The Audience of the Jacobean Masque, with a Reference to The Tempest

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the role of the royal and aristocratic audience in the masques produced in the reign of James I, the first period of which coincides with the last years of Shakespeare’s life and career. Masques were the only dramatic performances of the time in which the audience had such a complex role. The role of James I, Queen Anne, Prince Henry and later on Prince Charles was not restricted to the conventional one of the viewer, but was extended to the inception, production and staging of the masque. Queen Anne and her two sons often crossed the borders separating the actors from the audience and held the key roles of the spectacle. The masquers surrounding them were trusted members of their court who also left their conventional positions as viewers to become actors. The aim of these outrageously costly spectacles was the glorification of the King and his court. However, a close reading of these masques reveals the weaknesses of this form of propaganda and the frivolity and arrogance of its audience. The examination of the masque included in The Tempest sets its own questions with respect to the privileges of the people who constituted the masque audience and highlights the reasons that are responsible for the parallel decline of the masque and monarchy.

Full Text:

References

the plays were becoming more edgy and human situations were becoming more exaggerated. And here again, the finest example of a Jacobean masque is Shakespeare’s The Tempest. Some of the most prominent of the Jacobean playwrights, apart from Shakespeare, are Jonson, Webster, Tourneur, Beaumont, Fletcher, Middleton, Rowley, Marston, Heyward, Ford and Dekker. Please take a moment to review this content!