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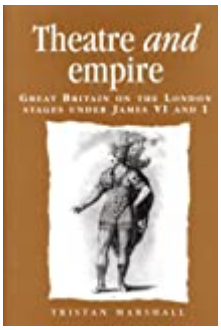

Tristan Marshall. *Theatre and Empire: Great Britain on the London Stages under James VI and I.* Politics, culture and society in early modern Britain. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000. viii + 211 pp. $74.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7190-5748-9.

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When James VI of Scotland was crowned James I of England, he hoped to unite his two kingdoms. Although that project ultimately failed, Tristan Marshall claims that James's reign witnessed the popularization of "the idea of 'Britain' " as a cultural entity. In *Theatre and Empire*, Marshall argues that a careful, contextualized reading of a number of Jacobean plays reveals an evolving discourse focused on such a British identity and concerned with issues of war, religion, and overseas exploration. The argument contributes, of course, to the interpretation of the plays, but historians of Jacobean political thought should read Marshall's nuanced discussion even more attentively than should historians of the drama. Marshall's contention that "public theatre described, informed and ruminated on aspects of both foreign and domestic policy" (p. 5) reflects important aspects of Jacobean thought. His portrayal of a public discourse on "empire" is, on the whole, convincing. Moreover, Marshall's careful handling of dramatic texts models methodology both for historians who rely on literary evidence and literary scholars searching for political contexts.

Marshall sets his discussion of theatrical portrayals of Britain in the context of early seventeenth-century concepts of both imperialism and empire, arguing that "the early Jacobean period saw the coalescing of sixteenth-century ideas of empire into a new form" (p. 9). Those ideas concerned both "the internal sovereign national state" (p. 11) and the plantation of colonies overseas; both were in turn linked by 1603 to notions of militant Protestantism. Marshall dubs ideas of empire stressing the autonomy of the English throne "*imperium*"; he traces the notion of an *imperium* of Great Britain back to attempts to create a political union of England and Scotland as early as the reign of Edward VI. James I's campaign for union had roots also in the writings of such Scottish intellectuals as John Gordon, William Cowper, James Maxwell, John Mair, and George Buchanan; their works variously stressed religious aspects to the recreation of Britannia and emphasized British overseas expansion (a prospect Buchanan deplored). Much of the imagery praising James or celebrating his accession Marshall sees as "specifically imperial iconography" (p. 31) in which James might be "phoenix, the British king reborn, and the mighty cedar" (p. 34) or, like King Arthur, both an exemplar of chivalric values and the unifier of Britain.

James's early reign also witnessed a growing acceptance of overseas colonization, a movement associated in the popular mind with the image of imperial Rome. Advocates of the Virginia settlement played on the idea of ancient British glory and linked the seventeenth-century spread of British Protestant rule to the "Constantinian

legacy of conquest" (p. 19); the participation of both Scots and Englishmen made Virginia an "extension of the new British power" (p. 23). The Ulster plantation pointedly included both English and Scots tenants in a firmly British settlement and placed both Scots and Englishmen on the committee that allotted lands, although Scots tenants took second place to their English counterparts. Between 1610 and 1615 many scholarly writers celebrated Great Britain as physical entity with a memorable ancient political past, linked also to the restoration of true religion. Marshall maintains this writing was not simply oppositional, contending also that the myth of Brute retained a popular following, although England's antiquarians had begun to question its truth by the 1590s.

During the period 1603-1610, when the king sought a *reunion* of England and Scotland " 'under one Imperiall Crowne' " (p. 53) and the idea of Britain retained currency in the London Lord Mayor's pageant, Marshall finds that a number of contemporary plays incorporate implicit or explicit reference to Britain as *imperium* or as empire. Properly understanding the "British" dimension of plays performed during the years when James's project for British union was unraveling shows a British identity that retained popular appeal despite James's political failures. Although an important dimension of each of the plays discussed, dramatic references to Britain or to empire are not always the central issue in each play. In his introduction Marshall emphasizes that his findings do not provide complete interpretations of the plays; rather the playwrights' voicing an ideology of Britain is best seen as part of an on-going dialogue that is but one of several dimensions of any particular drama. Discussion of *The Tragedy of King Lear*, *No-Body and Some-Body*, *Macbeth*, *A Shoe-Maker, a Gentleman*, and *Cymbeline* shows that each of these plays is set in an ancient, British past, most comment on aspects of proper rule, and several also make important associations between an imperial Britain and true religion.

