Review Essay: David Bergeron, *Shakespeare's Romances and the Royal Family*

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David Bergeron, *Shakespeare's Romances and the Royal Family*, University of Kansas Press, 1985. $25.00

David Bergeron devotes *Shakespeare's Romances and the Royal Family* to what he terms a “re-presentation” of many of the court personages with whom he identifies play characters. According to Bergeron, the Jacobins for whom Shakespeare wrote these plays were politically pleased, as they had not had the opportunity to be for more than half a century, with the existence of a royal family and royal children in whom the public foresaw future political stability through a secure succession.

Bergeron makes the continuing point that the secure succession of this government had descended through the female line—a clear compliment to James I since his mother was Mary, Queen of Scots. Through the celebration of inheritance rights through female descent, Shakespeare emphasized in play and life political security and continuity brought by royal children to James’ people.

Mr. Bergeron uses *Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale, The Tempest,* and *Henry VIII* as the basis for his theories. In *Pericles,* there are two generations of kings’ daughters, who, having endured harrowing experiences as young women, serve as rulers’ wives in cities other than their native ones. In *Cymbeline,* the king’s lost three children are discovered; they are of an age to provide succession to the throne. In *The Winter’s Tale,* the lost royal Perdita is found, and is, through her adventures, on the verge of marriage to the heir of her father-king’s former friend-king; the two kings have been estranged for sixteen years. In *The Tempest,* play-goers discover on a remote island the rightful ruler of Milan and his now grown daughter together with the enemy king of Naples and his son. Naturally, the young pair will love, wed, and inherit. In *Henry VIII,* the play ends joyfully with the birth and baptism of the baby Elizabeth, Henry VIII’s youngest daughter whose reign was christened that of “Gloriana.”

In each of these plays, there are definite parallels to be made with James’ three surviving royal children. The romances end just before the death of Prince Henry, the heir of hope for the English people, and the foreign marriage of the lovely and popular Princess Elizabeth. The disappearance of the two older surviving children leaves only the sickly Charles—about whom and the promise of his future reign nothing is prophesied. The elimination from the English scene of Prince Henry in 1612 and the Princess Elizabeth in 1613 coincides with the last of Shakespeare’s hopeful romances in which the king has children representing the happy future and who are recovered after a prolonged absence during which they are “lost.”

Bergeron does not speculate, but it is feasible to do so, concerning the possibility that the unfortunate disappearance from the English scene of Prince Henry and the Princess Elizabeth, the source of so much English joy, had perhaps some effect on the closure of Shakespeare’s writing career.
Shakespeare could write no more utilizing the happy expectation brought by royal children.

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BOOKS RECEIVED

Philippa Brown, *Sibton Abbey Cartularies and Charters*, Boydell & Brewer, Suffolk, 1985. $29.50

Liana Cheney, *Quattrocento Neoplatonism and Medici Humanism in Botticelli's Mythological Paintings*, University of America Press, 1985. $22.50


Kenneth Muir, *Shakespeare Contrasts and Controversies*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1985. $18.95

Gail Paster, *The Idea of the City in the Age of Shakespeare*, University of Georgia Press, 1985. $24.00


John Steane, *The Archaeology of Medieval England and Wales*, University of Georgia Press, 1984. $27.50