, ed. Sandra L. Williamson (Detroit: Gale Research, 1991), pp. 327-42.

²Philip Brockbank, "*Julius Caesar* and the Catastrophes of History," in his *On Shakespeare: Jesus, Shakespeare and Karl Marx, and Other Essays* (Basil Blackwell, 1989), pp. 122-39; reprinted in *Shakespearean Criticism*, Vol. 13, *Yearbook 1989*, ed. Sandra L. Williamson (Detroit: Gale Research, 1991), pp. 252-59.

Suggestions are Welcome

The editors encourage comments and suggestions from readers to expand the coverage and enhance the usefulness of the series. In response to various recommendations, several features have been added to *SC* since the series began, including the list of plays and poems covered in each volume, the topic index, and the sample bibliographic citations noted above. Readers are cordially invited to write the editor.

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Giving and Receiving: *Love's Labour's Lost* and the Politics of Exchange

Mark Thornton Burnett, *The Queen's University of Belfast*

In 1559, basking in the glory of her new queenly status, Elizabeth I processed through London to Westminster, the traditional site of coronation, and on route the sovereign availed herself of every opportunity to express gratitude for the smoothness with which her election had been effected. Elizabeth “did declare hersele no lesse thankefullye to receive her people’s good wille, than they lovingly offred it unto her.”¹ Similar delineations of reciprocal protestations of indebtedness recur in the official account of the event. After a child had delivered a welcoming oration, Elizabeth “thanked most hartely both the citie for this her gentle receiving at the first, and also the peple for confirming the same.”² And so it continues, this pattern of giving and receiving, of accepting proffered good wishes with courteous appreciation and approval. Witnessing a pageant and delighting in the gift of a Bible, Elizabeth displays consummate skills—wooing with modest grace, capturing affections, reinforcing allegiances. The description of her passage through the city is a striking example of the politics of securing royal power at a time of uncertainty and upheaval. As Louis Adrian Montrose states, “The stations of the journey occasioned a coherent program of allegorical pageants which confirmed the royal succession; affirmed principles of good government and reformed religion; and encouraged the young, female, and virgin ruler with demonstrations of public support and citations of biblical precedent.”³

Among the cultural strategies available to Elizabeth in her pursuit of stability, gift-giving was probably the most established and successful. Gifts circulated in abundance at the Elizabethan court, from suitor to sovereign and from sovereign to suitor. To placate enemies, quell resentment, and flatter foreign ambassadors, Elizabeth sent gifts ranging from needlework to rings, books, and golden chess-pieces.⁴ In return, courtiers presented jewels, clocks and literary exercises, encomiums and Latin verses.⁵ Everyone was ideally rewarded according to position and rank; favor was distributed with scrupulousness and exactitude. Particularly on festive occasions and at New Year gifts passed hands, forming part of a narrative of exchange and serving as potent symbols of the workings of patronage. At the Elizabethan court, therefore, gifts fulfilled specific cultural, economic, and political purposes.

Gift-exchange is a distinctive feature of many societies and performs tasks beneficial to the continued viability of the social order. According to Marcel Mauss in his classic study *The Gift*, “prestations” (the presentation of gifts) guarantee the vitality of a culture; express its connections with the past and the present; permit economic aggrandizement; promote solidarity and trust; and are a binding

force in bringing together the members of particular social organizations.⁶ Often exchanged on liminal occasions (births, circumcisions, marriages and funeral ceremonies) and lacking material value in themselves, gifts are coveted for the histories they represent and the relationships they articulate. Things material and non-material (food and ornaments, words and incantations) circulate to engender the successful functioning of a society’s activities. Through the gift an identity is ascribed, one which donor and recipient negotiate and renegotiate as they engage in playing their parts in a self-perpetuating system of social obligations. Of course the relationship may break down: refusing to reciprocate or offering more than can be reciprocated can cause conflict, and in the exchange of gifts there is always an element of muted hostility and competitive rivalry.

