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of a general trend in theatre history, as is evident in the work of the critics included in John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan's *New History of Early English Drama* and representative books by Tiffany Stern and Lucy Munro. The same fracturing, but with a firmer underpinning by critical theory, is also evident in the most recent work in the field brought together in the *Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theatre*.

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Introduction: Defining 'Jacobean Drama'

'Jacobean Drama' is a term which, in the past, has often been used synonymously with the term 'Jacobean Tragedy' to describe, in John E. Cunningham's terms, 'plays of a certain atmosphere or flavour' that are 'very closely concerned with death and dying, with the air of the graveyard and the thoughts of men as they reached their end'.[1] In this, the plays of the Jacobean age are implicitly – and often explicitly – contrasted with 'Elizabethan Drama', the plays produced during the golden age of the English theatre closely identified with the leading figure of 'gentle' Shakespeare. In such uses of the period descriptors 'Elizabethan' and 'Jacobean',[2] the latter becomes everything that the former is not: decadent, violent, satirical, derivative, and it is this sense of decadence which constitutes the drama's appeal to many modern readers, who seek in the violence and transgression of the past a correspondence to the present.

The terminological muddle is complicated by the fact that, up to the 1960s, critics were prone to refer to *all* drama produced between the opening of the first public playhouse in 1576 and the formal closing of the theatres in 1642 as 'Elizabethan'. This is the usage we find not only in *The Elizabethan Stage* (1923), the massive history of the theatre by E. K. Chambers (1866–1954) that still looms large on our shelves and in our minds, but also in some of the most important critical appraisals of Jacobean drama of the mid-twentieth century, right up to Ralph J. Kaufmann's *Elizabethan Drama: Modern Essays in Criticism* (1961), which includes essays not only on Kyd and Marlowe, as one would expect from the title, but also on Jonson, Webster and even Ford, a Caroline playwright. The problem with such a usage of 'Elizabethan' as a portmanteau term is obvious: not only does the term stop being meaningful, but it also obscures the important developments that took place after 1603 which produced the distinctive flavour of Jacobean drama. When subsumed under the term 'Elizabethan', the drama of the Jacobean period is implicitly seen as derivative, as the product of an age to which it no longer belongs and therefore a misfit, whose bleak and cynical mood does not accord with the imagined gloriousness of the Shakespearean age of Elizabeth. The decision to focus this book on Jacobean drama as the corpus of plays that is defined historically as the plays written, mainly for the public and private stages in London,

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during the reign of James I, is a deliberate counter to the way in which the plays of this period have in the past been overshadowed by the term 'Elizabethan'. Putting the spotlight on the Jacobean period brings out the distinctiveness of its theatrical world, a world of which Shakespeare is still a significant part, though his Jacobean plays can, in this light, more readily be seen as part of a wider theatrical context by which he was influenced as much as he contributed to it. After more than thirty years of scholarly activity that has sought to understand early modern drama in its historical, political and cultural contexts, it seems timely to bring together in one book the critical milestones that have worked to disentangle 'Jacobean Drama' from the 'Elizabethan'.

The beginning of the 'Jacobean' period can be difficult to pinpoint. Glynne Wickham, for example, uses the year 1597 as his starting point because that year saw the Elizabethan Privy Council's order that all the London Playhouses be suppressed, bringing with it the professionalisation of acting.[3] 1599–1600, the years which saw the construction of the Globe and Fortune theatres as well as the establishment of two rival companies of boy actors, could also be considered a convenient starting-point. The date which I will, on the whole, opt for in this Guide, is nevertheless 1603: it sees not only the accession of James I and a corresponding change in the political and cultural environment, but, crucially, the conferring of royal patronage upon all the London playing companies. While this did not bring about an instant change in the nature of the relationship between the players and their audiences, it does mark the beginning of a shift towards a tighter allegiance to the court as opposed to the city. In terms of developments in theatre architecture, the accession of James, and Queen Anna of Denmark's enjoyment of court masques, led to the introduction of Inigo Jones's proscenium-arched stages in 1604–5 which, while at first quite insignificant in their influence on the public playhouses, were eventually to revolutionise the English stage.[4]

By contrast, defining the end of the 'Jacobean' period for the purposes of this book is quite straightforward: not only did John Fletcher, the leading playwright of the King's Men, die that year, but the restrictions on playing during Lent in 1625 were followed by a prohibition on playing following the death of the King, which was followed by an outbreak of the plague that saw all theatres closed for eight months. As a result, the Admiral's or Palsgrave's/Elector Palatine's Men, the company that had been the principal rival of the King's Men throughout James's reign, ceased their existence as an independent company and the Lady Elizabeth's company, which had evolved out of various groupings of former boy companies and which premiered plays as important as Middleton's *Chaste Maid* and Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*, was also broken up.[5] There is thus a clear distinction

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to be made between theatres of the Jacobean reign and the Caroline, which, once the theatres reopened, largely saw a consolidation of playing arrangements with a stable number of playing companies.

