



# Exchanging Hearts in English Renaissance

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## Abstract

During the renaissance, Britain's economy developed a lot. At the same time, it also injects some new ideas into society. Some works reflected how people's attitude toward love changed during this time like Philip Sidney's *A Ditty*. This paper studies the poem through economic criticism and interprets it from a new perspective.

## Subject Areas

Economics, Literature

## Keywords

Renaissance, Philip Sidney's a Ditty, Love, Economic Criticism

## 1. The Origin of Economic Criticism

Money used to be described as vulgar, while art as noble. People hardly discuss them together. Because aesthetic value brought by art is different from material problems brought by money. However, economics and literature are inextricably linked from themes like Timon of Athens to patronages and publishers who have an influence on writers. And this phenomenon lasts till the emergence of Samuel Johnson. G.H. Lewes declared that: He was the first professional author—the first who, by dint of courage and ability, kept himself free from the slavery of a bookseller's hack, and free from the still worse slavery of attendance on the great. He sought his subsistence in public patronage, not in dedications to men of rank [1].

Economics and literature also have gone through break-ups. When economic criticism was firstly created, its definition was precise. Kurt Heinzelman divided economic criticism into imaginative economics and poetic economics [2]. The former emphasizes economic systems are structured by means of the imagination upon what are essentially fictive concepts, while the latter scrutinizes the

way in which literary writers use fictive economic discourse as an ordering principle in their work. Actually, the connection between economics and literature is complementary. Marc Shell's definition also verified this relation: literary works are composed of small interactions and metaphors, some of which can be analyzed by economic contents that it referred to, but all can be studied in economic ways [2].

So, when did they separate from each other? Kurt Heinzelman thought the publication of *Theory of Political Economy* written by W. S. Jevons in 1871 not only suggested the revolution of economic thoughts, but also their separation. But there was also another saying that the time should be a century earlier when political economy and typical bourgeois literary form, novel emerged simultaneously. And the gendering of culture and the consequent separation of the political and domestic domains in the late eighteen century also had something to do with the separation. Just as James Thompson wrote: if the novel is "that discourse that describes or imagines and so constructs privacy and domesticity, political economy is the discourse that imagines or describes civil society and publicity [3]." Moreover, the advent of romanticism played an important part. From then on, art and business stood on each other's opposite sides, so aesthetic value and monetary value separated as well.

One of the most important views in economic criticism is metaphor. Kurt Heinzelman and Marc Shell both agreed metaphors are in a sense economic, since the etymology of "metaphor" contains within it the concept of transfer or exchange. Shell also demonstrated money is an "internal participant" in the semiological organization of language: if language consists of economies, so also economics is a language [4].

Then this word triggered critical economics movement which aimed to inject self-consciousness into the practices and paradigms of economics by exposing its metaphorical or fictive bases. This movement forced economics to reform. The appeal of bounding economics and social science together was becoming higher as well. Since the main points of early economic criticism are too scattered to collect, there is no complete theoretical system. Nowadays the priority of economic criticism is to find out how these two disciplines interact and to see if they can bring sparkles to each other.

This paper explores economic terms in Renaissance poem—A Ditty through economic criticism. It first introduces the economic and cultural context during Britain's Renaissance. Following that, patronage tradition in literary history is discussed, then comes the analysis of economic terms in A Ditty written by Sidney and conclusion of this paper.

## 2. The Economy and Ideas in Renaissance

After the 11th century, the once-declined Western European cities began to prosper again, and a large number of literary works based on secular emotions appeared. The secularization of literary works became richer due to the injection

of these contents, and the forms of expression of these literary works were also different, like realization of human love in poetry, the protests against all aspects of the religious world, and the different attitudes towards erotic desires. With the continuous expansion of Renaissance, Britain has also made world-renowned achievements in culture. A large number of great thinkers and writers have emerged, and they have created many well-known masterpieces, which are praised by people today. The reason for the rise of the Renaissance in Europe was the development of commodity economy and the budding of democratic political thought. There is also a specific social and cultural element that is the discovery and re-understanding of ancient Greek and Roman culture. The source of classical culture should be ancient Greece, ancient Rome and early Christian culture. It is on the basis of these cultures that writers have achieved new creations and breakthroughs in ideas.