Interdisciplinary work in the humanities in recent years, including “cultural materialism” and the “new historicism,” has made possible exciting reassessments of the texts of the English Renaissance. Anthropologically inspired readings of Shakespeare and exchange have been attempted, but *Love's Labour's Lost* has so far remained unaffected.⁷ In this essay I will be pursuing a culturally-inflected interpretation of the play that pays attention to its historical embeddedness and its relationship to court politics. In so doing, I am taking up the suggestions of Montrose who distinguishes the “rhythm of reciprocity” of *Love's Labour's Lost*, its “network of reciprocal rights and obligations,” and its refraction of the “cultural condition” of the court.⁸ Although Montrose does not elaborate these observations into a discussion of gift-exchange, he furnishes a provocative starting-point for a more fully documented contextual critique. Politically charged arguments over territory, anxieties about money and royal practices which had fallen into disrepair, and speculations about the future of forms of constituted authority determine to a great extent the play’s particular tone and texture.

The topicality of the play has been a focus for considerable debate. Earlier studies established precise historical parallels in the visits of the Princess of France, Marguerite de Valois, and Queen Catherine to Navarre in 1578 and 1586 respectively, or they endeavoured to dismantle the drama’s satirical apparatus and its lampooning of Sir Walter Raleigh and approval of Essex, Southampton, and their supporters.⁹ My concern is not with a static reflection of a unitary “history”; rather, I seek to understand *Love's Labour's Lost* in terms of its critical dialogue with more wide-ranging Elizabethan cultural practices and its preoccupation with the dynamics of the gift.

II

Love's Labour's Lost is often held to be "light," witty, an expression of literary exuberance, and an exercise in courtly entertainment. As a counter-argument to these views, we need to recognize that the play is as much concerned with a contest over power, property, and financial debt. At the core of Shakespeare's text is a dispute over tribute-payments from which the rest of the action springs. Around the discussion between Navarre and the Princess of France about Aquitaine gather a host of competing issues. It is a crucial, if confusing point in *Love's Labour's Lost's* development:

King. Madam, your father here doth intimate
The payment of a hundred thousand crowns;
Being but the one half of an entire sum
Disbursed by my father in his wars.
But say that he, or we, as neither have,
Receiv'd that sum, yet there remains unpaid
A hundred thousand more; in surety of the
which,
One part of Aquitaine is bound to us,
Although not valued to the money's worth.
If then the king your father will restore
But that one half of which is unsatisfied,
We will give up our right in Aquitaine,
And hold fair friendship with his majesty.
But that, it seems, he little purposeth,
For here he doth demand to have repaid
A hundred thousand crowns; and not demands
On payment of a hundred thousand crowns
To have his title live in Aquitaine;
Which we much rather had depart withal,
And have the money by our father lent,
Than Aquitaine, so gelded as it is.
Dear princess, were not his requests so far
From reason's yielding, your fair self should
make
A yielding 'gainst some reason in my breast,
And go well satisfied to France again.
Prin. You do the king my father too much
wrong,
And wrong the reputation of your name,
In so unseemingly to confess receipt
Of that which hath so faithfully been paid.
King. I do protest I never heard of it;
And if you prove it I'll repay it back,
Or yield up Aquitaine.
Prin. We arrest your word:
Boyet, you can produce acquittances
For such a sum from special officers
Of Charles his father. (2.1.128-62)¹⁰

