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**Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies**

**Title**

Drama and the Market in the Age of Shakespeare (review)

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2qh3b84p>

**Journal**

Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 24(1)

**ISSN**

0069-6412

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**Publication Date**

1993-10-01

Peer reviewed

Douglas Bruster, *Drama and the Market in the Age of Shakespeare* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 164 pp.

*Drama and the Market in the Age of Shakespeare* is a study of how Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists confronted the changing face of London's market economy. The implications of such a project stretch well beyond economic history, calling into question long-held assumptions about the relationship between literature and commerce. Recent research in this field has demonstrated the many ties (often tortuous, always inseparable) that bind Shakespeare's works to the particular material conditions of the urban market. Douglas Bruster sets out to map some of these ties, and thus to bring us a step closer to what he calls "a poetics of the market."

In his first chapter, "Toward a material theater," Bruster seeks to define his project in relation to other recent work in the field, notably Jean-Christophe Agnew's landmark study, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750* (1986). Rather than viewing drama and the market as "worlds apart", Bruster insists that "the theater was, *a priori*, a market... a place of business" (10). No one (least of all Agnew) would deny that the theaters were businesses; but the bare equation "theater = market" glosses over rich complexities. In Shakespeare's era this equation was a matter for metaphor as much as a matter of fact—a shifting and unstable metaphor in which neither term possessed a privileged identity in relation to the other. If the theater could be analyzed as a market, the market could also be unmasked as a grand theater. Bruster tends to presume that the market was "real", and the theater a sector of it; the notion of the theatricality of the marketplace, with all of its disturbing implications, receives little attention.

The author's decision to see only one side of the coin allows him to draw a conclusion which I regard as untenable: that the theaters of London's suburbs were not the marginalized, potentially subversive institutions they have so often been mistaken for (by Renaissance authorities and modern critics alike), but "institutional participants in the cultural milieu" of early modern capitalism, speaking to the public "in ways more ordinary than radical" (11). What, then, of all the anti-theatrical polemics and legislation; what of the closing of the theaters? Bruster quotes anti-theatrical documents in order to demonstrate the cultural centrality of the playhouses, but he seems to miss their most important implications. (Thus, he reads a petition by affluent citizens against the construction of a new playhouse as simply an attempt to pre-

vent overcrowding in their precinct—an expression of deep cultural antipathy becomes for Bruster just another testament to the great popularity of the players.) His odd and ambiguous assertion that the theaters were “potentially no more marginal a part of London than their publics demanded” (10) explains little: it was not on the whole the play-going public that sought to shut down the playhouses. Indeed, if the enemies of the players had shared Bruster’s confidence in looking at a theater and concluding “it’s only a market”, their wrath might have been appeased; that it was not suggests that the situation was a good deal more complex than this book allows.

With this in mind, it is at once surprising and fortunate that the best arguments in this book stand independently of the governing thesis. Ultimately, the relations of theater to market and of margin to center are of little importance to Bruster’s interesting analyses of cuckoldry or the Troy myth in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. The chapters dealing with these subjects successfully build on the notion that playwrights confronted the market economy with “an anxious urgency, a felt imperative to interpret the ‘new’ intricacies of commercial exchange with a newly constructed theatrical vocabulary of the urban marketplace” (17).

The link between cuckoldry and capital, explored in the chapter “Horns of plenty”, is compelling. Renaissance playwrights delighted in the resemblance of the merchant to the “wittol”, or willing cuckold, both of whom resign themselves to putting their property to the use of another in return for material security and gain. In addition, both are seen to profit from another’s “labor” (mechanical or sexual). Of course, the central idea has already been summed up by Shakespeare’s *Lavatch*: “He that ears my land spares my team, and gives me leave to inn the crop. If I be his cuckold, he’s my drudge.” Demonstrating how surprisingly widespread and significant this seemingly perverse argument is, Bruster contributes a new layer to our understanding of the Early Modern era’s deep and abiding concern with the figure of the cuckold.

The book concludes with a discussion of *Troilus and Cressida*. This play may seem an odd inhabitant of a study which might be expected to deal primarily with “City Comedy”, but Bruster argues forcefully and well that this subgenre of twentieth-century invention tends to obstruct broader analyses of social commentary in Renaissance drama. Building on Empson’s observation that “all large towns in the plays are conceived as London”, he explores the widely perceived parallel between the cities of Troy and London (sometimes called “Troynovant”). In a play dripping with mercantile metaphor, Bruster sees Shakespeare writing “a

"Trojan history of the present" (102), satirizing London's seedy commercialism and drawing a parallel between a long ago war fought over cuckoldry and contemporary wars fought over trade. Read this way, the play suggests that even as cuckoldry brought about the destruction of Troy, so will commodities be the fall of London. This is the best essay in an uneven but suggestive account of how Shakespeare and his contemporaries confronted and interpreted their rapidly altering economic environment.

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