

Ralf Hertel. *Staging England in the Elizabethan History Play: Performing National Identity*. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2014. xi + 271 pp. + 14 illus. \$119.95. Review by ANTHONY WELCH, UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE, KNOXVILLE.

Looming over the Elizabethan history play, in Ralf Hertel's new study, is a question posed by the prickly Irish soldier Macmorris in *Henry V*: "What ish my nation?" For Hertel, early modern nationhood is best understood not as a legal or political construct but as a form of identity—an identity defined and sustained through performance. With a nod to Benedict Anderson, Hertel describes the Elizabethan theater as an "imagining community," a place where players and audiences could re-enact their shared history and cultivate a national consciousness (26). As the snarling Macmorris makes plain, nationhood in the drama of Shakespeare and Marlowe is complex, unstable, and fiercely contested. Drawing on the work of political theorists such as Liah Greenfeld and Anthony D. Smith, Hertel isolates five discourses that shaped England's emerging national identity, and he links each one with an Elizabethan history play. A sequence of ten paired chapters explores cartography and *Henry IV, Part 1*; history writing and *Richard III*; religion and *King John*; social class and *Henry VI, Part 2*; and gender and Marlowe's *Edward II*. Hertel is less interested in the playwrights' own political views than in the wide-ranging and often clashing nationalisms that they perform. He does, however, find most of these plays groping toward a broadly egalitarian national community that might quell the dynastic conflicts of the ruling classes and, perhaps to the surprise of our current Prince and Princess of Wales, lay the groundwork for "an England that will ultimately emancipate itself from monarchs" (73).

Chapters 1 and 2 focus on the rebels' quarrel over a map in act three of *Henry IV, Part 1*—the only scene in Shakespeare, outside of *King Lear*, that features a map as a stage property—to assess the role of "cartographic space" in the formation of national identity (45). Hertel links the play's sprawling social and geographical diversity to the "proliferation of geographic projects" in Tudor and Stuart England (39). Building on Richard Helgerson's view that Elizabethan maps "move away from the concept of the nation as embodied by its ruler

towards the nation as rooted in an expanse of land" (43), Hertel argues that the period's atlases, surveys, and chorographies risked carving up the landscape into a patchwork of local topographies, but they could also invite readers to rise above their regional differences in the name of a shared English identity. When Shakespeare puts a map of England into the hands of his rebels, he shows that cartography has "both a separatist and a unifying potential" (49): mapping the nation in *I Henry IV* leads to political division and regional conflict, but the play's diverse social landscape offers the theater audience a newly capacious, inclusive vision of what it means to be English.

Turning to Shakespeare's *Richard III*, chapters 3 and 4 study the place of history writing in early modern English national consciousness. Surveying the forms and methods of Tudor historiography, Hertel suggests that Shakespeare's history plays "give voice not to one version of history only but to a variety of perspectives, highlighting in their cacophony of claims the contested nature of history itself" (90). Hertel detects a centrifugal pattern in *Richard III*, as the play's focus steadily widens from a tight circle of courtly elites to a "national panorama" that reveals the stunted cynicism of Richard's patriotic rhetoric (105). In performing the tyrant's downfall, Shakespeare's ritualized language and dramaturgy "portrays the cleansing of the nation through the rituals of theatre" (108), strengthening the audience's sense of itself as a national community with common values and aspirations, even as the play warns how the rhetoric of nationhood can be twisted into a tool of partisan politics (114).

Shakespeare's *King John* and religious identity are the focus of chapters 5 and 6. Scholars are divided on the play's murky, inconsistent religious politics. Where does *King John*, with its stormy showdown between the English monarch and the Papacy, stand on the confessional conflicts that rocked Tudor England? For Hertel, the play is not a partisan religious polemic but instead "presents the terrors of a world devoid of God," where religion is "merely a cloak with which to disguise self-interested politics" (134, 145). Hertel lucidly documents the play's themes of fragmentation, disorder, and deadlock, its broken oaths and unheeded curses. Much less clear, however, is his conclusion that the godless world of *King John* "argues for the necessity of a new faith which is ... as much national as religious in nature,"

an “Anglican” regime “in which religion becomes nationalized” to ensure that “the English do not put religious faith before loyalty to their country” (134, 149).

Moving from religious controversy to class conflict, chapters 7 and 8 explore the interaction of national identity and class consciousness in *Henry VI, Part 2*. At stake in Shakespeare’s portrayal of Jack Cade’s rebellion is the question, “Who may claim to act in the name of the nation?” (181). For Hertel, early modern English drama portrays three distinct modes of national identity that are linked to social rank: absolutist (bound up with the ancestral lineage and political prerogatives of the royal house), elitist (reflecting the interests of the minor aristocracy or emergent middle class), and populist (speaking for the huddled masses). He concludes that Shakespeare discredits the false patriotism of both the anarchic rebels and the self-interested ruling class. Instead, the play sponsors a *via media* of elite nationalism—embodied in the figure of the country squire Richard Iden—that “does not want to do away with distinctions of rank” but strives to overcome class conflict through “a shared vision . . . [of] common responsibility for the nation” (188).

