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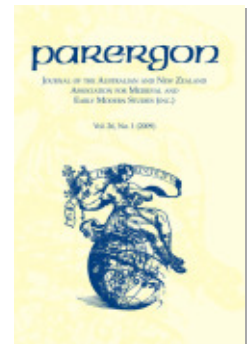
Imagination and Politics in Seventeenth-Century England
(review)

Marcus Harmes

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The structure Brundage has adopted, of returning to the same subjects (education, procedure, ethics, and the roles of various legal practitioners) in each of the eras discussed, gives the reader the opportunity to take each particular aspect of the legal profession and follow its development from the early Roman Republic to the late medieval period.

This is a book that will have appeal for a generalist reader looking for a broad-spectrum understanding of the subject as well as a more specialist reader whose specific interests lie in one of the aspects of the legal profession. Brundage's style is easy to read and his descriptions of what actually occurred in the legal faculties or in the courtrooms of the period are entertaining. This is a book that will appeal, and be of great value, to anyone who is beginning their research in legal history. Not only does it provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject, it also extensively lists both the primary and secondary sources available on the subject. This is a significant work that will assist researchers and students for many years.

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Butler, Todd, *Imagination and Politics in Seventeenth-Century England*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2008; hardcover; pp. x, 200; 5 b/w illustrations; R.R.P. £55.00; ISBN 9780754658832.

This is an original contribution to the crowded scholarly field that investigates intellectual history and the scholarly and artistic circles of seventeenth-century England. While Todd Butler's title refers to the seventeenth century in general, much of his text in fact relates to the Caroline period. He is largely concerned with manifestations of imaginative capacity during this time, especially as shown in the court masques and political crises of the era. His approach throughout is strongly multi-disciplinary, drawing on constitutional history, literature, scientific discourse and other seventeenth-century approaches to the imagination.

The author's originality stands out in his interpretation of the Civil Wars. He broadens familiar scholarly conceptions of a clash between King and Parliament into a reading of the Civil Wars as a cognitive process and an assessment of the very real political power which resided in imaginative capacities.

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The introduction surveys philosophical thought in imagination and phantasms from Plato onwards. Overall, Butler asserts the power which resided in imagination. He makes sense of this claim by revealing the varying degrees of suspicion or approbation that different thinkers have ascribed to the imagination, especially Plato's disapproval for poetry and its inherent untruthfulness. Butler also places historical debates about the implications of imagination into an English context, especially the religious contests about images which occurred during the Tudor period under King Edward VI. Again, Butler argues for the imagination as conveying potentially dangerous insights and provoking harmful thoughts.

His chapters further express the ambivalent place occupied by the imagination in seventeenth-century English thought. His first chapter reveals this ambivalence in the writings of Francis Bacon, who argued for imagination as a primary element of human thought in his *Advancement of Learning*. Yet as Butler points out, modern interpreters of Baconian science have tended to view Bacon as hostile to imaginative capacities (p. 18). Butler offers an alternative reading, taking Bacon's metaphor of imagination as both citizen and magistrate as his starting point for arguing that Bacon's approach to imagination was to stress its necessity and discipline. Butler's analysis of Baconian science stands forth distinctively from earlier surveys by stressing the intersection between politics and imagination; according to Bacon, imagination was a force which could gain and maintain political power if harnessed correctly (p. 55).

In part, he shows any ambivalence towards imagination as being due to imagination's confluence with politics, a point he also draws out from Caroline court masques. Again Bacon's philosophical works are used as an interpretative device to explain masques as having functioned as a stimulation to the imagination.

Caroline masques have received extensive scholarly attention. For many years, it seemed that Stephen Orgel and Roy Strong had had the last word on them, not simply through cataloguing plot, music and costume but in reading them within the context of the history of ideas. Yet Butler shows imagination to have been a contested property during the Caroline period, especially popular imagination. He ties together sharply divergent Caroline stages, namely courtly masque and Charles I's scaffold in 1649, in order to demonstrate the potency of displays that provoked imaginative capacities. Assessing Charles' execution as an act endowed with imaginative potency,

Butler also stresses the importance of the *Eikon Basilike*, a text purportedly authored by Charles I himself and which he also reads in terms of its imaginative potential (p. 93).

Of course Butler is not the first historian to stress the inherent theatricality of Charles I's execution or the impact of the *Eikon Basilike*, but his work is distinctive for the intersection he charts between political events and the imaginary sphere. Further chapters also pursue interpretation of the public image of the martyred Charles I, especially Milton's acknowledgement that Charles and his supporters used the power of the imagination as a key to political authority (p. 136).

Overall the text would have benefitted from a slightly sharper focus. Given that Butler argues for the intersection of imagination and politics, his treatment of the constitutional history was at times disjointed, as political events floated in and out of his analysis as occasion demanded, rather than receiving systematic treatment. But his central idea of the nexus of politics and the imagination is clear and strong and this is a fresh and valuable contribution to existing studies, not only of seventeenth-century politics, but also the History of Ideas.

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Cowan, Alexander, *Marriage, Manners and Mobility in Early Modern Venice* (Historical Urban Studies), Aldershot, Ashgate, 2007; hardback; pp. xvii, 209; 9 b/w illustrations; R.R.P. £55.00; ISBN 9780754657286.

This book provides a unique perspective on attitudes to marriage, concubinage and social mobility amongst the Venetian Patriciate in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Its aim is 'to examine upward social mobility through marriage in early modern Venice' (p. 13). It does so via a systematic analysis of the surviving *prove di nobiltà*, the investigations of a governmental magistracy – known as the *Avogaria di Comun* – into whether or not proposed marriages of Venetian noblemen to brides from outside the Venetian Patriciate, and/or those of natural daughters of Venetian noblemen to members of the Venetian nobility should be approved for registration by the Venetian State. Records survive for the investigations into the social and moral backgrounds of approximately 500 women who wished to marry into