

Elizabeth Oakley-Brown and Louise J. Wilkinson, eds. *The Rituals and Rhetoric of Queenship: Medieval to Early Modern*.

Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009. 288 pp. index. \$74.50. ISBN: 978-1-846-82178-3.

This collection of essays typifies the strengths and weaknesses of the genre. It brings together provocative new work on queens who have received little scholarly attention, such as Louise Wilkinson's essay on Isabella of England, wife of Emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen, and Manuela Santos Silvas's on Philippa of Lancaster, wife of João I of Portugal. These meticulously researched and carefully analyzed essays add considerably to our understanding of women as agents of diplomacy through marriage and cultural exchange. Jessica L. Malay shows

convincingly how Elizabethan practices of queenship affected Lady Anne Clifford and deftly extends Sarah Hanley's argument that political culture has a profound ripple effect that touches women of lower social ranks. In one of the strongest essays in the collection, Rayne Allinson analyzes personal articulations of monarchy in a view from the throne in the letters of King James VI and Queen Elizabeth I. Allinson makes a strong case for including queens' letters into the field of early modern political theory as part of the canon alongside Machiavelli and Erasmus. Paula de Pando takes a fresh look at Anne Boleyn from a novel point of view, the Spanish diplomats at court. Metaphors of the queen's body, which often seem on the verge of exhaustion, are animated by Sabine Lucia Miller's study of the ageing body of Mary Tudor.

But the collection suffers from a common problem, that of coherence. Of the eighteen essays that examine nine different women, five were written by historians, thirteen by specialists in literature (one a modernist), including two who specialize in drama. All of this is subsumed under the heading of ritual and rhetoric, a catch-all category. Just about everything a queen did could be termed ritual or have rhetorical significance. What binds these essays (save one) is family dynamics and political culture. Lumping Kristin Bundesen's study of Elizabeth I's reliance on an extensive family network under ritual does not convey the substance of an argument that is so much more than simply ritual. Bundesen's essay forms a key part of newer work on monarchy that envisions royal government as a family affair, and by bringing in more than just the nuclear family and by studying a plethora of female cousins around Elizabeth, she reminds us just how extensive this family business was. It makes perfect sense to study rhetoric and representations of the queen through art and literature and personal letters. Shehzana Mamujee, Kavita Mudan, Alison Findlay, Lisa Hopkins, Nadia Bishai, Sandra Bell, Leticia Álvarez-Recio, and Liz Oakely-Brown examine letters, treatises, and drama, linking verbal representation with practice and ritual, blurring the distinctions in ways that give a fuller dimension of a lived life, rather than just a slice of it. But Elisabeth Bronfen's and Barbara Straumann's facile fashioning of Elizabeth I as star and diva and then comparing her to twentieth-century self-portraiture, Hollywood photos of Marilyn Monroe and Gwyneth Paltrow, is out of place among essays grounded in historical evidence with judicious use of theory.

The title of the collection is misleading. Yes, the essays cover "medieval to early modern," but only a very narrow slice of that capacious time period. Four medieval queens are represented but only two, Isabella of England and Philippa of Lancaster, were born before 1400. The rest are early modern, they are all clustered in the sixteenth century and although the editors claim that the essays focus on the transition from medieval to early modern, that hope is never realized meaningfully. Although not all are queens of England, all, except for Mary Stuart, are English. Had the title been more accurate, the editors' claim that this book is the first book about queenship to cover both medieval and early modern queens would have been correct, as would their claim that no queen before Mary Tudor ruled in her own right. But as historians of medieval and early modern queens in Iberia know, the

editors are wrong on both points. These issues notwithstanding, Oakley-Brown and Wilkinson have given scholars a considerable feast of new research, new sources, and theoretically rich analyses of late medieval and very early modern queens from and in the British Isles.

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