



The Storm at Sea: Political Aesthetics in the Time of Shakespeare

By Christopher Pye

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The Storm at Sea: Political Aesthetics in the Time of Shakespeare counters a tradition of cultural analysis that judges considerations of aesthetic autonomy in the early modern context to be either anachronistic or an index of political disengagement. Pye argues that for a post-theocratic era in which the *mise-en-forme* of the social domain itself was for the first time at stake, the problem of the aesthetic lay at the very core of the political; it is precisely through its engagement with the question of aesthetic autonomy that early modern works most profoundly explore their relation to matters of law, state, sovereignty, and political subjectivity.

Pye establishes the significance of a "creationist" political aesthetic—at once a discrete historical category and a phenomenon that troubles our familiar forms of historical accounting—and suggests that the fate of such an aesthetic is intimately bound up with the emergence of modern conceptions of the political sphere.

The Storm at Sea moves historically from Leonardo da Vinci to Thomas Hobbes; it focuses on Shakespeare and English drama, with chapters on *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *A Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*, as well as sustained readings of *As You Like It*, *King Lear*, Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, and Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. Engaging political thinkers such as Carl Schmitt, Giorgio Agamben, Claude Lefort, and Roberto Esposito, *The Storm at Sea* will be of interest to political theorists as well as to students of literary and visual theory.

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The Storm at Sea: Political Aesthetics in the Time of Shakespeare By Christopher Pye Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #11833859 in Books
- Published on: 2015-03-02
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 6.20" h x .80" w x 9.10" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 272 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

"A learned, ambitious, sharply argued, and consequential book. In a forceful reconsideration of the aesthetic as itself a site of political thought, Pye is throwing down the gauntlet against the prevailing climate of historicist work in early modern literary criticism, which has placed the Renaissance before the arrival of the aesthetic as a category." -Andrew Daniel, Johns Hopkins University

"Drawing on a rich and wide-ranging selection of important works from Leonardo da Vinci to Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*, through the plays of Thomas Kyd, Christopher Marlowe, and Shakespeare, Christopher Pye makes a powerful case for the existence of an autonomous early modern aesthetic prior to Kant, through readings that are highly attentive to textual detail and theoretically informed by thinkers from philosophy, political theory, and psychoanalysis."--Philip Lorenz, Cornell University

"This is scholarship that does not hesitate to strike out against the errors of earlier critics. Pye goes in chosen directions that prove rewarding."--Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance

The Storm at Sea proves successful because it will prompt early modern literature scholars to reevaluate the foundational methodological assumptions of historicist work... *The Storm at Sea* is a challenging but rewarding read that generates questions long after its completion."--*Renaissance Quarterly*

"...in Christopher Pye's *The Storm at Sea: Political Aesthetics in the Time of Shakespeare* the weather is an altogether different beast. For Pye, the storm at sea is a metaphor for the 'interval between theocentric institutions and the appearance of the formal state.' This 'interval' is especially compelling in this book because it foregrounds aesthetic autonomy as a 'privileged space in which the problem of foundations as such is engaged.'"--*Shakespeare Survey*

About the Author

Christopher Pye is Class of 1924 Professor of English at Williams College. He is the author of *The Regal Phantasm: Shakespeare and the Politics of Spectacle* and *The Vanishing: Shakespeare, the Subject, and Early Modern Culture*.

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