



*Shakespeare's Foreign Queens:
Drama, Politics and the Enemy
Within*

Sandra Logan

New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018

Review by: Alexandra Claridge



Shakespeare's Foreign Queens: Drama, Politics and the Enemy Within. By Sandra Logan. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. ISBN 978-1-137-53483-5. xi + 279pp. \$64.99.



In the back cover of *Shakespeare's Foreign Queens*, Debra Barrett-Graves labels the book “timely and relevant.” While it is primarily a close analysis of Shakespearian queens, the themes that draw them together are exceedingly relevant to the problems of our own era. This book focuses on themes of femininity, power, and identity, touching on theories and ideas that are recurrent in both contemporary academic discourse and in the media. This relevance is conscious on the part of Logan, who writes that “these early modern debates about and representations of abusive sovereignty remain utterly pertinent to our own historical moment, although undoubtedly the specific contexts and political realities we face have changed” (viii). While Logan’s reading of the queens in the early modern context is astute and insightful, it is the relevance of their confrontation with power that stands out.

This book is true to its title, providing a detailed analytical study of four Shakespearian foreign queens. But, while it deals with issues of gender and foreignness, its overarching focus is on the uses and abuses of sovereign power. Logan posits that foreign queens are in a uniquely vulnerable position because their foreignness isolates them, often connecting them to an enemy power, and places them at the mercy of their volatile husbands. While the queens each have a different circumstance and a different relationship with their king, they are all united by their sensitivity to the failings of the state and of their husbands. Each chapter presents a different aspect of abusive sovereignty in relation to a different queen and a compelling argument is presented for reading the problems of the Shakespearian state through the prism of the queens’ mistreatment.

The book consists of five chapters: an introduction, and one chapter for each of the four queens. The introduction offers an overview of the theoretical background of the book. It considers the unusual legal position of the foreign queen as both a subject and an alien. As queen they ought to be held in the highest esteem, but their foreignness placed them perpetually on the liminal boundary between friend and enemy, a position worsened by diplomatic volatility. Logan considers the concept of the enemy of the state, both external and internal, and the circumstances in which the sovereign himself might be considered an internal enemy. To support her arguments, Logan draws on a range of political theorists, both from the early modern period and later, including Bodin’s *Six Books, Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos*, Giorgio Agamben, Carl Schmitt, and Walter Benjamin. Having contemplated

the uniquely vulnerable position of the foreign queens, the last part of the introduction focuses on the four themes and four queens that make up the subsequent chapters. These themes are fragmented identity, hospitality, citizenship, and banishment.

The subsequent case studies are not placed in chronological order but in order of the queen's resistance to the difficulties imposed upon them by their husbands and their state. Logan deals with Katherine of Aragon in *Henry VIII*, Hermione in *A Winter's Tale*, Tamora in *Titus Andronicus*, and Margaret of Anjou in *Henry VI, Parts 1-3* and *Richard III*. In the second chapter of the book, concerning Katherine's fragmented identity, the treatment of the Spanish queen is considered as an indicator of the state's condition, and particular attention is paid to Wolsey as an internal enemy. The third chapter centres on the concept of conditional and unconditional hospitality—as identified by Derrida—within *A Winter's Tale*. Logan considers how the conditional hospitality of the court influences the unconditional hospitality of shepherds when contact is made between the two. The fourth chapter focuses on Tamora, as the enemy within who perpetrates violence against the commonweal, leading to the collapse of the virtues and laws on which the healthy state relies. While the first three case studies consider queens who were vulnerable to the whims of their husbands, the final chapter takes a slightly different angle, focusing on the curses of Margaret in the tetralogy as a response to her family's fall from power and her exile. The treatment of Margaret in this chapter is sympathetic, focusing on how Shakespeare portrays her as the victim of her unmanly husband but who, in *Richard III*, seeks revenge on the family who overthrew her own. The page long conclusion succinctly summarises the similarities between the problems of the foreign queens and the various levels of resistance exhibited by them.

Many of the insights and conclusions within this book are drawn from extensive close reading of the Shakespearian texts, which is combined with a historicist approach. The political theory presented in the introduction is used recurrently throughout the book, neatly tying ideas exhibited within a Shakespearian context to a wider understanding of sovereign power. The close reading of the texts is frequently in chronological order, with the start of the chapter dealing with earlier scenes and the end of the chapter dealing with later scenes. This gives each chapter a sense of a build-up, where the problems of the state reach a crescendo at the end of the play, clearly showing how the ideas develop with the characters and the plot. Through these approaches, Logan constructs full character studies of each of these queens as well as using them to support the larger arguments made in the introduction.

The use of case studies allows the book to act both as a single argument within a monograph and as an anthology of stand-alone essays. There is very

little crossover between the chapters, and most of the common theory is contained in the introduction. The practical structure of the book also lends itself well to being read as an anthology. Each chapter contains a brief introduction to its subject, has distinct notes and its own bibliography. The index is general and, at nineteen pages, is comprehensive.

As Logan makes clear, this is not merely a book about gender, nor is it solely a book about foreignness. It is instead about the uses and abuses of power in relation to an extremely vulnerable member of society. While the issues dealt with are framed within the context of Shakespearean drama, the ideas of identity, foreignness, and femininity have powerful resonance with our own circumstances. In this way, Logan's book gives a voice to yet another way in which Shakespeare transcends the confines of his age.

ALEXANDRA CLARIDGE

University of Liverpool