The thrust of the disagreement is this: Navarre claims that 100,000 crowns of the 200,000 owed his father by the King of France were never delivered, notwithstanding the King of France's contrary claims. An area of Aquitaine (worth less than 100,000 crowns) was offered in surety. If France were to pay half the outstanding amount, Navarre urges, he would forget about Aquitaine and make peace. However, things are complicated by France's having requested 100,000 crowns from Navarre, which he finds intolerable. Furthermore, it is difficult to decide if France has met all of his financial obligations, if Navarre is unjustly retaining Aquitaine, if both parties are to be trusted and believed, or if both are to blame. All of this is a political mess, a ter-

ritorial headache, and the difficulties of the situation create a powerful impression of deadlock. Calling for acquittances presents itself as the only solution. But Boyet has a more good-humored idea when he proposes: "I'll give you Aquitaine, and all that is his, / An you give him for my sake but one loving kiss" (2.1.247-48). Boyet elects himself as an arbiter in the diplomatic crisis, and recommends an exchange that fuses property interests with sexual desire as an antidote to injured sensibilities; for material possessions, the Princess will make a gift of her kiss.

Idealistic and flippant, perhaps. Still, Boyet's unheeded suggestion prepares the ground for other exchange structures that pervade the play as a whole. Indeed, the opening stages are concerned with nothing less than the granting of gifts and the weighing up of reciprocal responsibilities, reflected in Navarre's announcement of his dedication to academic asceticism:

Let fame, that all hunt after in their lives,
Live register'd upon our brazen tombs,
And then grace us in the disgrace of death;
When, spite of cormorant devouring Time,
Th' endeavour of this present breath may buy
That honour which shall bate his scythe's keen
edge,
And make us heirs of all eternity.

(1.1.1-7)

It is less a transformation of identity than the striking of a bargain that Navarre imagines. Metaphors of monetary exchange dominate although there is no actual money involved in Navarre's speculations. Instead, he will renounce his life to secure glory, the perpetuation of his name and a place in immortality. In his will to win honor, he resembles the "rich man" described by Mauss in some Indian societies of the American Northwest who is "constrained to expend everything" and who spends "recklessly" to gain power and "prestige," Mauss adds: "Sometimes . . . one destroys simply in order to give the appearance that one has no desire to receive anything back."¹¹ This chimes with the way in which Navarre extravagantly makes a gift of himself, although it neglects questions of inheritance. For Navarre does require a reward which will be to inherit eternal fame; in his declarations, even at this early stage, is glimpsed the Princess' becoming an heiress at the close.

One effect of exchange is to inaugurate social obligations, and the ramifications of Navarre's decision emerge when he states:

You three, Berowne, Dumain, and Longaville,
Have sworn for three years' term to live with me,
My fellow-scholars, and to keep those statutes
That are recorded in this schedule here:
Your oaths are pass'd; and now subscribe your
names,
That his own hand may strike his honour down
That violates the smallest branch herein—
If you are arm'd to do, as sworn to do,
Subscribe to your deep oaths, and keep it too.
(1.1.15-23)

Now the nature of the contract is explained. Having enumerated the benefits accruing from a devotion to abstinence, Navarre details the inverse side of the agreement,

the restraints and regulations. An air of soldierly bravado is introduced as Navarre enjoins his fellows to subscribe their names, an act which is also an effacement of name inasmuch as Berowne, Dumain and Longaville are turning their backs on their previous selves. The gifts they will eventually receive come with a high price. That the imbalances of the exchange outlaw qualities of vitality and spontaneity is registered in the wordplay upon "pass away" (1.1.49) and "rest" (1.1.53), and the reminder of the irreducibility and inevitability of death again anticipates the mood of the play's conclusion.

And yet Navarre will not be persuaded to abandon his scheme. An argument with Berowne develops:

Ber. By yea and nay, sir, then I swore in jest.
What is the end of study, let me know?

King. Why, that to know which else we should
not know.

Ber. Things hid and barr'd, you mean, from
common sense?

King. Ay, that is study's god-like recompense.
(1.1.54-58)

Once more Navarre flirts with the idea of spiritual reparation for earthly endeavor. The objections of Berowne do nothing to dampen Navarre's enthusiasm; he is unmoved by his fellows' reservations. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines "recompense" as "Compensation (received or desired) for some loss or injury sustained." However, the word carries the subsidiary meaning of "Return or repayment for something given or received."¹² The notion of reward recurs as Navarre, to defuse opposition, defends a contract whose terms appear increasingly unattractive and untenable.

