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Review Essay: Marshall, Cynthia. *Last Things and Last Plays: Shakespearean Eschatology*

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on Elizabethan political history. The excitement created by its publication is enhanced by the fact that the original manuscript sources from which this work was created come from that period of Elizabethan history that has yet to be adequately calendared. As in his previous two volumes, MacCaffrey's new study deals with yet another set of short-term foreign and domestic issues. These issues arise from the queen's reluctant entry into war with Spain, the sudden emergence of Anglo-Irish relations from the back burner of domestic policy to the forefront of England's foreign policy, and the appearance of a new generation of councillors, including the dangerously powerful and volatile earl of Essex, whose vaulting ambitions and ungovernable pride revived the specter of faction and even threatened the security of the crown. Purposely written from the limited scope of Westminster, it ignores the perspectives of other European capitals in a successful effort to explore how Elizabeth and her privy councillors defined and realized their goals.

Through close examination of Elizabeth's diligent and constant exercise of power much is revealed about the techniques of her statecraft, uncluttered by the magnetic attraction of the numerous myths that surround her. Forever battling the processes of change, she not only sought to be informed of and in control of all events and individuals close to her but also to avoid the restless personal and martial ambitions of her father as well as the religious extremism of her brother and sister. Authorizing few initiatives, yet constantly forced to respond to pressing events, Elizabeth emerges with a steadiness and consistency of policy that would do her cautious grandfather proud, a policy that ultimately worked to England's advantage. Not surprisingly, her government took a giant step away from the dynastic past with its traditionally aggressive pursuit of royal ambition toward a still-born creation of the early modern bureaucratic state. Her establishment of a rationalized, compact, efficient, and highly successful bureaucracy not only set England apart from its own past but also from its royal neighbors, whose sixteenth-century struggles for power were governed by the overpowering passions of reputation. England's insular security provided Elizabeth a freedom of diplomatic maneuver unavailable to her European neighbors. She therefore took as much or as little of any war as she liked. All commitments were tentative, no alliance irrevocable, and with each shuffle in the diplomatic game the other players had to bid all over again for England's friendship or neutrality.

MacCaffrey's book has no equal for this period of English history. Bursting with insights, discovery, and judicious conclusions, *Elizabeth I: War and Politics, 1588-1603* will force all Tudor historians to rethink their conclusions. Certainly no Elizabethan historian will dare ignore its contents.

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Marshall, Cynthia. *Last Things and Last Plays: Shakespearean Eschatology*. Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale 1991. xv + 142 pp, appendixes, works cited, index. \$24.50.

Adelman, Janet. *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays: Hamlet to The Tempest*. Routledge, London 1992. xii + 379 pp, note on the text, notes, author index, index to Shakespeare's works, subject index. \$49.50 / \$15.95.

These two books reflect different ways the new orthodoxy in Shakespeare studies rejects a disinterested formalism for a charged contextualization that seeks to find the meanings of texts in the culture and language that underlie their history. *Last Things and Last Plays: Shakespeare's Eschatology* by Cynthia Marshall examines Shakespeare's *alterswerk* (last works) through a new historicist consideration of *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*, while *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays: Hamlet to The Tempest* by Janet Adelman employs Freudian oedipal premises (she refers to this a 'preoedipal anxiety' [p 247]) to claim that male psychic fantasies create and transform Shakespeare's plays. Adelman holds that in *Hamlet* and the plays that follow, central male characters try to escape from their maternal dependence and their problematic encounters with the contaminated and sexualized mothers' bodies in order to find and free their male identities.

Marshall's purpose is to examine Shakespeare's final works against the themes of closure, recapitulation, judgment, and death, while the core of Adelman's book, based on psychoanalytic essays she has published elsewhere (p xii), discusses the ostensible fantasies of the major male characters who see the central female characters as psychically split as they are transformed by the male fantasies from mothers, lovers, and virgins into whores, bawds, and strumpets, when the virginal and maternal body, through sexual union, is soiled by the defining sexual act.

