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Queens and Power in Medieval and Early Modern England
Edited by Carole Levin and Robert Bucholz
University of Nebraska Press

Contents

List of Illustrations *ix*

Acknowledgments *xi*

Introduction: *It's Good to Be Queen*
ROBERT BUCHOLZ & CAROLE LEVIN *xiii*

1. "Greater by Marriage": *The Matrimonial Career of the Empress Matilda* CHARLES BEEM *1*
2. Widow Princess or Neglected Queen? *Catherine of Aragon, Henry VIII, and English Public Opinion, 1533–1536*
TIMOTHY G. ELSTON *16*
3. "Most godly heart fraight with al mercie": *Queens' Mercy during the Reigns of Mary I and Elizabeth I*
SARAH DUNCAN *31*
4. Princess Elizabeth Travels across Her Kingdom: *In Life, in Text, and on Stage* CAROLE LEVIN *51*
5. Marriage à la Mode, 1559: *Elisabeth de Valois, Elizabeth I, and the Changing Practice of Dynastic Marriage*
JOHN WATKINS *76*

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6. Queen Solomon: *An International Elizabeth I in 1569*
LINDA S. SHENK *98*

7. The Virgin and the Widow: *The Political Finesse of Elizabeth I and Catherine de' Medici* ELAINE KRUSE *126*

8. Crafting Queens: *Early Modern Readings of Esther*
MICHELE OSHEROW *141*

9. "Shine like an Angel with thy starry crown": *Queen Elizabeth the Angelic* ANNA RIEHL *158*

10. Shakespeare's Queen Cleopatra: *An Act of Translation*
RICHARDINE WOODALL *187*

11. "*She is the man, and Raignes*": *Popular Representations of Henrietta Maria during the English Civil Wars*
MICHELLE A. WHITE *205*

12. Sex and the Single Queen: *The Erotic Lives of Elizabeth Tudor in Seventeenth-century England* MARJORIE SWANN *224*

13. The "Stomach of a Queen," or Size Matters: *Gender, Body Image, and the Historical Reputation of Queen Anne*
ROBERT BUCHOLZ *242*

14. Two Poems AMBER HARRIS LEICHNER *273*

Selected Bibliography *277*
Contributors *311*
Index *317*

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Illustrations

Frontispiece: Princess Elizabeth

6.1. Frontispiece from *Christian Prayers and Meditations*, 1569 *104*

9.1. Title page from the *Bishops' Bible*, 1568 *163*

9.2. Illumination of Elizabeth I from *Actes and Monuments*, 1583 *164*

9.3. Title page from *General and Rare Memorials pertaining to the Perfect Arte of Navigation*, 1577 *166*

9.4. Teshe's "Elizabeth in Procession," ca. 1580–84 *168*

9.5. Rainbow Portrait of Elizabeth I, ca. 1603 *175*

9.6. Frontispiece from Camden's *Annales*, 1625 *178*

13.1. Kneller's portrait of Queen Anne, ca. 1690 *251*

13.2. Queen Anne holding the Sword of Justice, ca. 1703 *252*

13.3. Vertue's engraving of Queen Anne, 1702 *254*

13.4. Lilly's portrait of Queen Anne, 1703 *260*

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Introduction

It's Good to Be Queen

ROBERT BUCHOLZ & CAROLE LEVIN

Queens are much in fashion these days, receiving scholarly attention as never before. Always popular with historical novelists, dramatists, filmmakers, and their audiences, queens regnant, consort, mother, and dowager have emerged in recent years as legitimate and frequent subjects of serious academic inquiry.[1] For scholars—and perhaps for a wider audience—queens are interesting because they are anomalous and often liminal. In most places, for most of human history, the political, social, and cultural power of rulership has been accorded to males. In early modern Europe that arrangement was buttressed by a patriarchal worldview trumpeted from thousands of pulpits, propounded in hundreds of books and proverbs, manifested in gesture and dress—indeed, in almost every aspect of life. That so few women ruled in medieval and early modern England, that those who did faced obstacles unknown to their male counterparts, and that those who ruled successfully have not always been celebrated for their achievements tells us a great deal about the early modern worldview, in particular its attitudes to order, hierarchy, rulership, property, biology, and the relations between the genders. This is

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because queenly reigns were—like festivals or riots, albeit of a more sustained duration—extended moments of suspension in the normal working of political, social, cultural, and gender history. According to Katherine Eggert such moments established "through counterposition the possibility of another mode of shaping the basic conditions of existence."[2] As real and powerful women ruled, depictions of queens—historical and mythical—also became more multifaceted and complex. Examining together actual early modern women of power and early modern representations of queens yields a far richer understanding of the interplay of gender and power in politics and culture. No wonder that historical queens and literary depictions of them have increasingly moved center stage in the world of early modern scholarship.

