



A Blessed Shore: England and Bohemia from Chaucer to Shakespeare

Alfred Thomas

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In *The Winter's Tale*, Antigonus announces that his ship has washed up on the shores of Bohemia. How and why landlocked Bohemia? Did Shakespeare not know his geography, or is something else at work here? Alfred Thomas answers these questions by exploring cross-cultural interactions between England and Bohemia from the fourteenth to the early seventeenth century. He is interested less in the diplomacy and politics of this history than in the images—the shifting blends of fact and fiction—that each of the two cultures nourished about the other. Although Thomas gives original readings of famous English texts by Chaucer and Shakespeare, this is also a book about Czech writers and travelers; one Czech expatriate, Anne of Bohemia, became Queen of England. For both countries these were decades of religious and dynastic turbulence, and Thomas's analyses of the relations between Wyclif and Hus, Lollards and Hussites, help us to understand why Bohemia was viewed as an almost utopian land of refuge ("a blessed shore" on which a ship might wash up) for persecuted English men and women. Of particular interest is his analysis of the ways in which English court culture emulated that of Prague, which was an imperial seat at a time when England was still a peripheral place with little influence on the heart of Europe. Thomas shows that the relationship between the two cultures was never a straightforward one, but a mirror-like formation in which each saw the other "through the distorted and subjective effect of its own reflection."

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