This book will thus make an argument in favour of recognising the drama produced during the reign of King James I as marked by a shift from the public playhouses to an increasing use of smaller indoor venues (also known as 'private' playhouses) and the growing importance of drama at court. At the same time, it will also use the adjective 'Jacobean' in a looser way that returns us to John Cunningham's perception of the drama's distinctive 'flavour' in the period. This involves a more flexible periodisation, in which we accept that 'the characteristic preoccupations and tones of early seventeenth-century tragedy had already been anticipated in the work of Kyd and Marlowe [arguably the two most influential Elizabethan authors of tragedies] and were definitively established by five plays first performed between 1599 and 1604', namely Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Othello*, Marston's *Antonio's Revenge*, Jonson's *Sejanus* and Chapman's *Bussy d'Ambois*.[6] These tragedies bring to the fore the key ingredients of the popular perception of 'the Jacobean', namely a heady mixture of revenge, cynicism, self-awareness, complex plotting, corrupt courts, sexual excesses and perversions, secret murders, with spies and flatterers surrounding the charismatic but flawed hero. In comedy, too, what we now recognise as the distinctive flavour of Jacobean city comedy was anticipated in the satirical plays performed by boys' companies in the private playhouses at the turn of the century. 'Jacobean', then, while referring to a strictly delimited period, is a useful term that allows me to include in the book studies that analyse the plays that anticipate the drama performed during James' reign. It also allows me to touch on, for example, Peter Greenaway's *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* (1989) as a 'Jacobean' film, since it aims to reproduce a 'Jacobean' mood of sexual excesses, spectacular violence, cynicism and stylish plotting.

The purpose of this book is to discuss the criticism of Jacobean drama as defined above rather than to analyse any specific plays of the period or, indeed, the criticism of specific plays. If some plays gain particular prominence in specific chapters – for example, *As You Like It*, *Epicoene* and *The Roaring Girl* in the section on cross-dressing – this is motivated by their importance to the issues under discussion and the wish to provide a stable point of comparison between critical approaches rather than a wish to privilege them for their own sake (or a desire to claim *As You Like It* as a Jacobean play, for that matter). While Shakespeare is manifestly part of the theatrical culture of Jacobean England and the period saw the production of some of his most important plays, this Guide will, as much as this is ever possible, treat him as but one among all the playwrights active in Jacobean London and will privilege criticism that is

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concerned with Shakespeare's contemporaries over criticism that takes Shakespeare as its exclusive subject. The focus of the book will furthermore be on the critical present and future rather than the more distant past. Readers will be guided to a selection of the 'giants' of twentieth-century criticism in Chapter 1 and, where relevant, in later chapters, but my aim is principally to point my readers towards the works that enable an understanding of current debates and a selection of the most innovative critical departures since the 1980s. It is with this focus in mind that I am only including the dates of birth and death of critics whose work pre-dates the 1960s: criticism written after that time points towards the present and constitutes an early part of current debates.

To understand these debates, however, requires that we first turn to the critical trails that led up to them. Accordingly, my next chapter will consider, in necessarily broad brushstrokes, the rediscovery of Shakespeare's contemporaries by Charles Lamb at the beginning of the nineteenth century and the influence his work had on Romantic critics. Later in the century, the Romantics' endorsement of the contemporaries gave way to a more divided view of the plays, with moralists decrying the self-same decadence that was valued by *fin-de-siècle* aesthetes. In the twentieth century, the theatrical revivals and attempts at authentic staging by the Elizabethan Stage Society combined with the efforts of textual critics and theatre historians to give a 'scientific' grounding to the study of the drama. Meanwhile, influential critics followed T. S. Eliot's lead in focusing on the language of the plays, often adding a moral commentary to their analysis of the drama. In the later twentieth century, the influence of critical theory and the emergence of newer methods of historical investigation led to the comprehensive reassessment of Jacobean drama to which the remainder of the book is dedicated.