Because queens were anomalous, their regimes interrupting "normal" monarchy, previous scholars have understandably treated queenly reigns as "one-offs." One of the purposes of this collection is to demonstrate more continuity than has generally been seen across queenly reigns. The expectations of queenship articulated by Michelle A. White in her paper on Henrietta Maria apply to all the women discussed in this collection. Queens themselves "talked" to each other, either literally, in the case of the "sisterly" correspondence between Catherine de' Medici and Elizabeth I, or figuratively across time, as when Cleopatra was translated into a post-Elizabethan icon, or, a century later, when Anne consciously evoked Elizabeth's style by choosing her motto and wearing clothing patterned on hers. As both Elaine Kruse and John Watkins remind us, the third quarter of the sixteenth century, the chronological heart of this collection, saw queens reigning or ruling in England, Scotland, and France, negotiating with each other, and furthering diplomatic unions across the continent via strategic marriages. Despite the horror expressed

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by John Knox in his *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558), for a few decades at least, female rule became the norm.

The coincidence of so many women ruling or figuring in diplomatic marriages at this moment in history allows John Watkins to interrogate the value of using gender as an analytical tool for the new diplomatic history. He argues that the negotiations for Cateau-Cambrésis may be seen as inhabiting a transitional period in which, on the one hand, consorts and mistresses were still deployed traditionally, as marital bargaining chips, quiet intercessors, or consorts, but in which, on the other hand, sovereign women like Mary I and Elizabeth I ruled in their own right. This introduced a new and potentially disruptive element to the European dynastic system. In particular, Elizabeth's apparent refusal to play by the traditional rules—to forge alliances through marriage and childbearing—cast the whole system into doubt. After Elizabeth, starting in England, such marriages increasingly became matters of public comment and, often, opposition: John Stubbs's heirs were William Prynne and Henrietta Maria's other critics as described by Michelle White. In the later seventeenth century, his intellectual and political successors called for Catherine of Braganza's divorce during the Exclusion Crisis, demonized Mary Beatrice of Modena, or, later still, complained of the political influence of Caroline of Ansbach or Marie Antoinette. In Watkins's bold vision, the Virgin Queen thus began the long process by which the authority of personal monarchy was undermined in England and on the continent, laying the foundation for a truly constitutional monarch like Anne and for solutions even more radical elsewhere. Thus, if queens were anomalous, the period covered by this book shows them to be protean, transitional, and catalytic figures, changing the landscape of European politics forever.

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Traditional versus Nontraditional Queenship

Admittedly, some queens behaved as if nothing had changed, doing little to disabuse their subjects of the idea that they were conventional women in royal dress whose purpose was to produce male heirs. Michelle White usefully delineates the characteristics of the ideal early modern queen: her reproductive duties apart, she was to be obedient, passive, submissive, chaste, pious, kind, and decorous, but to retire to the background. Elisabeth de Valois seems to have been the ideal of the type: according to Watkins, her "career manifests a distinct retreat from the public task of mediation toward the more passive responsibility of bearing offspring." He argues further that this was a necessary condition of living with Philip II: "The domestic contentment that both Philip and Elisabeth seem to have enjoyed almost certainly depended on her lack of personal political ambition." In other words, Elisabeth de Valois' role was determined, as it was for so many early modern women, by what her husband, that is, the strong male given authority over her, would tolerate.

