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Graham Hammill and Julia Reinhard Lupton, eds. *Political Theology and Early Modernity*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012. x + 315 pp. ISBN 0226314987 (paper).

Reviewed by Penelope Anderson, Indiana University

Widespread scholarly interest in political theology forms part of a related set of investigations – among them “the religious turn” and an assertion of “the post-secular present” – that have become especially prominent in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks in New York (Jackson and Marotti; Mohamed). Much of this work explicitly addresses the present moment, as both Christian and Muslim religious fundamentalism gathers force. (Consider John Carey’s famous identification of John Milton’s Samson with suicide bombers.) In addition to a concern with the relation between politics and religion in the present day, thinking on political theology also responds to earlier models of scholarship, such as New Historicism (which shaped early modern scholarship for many years) and the secular emphases in histories of republicanism, such as those of J. G. A. Pocock.

The new work on political theology, elegantly exemplified by Graham Hammill and Julia Reinhard Lupton’s *Political Theology and Early Modernity*, recasts the terms of this debate in important ways. The collection insists upon the “ongoing entanglement and antagonism” between politics and theology, rather than a triumph of one over the other. (The phrase is Hammill’s, from his 2012 monograph *The Mosaic Constitution* [3].) The diverse essays in the collection range from explicit briefs for secularism (Étienne Balibar, Victoria Kahn, Paul Kottman) to those described by the editors as “neither secular nor religious,” though they draw upon theological habits of mind (3). That characterization, in the editors’ introduction, downplays the vitality of theological thought as demonstrated in individual essays (including Gregory Kneidel’s, Jennifer Rust’s, and Lupton’s own). Indeed, the interplay of disparate, often contradictory, viewpoints is one of the signal strengths of this collection, although it makes for heady reading at times.

A slight hesitation to grant too much to theology in the abstract, though not in the nuanced particulars of the essays themselves, likely derives from political theology’s vexed intellectual past. As the editors’ introduction suggests and the essays in the first section show in detail, political theology has a clearly defined canon: formatively, Carl Schmitt, in his 1922 *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*; his contemporaries Hannah Arendt, Walter Benjamin, Sigmund Freud, Ernst Kantorowicz, and Leo Strauss; and Giorgio Agamben (Benjamin’s Italian editor) now. Schmitt is the problem here: his widely influential account of politics as the secularization of theology undergirded his contributions to the Nazi regime, for which he drafted parts of the Weimar Constitution (Lupton, *Citizen-Saints* 4). The hope of this volume, in Hammill and Lupton’s words, is to “speak here of a *political theology* (editors’ version 1) (inveterate, entrenched, phantasmatic, and reactionary, the stuff of Nazism, racial panic, and the *arcana imperii*), and a *political theology* (editors’ version 2) that would rework and refigure those disturbing anchors of psychic life, not only in order to create an easement from their tenacious claim, but also to recover and repurpose whatever it is that makes them so resilient” (5).

The answer to Schmitt's pernicious legacy, this volume shows, is to investigate the intellectual contributions of his contemporaries as well as the political-theological texts these thinkers analyzed. Many of those texts are early modern ones: Machiavelli, Shakespeare, Spinoza, Hobbes, Milton. The usual story, as the term "early modern" itself asserts, is that the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries transition, via the Reformation, humanism, and political revolution, from explicitly theological state structures toward increasingly secularized ones. Some essays in the volume substantiate this narrative, others refute it, but all complicate it by articulating the use made of early modern texts by modern thinkers. *Political Theology and Early Modernity* also reverses this dynamic, generating a critique of political theology through readings of early modern texts.

As this background suggests, *Political Theology and Early Modernity* is an important book, with contributions by many of the most prominent scholars in the field. That a short bibliography on political theology would include monographs by many of its contributors is a measure not of parochialism but of the field-defining work encapsulated here. This volume continues and deepens an ongoing conversation, with the consequence that future work on this topic will have to take account of it. At the same time, this means that a number of the essays demand an audience already familiar with the issues and texts under discussion. The essays can be quite dense and complicated; a reader newly interested in issues of political theology would do better to start with Lupton's *Citizen-Saints* and Hammill's *The Mosaic Constitution*, for instance, or with Victoria Kahn's new book *The Future of Illusion*, all of which articulate the central issues more clearly at greater length.

