

Early Modern Literary Studies

**John Kerrigan, *Archipelagic English: Literature, History, and Politics 1603-1707*
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In choosing the title *Archipelagic English*, John Kerrigan invites his readers to think about early modern England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales as not simply geographically linked but also culturally and politically linked. These entities were also, but not always, bitterly divided. It is within this two-island, three-kingdom, four-nation framework that Kerrigan's lengthy book, with well over 100 pages of notes, seeks to reorient the study of English literature – mainly, but not exclusively, literature of the seventeenth century, which Kerrigan labels 'one of the most important periods of literary production and, connectedly, nation and state formation' (p. 2). While Kerrigan is not the first literary historian to explore literature written in English in this period within a wider British and Irish framework – books by David Baker, Andrew Hadfield, Willy Maley, Mark Netzloff, and Kate Chedzoy come to mind – he goes about the business in a more comprehensive manner than any other critic to date: that is, he considers male and female authors; he examines writing from and on England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales (not to mention work in Hiberno-English and Scots/Inglis as well as work translated from Welsh and Gaelic); and he expands his focus well beyond 1707, continuing on to Swift and Scott and the varieties of Britishness that emerged leading up to and around 1802. Unlike any other critic heretofore, then, Kerrigan offers us a rich reexamination of anglophone literature of the early modern period from a less anglocentric perspective.

One of the strengths of this well-researched book is the way in which it connects authors, texts, and events within and across chapters. Kerrigan is attentive to political and cultural legacies, and his analyses gain force as he highlights the impact of authors and texts on later writers and readers. The chapter on Shakespeare's *Macbeth* – aptly titled 'Archipelagic *Macbeth*' – glances occasionally to the Caroline play *The Valiant Scot* (1637) so as to tease

out the prophetic strains in Shakespeare's Jacobean 'Scottish' play. Thus, the centrepiece of this chapter is an early Jacobean play; however, the perspective broadens to incorporate Anglo-Scottish (actually, archipelagic) issues that dominated both James's and Charles's reigns. Connections are also made across chapters: this is true of individual authors (Marvell features in chapters 7 and 9) and of genres (for instance, chapters on the Earl of Orrery's dramatic works and on 'The Derry School of Drama'). The long, reflective epilogue that majestically concludes the book considers how eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century writers looked back at the signal period 1603-1707, a period that commenced with regal union, witnessed violent union, and resulted, eventually, in Anglo-Scottish political union. Kerrigan does well to consider some of the union literature that was produced in the wake of the 1707 Union; oddly, he says little or nothing about the plethora of print and manuscript tracts and treatises that were published in 1604 and 1605 (some of which were later republished). Attention to these early Jacobean writings on various aspects of union, including cultural union, would have enriched Kerrigan's focus on the fashioning and refashioning of cultural identities.

Although a strong sense of connectedness binds this book's various chapters, it would be unfair to say that Kerrigan tells a straightforward tale. Kerrigan, as he states in his Preface, selects thematically related 'texts or clusters of texts' and explores them within the context in which they were produced and received, and in doing so he rejects 'overarching historical narratives' (p. viii). Consider, for example, Kerrigan's chapter on Wales and Jacobean drama ('The Romans in Britain'), which covers a number of plays (William Rowley's *A Shoo-maker a Gentleman*, Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, John Fletcher's *Bonduca*, and Robert Armin's *The Valiant Welshman*) that were written a few years into James's English reign. Arguing that a 'play about ancient Britain could not exist for post-1603 audiences . . . in a purely English perspective' (128), Kerrigan highlights the complex and often contradictory ideologies embedded in these plays, in particular their representation of Wales, with which the 'positive qualities of ancient Britain were associated' (p. 117). This chapter's strength lies in its ability to eschew a simple and simplistic pro-/anti-Welsh/British binary in favour of a much more complex archipelagic model of literature, history, and politics. Kerrigan's careful reading of these plays is sensitive to the ways in which Jacobean popular theatre was able to accommodate the politics of James's composite monarchy. For Kerrigan, literature is more than a repository of cultural stereotypes; it is a medium in which national subjects reflect seriously on the intricacies of state formation.

Kerrigan is a superb close reader of literary texts (his *Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to*

Armageddon won the Truman Capote Award for Literary Criticism). Some literary historians may bemoan the fact that Kerrigan's intense focus on history and politics draws him away from the close, critical readings of works of literature for which he is known. It would be churlish to suggest that Kerrigan forgoes literature for history and politics; indeed, to suggest that Kerrigan is led by current historiographical trends would be to miss the central aim of this book. His reading of Katherine Philips' late poem 'To his Grace Gilbert Lord Arch-Bishop of Canterbury, July 10. 1664' (pp. 217-18), for example, foregrounds syntax, diction, and rhyme while situating her poem within an interpretive framework attentive to Philips' gender, confessional identity, patronage networks, and geographical situation: not just her home in West Wales but also 'the larger British and Irish worlds in which her poems increasingly circulated' (p. 219) – namely, London and Dublin. Similarly, his chapter on William Drummond is remarkable not only for its engagement with a large number of the neglected Scottish poet's works produced during his lengthy career as a writer but also for its attention to Drummond's responses to two English/Scottish monarchs: King James VI and I and Charles I. That Drummond has been underappreciated by literary historians has everything to do, Kerrigan argues, with Scottish nationalists' rejection of his too 'English' characteristics and because our anglocentric accounts of literary history have no place for a poet who is deemed belatedly Petrarchan and too far off London's literary radar. As is often the case in this book, this chapter reveals just how undervalued an author is by reexamining the author's work within a larger British context.

Archipelagic Identities seeks to 'devolve' early modern English literature. It does this in surprising and fascinating ways, introducing readers to neglected writers and underexplored contexts. Along with Philips' poetry, Morgan Llwyd's and Henry Vaughan's writings are explored within the theological context of seventeenth-century Wales. In chapter 7 – 'The Archipelago Enlarged' – the writings of Milton and Marvell are situated within an ever-widening arena that includes Scotland and Ireland as well as the Netherlands, for the interactivities of the Commonwealth, for whom Milton and Marvell often found themselves writing, with the United Provinces were intense. Given the plethora of criticism on Marvell's 'Horatian Ode,' it is difficult to imagine how this poem could spark a reading that takes the poem in new directions. Kerrigan invites us to reconsider the ode as a poem that is as much about Cromwell and the impending invasion of Scotland as it is about Cromwell's Irish campaign. The strength of this book's historicising thrust is its ability to recover the circumstances of the composition and reception of the texts under consideration, circumstances that are revealed to be much wider – culturally, geographically, and politically – than previously thought.