Some historians have portrayed both Mary I and Anne as similarly passive and submissive. The essays by Sarah Duncan and Robert Bucholz, however, qualify or reject the traditional view, showing each taking male advice but ultimately setting the agenda for her reign.[3] In fact, nearly every queen portrayed in this book failed to meet the expectations laid out by White. In part, this was because each operated in a vacuum created by the lack of the sort of dominating male figure those expectations presupposed. Catherine de' Medici and Elizabeth I, widow and virgin, both ruled famously and effectively without husbands. Esther's king was weak and easily (mis) led; Cleopatra's Antony was an ineffective admiral and diplomat; Matilda's brief reign was made possible by Henry I's lack of a male heir, exacerbated by her cousin Stephen's incompetence; Charles I

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was largely absent from the diplomatic arena inhabited so skillfully by Henrietta Maria. In fact, there was nothing new about this. Weak kings and unstable political situations often drove royal women to abandon their traditional, supplementary roles: Isabella of France and Margaret of Anjou had done so in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; Charlotte of Mecklenberg-Strelitz would do so in the eighteenth and nineteenth. All were compelled to suspend their domestic activities, assert themselves at court, and insert themselves into public life. In many cases, they sustained the dynasty (at least temporarily) but paid with their reputations. Indeed, Henrietta Maria's efforts on behalf of her husband rendered even her fecundity—a traditional expectation of queenship—a bone of contention because of fears that her children would be raised Catholic.[4]

Still, in the absence of a dominating male, the unusual combination of their gender and royal authority gave these women an opportunity to redefine power and gender roles (as applied to royal women, anyway) by exploiting the ambiguity involved in the status of being a female king. It is a truism of the historiography on queenship that assertive royal women faced immense obstacles, both physical and conceptual, and that the odds were stacked against their successful reigns. But perhaps we have read this all wrong. Perhaps queenly status, the possession of the attributes of both males and females, was potentially liberating. Obviously, it was good to be queen. Queenly status allowed women to assert themselves in public roles usually closed to their gender. Charles Beem articulates how Matilda practically invented regnal queenship in England. Timothy Elston's previous work has demonstrated that Catherine of Aragon pushed the limits of consortship; in this collection, he shows her pushing those of widowhood.[5] Mary followed Matilda's lead, but as in so much else, Elizabeth was the real pivotal figure: in exploiting the possibilities of her unique status and constructing a self with the

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most useful attributes of both males and females (nicely epitomized in Linda Shenk's "female Solomon"), she had a long and successful reign that rendered the accession of Anne and her female successors possible, even unremarkable. Moreover, the sheer originality of Elizabeth's rejection of the dynastic principle that drove her father and nearly all early modern kings and queens gave Elizabeth and England the freedom of maneuver to survive in the shark-infested waters of western northern Europe. In Watkins's reading, it also marked a step toward the desacralization of monarchy in Europe.

Watkins is careful not to argue that Elizabeth's unorthodox path was a step in the direction of the decommodification of female royal bodies: clearly, diplomatic royal marriages continued. Nevertheless, in this collection, Marjorie Swann shows how Elizabeth's choice of virginity—if it was, indeed, a choice—disrupted the early modern gender system as well.[6] Swann admits the argument that Elizabeth's royal status rendered her unique and so not as obvious a model for most early modern women. But that did not render her any less iconic a figure—a model woman if not a model for women. Examining the posthumous printed construction of Elizabeth, she finds plenty of subversion of traditional models of sexuality. Elizabeth's legitimization of virginity was corrosive enough to a Protestant world that expected every woman to marry, but John Banks's outrageous—and popular—play *The Island Queens* was even more threatening. Repudiating the time-honored belief that Elizabeth gave up the love of men for her country, Banks's Elizabeth is perfectly willing to abandon reason of state—even the state itself—as well as taboos on incest and lesbianism to consummate her love for Mary, Queen of Scots. Rather than bear children by a male husband, this Elizabeth turns traditional expectations of queenship on their head by imagining their love as procreating not heirs but "Fresh Pleasures and rich Welcomes."