When discussing the culture of Renaissance, researchers generally use the concept of “secularization” to define it. The secular literature in the Middle Ages is relative to the Christian religious literature and can be roughly divided into heroic epic, knight literature and urban literature, which include poetry, prose, drama and story.

The rise of secular culture can be summarized from the following aspects. First, with the transition of Western European society from feudalism to capitalism, the social and political concepts in the Middle Ages began to transform from tradition to modern times. At that time, the church’s monopoly on culture could no longer meet the needs of social development. Because citizens are looking for higher profits, they have certain requirements for literacy. But the church has a monopoly on culture, and these demands on the citizens are also unbearable. Therefore, the establishment of some secular cultural schools has become an urgent need of the citizen class. Second, Christianity monopolized the realm of social consciousness at that time, and people’s thinking was constrained. When the economy develops and the city rises, people gradually realize that “those who can travel all over the world must be knowledgeable people. Even if they are deprived of property and have no friends, they are still citizens of every country and can fearlessly contempt changes in destiny.” So, intellectuals began to study ancient works, which also promoted the development of citizen culture.

The Renaissance first originated in Italy and made great achievements there, then began to spread from Italy to various places. It had a huge impact on the Renaissance in European countries. It can be said that other countries are following in Italy’s footsteps. There is no doubt that Britain is also influenced by Italy.

Britain in the Middle Ages was a country dominated by agriculture. The feudal serfdom severely hindered the transfer of labor and population in society. The outbreak of the Black Death caused a sharp drop in the labor force and contributed to the disintegration of the British manor system economy and the economic development of the British Welfare Society. It caused a massive decline in

the British population, which triggered a series of reactions in society, from the form of land rent from labor rent to currency rent, to the change in the agricultural planting structure and the socio-economic structure, and the serfs gradually Get rid of the personal attachment to the feudal lord and obtain a certain degree of freedom. These factors have played a role in promoting the collapse of the serf system and the feudal manor economy.

In short, the widespread epidemic of the Black Death in the United Kingdom has brought unpredictable disasters to the development of society and caused a massive decline in the population [5]. Some scholars even bluntly said: “The Black Death is a shame in European society, because it exposes the hidden contradictions and defects of feudal society. At the same time, for Europeans, it allows them to recognize that their society is in danger.” But from another perspective, the Black Death objectively promoted the disintegration of the British serfdom economy and promoted the changes in the traditional British economic structure. The development of animal husbandry such as sheep farming led to the development of the British rural economy. At the same time, people’s traditional spiritual beliefs have also begun to disintegrate. People pay more attention to their own development. The concept of equality and freedom has gradually penetrated into people’s daily lives. While promoting people’s own development, they have also injected new ideas into the development of society.

### 3. Patronage Tradition

In recent years much has been said about patronage of the arts in modern society. Very seldom, and then only for exceptional reasons, has the writing of poetry brought the poet an adequate income; and there is no reason to suppose that it ever will. But this question of cash is the least important part of the problem: poets have contrived to live in spite of the lack of sale for their product, and have written in poverty, ill-health, in prison, or when starving. The true problem of patronage is that of the relation between the poet and his audience, which has been complicated latterly, not so much by penal taxation as by the Romantic theory of poetry as self-expression. The poet has been inclined to say, “Give me my bread and butter and I will reveal my soul” and has been a little pained at the unenthusiastic response. Patrons have been too ready, none the less, to accept this doctrine, and have either given prizes for work already written, or have made gifts to young writers to enable them to work on their own for a period. But patronage once implied something of much more value. It implied the commissioning of poets to produce works of a particular kind. It implied lively and stimulating criticism of the poet by the patron. Above all, it gave the assurance to the poet that the work he had been asked to write was something the patron wished to have. In other words, patronage meant that the poet was producing something to meet a known taste.

For the Elizabethans were very conscious in the first half of the Queen’s reign that the art of poetry was spurned and neglected in England. From a study of li-

terary patronage generally in the time of the Renaissance I soon discovered that I could most usefully treat the subject by concentrating on the patrons to whom the poets and writers of the time acknowledged their principal debt, Philip Sidney.

#### 4. Economic Terms in Renaissance Poetry

A Ditty first appeared in Puttenham's *Art of English Poetry* (1589) to illustrate the Epimone, or the love burden. Then the following year it was inserted in *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* (1590), with the six additional lines quoted below:

“His heart his wound received from my sight,  
My heart was wounded with his wounded heart.  
For as from me on him his heart did light,  
So till methought in me his hurt did smart:  
Both equal hurt, in this change sought our bliss,  
My true-love hath my heart and I have his [6].”