Marshall contends that eschatological themes represent an active concern in Renaissance culture, which is heavily imbued with apocalyptic thoughts, and, indeed, Anglicans, Puritans, Roman Catholics, and millenarians did share an abiding concern for last things. Her book, however, deals with two subjects: the mortality consequent for humanity in the last plays and the strong generic resemblances between Shakespeare's late romances and the medieval indigenous drama. Apocalypticism is, therefore, the subject of six chapters that comprise the main text, while the eschatological implications of the medieval drama are the subjects she takes up in the appendices, which discuss '*Cymbeline* and the Medieval Domsday Plays' and '*The Winter's Tale* and the Corpus Christi Resurrection Plays' (pp 119-9).

Adelman, on the other hand, in order to develop the thesis that Hamlet, Troilus, Othello, Angelo, Lear, and other male protagonists are unable to return to the contaminated sacred female space, claims that male flight from the repository of sexual soiling accounts for the major characterization of the central male characters as they try to escape from the contaminated female body. Eight chapters (pp 1-238) are fortified with 124 pages of notes (pp 239-363) through which Adelman explores the uneasy relations that Shakespeare's male characters have with their unconscious psychic fantasies.

Arthur F. Kinney has written a laudatory foreword to Marshall's book in which he states that Marshall's examination can place Shakespeare's last plays 'in different shades of light, at once revealing their obscurantist leanings towards darkness and watching their more open attempts to confront mortality itself' (p x).

Marshall's approach does provide an especially insightful way to examine the final works of Shakespeare's dramatic career because eschatology, by definition, attempts to connect the personal experience of death and last things to the universal concept of an ending. She is particularly helpful in chapters 2 and 3, which focus on the subjects of judgment and afterlife, and in chapters 4 and 5, which examine the destructive attitudes people develop toward time, the amorphous raw material which eschatology attempts to give shape and definition.

Insofar as readers are prepared to accept Adelman's premises, this book can be considered as a good illustration of psychoanalytic feminist criticism. It is rigorous in its readings and original in its efforts to reexamine traditional ideas and interpretations. She seeks to reconceptualize and reinterpret the female body in relation to the loss of idealized masculinity from a feminist perspective. But this book is also a frontal attack on Shakespeare himself, who is seen as sharing complicity with the dominant male characters' fantasies by rewarding them with power at the end of the plays through the resumption of the patriarchal order, even though Adelman implies that Shakespeare attempts to separate himself from the bearers of these impossible fantasies of escape. He is seen by Adelman as intolerably exploiting women, paying them back for their sexual wholeness as he imaginatively shares with the male characters their revulsion at the fully sexualized woman.

These oedipal readings are, in many instances, highly questionable (in Adelman's reading of *King Lear*, she says that 'Gloucester is transformed into a woman', and the 'punitive female power of the storm — the power of the dark and vicious place — is given a local habitation and a name' [p 112]). The evidence is selectively and flexibly utilized to suit the author's preconceived thematic intention to demonstrate that power has devastating consequences, both for masculine selfhood and for the female characters who oppose it. Adelman's psychologized account is likely to provoke strong responses, critical questions, and controversy by those who do not accept the doctrines of Sigmund Freud as the definitive way to interpret Shakespeare's plays as demonstrating the son's frustrated desires for their mothers' exclusive sexual attention and by those who do not think that all males think that all females are inescapably sexual.

Marshall's book, however, is well argued, interesting, and informative, one whose significance is confirmed by the clear patterns it draws between its central eschatological thesis and the dramatic romances that demonstrate Shakespeare's concern with last things. Marshall makes excellent use of the sources, grounding her claims on substantial documentation. Her study represents an insightful contribution to the scholarship on Shakespeare's concern with the prevailing ideas in his culture, and she provides a new depth of understanding to these last bittersweet plays.

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McIntosh, Marjorie Keniston. *A Community Transformed: The Manor and Liberty of Havering, 1500-1620*. Cambridge Studies in Population, Economy, and Society in Past Time. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1991. 489 pp. \$74.95.