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In fact, it might be argued that queenship, the status of being royal, powerful, and a woman, allowed for new channels of power, not only for women, but in general. One way in which female gender (or at least consortship) may have been an asset was in patronage, especially cultural and religious patronage. In the seventeenth century, Anne of Denmark, Henrietta Maria, and Catherine of Braganza used their households to patronize political actors and coreligionists who would have had a harder go of it in the royal court.[7] As we have seen, Elizabeth exploited her gender to render herself more powerful, more able to command loyalty, than she might have done if she were a man. One way to do this was through what might be called "the appeal to chivalry"—the culturally constructed expectation that men will defend women in danger. Elizabeth I was not the only masterful exploiter of this cultural norm: other examples include Mary I in her unjustly neglected Guildhall speech; Mary II as regent; and Anne following the declaration of war on Louis XIV. Indeed, it might be argued for the beginning of the eighteenth century that it would have been far more difficult to keep England in the War of the Spanish Succession, following a controversial revolution, in the midst of bitter party and religious strife, had the main object of personal loyalty been a man. Certainly, a minority seem to have fought with any spirit or heartfelt loyalty for William III in *his* war, while Anne seems to have inspired ardent affection in hers. Thus, the existence of regnal royal women created an anomaly that made possible different constructions of image, loyalty, and power relations than were possible with kings.

Legitimacy

Nevertheless, before queens could initiate such constructions, they faced challenges unknown to or met far more easily by male rulers. The first and most obvious such challenge was legitimacy: this

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collection traces a progression on this issue from the first, tentative assertions of female sovereignty in England under Matilda, through the pivotal reigns of Mary I and Elizabeth I, to the uncontroversial accession of Anne. Given contemporary, but long-standing, attitudes toward the respective roles of men and women, it was inevitable that the idea of a female monarch would seem foreign[8]: as Michele Osherow and Richardine Woodall remind us, reservations about female rule and authority went back to ancient times. In this context, Henry I's decision to name his only surviving child, Matilda, as heir was a radical embrace of the hereditary principle over the claims of gender and expediency. Admittedly, as Beem points out, this was intended as a temporary expedient, since Matilda's viability was predicated on her ability to produce a male heir: that is, she could only be seen as an attractive alternative to Stephen if she promised to be succeeded by a man.

Beem's Matilda, arguably England's first queen regnant, comes across as a more subtle and skillful politician than the termagant immortalized by medieval and Renaissance chroniclers. She shrewdly skirted the issue of female legitimacy by styling herself "Lady of the English," a title that appealed to personal feudal loyalties rather than to territorial claims. Though subsequent royal women were accused, as she was, of overweening power, they exercised that power (or were thought to do so) as consorts, not queens regnant, until the succession crisis of 1553. It might be argued that the willingness of the English Privy Council to turn to, first, Jane Grey, and then Mary Tudor shows that, in the wake of the Wars of the Roses and the elaboration and centralization of the Tudor State, the English ruling class had finally embraced Henry I's principle, choosing blood legitimacy over gender legitimacy: no man was offered as a serious alternative in 1553 or 1558 because no man could claim so close a kinship to previous kings. However, it is equally true that in 1547 no

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one had seriously suggested Mary over her pre-adolescent brother: clearly, if blood trumped gender in the English monarchical system, gender trumped age.

The key to all subsequent female ascendancies was Elizabeth's long and successful reign—and, perhaps, the failures of her male successors. While many in 1603 seem to have welcomed James I because of his gender, by the end of the century the Stuarts' performance, in particular their divisive religious policies, rendered another female reign more palatable. For reasons that remain largely unexplored but surely have much to do with their strong reputations as Protestants, Mary II's transitional and partial ascendancy was followed in 1702 by Queen Anne's uncontested accession to undiluted sovereignty without so much as a Knoxian murmur. This is not to say that patriarchal anxiety about female rule had been allayed, but it was now more often expressed in satirical and allegorical criticism of policy rather than in Scriptural proscription of the fundamental right of women to rule.[9] Anne's triumphant reign, in turn, paved the way for Victoria and Elizabeth II—and for those who would argue that England's most successful rulers have all been women.[10]

The Limits of Self-presentation

Given the anomalous role of queens and questions about their legitimacy, a pressing issue once they were on the throne was self-definition, self-presentation, and the fashioning of the royal image. This again reminds us that the nature of queenship was protean—perhaps more so than kingship. Faced with so little precedent, regnal queens had choices as to how to present themselves and even, perhaps, how to rule: once again, Matilda appears to have been ahead of her time. Conversely, in both Timothy Elston's and Carole Levin's essays we see queens—actually a former queen and a future queen—desperately trying to forge their images when