If Navarre participates in a system of exchanges, then the Princess is similarly implicated. Her arrival at the court of Navarre is heralded by Boyet's cheering encouragement:

Now, madam, summon up your dearest spirits:
Consider who the king your father sends,
To whom he sends, and what's his embassy:
Yourself, held precious in the world's esteem,
To parley with the sole inheritor
Of all perfections that a man may owe,
Matchless Navarre; the plea of no less weight
Than Aquitaine, a dowry for a queen.
Be now as prodigal of all dear grace
As Nature was in making graces dear
When she did starve the general world beside,
And prodigally gave them all to you.

(2.1.1-12)

Economic metaphors are pointedly emphasized in Boyet's exhortatory address. Spirits are to be valued—"dearest" is employed in the sense of material importance. The financial undercurrent of the speech is sustained in "precious" and "world's esteem," a phrase that recalls Navarre's reflections on the "world's desires" (1.1.10). Further correspondences accumulate: Navarre's devouring Time becomes a generous Nature who gives the Princess graces in a spirit of aristocratic *largesse*. As nuance and personification build toward a sense of Navarre's and the Princess' interlocking destinies, the political situation is illuminated: the Princess will be pleading for a gift of prop-

erty, Aquitaine, to increase the worth of the dowry accompanying her marriage.

What is underscored as the play begins is a series of "prestations" which permeate many levels of the fabric of Navarre, from diplomatic operations and property decisions to relationships between men and fathers and daughters. Equally apparent are voices of resistance and an anxiety that gift-exchange does not advantage both participating parties. Throwaway remarks that pepper the preliminary scenes suggest that every exchange in the play invariably backfires. Berowne exclaims:

These earthly godfathers of heaven's lights,
That give a name to every fixed star,
Have no more profit to their shining nights
Than those that walk and wot not what they are.
(1.1.88-91)

It is possible, as William C. Carroll points out, that Berowne is arguing sophistically here.¹³ More immediately obvious, though, is Berowne's contention that astronomers, having bestowed identities on new solar systems and constellations, are not rewarded with subsequent knowledge. The status of the donor is not augmented by baptizing a previously unknown phenomenon. Shortly afterwards, Armado rhapsodizes about being in love:

If drawing my sword against the humour of affection would deliver me from the reprobate thought of it, I would take Desire prisoner, and ransom him to any French courtier for a new-devised courtesy. (1.2.55-59)

Armado's mean transaction echoes Berowne's sympathy for the astronomers. To renounce Desire for a tip about the latest fashions in bowing, culled from a French boudoir, seems a poor exchange. Nor is Desire exorcised, for it asserts itself in the phallic deployment of the sword and the sexually charged demonstration of a flamboyant *politesse*.

III

The fantastical Spaniard is not limited to complaints about his amatory inclinations; he belongs, in fact, to a larger network of exchanges that affects Costard and Jaquenetta, that develops the anatomization of money in *Love's Labour's Lost*, and that pushes the play's fascination with the gift into other areas of society. The subplot thematizes the writing, sending, and receiving of letters which, in the symbolic economy of *Love's Labour's Lost*, are perceived as presents.¹⁴ In this matrix of textual transmissions Costard is the unwilling and incompetent messenger. Imprisoned, he is allowed his freedom by Armado: "Sweet air! Go, tenderness of years; take this key, give enlargement to the swain, bring him festinately hither; I must employ him in a letter to my love" (3.1.3-5). Armado becomes a creditor by making a gift which cannot be refused: Costard, he knows, does not wish to remain behind bars.¹⁵ Tied to a social superior who gives to have his rank affirmed, Costard must act as a go-between. Armado states: "I give thee thy liberty, set thee from durance; and in lieu thereof, impose on thee nothing but this: bear this significant to the country maid Jaquenetta" (3.1.125-27). One form of imprisonment has been replaced by another,