Despite the varied approaches of the individual essays, two argumentative through-lines distinguish this collection and thus chart directions for future research. The first is a focus on genealogy: deep and wide reading not only in Schmitt and his contemporaries, but also in the early modern texts they studied themselves. The second is a concern with the figural (which encompasses fiction, analogy, and metaphor, and relates to but differs from typology). These two concerns map loosely onto the book's two parts: Part One, "Modern Destinations," addresses mostly theoretical texts in order to limn the genealogy of political theology; Part Two, the significantly shorter "Scenes of Early Modernity," focuses on readings of early modern texts in order to show political theology in action. It is a virtue of the collection, however, that both sections incorporate both concerns. Indeed, the most exciting essays in the volume explicate the figural thinking in theoretical texts, and in so doing make a robust argument for the urgent virtues of literary analysis.

Victoria Kahn's opening essay performs genealogical work by arguing that Leo Strauss is as important to the theory of political theology as Schmitt. More importantly, however, she uses a reading of Spinoza to refute Strauss' and Schmitt's rejections of culture (a view each thinker came to share, but arrived at quite differently). And it is specifically *reading* that is vital to Spinoza, for the possibility of "literary culture as a bulwark against political theology and a model of political judgment" emerges from an idea of Scriptural truth gleaned not through revelation but through reading (24). In an explicit brief both for secularism and for literature, Kahn articulates "a decision for literature," in which culture and imagination can offer a critique of political theology (42). The genealogical work with Strauss, Schmitt, and Arendt thus results in a literary emphasis through a deep reading of Spinoza.

The next two essays, by Adam Sitze and Carlo Galli, form a pair, as Sitze introduces and translates Galli's work on Schmitt's *Hamlet or Hecuba* (1956; Italian trans. Galli 1983; English trans. Pan and Rust, 2009). In Sitze's exposition, Galli insightfully reveals the genealogical dimension of Schmitt's view of the political as an ongoing crisis generated by the traumatic "dissolution of the specifically Roman Catholic form of representation that governed political order in medieval Europe" (Sitze 51). Galli's own essay, first published as the Italian introduction to *Hamlet or Hecuba*, argues that Schmitt's text not only articulates but also embodies the problematic relation between "political reality and forms of representation" in Schmitt (Galli 63). In a very different way than Kahn, Galli too asserts the importance of the literary, here casting it as central to Schmitt's own political thought.

Whereas Galli shows the significance of literary texts to Schmitt, Hammill investigates Hans Blumenberg's critique of the unacknowledged metaphoricity of Schmitt's thought. Using Hobbes, Blumenberg "begins to understand political theology as a shaping fiction, one whose strength comes not from a genealogy of the state but instead from the persuasive force of theological metaphors that populate the early modern and modern landscape" (84). These shaping fictions, always partial and incomplete, contrast with the "literalizing effect" of Hobbes's social contract (98). For Hobbes, confession produces a "rhetorical subject" self-constituted and self-governed, revealing the latent metaphoricity of the political-theological sovereign and thus the space for creating alternative forms of governance (99).

Hammill's essay opens the possibilities of the metaphorical for imagining new forms of politics; Jennifer Rust, in contrast, limns the dangers of the merely metaphorical in Kantorowicz's use of Henri de Lubac's *Corpus Mysticum* (1944, U.S. pub. 2007) to critique Schmitt. While stressing the communal model of the *corpus mysticum*, Kantorowicz nevertheless diminishes the mystical by equating it to the "'fictional, ideal, abstract'" (113). For Rust, Kantorowicz's secular uses of this "mere metaphorical material" reverse without undoing Schmitt's authoritarianism (118). Working from within the theological tradition, Rust importantly emphasizes that "it is only from a static, secular position that figuration or symbolism necessarily takes on the meaning of abstract or empty fiction" (119). As Kahn's and Hammill's preceding essays suggest, the secular need not equate to the static, but Rust offers the complementary caveat that metaphor's shaping powers need not only come from within the secular.