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they lack complete power to do so. Just as Matilda continued to evoke her status as empress and reject that of countess, Catherine of Aragon rejected her new status as a princess-widow, clinging to the style of queen. Her position was strengthened by the pointed fashioning of her image that had taken place over the previous quarter-century: Henry VIII found it far more difficult to unmake a queen in the eyes of his people than to make one. As Elston points out, Catherine also, whether consciously or unconsciously, played off of contemporary expectations of widows as public dispensers of charity and promoters of piety. Ultimately, like Elisabeth of Valois later, Catherine was dependent on what the strong man in her life, Henry VIII, would allow—even in her religious devotions. But equally, Elston's essay shows the limits of male monarchs' control over queenly images: the king could thwart his former queen's public activities, but he could less easily influence how people felt about her. The imaginary Catherine that he had helped construct for twenty years lived on in their hearts.

Elizabeth began to craft her image long before her accession. As Carole Levin shows, a queen *in potentium* was limited in her ability to do this: Elizabeth could commission a portrait, but she did not control dissemination of her image as she would as queen. She could dress and shape her physical presence as much as she wished, but she could only display it to the public as her brother's Council and her sister allowed. She could plant the seeds for associations that she would cultivate throughout her long reign—Protestant heroine, woman alone against a hostile world, lover of her people, saint—but those seeds would bear little fruit so long as Mary lived. Levin demonstrates that Elizabeth exploited the few possibilities open to her with such prudence and skill that she not only survived Mary's reign but continued long after her own death to evoke the associations she had nurtured.

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Queens as Intercessors

Conversely, Levin's piece and Mary I's reign demonstrate that not even a queen regnant with the full authority to control her image was able to do so completely. As Andrew Barclay has written, "queenship in this period was never something created only by the queen herself."[11] Sarah Duncan uncovers a veritable war of words over Mary's attempt to fulfill the long-standing association of queens as intercessors for mercy. Nearly every queen in this book took on this role. Osherow's piece on Esther discusses how the queen saves her people from a wrathful king through her masterful (and arguably deceitful) use of gesture and language. Duncan's essay shows that Catherine of Aragon uses similar methods—"with tears in her eyes and on her bended knees"—on behalf of May Day rioters in 1517. In each case, traditional expectations of womanhood—subservience, humility, emotionalism—gave the women in question agency.[12] Put another way, sometimes patriarchy sowed the seeds of its own subversion. Though not a queen, Christine, Duchess of Lorraine, became the crucial linchpin in the Cateau-Cambrésis negotiations precisely because, as a royal woman, her role was by definition liminal and unthreatening, enabling her to move back and forth across hostile lines.

Queens regnant may have been anomalous, but they were not quite so liminal. As a result, the granting of mercy carried greater consequences than it did for the intercessor, as the decision rested ultimately with the sovereign, who would have to live with it. The difficulties are highlighted by Mary I's delays in executing Jane Grey and the Wyatt conspirators, and Elizabeth I's hesitation over the fate of Mary, Queen of Scots. In the end, it was Mary I's consort, Prince Philip, who played the part of intercessor for accused traitors, including Elizabeth, at her court. Here we see the protean nature

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of queenship in its ability to turn around gender roles. It is also significant that having a consort enabled Mary to grant mercy, passing off some responsibility to the mediator in a way that might not have been possible were she ruling alone. One of the impressions left by Queen Elizabeth's various utterances about Mary, Queen of Scots, is the sheer loneliness of her decision. As Duncan points out, there remains much work to be done on Elizabeth's sense of and reputation for mercy. Despite executing some 450 northern rebels, 180 Catholic priests and supporters, Mary, Queen of Scots, the Duke of Norfolk, the Earls of Northumberland and Essex, and assorted members of the gentry, Elizabeth is not often thought of as bloodthirsty, leading Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford to argue that "for a sixteenth century regime, her reign saw very few executions."[13] This raises the question of why Elizabeth I succeeded in portraying herself as merciful where Mary I failed. In part, it would seem to be a simple matter of which side won and thus wrote the history. But also to be considered is that Elizabeth's reign spanned nearly forty-five years, while Mary burnt over three hundred Protestants in just three years of her five-year reign. The vast majority of Mary's victims were no threat politically to the state, unlike those executed in Elizabeth's reign. Still, are Elizabeth's expressions of reluctance to be taken at face value? Was there something in the "quality" of Mary's mercy that was more "strained"?

