

rather than doomed creator, and to accept postmodern pastiche as a potential (and potent) alternative to blank parody. In the book overall, she demonstrates the considerable value of such an approach.

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Tristan Marshall. *Theatre and Empire: Great Britain on the London Stage under James VI and I*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000. Pp x, 211.

Bruce Galloway, the historian, once dismissed as 'naïve' the notion that James [I] was 'spellbound by a vision of "Britannia Rediviva"'. James 'refused offers of Empire', said Galloway, and besides, he declared, in the period 'theatre was one thing, politics, quite another'.¹ In *Theatre and Empire*, Tristan Marshall seeks to refute this claim and others like it. James I, he argues, set out to engineer the creation of a specifically 'British' national identity and to promote an imperial 'Britain' at home and abroad. This 'evocation of "Britishness" is' – or should be – 'at the heart of our understanding of [his] reign' (1). Much of Marshall's book is given over to canvassing the texts, most of them plays, in which this 'identity' was variously seized upon, reworked, and disseminated by James' subjects throughout his reign. The larger historical claims of *Theatre and Empire* are convincing, it seems to me. This is a worthwhile book for the questions it raises (albeit glancingly) about the relations between the theatre and royal authority and ideology in the early Jacobean period. But its specific demonstrations of those claims, and its readings, are, if not unconvincing, then sometimes unfocussed or underdeveloped, leaving much about those relations unexplained and many of those questions unexamined.

Marshall's rejoinder to Galloway at the end of the first chapter suggests both the larger stakes of his argument and his sometimes disjointed approach to it. James, counters Marshall, was enthusiastic about the 'Ulster plantation as a British project'. And who's to say that the 'idea of Britain as a political entity remained the prerogative of the crown alone'? "'Britain" meant many things', he suggests, one thing to common lawyers, perhaps, and another to playwrights such as Shakespeare, who used it as a 'point of topical relevance by which to entertain' (40). Marshall's overall point here is a good one: 'Britain' should not be thought of in narrowly 'political' terms. The failure of James' plans to install

'Great Britain' as a 'political entity' has misled some historians into underestimating its coherence and resilience as a 'cultural entity' (2), but Marshall does not make this mistake, even going so far as to claim that 'Great Britain actually came to life for a short period at the beginning of the seventeenth century' (4). He is assiduous in showing where and how the trope of 'Britain' surfaced in early Jacobean writings, and he uncovers a wide range of references that do in fact demonstrate the centrality of 'Britishness' to Jacobean thought. But to make a convincing case that Britain came to life as a cultural entity early in James's reign we would need to do more, I think, than to establish that a good many 'recurring ideas resonant in the British myth and the British history' can be found in the drama of the period and that many of these 'ideas,' though lacking any 'single uniting image or motif' (56), can presumably be traced back to the court of James I. We would also need, I think, to trace out the relations between the 'politics' of 'Britishness' as they are sometimes understood by historians and the more comprehensive 'politics' that includes *Cymbeline*, *The White Devil*, and *The Welsh Embassadour*, and the many other plays that Marshall cites. We would want to show, in other words, that the 'theatre' of the early modern period was not one thing and its 'politics' quite another, but that both were elements in one complex and dynamic 'thing': the 'cultural politics' that produced the 'British moment' in the early seventeenth century.

This would not be a new demonstration. Something like it has been on the agenda for early modern studies, in one way or another, for about twenty-five years. But what is surprising about *Theatre and Empire*, besides how 'under-theorized' it is, is how little attention it pays to the specific 'relays' between 'politics' (the historians' version) and 'politics' (the critics'). Marshall covers both of these, certainly. In chapter one, we are given an overview of the intellectual antecedents of terms such as 'empire' and *imperium* and of the 'British' inflection these terms received in the early years of James' rule. Similarly, chapter three opens with a valuable discussion of the role that Prince Henry played in elaborating 'Britishness' as an 'imperial mentality' (87), in contrast, as it seemed, to his more pacific father. The book as a whole sets out a distinct and convincing historical narrative, moving from James' ambitious, but ultimately frustrated, plans for 'Union' between England and Scotland in the first seven years of reign, to the 'apotheosis of theatrical material relating to the new Britain' (87) under the tacit sponsorship of his son over the next three years, to the 'hiatus' (145) in the 'British' project that followed Henry's death and lasted, as Marshall shows, to about 1625. Individual plays, however, are discussed in a brisk fashion, one after the other, usually without much linkage to the preceding 'historical' discussion beyond a general demonstration

that there is a 'British' dimension to the work in question. (The extended treatment of *Cymbeline* is the exception.) The precise relations between these works and the views of James (or Henry) are rarely articulated, and we're left with the sense that these groupings are mostly chronological.

In the end, perhaps, the strength of *Theatre and Empire* lies more in its chronology than the specific claims that it advances. Its overall structure makes a kind of argument of its own concerning the inter-relation of the two sorts of 'politics' that Marshall posits. He holds, we can gather, that the notion of a 'politically' unified 'Britain' seemed most plausible in the first heady years of James' rule, before resistance mounted on both sides of the Anglo-Scottish border, but that was not the time when the 'cultural' theme of 'British empire' reached its full extension; that was later, under the influence of Prince Henry. But when Henry was gone, this theme had no authoritative *locus* around which to coalesce, and so lost much of its force. Some interesting premises can be detected here: 'Britishness' is a Jacobean notion, but not one whose origins need to be located entirely or only in James I. 'Britishness' is inextricably tied to the house of Stuart, but not to just one figure in it and, more provocatively, not to the success of the British project as a legal arrangement. It reaches its 'cultural' 'apotheosis' *after* the political establishment had decisively rejected a full-blown British 'union'. At the same time, 'Britishness' is not exclusively a royal project; it is also a concern of a many Jacobean subjects, who 'receive' it from the crown and then play it back in various ways. Though this 'fluid discourse' is 'notable ... for its *lack* of criticism of the Jacobean monarchy' (40, emphasis Marshall's), the purposes of Jacobean subjects are not always identical with those of the king (or prince). Sometimes they seek to comment, occasionally to refute, and sometimes they simply look for 'point[s] of topical relevance by which to entertain'. These would all be coherent (though debatable) arguments. Some (though not all) have been made elsewhere. Here, however, they are mostly implied. *Theatre and Empire* is thus an informed and suggestive, but also frustrating book; it opens new lines of thinking into its subject without doing as much as it could to advance the critical debate in which it takes part.

David Baker

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- 1 Bruce Galloway, *The Union of England and Scotland 1603–1608* (Edinburgh, 1986), 165. Quoted in *Theatre and Empire* 40.