

the author finds *King Lear* troubling because his representation of the context or 'occasion' in which the play was produced and performed affords no other reading. 'The occasion', Schwyzer writes, 'was a court performance in the midst of the unionist campaign, when writers of all stripes and talents, from bishops to hacks, were bubbling over with prince-pleasing effusions in favour of a reunited Britain' (158). The problem with such a description of the 'occasion' of *King Lear*'s performance is its limited and limiting representation of Union literature as the work of prince pleasers who have no intention of thinking through questions of Union. Schwyzer offers Samuel Daniel's *Panegyrike Congratulatorie to His Kings Maiestie* (1603) as an example of such prince-pleasing; however, he elides not only the moments in Daniel's poem in which the poet admonishes the monarch not to meddle with things English but also Daniel's intriguing reference to the 'Republicke', which seems out of place for royal panegyric. Jacobean texts, such as Daniel's *Panegyrike*, highlight the need for a critical vocabulary that goes beyond a pro-and anti-Union binarism. Schwyzer's description of *King Lear* as 'so cagey and ambiguous on the union question that it admits of flatly contradictory readings' (160) forecloses fruitful investigation into ideological contradictions. Ironically, this book ends a narrative (on Britishness) at a point in time when British subjects were responding – imaginatively, ambivalently, critically – to the emergence of a multi-national British state.

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Jacqueline Vanhoutte. *Strange Communion: Motherland and Masculinity in Tudor Plays, Pamphlets, and Politics*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003. Pp 236.

How does a geographical space become a community – a nation 'for whom we die', to quote Rupert Brooke's World War I poem? The answer, according to Jacqueline Vanhoutte's articulate and insightful study of early modern English nationalism, lies in the metaphors that shape that space and transform it into a concept. Brooke calls his country a mother, and Vanhoutte frames the question that informs her book in terms of this specifically maternal metaphor: 'Why is England ... imagined as "the undying / Mother of men"', and how do the metaphors that define a particular form of nationalism in turn define the

experiences and identities of nationalist subjects' (16–17)? Vanhoutte seeks to fill what she sees as a critical gap in popular theories of nationalism: while many have written about the construction of nations, 'few have attended to the particulars of nationalist rhetoric, and several reproduce that rhetoric uncritically in their own writing' (16). This book, in sum, sets out to show how motherlands and their patriotic sons are made, not born.

Vanhoutte differentiates herself from critics like Benedict Anderson who locate the rise of English nationalism in the nineteenth century, and from the dominant group of early modern scholars who read the popularity of the woman-as-land trope as a direct response to Elizabeth I. She instead argues that feminized representations of England, and the England-as-mother trope in particular, date back to the Henrician period. With the advent of the Protestant reformation, traditional ideas of community were no longer dominant, and nationalist writers 'had to reshape hierarchies to reflect the primacy of national over religious or even dynastic affiliations' (19). The motherland trope was particularly effective in creating a sense of community during this time of shifting allegiances, she asserts, because it formed an emotional fraternity between Englishmen of all classes. It is, above all, an elastic trope, Vanhoutte argues, one that morphed to express the individual concerns — especially those about gender and marital status — that marked each Tudor monarch's reign.

Vanhoutte limits her analysis to Tudor plays and pamphlets because she sees these genres as 'preeminently suited to the dissemination of nationalist sentiment' (21). She arranges her chapters chronologically, working her way from Henry VIII's reign through Mary Tudor's and Elizabeth's, and finishing with a chapter on Shakespeare's history plays. Chapter one analyzes how Henrician propagandists like playwright John Bale and pamphleteer Richard Morison originally developed the motherland trope to shift the allegiance of England's subjects from the Pope's church to Henry's Tudor monarchy — from the 'mother of whoredom' (Bale's name for the Catholic church) and the Virgin Mary to Mother England. Chapter two argues that the accession of a woman, Mary I, and the threat of her marriage to a foreigner provoked a new set of concerns and inspired an anti-monarchical use of the motherland trope. While the chapter considers how plays like Nicholas Udall's *Respublica* display a desire to reconcile the tension between female monarch and motherland, it primarily focuses on hostile anti-Marian propaganda and its alignment of nationality and masculinity. Writers of these texts created and disseminated the image of a defenseless, feminized country in need of manly Englishmen to protect it against an unnatural female tyrant and her Spanish consort. When

Elizabeth took the throne, Vanhoutte argues in chapter three, this new 'nationalist mode of masculinity' (23) found expression in attempts by writers like Sackville and Norton, John Aylmer, and John Stubbs to manage the single queen and, by extension, the helpless motherland.