Kathleen Biddick's essay takes up the typological relation between *littera*, associated with the Jew, and *figura*, associated with the Christian, to think through the problem of the enemy – in Biddick's vivid language, the "undead Muslim as the irritant around which the pearls of messianic time slowly accrete" (125). Whereas Agamben answers Schmitt's insistence on the enemy with "messianic time" (a decisive, typological relation), Biddick critiques this as a Christian account of sovereign authority. The "murderous typological" power of the Christian, Biddick shows, is power over signs: the power to make miracles and to serve as the site of incarnation (138). Resisting the Christian typology that "foreclosed semiosis to Islam, assigning it to a mechanical world of gears, and superseded semiosis for Jews" offers an alternative relationship to time and signs that does not inevitably turn neighbors into enemies (138).

Following upon the violent temporality of typology in Biddick's essay is Paul A. Kottman's chapter on the importance of lived historical experience to the thinking of Arendt. Arguing

explicitly for the value of secular reason in contrast to an austere faith, Kottman finds the recent focus on theology important for questioning the conflation between secularism and historical progress. Rather than successful development, secularism's history instead understands itself as "past failures to found a fully secular polity" (144). This retrospective, failure-threaded regard does not doom revolution, but instead offers an entirely secular way to bind human beings to one another, by means of historical experience. Arendt's insistence on the authority of lived human experience is no less than the stuff of freedom itself, made "*out of past failures*" (155).

Jane O. Newman's essay forms a counterpoint to Kottman's embrace of the secular. Treating not only Erich Auerbach but also other German intellectuals of the interwar years, Newman's essay articulates the force of sacred logics in imagining alternatives to oppressive state power. In Germany after World War I, Auerbach and his interlocutors undertake a form of "methodological treason" simply by writing about French classicism (162-163). In Blaise Pascal, Auerbach discovers a way to act justly in an unjust world: act on God's orders. Newman finds this a productive model for reconsidering twenty-first century relations between force and justice. Divine inspiration does, however, produce a familiar modern (and early modern) problem: how can the one who acts, and still less those acted upon, be sure of the source of those orders? This is a question provoked partly in the stimulating interaction among the volume's essays, from Kahn's emphasis on reading as the means to discern truth to Biddick's discussion of the violent interpretive practices of typology.

Part Two, "Scenes of Early Modernity," offers a more sustained focus on literary texts while maintaining the theoretical sophistication and generativity of the volume's first part. Jacques Lezra focuses on the question of cultural mediation by tracing the allusion behind Freud's famous sentence "Where id was, there ego shall be." Drawn from Friedrich Schiller's *Don Karlos, Infant von Spanien* (1786-87), Freud's words echo the confrontation between the Spanish King Philip II and the Inquisitor – "a primal encounter between 'politics' and 'theology'" (185). In the competition over whether the state or the church has the authority to kill, the play also demonstrates the refusal of substitution, when it declares the death of one character in place of another insufficient: "there, Freud understands, a different, *primal* scene is acted out, and something, call it freedom or citizenship, *begins*" (206).

Analyzing tapestries of Paul and Peter based on Raphael's cartoons, Julia Reinhard Lupton's essay charts the play between the mobility of the thing itself and the distanced representation necessitated by its loss. The tapestries reveal the importance of media, whereby "in the banqueting houses of the Renaissance courts, *biopolitics* (commensal entertainment as a form of communicative action) could also be *political theology* (the pressing of religious narratives into the service of secular forms of legitimacy)" (214). This is a narrative of secularization, in that religious narratives serve secular ends; it also refutes that secular story, as the furling and unfurling of the tapestries in accordance with the liturgical calendar gives the representations a particular kind of lived meaning. Lupton's focus on the material dimensions of the representational usefully extends the emphases of the collection's other essays.

Drew Daniel takes up the marriage negotiations between Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Alençon to consider Schmitt's use of Jean Bodin. Addressing Schmitt on "analogy" and "similitude," Daniel makes the illuminating point that "the simultaneity of marriage's inclusion

in both the sphere of theology and the sphere of politics becomes the origin point of the theologico-political idea's gradual metamorphosis from coextension to metaphor to simile" (249). This genealogy of figural transformation, in Daniel's reading, limits the impact of the theological for Schmitt – unlike John Stubbs, who staked his life on his right to conscience when he protested the queen's potential marriage (and got away with losing only his hand). Though Daniel does not mention it, the right to conscience also forms the exception to wives' duty to obey their husbands – and thus, potentially, the loophole to a marital contract otherwise insupportable for a regnant queen.

