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Schwartz, Regina Mara. Loving Justice, Living Shakespeare

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chapters open up overlooked and extremely rich materials from the eve of the Reformation, demonstrating how fluid confessional attitudes proved, prior to any religious conflict. “Heresy” served to sharpen a sense of religious division through stigmatizing others. When and how early moderns began to adopt confessional labels for themselves remain questions to be broached in another work.

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Schwartz, Regina Mara.

Loving Justice, Living Shakespeare.

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. Pp. xi, 141. ISBN 978-0-19-879521-6 (hardcover) US\$29.95.

Much love of writing about Shakespeare has gone into the making of this book. *Loving Justice, Living Shakespeare* reads more like an extended essay on human justice and love, with Shakespeare as a sounding board. This book is about complications and pleasures that justice creates in the professions of love in the Shakespearean world in which seeing the world “justly” (vii) is itself under the dramatist’s scrutiny. This, in a nutshell, is how Rowan Williams, Master of Magdalen College at the University of Cambridge, introduces Regina Mara Schwartz’s book about the ideas of justice in Shakespeare, the notions (and sense) of right and wrong, hurt and pain, joy and contentment, cruelty and forgiveness, and where one’s duty to the other (the lover, the neighbour, the friend) belongs among these ideas.

The crux of the book is the exploration of how love and justice are distributed in plays in which harm and moral and social reckoning are brought upon as a resolution but also a way of thinking, on Shakespeare’s part; and of the different functions that love plays in relation to justice, power, and giving in *King Lear*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Hamlet*. For this reviewer at least, the book was an academic page-turner. Schwartz’s elegant and probing writing reveals her deep command of the subject; she is able to synthesize the complex and extensive problems from the theological, philosophical, and cultural history of justice and love in crystal clear sentences

in which passion and precision of thought reveal her sensitivity to both the text she analyzes and the attention of her reader. Personal story at times intersperses with and enhances, rather than interrupts, the critical narrative about the acts of giving love and the complexities of justice in Shakespeare and his theoretical, religious, and philosophical antecedents and contemporaries.

The book begins with a critical and inevitably (given its short length) selective overview of the philosophical discussions of justice, starting with Thucydides (whose importance for Renaissance writing is yet to be comprehensively and systematically assessed), Hesiod, Aristotle, Aeschylus, Plato, Luther, and Calvin, and taking us to the Bible, Kant, Hegel (briefly), Freud, Nietzsche, Levinas, and Derrida. Thus, the book places Shakespeare at the intersection of religious and philosophical writing across time. The law of justice and an understanding of love as an act of giving, or justice as love, and of how difficult it is to give love, but also to weigh justice, are explored in a reading first of the Hebrew Bible then of the plays by Shakespeare.

Chapter 3, “The Power of Love,” for instance, opens with a straightforward claim that one of the reasons political theorists dealing with justice do not explore love is because “it lacks power” (37). True. Another reason may be that love itself is not a topic of debate; instead, we debate, over its application, representation, expression, and experience. What is important about this book is that it revives a subject that has been left out of much poststructuralist writing (not that this book engages specifically with poststructuralist theories) and historiography on the early modern period—as older critical schools, having once dealt with the topic, are re-examined. Schwartz’s reading of *King Lear* reveals a Shakespeare attentive to the nuances of his time’s debate about common and natural law, in his dramatization of justice. But he’s also shown to be a playwright exploring the thin line that separates duty, justice, and expressions of love at the intersection of domestic and public realms which he inhabits and attempts to rule at the point of his waning creative life. Love as a verbal exchange between lovers, analyzed illuminatingly using the sociologist Niklas Luhmann’s theory on love as communication, is the subject of a compelling short section on *Romeo and Juliet*. What classical and Renaissance dialogues and non-fictional writing about romantic love say about love is a topic that would extend and complicate the critical analysis at this point.

Chapter 4, “The Economics of Love,” examines the concept of “contractual justice” (69) leading into the analysis of love’s economic vicissitudes within

the “contractual thinking” (71) that “govern[s]” both love and justice in *The Merchant of Venice*, a play in which both Christian and Jewish concepts of justice conflate and conflict, and affect love expressed in “commercial terms” (79), as it often was described in “Renaissance literature” (79). An example or two from that rich body of literature would have put the illuminating discussion of *Merchant* in dialogue with the writing that produced the play and against which the play reacts.

The book’s last chapter, “The Forgiveness of Love,” takes us back to Aristotle and Plato, as well as to Richard Posner’s writing about the economics of justice and Robert Nozick’s discussion of the difference between retribution and justice, as a way of situating the analysis of *The Merchant of Venice* in the discourse of forgiving as a place in which love and justice intersect. But this chapter also opens up a discussion of *Hamlet* as an “anti-revenge tragedy” (103). Much has been written about the complicated political and affective world of *Hamlet* lately, but a philosophical connection between this tragedy and the concept of justice, both eternal and legal, adds a compact yet important layer onto the critical moment at which discussions of *Hamlet* have regained critical force. Schwartz’s contribution to the *Hamlet* moment lies in her thinking about how justice and revenge are pitted against, or by, moral rebuke.

Overall, this book belongs to the growing criticism on Shakespeare and philosophy. The force of Schwartz’s writing lies in disentangling—clearly, simply (but not simplistically), and persuasively—the intricately layered concepts of love, as a discourse and experience, and justice, as a counter-discourse and demand. She uses a critical language that makes this book valuable to specialists and a general readership in search of reliable, expert, and beautiful critical judgment on two important notions between which the lives of characters in Shakespeare’s plays unfold.

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