Vanhoutte's close readings of the plays expose subtleties that other critics have missed. As she points out, plays like *King Johan*, *Gorboduc*, and *Respublica* have either been overlooked or oversimplified by early modern scholars analyzing the rise of nationalism. She argues that in order to contextualize Gaunt's speech from *Richard II*, in which England is a 'teeming womb of royal kings' that depends upon the brave 'deeds' of English sons, we must go back to these early plays and grapple with their use of the motherland trope. Her point is entirely convincing, although the extensive close readings of the plays she has chosen at times overwhelm her larger and more engaging discussion of how the maternal metaphor is operating in the culture beyond the playhouse.

Vanhoutte's analysis is most innovative when she is considering these earlier, under-considered plays. She shows, for instance, how in *King Johan* 'Bale invokes medieval cosmographic representations only to dismiss them in favor of the geographically and politically bounded entity known as "Englande"' (48). Her reading of Englande's maternal attitude toward King Johan is particularly incisive: as she picks up the dying king, 'Englande and her martyred king form a nationalistic pieta. ...together, Englande and Johan collect all the meaning liberated by the play's desecration of Catholic forms' (51).

When she gets to Shakespeare, Vanhoutte offers less consistently original readings of the female characters; and at times the women are oversimplified in the service of her thesis. She convincingly reads how true Englishmen in the histories must put motherland above actual women in order to fit the developing model of masculinity that the book traces; but her claim that Shakespeare's English mothers are either figured as promiscuous betrayers whose 'maternal powers ... prove consistently detrimental to the nation' or 'as generalized figures of mourning and violation' (149, 146) does not do justice to the complexities of maternal figures like *Richard III*'s Queen Elizabeth and the Duchess of York. These mothers in particular protect the motherland by actively thwarting Richard's plans to remodel himself as a true English king with a royal line. The wrathful and witnessing maternal words that the women – and the Duchess especially – hurl at Richard as they block his royal progress serve to hobble his slanderous and bloody campaign. And Elizabeth more than holds her own with Richard as they verbally spar over the fate of her daughter; ultimately she will not consent to turning her 'daughter's womb' into a 'nest of spicery' for Richard's offspring (although he, in his flawed judgment,

misinterprets her as a 'shallow, changing woman' who will fall prey to his rhetorical seduction). Together, these mothers represent far more than the helpless voices of 'weeping wives, mothers, and daughters' to which Vanhoutte's thesis relegates the play's women (162).

Given that there are few moments of positive maternal empowerment in Shakespeare's early histories, Vanhoutte's focus on negative or weak royal mothers is largely understandable. She is not claiming to write a history of early modern maternity in general. She does expose the potential limitations to her approach, however, when she claims that 'the question of women's place in the nation had no particular urgency in the late 1530's, since Henry VIII had already produced one male heir and was still likely to beget more, (60). By focusing solely on subjects' responses to each Tudor monarch, she appears to key the construction of gendered discourse and gendered tensions to the issue of who was ruling at any given time. As scholars of early modern women have asserted, maternity and womanhood more broadly were highly contested sites at this time in England, open to a variety of mediating discourses from sermons and anatomy texts to the unpublished voices of women themselves.

The 'question of women's place' took on a particularly heightened urgency around the business of motherhood in the early sixteenth century: religious and medical authorities in particular sought to limit the agency of female birth attendants and mothers through ecclesiastical laws, prayer-books, and guild regulations. When Richard Jonas translated the first midwifery text into English in 1540, he used images of birth and maternity to replace the mother's helper with his book and to fashion his project in terms of a nationalistic imperative: by delivering *The Byrth of Mankynde* from Latin into his readers' 'maternal' tongue, he is able to serve 'all women in this noble realme of England' and enrich 'our mother langage'. Instead of a female midwife ('throughe whose rudenesse and rasshnesse ... a great number are caste awaye and destroyed'), Englishwomen will have his book in 'readynesse' – a book that by the 1545 edition is imagined to 'supply the roome and place of a goud mydwyfe'.

There are many such examples from this time where men frame their deeds in nationalistic terms by calling upon the needs of mother England and so justify the disempowerment of actual women. Vanhoutte's study of monarchy and motherland maps out an important piece of this larger cultural landscape.

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