As this suggests, and as Duncan demonstrates in the case of Prince Philip, intercession and mediation were not in themselves neutral activities: they were subject to political interpretations. Michelle White's essay on Henrietta Maria illustrates the dangers. Attacked early in her marital career for pleading with her husband on behalf of Catholics, she was excoriated during the civil wars for pleading with the crowned heads of Europe on behalf of her husband. Despite the fact that, in both cases, she was only moderately

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successful (after all, the men and munitions she brought in 1643 did not turn the tide), she became an icon of monstrous queenship to the puritan/parliamentarian side. White's essay shows us the process by which a queen lost control of her image in a new world of print culture, and in particular during the open window of a relatively free press, 1641–50. White illuminates precisely how news gathering and dissemination had expanded since the days when Elizabeth exercised such iron control; indeed, this essay is much enhanced by its "how-it-was-done" guide to the dissemination of news. After 1641 it was simply impossible for the Crown to control what was being said about it because the many-headed hydra of a free press produced pamphlets, newsbooks, woodcuts, ballads, poems, joke-books, rhymes, and so on targeted to nearly every possible audience in England: elite and common, urban and rural, male and female, literate and illiterate. The long-term result could only expose the magic of monarchy to what Walter Bagehot thought of as the corrosive effects of daylight.

The immediate result was a portrait of Henrietta Maria that resembled the old "she-devil" depictions of Isabella of France and Margaret of Anjou in previous centuries. Similar attacks on the influence of women at the English court would be made through the reigns of George II and beyond. Their common denominator is that they criticized the queen's mediating role when it shaded into political influence. That is, female intercession was approved of as consistent with patriarchal monarchy when it involved the solicitation of mercy for individuals or, possibly, groups. Such solicitation served the purposes of patriarchal monarchy by endowing it with flexibility and crowd-pleasing mercy. But it stepped out of bounds when it translated into influence with the ruler over policy or patronage: as White notes, Henrietta Maria was accused of both. In contrast, Osherow points out that most early modern commentators were

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careful to construct an Esther who was obedient and subject to the advice of men, downplaying her agency and duplicity.

To some extent, these constraints applied to male favorites as well: there seems to have been a long-standing notion that any influence exerted in the closet or bedchamber, especially by someone not of cabinet rank, was inappropriate. But seventeenth-century male courtiers like the George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, or the circle around James, Duke of York, were permitted, indeed expected, to engage in the world of military and diplomatic action—while Henrietta Maria was criticized for it. Why? White argues that a crucial factor was Henrietta Maria's religion: the "Papist" nature of her advice aimed, in her critics' eyes, at accomplishing a Popish plot. But, as White points out, gender played a role as well: attacks on the queen's ability to bear children, on her health (associating bodily consumption and corruption with that of the state), and, more overtly, the notion that Charles I was tied by apron strings all used expectations for her gender as a measuring stick with which to beat her. Opposition figures had traditionally used the charge of inappropriate influence to avoid having to say that the king was wrong—rather, his unsuitable policies were the self-evident result of bad advice from "evil counselors." It is possibly indicative of the misanthropy that was a part of the general culture that Henrietta Maria continued to be demonized in this way even after half the country had, in effect, admitted that the king was wrong by waging war against him. Whatever Charles I's crimes, his consort had committed a more fundamental one—"she is a man, and Raignes"—thus upsetting the gender hierarchy and claiming a legitimacy to which she was not entitled.

In response, Charles argued that parliamentarian writers had violated the privacy of his marriage by exposing his letters to the queen. But when it came to the substance of those letters, he felt

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compelled to diminish her efforts, emphasizing that she advised only on menial appointments—thus playing into a view of queenship that has been the prevalent one, but directly at odds with that argued for in this book.[14] And yet, Charles I's suggestion that Henrietta Maria might appropriately take on even a modest role in running the state was highly controversial—and received much the same reception as the Clintons' "two for one" offer in the early 1990s: the general culture still rejects vehemently the notion that a female spouse can play an active or even advisory role to a male ruler. In each case, the female is portrayed as a "she-devil," the male as submissive, weak, and, therefore, delegitimized. If Prince Philip much preferred his queen to be quiet, so has the general public for much of even recent history.

