



Scholars and Poets Talk About Queens,
Carole Levin and Christine Stewart-
Nuñez eds.
(New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

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Queens have long reigned as popular subject matter for fictional genres from historical novels to feature films. Take, for example, the novels of Philippa Gregory, depicting queens such as Elizabeth Woodville and Anne Boleyn, which sold millions of copies and were later turned into both television series and films. This is most likely because there is usually less historical evidence for queens (and women in general) than kings, allowing more space creatively to conceptualize their lives and interactions. Alongside novels, television, and movies, poetry is one way to fictionalize queens.

Scholars and Poets Talk About Queens explicitly addresses this fascination with queens by offering scholarly essays and poems about queens in one volume. This unique collection pairs essays on reputations of queens with modern poetry about those same queens. In doing so, the editors argue that this demonstrates “the ongoing relevance and immediacy of these powerful women: whether fictional or factual, these queens continue to be compelling figures” (Levin and Stewart-Nuñez: 2015, 1). The collection addresses a fictional queen (Hecuba); an ancient queen (Cleopatra); medieval queens (Boudicca, The Empress Matilda, Margaret of Anjou); early modern queens (Catherine of Aragon, Mary Stuart, Elizabeth I); and a pirate queen (Grace O’Malley).

The poems tend to be on the same themes as the essays. For example, the essay on Hecuba, by Marguerite A. Tassi, is concerned with Arthur Golding’s printed edition of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in 1567. In this edition, Golding spends 200 lines on the tragedy of Hecuba and uses rhetoric to evoke sympathy for her, as was traditional in Renaissance Ovidiansim. For Tassi, Golding’s Hecuba is meant to inspire empathy as motherly caregiving was understood to be a basic human instinct. Darla Biel’s accompanying poem ties nicely with Golding’s Hecuba, as Biel writes her poem from the perspective of Hecuba as she grieves that she was the cause of the destruction of Troy and the reason for the deaths of her children. Likewise, Andrea Nichols’s essay on Cleopatra examines representations of Cleopatra in English drama between 1592 -1611, and suggests that drama featuring Cleopatra was used as a social critique of Queens Mary I, Elizabeth I, and Mary Stuart, as it tied together “power, gender, sexuality, authority, succession, loyalty, and civic duty” (Levin and Stewart-Nuñez: 2015, 44). Erika Stevens’s accompanying poem is sympathetic to Cleopatra and finds her to be a victim of male hegemonies.

Not all of the scholarly essays are followed by poems, as Carole Levin chose to write a brief play on Boudicca. The play takes place with the impending invasion of the Spanish Armada, and has the ghost of Henry VIII appear to his daughter, Elizabeth, to tell her that he wishes he had had another son because she cannot be on the battlefield. The ghost of Boudicca also appears and gives Elizabeth the idea for her speech at Tilbury. The play ends with the defeat of the Armada and Boudicca reprimanding Henry for not believing in the abilities of his daughter. Katerzyna Lecky's scholarly article addresses how the Boudicca in Holinshed's *Chronicles* taught Elizabethan audiences about nationhood as she represented Britain in the revolt against the Romans. Boudicca was used to show how a female leader could unite a nation in a time of crisis, as Elizabeth did in 1588. Both Boudicca and Elizabeth railed against the patriarchy in place to a specifically British commonwealth.

Several of the other essays explicate specific attributes or reputations of these queens, such as Carole Levin's article on Margaret of Anjou as a "she-wolf," Paul Strauss's essay on Elizabeth I as a nurse, and Brandie R. Siegfried's article on the legendary meeting between Elizabeth I and Grace O'Malley. Other essays suggest that queens still need to be viewed and studied through a more gendered lens, such as Charles Beem's essay on Matilda as an unsympathetic, political queen, Alyson Alvarez's article on the behaviour of Mary Stuart during her two widowhoods, and Theresa Earenfight's article that calls for Catherine of Aragon to be understood within the context of the other women around her, rather than through the lens of her husband and other dominating Tudor men. The remaining essays address New Year's gifts given to Elizabeth I (Sonja Drimmer), a biological sketch of Jane Dudley (Catherine Medici), and an examination of early modern queens associated with poison, in both literature and reality (Jo Eldridge Carney).

Altogether, this collection is quite exceptional in its gathering of essays on early modern views of queens along with contemporary depictions and reputations. Having poems and short plays juxtaposed with scholarly articles allows the reader to read first-hand how such reputations are created, sustained, and discredited. This collection should be read by scholars and students alike who appreciate queens, queenship, and their ever-fascinating relevancy to modern culture.

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