Marshall notes, for example, that Lear's mistakes include not only diminishing his own power but also dividing his kingdom, and that *King Lear* couples "British" material with prophecy, a Britain made whole in the play by the geographical markers for Albany, Cornwall, and Kent. The play concerns the unity of Britain as an autonomous kingdom during the period when the king pressed his parliament to support Union: it was a play illustrating "a specific moment in the British reconstruction at the time," and was not replayed "simply because its message and become outdated" (p. 59). *No-Body and Some-body* or the history of Elidurus, shows a virtuous and ancient king accept the British crown with such reluctance that he weakens the kingdom. *Macbeth* shows Scotland in a time of war: "a traitor seizes the throne and…is then undone by intervention from a friendly England. A young king who expresses his wise thoughts on the subject of the just ruler comes to the throne as a result" (p. 63). Marshall notes that late Elizabethan and early Jacobean writers saw Malcolm's alliance with Edward as "prefiguring the Union" (p. 64). Rowley's *Shoe-Maker* emphasizes Britain's imperial future by associating Britain with Rome and showing also the long linkage of Britain with true religion.

Cymbeline, for Marshall, presents a particularly interesting and complex commentary on early Jacobean conceptions of Britain as both *imperium* and empire. Marshall emphasizes the dangers inherent in attempts to identify characters in the play with James or other historical figures and looks rather for "themes relevant to the Jacobean Court," among them intense British patriotism and the importance of seeing an autonomous British *imperium* functioning within the wider framework of European politics. Marshall sees the character of Lucius, Caesar's deputy, as the "iconographic core of the play" (p. 75), a point supported by the comments of a Jacobean playgoer who probably saw *Cymbeline* in 1611. In a drama larded throughout with imperial imagery, Lucius is instrumental in bringing about the reunions that resolve the play's dilemmas: the reunion of Imogen and her husband, of Cymbeline with his daughter, and of Britain and of a Rome about to be blessed with the birth of Christ. Whether or not the formal Union sought by James was realized, the London stage continued to celebrate Britain, its glorious Roman and Christian past, and its imperial destiny.

The chivalric, imperial, and religious enthusiasms of Henry, Prince of Wales, contributed to the imperial thinking of the period 1611-13, years which saw Henry's investiture and his sister's marriage to the Elector Palatine. Before his death in November, 1612, Henry had cemented friendships with a number of aggressive and expansionist leaders, listened to calls to raise arms for Protestantism, and developed strong interests in British naval affairs, in expansionist ventures like the Virginia colony and the search for a Northwest passage, and in harassing Spain in the West Indies. In the central part of this book Marshall explores "the apotheosis of theatrical material relating to the new Britain" (p. 87), material with a sometimes martial endorsement of British expansionism that provides a clear contrast to the more restrained royal ambitions reflected in the royal masques

of the same years. The themes he discovers in the plays vary greatly.

Marshall sees an imperial subtext in *The Tempest* featuring "a stage representation of…Britain as a distinct island kingdom replete with a past steeped in ancient history" (p. 96; Marshall stated the argument for this interpretation at greater length in a 1998 article in *The Historical Journal*). The play's ending recognizes the role of the outside world in the destinies of the characters who populate the kingdom. If we are to accept Marshall's reading of the play (his case rests largely on the wealth of "imperial" imagery in the text), the imperial theme is relatively subdued in *The Tempest*. In *Tom a Lincoln* an illegitimate son of King Arthur conquers much of Europe, mirroring the martial ambitions of a young British prince. Another young prince, a character stirred by chivalric values, brings the "only ray of hope" (p. 104) amidst the political corruption of *The White Devil*, authored by John Webster who was to eulogize Prince Henry a year after the play was first performed. Caradoc, the *Valiant Welshman*, becomes British as he defends Britain against the Romans, just as Prince Henry of Wales supports the father who has united Britain. Marshall calls the play "almost a manifesto of the prince's specific beliefs and aspirations" (p. 105), and Caradoc, like Henry is, for a time, prevented from practicing war as he would like. William Rowley's *The Birth of Merlin*, Jasper Fisher's *The True Trojans*, and Fletcher's *Bonduca* all draw on episodes from the historical relationship between Rome and Britain, emphasize chivalric values, and are steeped in the imagery Marshall identifies as imperial. The first is, Marshall says a "clarion call for ambitious patriotism" (p. 114), the second a warning against divisions within the imperium, and the third ends with a lament for the dead young prince who promised to bring the empire to greatness.