This comprehensive reassessment would not have been possible without the joint developments in theatre history and the study of textual transmission, to which Chapters 2 and 3 are dedicated. In both fields, early twentieth-century attempts at bringing a more 'scientific' methodology to bear on the textual and documentary evidence came under attack in the second half of the century, as more material evidence came to light and poststructuralist theory invited scholars to acknowledge and embrace multiple viewpoints and instability. In theatre history, I trace the movement towards, first, a rejection of theory and a search for empirical evidence around the turn of the millennium, and second, a tentative return to an acknowledgement of the intrinsically theoretical nature of attempts to re-imagine the early modern theatrical world in more recent work. In textual studies, theory has always been central to the field, whether in the work of the 'New Bibliographers' who shaped the texts as we still often encounter them today on our shelves, or in the 'New Textualists', whose revisionist attack on the 'New Bibliography'

relied very markedly on the poststructuralist thinking of Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault. I close the chapter on textual transmission with an overview of the most significant editorial developments that have a direct impact on the nature of the texts we rely on to study Jacobean drama.

Chapter 4 is concerned with the two critical schools which arguably have had the greatest influence on the ways in which Jacobean drama is approached today: the 'New Historicism', which is closely identified with a group of North American critics and its British counterpart, the 'cultural materialism' influenced by the work of Raymond Williams. I use the chapter to outline the different approaches of these critics and the ways in which they aim to use historical methodologies to expose the ideological structure and tensions apparent in Jacobean drama. I then turn to more recent approaches that take issue with some of the tenets of New Historicism and outline some of the avenues that have opened up for present-day scholars.

Historical contexts are not the only context in which plays are read, however. For centuries, one of the primary ways in which audiences and readers have approached the drama has been to set each play into an intertextual dialogue with other plays of the same genre. Understanding the rules governing generic distinctions and the ways in which individual plays violate or respect those rules has always been a crucial ingredient of literary analysis. It is therefore not surprising that the study of generic forms is still flourishing even as it is often looked at as rather old-fashioned. Chapter 5, accordingly, is concerned with the genres of Jacobean drama and pays particular attention to the smaller genres and sub-genres – the masque, city comedy, revenge tragedy, tragicomedy and closet drama – that are the most characteristic of the Jacobean period. It is symptomatic of the vigour of the field as a whole, I would suggest, that it is in the analysis of these quintessentially Jacobean genres that we find some of the freshest approaches to the drama.

The following two chapters, on the body and race and on gender and sexuality, follow specific sets of avenues that have been opened up by the work of the historicist and materialist critics and by the new attention to the politics of private life that has resulted from the race and gender activism of the 1960s and 1970s. Much of the most vibrant work on Jacobean drama is intimately concerned with the human body, its physical make-up, its conceptualisation in medical discourses and conduct manuals of the early modern period, its racial characteristics and its gender in a theatre whose performers were all white males. I start with a consideration of the work of the four critics (Mikhail Bakhtin, Thomas Laqueur, Jonathan Sawday and Gail Kern Paster) who have had the greatest influence on our conceptualisation of the early modern body and its relationship to its culture. I then move

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on to the work of race critics who have taken issue with the drama's presentation not only of blackness but also of whiteness, leading to investigations that have changed the way we view the relationships between England and its trade partners and colonies. In the chapter on gender and sexuality, I move on to consider more closely issues surrounding the staging of femininity on an all-male stage and the ways in which the female characters of Jacobean drama may be read as ideological constructs. New historicist and cultural materialist criticism have had a marked impact on the study of gender and sexuality, as is also evident in the queer studies of Jacobean drama with which the chapter ends.

The book concludes with a consideration of the work-in-progress that is the development of performance studies of Jacobean drama. Based, to a large extent, on the work of Shakespearean performance studies, the analysis of Jacobean drama on stages and screens is the newest of the approaches treated in this book and is therefore also one of the most challenging. The theoretical underpinning of the field is still rudimentary and I discuss the many questions that have been raised so far by the pioneers of Jacobean performance studies. I end with a discussion of the few critical appraisals of the available corpus of films of non-Shakespearean Jacobean drama. As the corpus expands and more criticism becomes available in print, this promises to be a vigorous and wide-ranging critical field that engages with the work of theatre historians, textual critics, historicists, and genre critics as much as it already does with the analyses of the body, race, gender and sexuality, as we begin to recognise the power of performance to encompass and engage with a multiplicity of concerns and approaches.

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