*Arcadia* is a long pastoral romance mixed in prose and poetry. This poem is like Sidney's definition of “true love”, that is, true love is the mutual sharing, appreciation and cherishment of both parties. “My true love owns my heart, and his, I will live forever.” Through repetition, the feeling that lovers become one when they are deeply in love comes out of the lines, and the sound after reading is lingering, leaving a deep impression on people. The poet wrote this poem for his sister, so the “I” in the poem is female.

In the first stanza of this poem, the order of second line “by just exchange one for another given” should be “once (heart) given by just exchange for another (heart)”. During the Elizabethan era, the British commodity economy developed rapidly, and fair exchange became an important criterion in trade. This was also reflected in the relationship between people in society and in love. It seemed the way to gain true love is to exchange one heart for another. And Sidney compares love to “bargain” in the fourth line of the first stanza. While “the just exchange” is an economic term used when people make deals with others in the market. Ricardo Andrés Guzmán and Michael C. Munger proposed a theory of just market exchange [7]. According to it, any plausibly just market exchange must balance two conflicting moral considerations: non-worseness and euvoluntariness (true voluntariness; Munger, 2011 [8]). Non-worseness implies that all voluntary and mutually beneficial exchanges are morally permissible. Euvoluntariness requires that neither party to a negotiation is coerced into an exchange by threat of direct harm, such as physical aggression or the disclosure of embarrassing secrets. Similarly, in romance, during the process of exchanging hearts, both the female and male sides are voluntary and mutual. In this poem, since she gave her “heart” to her “true love”, and so did he, the deal is just and actually they are equal in the exchanging process. The level of love can also be measured in the second stanza. It writes he loves my heart, for once it was his own. Compara-

tively, she “cherish his” because in her “it” bides.

Ricardo and Michael also propose three principles of just market exchange:

1) No beneficence: A negotiator in a market setting is not morally obligated to give something that he owns in exchange for something that he values less than what he is giving.

2) No abuse: If a negotiation is procedurally unfair, the stronger party is forbidden from using his unconscionable bargaining power, except where this prohibition conflicts with the first principle, in which case he can use his power only to avoid a loss.

3) Free exchange: If a negotiation is procedurally fair, the parties have the right to exchange at any mutually agreed terms, and they also have the right to not exchange, as long as such rights do not conflict with the first and second principles [9].

It seems that love should also follow these rules. When someone wants to gain something from a relationship, his affection towards love is impure. Then “love exchange” cannot be called just. Similarly, any external force shouldn’t be put on love, it must be free and the willingness to exchange must come from couples themselves.

## 5. Conclusions

During the Renaissance time, business and art in Britain prosper at the same time. The outbreak of the Black Death caused a sharp drop in the labor force and contributed to the disintegration of the British manor system economy and the economic development of the British Welfare Society. The development of animal husbandry such as sheep farming led to the development of the British rural economy. At the same time, people’s traditional spiritual beliefs have also begun to disintegrate. People pay more attention to their own development. The concept of equality and freedom has gradually penetrated into people’s daily lives. While promoting people’s own development, they have also injected new ideas into the development of society. The secular literature in Renaissance can be roughly divided into heroic epic, knight literature and urban literature, which include poetry, prose, drama and story. And a large number of great thinkers and writers have emerged, and they have created many well-known masterpieces, which are praised by people today.

According to economic criticism, economy and literature have a deep connection with each other. Economy is also a kind of language. It can be interpreted from texts. For literature, it is composed of metaphors, while all metaphors contain the meaning of exchange, which can be studied from the perspective of economics. Britain took economy seriously in history. Therefore, to study the English renaissance through this way is meaningful. It interpreted A Ditty in an economic way. There are also some economic terms that appeared in this poem to support this idea, such as “bargain” and “just”. This poem shows that in Renaissance Time, people’s attitude toward love and life. True love can be gained

from exchanging hearts.

Although economic criticism is getting more and more attention nowadays, it comes with a set of problems like the overuse of “economy”. This is also limitation of this paper. Studying literary works in an interdisciplinary way may bring new vigor into literature, but not depend upon too much.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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