

interpretation based on an analogy between the role of merit in winning salvation and the role of merit in winning romantic love. In suggesting that God, not she, deserves credit for curing the king (II.i.150–56), for example, Helena articulates a vision of the relation between divine inspiration and human merit that might be acceptable to both Catholics and Protestants.

Twelfth Night, Hunt believes, contrasts alternative Protestant views of providence. Moderate Protestants stressed that God works through secondary causes, such as the natural forces that cast Viola on the shore of Illyria, and, more importantly, Viola herself, who is favored by Providence because she acts charitably. In contrast, Malvolio's view of Providence is that it works immediately for the benefit of the elect — namely himself. Hunt argues persuasively that “Shakespeare is not so much intolerant of a kind of Puritan Providence, as he is bent upon dramatizing its narrowness so as to make another, more expansive kind of providence attractive” (87).

Hunt's interpretation of *Othello* is likely to be received as the most controversial in this study. Many interpreters have cast Desdemona as the good angel and Iago as the devil in a morality play that evokes the Old Religion. Interestingly, Hunt suggests that this interpretation is an oversimplification promoted by characters within the play — notably Othello — who are attempting to absolve themselves of guilt. An alternative interpretation is that Desdemona's terrible suffering implies that she is not protected by the special Providence reserved for the elect; though martyrs among the elect also suffer unjustly, they display an assurance of their salvation that Desdemona lacks. For Hunt, this horrific treatment of predestination in the play may be designed to “make playgoers better appreciate the grace of a liberal Providence” (118) promoted by theologians such as Hooker.

Hunt's “Coda” emphasizes that Shakespeare is not naïve in thinking that we can easily create unity within Christendom, or even within Protestantism. Yet Shakespeare encourages us nonetheless to cultivate a degree of tolerance, and he shows “empathy for the human condition in its frequent inability to do so” (130).

Thoroughly documented and informed by detailed knowledge of doctrinal issues current in Shakespeare's culture, *Shakespeare's Religious Allusiveness: Its Play and Tolerance* deepens our understanding of the subtle and complex ways in which Shakespeare deals with a range of theological issues. This study is especially valuable for its critique of efforts to portray Shakespeare as a doctrinaire adherent of a particular theological position.

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A. G. Harmon. *Eternal Bonds, True Contracts: Law and Nature in Shakespeare's Problem Plays*.

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The relation between law and comedy is an old one. The law can be comic because it is an ass, but it is also a part of the structure of New Comedy, whose

legacy has been so enduring since Plautus, Terence, and others first made plots in which the younger generation expressed a spirit of love that had to circumvent the law of the older generation often embodied in the *senex*, or old man. Law in a general sense was a means of social control for one generation over the next as well as being the way by which the ruling class exercised power over their subordinates. The parental block is often a trial for the lovers. The challenge to the old order leads to chaos and the establishment of a new order. And the older generation, especially in Shakespeare's romantic comedy, becomes educated into this new order by the very children they sought to teach and control. The spirit of youth schools the law of the elders. Comedy becomes, then, a means to teach the limits of that law.

What makes A. G. Harmon's study particularly interesting is that it combines an examination of law and nature with that of the problem play, that is, one involving a social study and the other a formal problematic. Harmon's argument, or at the very least his title, depends on what plays are considered under this category. The usual triad is *Troilus and Cressida*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, and *Measure for Measure*, although some critics consider *Hamlet*, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, and *Timon of Athens* to be problem plays. There are other plays that critics have thus classified (I once argued for *Henry V*). Harmon includes *Merchant of Venice*, which stretches the genre and the time period to about five years earlier than the usual first play of this "genre," so that he should probably elaborate a justification for this inclusion. Whatever one thinks about this addition, it allows for a discussion of trials and justice that it would not otherwise permit. As in any scholarship in Shakespeare, the ground is well-tilled, and this creates quite a challenge for any scholar. In addition, whether one considers *Merchant* a problem play, discussions of law in it are important (see, for instance, Margaret Scott, Peter Alscher, Clara Mucci).

Harmon works in the area of law and literature. He admirably brings to bear his legal training and legal history — as well as the philosophical underpinnings in Aquinas amid the dangers of change both in the ecclesiastical and secular laws. Moreover, Harmon discusses contracts in *Measure*, and sees in it evidence of what is a proper marriage contract in Shakespeare. Harmon points to Isabella's distinction between crimes attempted and fulfilled. What probably confuses this issue is the nature of theology (Christ's words about lust and intentions), politics (who has the power and authority?), and drama (what involves the redemption of this "comedy"?). The notion of the mock contract in *Troilus* that Harmon offers is suggestive. He argues that in this play, which he views as parodic, there is a perversion of nature through the connection between sex and war. The disruption of order is something the satire in the play represents. Different orientations to nature, according to Harmon, connect the plays under study. For instance, in *Measure*, the agents of nature restore order by correcting those who cheat nature, whereas in *Troilus* this does not occur. In *Merchant* friendship and commercial bonds are part of these doubling orientations to nature. In this connection Harmon reminds us of the importance of Aristotle, as elaborated by Aquinas then Richard Hooker, and brings in material, efficient, formal, and final causes as a gloss

on the commercial enterprise and contract. How effective the law is in this play depends on the quality of mercy, that is the nature of charity and faith, so, I would add, religion and love affect the legal and dramatic representations of the bond.

The self-conscious nature of debate is a key element in the problem plays. *All's Well* is no exception. Harmon calls attention to the metaphysics in this play and how it is a summing up of the three plays he has discussed because it shares qualities with each. It is designed as a play to fulfill its contract. *Merchant* and *All's Well* share similar imagery between the bond and the marriage contract. Harmon sees in the bed-trick a fusion of the ends of a contract and of marriage: Helena gets the ring to beget a child. Deficiencies in contracts in these four plays need to be rectified to restore social integrity. This has a comic aspect to it: the structural imperatives of comedy demand this kind of new order. In aiming the discussion beyond these plays Harmon draws his argument together clearly, discussing *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Twelfth Night*, *King Lear*, and *The Tempest*, which he refers to as "his most metaphysical poem" (161). Harmon also concentrates on the marriage contract as an ordering principle, which was as true for Elizabethan and Jacobean law and religion as it was for Renaissance comedy. The marriage at the end of comedy is generative socially and dramatically. Harmon's book leads up to the epiphany that Shakespearean characters have at their wisest and most patient moments: a fulfillment in "contentment in a genuine existence" (163). The law in these plays helps to find quotidian resolutions to the imperfect and problematic worlds of these dramas — except for *Troilus and Cressida* — that allow for generative paths to better times. The exception of *Troilus* creates its own implications for a double bind to the double name of nature that Harmon discusses in his exploration of eternal bonds and true contracts. This book, a useful contribution to Shakespearean studies and to law and literature, is clear, able and generative despite whatever problems it faces and embodies.

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Catherine M. S. Alexander, ed. *Shakespeare and Politics*.

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The first chapter of *Shakespeare and Politics* attempts to corral the fairly heterogeneous selection of fifteen essays that follows into "a range of interlinked thematic clusters" (2). This task proves difficult: the articles that Catherine Alexander has selected are uniformly strong but complex, qualified, and suggestive. As a result, they do not lend themselves easily to summation. However, all the articles that follow the opening chapter have already been published in *Shakespeare Survey*. They appear here in the following order, given by author and (in parentheses) the number of *Shakespeare Survey* where the article was originally published: Blair Worden (44), Peter L. Rudnytsky (43), Anne Barton (38), S. Schoenbaum