Gregory Kneidel's essay analyzes the use of the word "testament" to describe the Christian Scriptures in Hebrews 9 and its interpretations by Lutheran scholar Matthias Flacius Illyricus and English poet and Anglican divine John Donne. As Kneidel writes, "the ambiguity of Hebrews 9—its imperfect typological shift from Christ's bloody covenantal sacrifice to His formal testamentary death—leads Flacius to align the spiritual with, not against, the political" (270). Donne, considering the competing jurisdictions of common law and canon law in seventeenth-century England, denies legal plurality until the last moment, when "he singles out love as an exception that thwarts the dream of a radically simplified and homogenized law" (277). The language of testament, alluding to Roman testamentary law, offers a way to push back against "the reductive logic of Christian typology" (277).

Writing on Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, Jonathan Goldberg focuses on the metonym "uncircumcised," used to demarcate the Philistines from the Israelites. Circumcision's importance derives from the vexed relationship between literal and figurative in a play about destructive violence drawn from the Hebrew Bible. The fact that circumcision is always both literal (a physical cut) and figurative (a sign of difference) marks the impossibility of sustaining difference in the play – between Israelite and Philistine, between husband and wife – even as Milton insists upon those differences. "The promise of indifference, of difference within sameness, but in the hope of thinking it without the violence that produces sameness by obliterating difference" is Goldberg's answer to the debates about religious violence inextricable to *Samson Agonistes*, though he does not absolve Milton from the "terroristic violence" of the play (294-95).

The postscript, by Étienne Balibar, considers Jacques Derrida's phrase "new Enlightenment." It explicates the contradiction within the term, which conveys both "radical alterity" and a "return to sources" (300). In so doing, it elegantly evokes, in philosophical terms, the work of the preceding essays, which return to sources, both early modern and early twentieth-century, in order to generate new questions about and new possible solutions to the seemingly intractable entanglements of theology and politics. Following upon the western Enlightenment's emphasis on reason, Balibar articulates the dangers of secularization as currently conceived, "vacillating between a liberal model of 'tolerance' and a republican model of 'civil religion'" (303). Affirming the volume's emphasis on early modern questions as urgent present-day problems, Balibar stresses the risk of this enterprise: "the adventure of learning and the affirmation of the equal liberty of human beings are indissociable from intellectual and moral risk, and from perennial transgression against established order and received wisdom" (303).

With the forward-looking words of Balibar in mind, I want to take a final look back. I have stressed the conjunction of genealogy and figure in *Political Theology and Early Modernity*: the look back to earlier texts, both literary and theoretical, and the close attention to the language and forms of those texts. But the conjunction of genealogy and figure might also suggest typology, the reading of a figure from the past in light of what comes later. In a variety of ways, this is a reading that the essays in this volume want strongly to resist. From Biddick's haunting undead Muslims to Kneidel's Roman testamentary law to Goldberg's foreskins, typological reading appears lacking because its time moves only in a single direction and because it imagines that a substitution might offer full compensation. The resistance to typology is of a piece with the questioning of Schmitt's secularization hypothesis. As typology is an insufficient explanation, an insufficient *reading*, of the complexities of the Hebrew Bible, so too Schmitt's model of secularity is insufficient: theology does not simply give over its "concepts," "form," and "stakes" to politics (Kahn 26).

The genealogical theory and the figurative close readings of this collection show the continuing importance of that incomplete replacement: the remnants and revenants that help to answer, or at least to question anew, the "present-day problem." Formally as well as theoretically, *Political Theology and Early Modernity* offers a rebuke to a mode of reading in which "the literary text is always . . . a pretext," as Galli writes of Schmitt (62). Instead, by employing a long historical sweep and the literary methods of close analysis, the collection as a whole could be said to articulate what Kahn terms "a decision for literature," in which humanistic inquiry interrogates political systems (42).

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