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Jeffrey S. Doty: Shakespeare, Popularity and the Public Sphere [Book review]

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JEFFREY S. DOTY, *Shakespeare, Popularity and the Public Sphere*. Pp. vii + 210. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

This is an important book. It examines the theme of popularity and its political and theatrical dimensions in some of Shakespeare's plays from 1595 to 1608. The plays included are *Richard II 1 & 2*, *Henry IV*, *Henry V*, *Julius Caesar*, *Measure for Measure* and *Coriolanus*, which all dealt with popularity and contemporary politics. The underlying idea of the book is that the theatre was an ideal place to explore the themes of popularity and publicity in early modern politics. These themes have of course been extensively examined in recent historical and literary scholarship, much of which is cited in this volume. There are some parallels here with Peter Lake's recent *How Shakespeare Put Politics on the Stage* (2016). However, Doty is also able to make a valuable contribution to Shakespeare studies and more generally to this recent work on popularity in early modern politics. He discusses several different aspects of popularity and publicity in the plays he has chosen for his analysis. These include, how the audience could be seen as 'a critical public' but also how staging plays about popularity and politics fostered political analysis. Doty argues that Shakespeare not only put popular political thinking onstage; he also prompted his playgoers to make analyses of contemporary politics. The theatre, as it were, played an important role in turning early modern subjects into citizens. As Doty puts the central argument of the book, 'when Shakespeare dramatized the tactics for winning the love of the people, he subjected the Elizabethan controversy of "popularity" – and the real figures associated with it – to playgoer[s] scrutiny' (19). More specifically, he argues that in Shakespeare's plays the audience could examine 'how popularity ... impacts monarchical politics' (56). The audience created some kind of 'a critical public' (59) and the theatre itself was 'an emergent space of political uptake and public deliberation' (64). Popularity is taken to mean both 'the public circulation of political arguments' (34) and the gaining of the favour of the people by flattering them.

Each chapter mainly focuses on one particular play. Chapter one discusses Bolingbroke as a popular man in *Richard II* and 'reflects late Elizabethan concerns about an emergent public sphere' (29). Bolingbroke manages to depose Richard not so much by the support of powerful nobles but especially by popularity – by the love of the people, which he adroitly cultivates. Richard, while he notices Bolingbroke's popularity, does not understand its importance. Chapter two demonstrates how Prince Hal wins the support of the people in *Henry IV* and hence emphasises how monarchy is in large part based on the consent of the nobles and the common people alike. In chapter three, Doty examines Caesar's popularity in *Julius Caesar*. Surprisingly, he does not discuss the famous funeral orations by Brutus and Mark Antony. Yet, they would have been of crucial importance not only because the political and civic order of the Roman commonwealth is at stake but also because they show how everything hinges on the common people. Chapter four focuses on monarchical popularity in *Measure for Measure*. Doty explores Duke Vincentio and his cultivation of popularity as a commentary on James VI & I's problems with the same and also shows the important role of news in public. The final chapter turns to *Coriolanus*. It argues that *Coriolanus*' hatred of popularity in fact emphasises its importance. There is also an interesting discussion of the first Scene of Act one, where *Coriolanus* is depicted as a truly popular man.

In offering these fine analyses Doty's book makes a significant contribution to our understanding of early modern popularity and the public sphere. However, there are some weaknesses in the book as well. The first recorded use of the word 'demagogue' was not in 1649 (14-15) but in 1629 in Thomas Hobbes's translation of Thucydides. While it is true that in his philosophical works Cicero was very critical of the common people (14), arguing for a republic governed by wise and virtuous *optimates*, in his rhetorical *oeuvre*, by contrast, he placed the emphasis on the orator's rhetorical skills to persuade the common people. This brings me to the main weakness of the book, which is the omission of the early modern *ars rhetorica*. This would have been important for several reasons. It was the *ars rhetorica* which offered an examination of popularity in positive terms. For Cicero, '*populus*' or '*multitudo*' formed the orator's main audience, and he even talked about '*oratio popularis*' – 'popular oration' (*Brutus*, 51.191), and how in eloquence language should fit 'the vulgar and popular understanding' (*De oratore*, 1.23.108). The early modern humanists followed suit and likewise argued that the common people – the multitude – were the orator's chief audience. They also often used the word 'popular' in relation to eloquence. Moreover, although the humanists perceived eloquence as a means of persuading and governing the common people, many in early modern England also issued urgent warnings about rhetoric in popular hands. Such orators were seen merely as people pleasers, who flattered the common people to foment sedition. In the characters of Brutus and Mark Antony, we see these two different types of orators in action. Doty does not discuss any of this, although its relevance to his analysis would have been obvious.

I do not want to end on a critical note. Doty's book is a fine account of the themes of popularity, popular politics and the public sphere in Shakespeare and it is a valuable study not only for literary scholars but also for historians of early modern England.

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