Censorship did not prevent playwrights from endorsing Prince Henry's chivalric and military ambitions, but the authors of the masques wrote at James's or his queen's command for a specifically royal audience. Marshall believes most of the masques written during these years "attempted to deflect" (p. 123) Henry from too militant an agenda. He examines Prince Henry's *Barriers*, Samuel Daniel's *Tethys Festival*, *Oberon, The Fairy Prince*, *The Masque of Flowers*, *the Memorable Masque*, and *The Masque of Truth.* Henry himself may have written the last of these for his sister's wedding, and it is the only one to advocate a dynamic Protestant foreign policy, although all the other masques reflect the imagery of imperium.

>From 1614 to the end of the reign, playwrights had no recognizable champion on whom to pin imperial ambitions. Marshall argues that Britain as empire nonetheless figured in playwrights' political vocabulary, particularly after 1618 when debate about foreign policy was increasingly vociferous. Even plays without an imperial subtext might comment on foreign policy–deploring James' new wife, for example–and appeals to Britain in history, in drama, or in a lord mayor's pageant, could mean advocating intervention in the Palatinate crisis. Marshall comments on Wentworth Smith's *The Hector of Germany* (c. 1614), Thomas Middleton's *Hengist, King of Kent* (1615-20), Thomas Dekker and Philip Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr* (published 1622), Massinger's *The Maid of Honour* (1621), and Dekker's *The Welsh Embassador* (1623). Smith's play adapts fourteenth-century events that united a brave but somewhat hesitant English king–who had recently lost a son–in an alliance with a brave German Palsgrave in a "piece of theatrical jingoism" (p. 159). Middleton writes of foreigners who adhere to the wrong religion betraying a British king, and Marshall links the play to warning commentary on the dangers of British kings succumbing to foreign and Catholic influence. Similarly, all three of Dekker and Massinger's plays advocate suspicion of Spain and a pro-Protestant agenda through the medium of plays that portray the British past or the by now familiar vocabulary of Britain as empire. The island kingdom of Sicily represents England, for example, in *The Maid of Honour*, which rebukes a generally well-meaning king for misdirected foreign policy.

In his afterword, Marshall points out that King Charles would appropriate the matter of Britain, although as a motif depicting a king guarding the peace, not material associated with the aggressive foreign policy advocated by late Jacobean playwrights. Under Charles, too, "Britain" seems to mean the subordination of Scotland and Wales to England, not the participation of some or all in a unified *imperium*.

Marshall's study is gracefully written and closely argued and repays careful attention. He is *very* careful about how he uses evidence: for example, he sets each group of plays in the context of non-dramatic discourse that is *contemporary* (within his scheme of periodization). Subtexts are identified as subtexts. Rarely does Marshall identify dramatic characters with the courtly figures of the playwrights' own world–rather he sees the political rhetoric of empire as material that enables the playwright to comment obliquely on contemporary political themes. He repeatedly reminds the reader of *other* plays, plays that did not use the imagery or themes of the plays in this study: the "theatre of empire" was one of many kinds

of rhetoric to be heard on the Jacobean stage. Because of this care Marshall's thesis relies on a broad spectrum of evidence: he has addressed plots, characters, imagery, political context, and intellectual context in three distinct groups of Jacobean drama and found a changing political rhetoric of empire. The thesis does not depend on his reading of any single work; I am not, for example, persuaded by the section on *The Tempest*, but find the whole book convincing.

The book orginated in Marshall's 1995 Cambridge Ph.D. thesis, extended here to include a long chapter (one of four) on the period after 1614. Marshall's careful attention to particular (but not all) relevant controversies betrays these origins, as does also, perhaps, his bypassing the more extended discussions of Jacobean politics that might have given his work more general application (and made it more accessible to, for example, a general American audience). The select bibliography includes relatively few works published since 1995 (it omits, for example, Curtis Perry's relevant 1997 *The Making of Jacobean Culture: James I and the Renegotiation of Elizabethan Literary Practice*). There are also occasional technical lapses: two of the plays that merit their own headings, for example, are not in the select bibliography, although their editions appear in the chapter endnotes. On the whole, then, this is a convincing, well-written book with a generally persuasive argument.