

Staging the Revolution: Drama, Reinvention, History, 1647-72. By RACHEL WILLIE. Manchester: Manchester University press, 2015. ix +242 pp. £70. ISBN: 978-0-7190-8763-9.

Wenceslas Holler's illustration of Aesop's fable 'Of The Rebellion of the Arms and the Legs', showing a swollen and monstrous headless belly with a face and arms and legs, whilst a sculptural head lies decapitated on the ground, is the arresting frontispiece to this book. The story of John Ogilby's translations of *The fables of Aesop paraphras'd in verse* resonates as a paradigm for this book's overall argument. First published in 1651 (with revised editions in 1665, 1668 and 1673) the continuity of political discourse through textual and visual narratives across both Republican and Restoration readers complicates any historical or critical cultural narrative of a fractural division in 1660.

Willie's book situates itself as part of decades of revisionism emphasising continuities between Republican and Restoration cultures and tropes and the memorialising of the cultural and political traumas of civil war. Her work builds on previous accounts of performance during the Republic to argue for a continuity of drama's political resonances in form and language as well as continuities of personnel, music, and narratorial tropes between masques, closet drama, pamphlet plays into post-restoration public staged drama.

Applying Habermas's notion of a unified public sphere, Willie argues that theatre was a public culture, explicitly acknowledged in public proclamations, licensing laws, and patents, as well as traceable through dedications, publishers and paratexts, enabling her to locate continuity not in people or institutions but in theatrical and literary discourse. She argues that dramatic form and tropes provided both a common forum and language of cultural memorialising and re-memorialsing across all political spectrums, and that the deliberate clouding of that commonality was (and has been) the work of an ideological monarchialism.

Willie's chapters take a broadly chronological journey: from "the paper stage" of the pamphlet plays of the late 1640s and 1650s, including the publication (and re-publication) of plays either performed before 1642, or written only to be read; through the Davenant masques performed both for the Protectorate and for the monarch after 1660; to the heroic dramas and their pastiches of the 1660s and early 1670s. Her epilogue aims to take these ideas into the eighteenth century and does little to benefit her argument's overall impact. We already know about Davenant's political and dramatic longevity across political eras, but Willie contextualises that within this broader sphere of writers, musicians, publishers and playwrights, and her discussion of James Shirley's masques in the 1650s usefully corrects his royalist tag.

Willie's impressive range of references and material can at times hinder her overall argument, leaving her reader mired in detail at the expense of illumination. I would like to have heard some acknowledgement of moments when drama is not political. Ockham's law really is true: aesthetic pleasure and escapism may be the best explanation of a theatrical event, and there is a whiff of the PhD thesis in these moments. Willie could develop ideas that are often too implicit here: can we further conceptualise a paper stage in the period? Is Davenant's post-Restoration career less Tory than previously argued? Our bellies may not be as grotesquely filled as Holler's headless allegory, but readers are left hungry for more.

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