Two concluding chapters address “anxieties about the relation of gender and power” in the discourse of nationalism (194). Hertel argues that the history play can be grouped with other literary forms, such as Petrarchan lyric and chivalric romance, that Elizabethan male writers deployed to shore up their masculine authority in the face of female rule. The public theaters, catering to a “specifically English longing for a masculinization of history” (212), became a natural site for exploring the relationship between the performance of manhood and the performance of national identity. Making a case study of Marlowe’s *Edward II*, Hertel finds that the fluid gender roles of Edward and Isabella move beyond “an essentialist binary opposition between the male and the female” toward “a gender self-fashioning that allows for an overlap between the masculine and the feminine” (222). Yet because its characters who violate gender norms come to bad ends, the play “discredits not only the concepts of an inborn identity but also those of social mobility” (224). In doing so, *Edward II* exposes the need for a shared national identity that might transcend its’ characters private passions and unite a divided polity.

This book's achievement lies in its subtle close readings of the plays, readings that alert us to the complex, competing models of national identity that found expression on the Elizabethan stage. Hertel's handling of key passages, such as the map-reading scene in *1 Henry IV*, is shrewdly observed and has rich implications. The structure of the book, with its paired chapters linking each play to a broad category of national discourse, extends the reach of Hertel's arguments but weakens their force. Although his overview chapters are cogent and well researched, they rehearse historical backgrounds that will be well known to many readers and do not always seem relevant to the plays at hand. For example, chapter 9 argues that Elizabethan writers cast themselves as the manly guardians of a feminized England in order to defend their male identity against an emasculating queen. Hertel tests his argument against such familiar touchstones as John Knox's "monstrous regiment of women," Queen Elizabeth's speech to her troops at Tilbury, the Ditchley portrait, Kantorowicz on the king's two bodies, Laqueur on the one-sex model of gender difference, male womb envy, and the gender politics of English Petrarchism. Yet when the author turns to Marlowe's *Edward II*, he touches only briefly on the play's implications as a commentary on Elizabeth's rule; he concludes that its real concern "is not whether national identity is gendered masculine or feminine but rather whether there is any space for it in a country torn into rival factions incited by the struggle for personal interests" (224). The claim is suggestive, but the scattershot survey that precedes it blunts its impact.

If the book's contextualizing chapters are sometimes excessively thorough, Hertel's primary goal—to explore "the performative surplus of the theatre event" and its role in shaping English national consciousness (1)—remains thinly sketched. Only occasionally in his analysis of these plays does the author touch on theories of performance or refer to aspects of Elizabethan stagecraft. With the exception of the *Richard III* chapter, which thoughtfully builds on Anthony Hammond's reading of the play as a sacrificial ritual, Hertel's account of the performative dimension of national identity breaks little new ground. The history plays, he argues, enabled Elizabethans to experience "living history"; they offered a vision of the national past so vividly corporeal that their audiences "might have forgotten that they were watching only

an actor . . . and believed they were actually seeing princes act” (228, 234). The plays’ characters could personify abstract political concepts, supply theatergoers with exemplary “models of behavior,” and nurture “a feeling of togetherness” that “contributed to the emergence of early modern national identity” (232, 115). This book does not fully deliver on the promise of its subtitle, and a more sustained study of the performative dynamics of Elizabethan nationhood is still needed. But Hertel has valuably shown that the English history plays of the 1590s addressed the issue of national identity with caution, dialogically, open-endedly, and, like Macmorris, in the interrogative mode.

Sarah E. Johnson. *Staging Women and the Soul-Body Dynamic in Early Modern England*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014. xi + 185 pp. \$60.00.
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Johnson opens her discussion of the soul-body dynamic in early modern England with a brief discussion of John Donne’s *Why hath the common opinion afforded woemen Soules* in order to introduce the ambiguity surrounding the female soul. The early modern gendering of the soul as masculine and the body as feminine along with the Platonic view of the soul as the governor of the body produced a gendered hierarchy which had implications for the representations of women on stage. Johnson suggests that the “feminization of the soul is wrapped up in male attempts to define or manage the very concept of the soul” (16), and this contributed to composite representations of women as bodies and spirits on stage. This exploration of the soul-body dynamic through its Jacobean staging is intended to highlight that “the gendered soul-body dynamic plays a role in representations of and attitudes towards women beyond literature that engages explicitly and centrally with this relationship” (20).

Johnson discusses Jacobean puppetry as staged in *The Revenger’s Tragedy* and *Bartholomew Fair* arguing that an analysis of the puppet in these plays provides an opportunity to explore the emptying out or division of the body and the soul (or spirit) as well as the relationship between the body and the spirit that were once conjoined. In her discussion of Vindici’s relationship to the murdered Gloriana,