Queen's Words, Queen's Prayers

But queens have not been quiet. They fashioned themselves through their actions, but also through their words. Queens' words are a theme in the essays by Beem, Levin, Shenk, and Kruse. Beem's Matilda is very careful about words, especially titles: styling herself *Imperiatrix* to give herself the mantle of imperium, *regis Henrici filia* to claim legitimacy, and "Lady of the English" to aggrandize loyalty but avoiding "Duchess of Normandy" and "Countess of Anjou" as beneath her. In the essays by both Levin and Kruse, Elizabeth I fashions her words carefully to draw a contrast with a current nemeses, either Mary I or Catherine de' Medici. In Kruse's piece in particular, we see the last Tudor in her own words, carefully parsing language, fashioning, during the Alençon negotiations, an eager, if not yet fully committed, future daughter-in-law to Catherine, but also a virtuous, vigilant, yet ultimately self-sacrificing mother to her people—all things to all men and women. The harsh sentence her government passed on John Stubbs in 1579 when he published

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The Discoverie of a Gaping Gulf Where into England is Likely to be Swallowed by another French Marriage—he lost his right hand—was a signal that she alone could do the fashioning: her people had better be wary of attempting to construct her too much according to their liking.

Another theme to queenship and, thus, this collection, is religion. Piety was an expected attribute of queens and a necessary condition for successful queenship, but, as we have seen in the case of Henrietta Maria, it was not a sufficient one and could be dangerous. Osherow's Esther, Elston's Catherine, and Levin's Elizabeth all found their reputations for piety to be validating, legitimizing images, in part because they accorded with the religious sympathies of their respective "audiences." Indeed, in Osherow's piece, it is Esther's right religion, the congruence of her purposes with God's, that frees her to violate both the truth and gender norms. Linda Shenk's Elizabeth enhances her reputation for piety with the authorization of prayer books containing what purport to be her own devotions. It is hard not to see Elizabeth performing here—not only for her God but also for her people and, indeed, for the French, the Spanish, and anyone else who might be paying attention. This is a classic case of the "theater of monarchy": what could be more theatrical than broadcasting one's most private conversations with God? Elizabeth assumes the part of Solomon, the archetypal learned, godly ruler, susceptible to good human counsel but not subject to it. The result is an image of harmony—between herself and God, herself and her counselors, herself and her people—that belied the seeming instability of her regime. In contrast, Henrietta Maria's piety—and that of the next two Stuart consorts—was destabilizing because it was out of step with the religious predilections of their subjects. Not just any piety would do.

The protean nature of queenship could pose difficulties for subjects

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as well as queens. Anna Riehl notes the dangers in portraying the queen: one false move and one might end up like Stubbs. The angel motif was safe: it was deeply rooted in European culture yet impeccably English; crossing confessional boundaries, it called attention to Elizabeth's semi-divinity, her sacerdotal status, her beauty, and her wisdom. It also dovetailed nicely with the intercessory function of queens. At the same time, as we have seen, queens could not always control their image and lost control of it after their deaths: while Elizabeth would certainly have approved of the many angelic elegies on her death, the essays by Woodall, Swann, and Bucholz address posthumous representations of queens of which they would not have approved.

Biological Determinism?

It might be argued that, in the end, the queens in this collection largely failed to escape the determinism of biology. After all, their very royal status derived from being the daughter or wife of a royal male. As women no less than as queens, all were expected to marry, engage in sexual relations, and have children—in that order. In Osherow's essay, Queen Vashti is banished because of her refusal to display her body like an object while Esther is forced to submit to the bed of an uncircumcised husband. Cleopatra is discounted by the Romans because of her willingness to, in effect, do both. In each case, their bodies are all these women have been allowed to work with: both Esther and Cleopatra use them to satisfy the sexual and romantic longings of male authority figures, and both costume and deport themselves carefully and effectively to achieve political ends. In contrast, Matilda's body sometimes worked against her: her marriages brought her the added prestige of the "empress" title and Geoffrey of Anjou's army but also complications and obligations that sometimes thwarted her ambitions. For example, her pregnancy

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Contributors

Charles Beem is an Assistant Professor of History at the University of North Carolina, Pembroke, the author of *The Lioness Roared: The Problems of Female Rule in English History* (2006), and the editor of the *Royal Minorities of Medieval and Early Modern England* (2008). He is currently at work on a study of the colorful but obscure Tudor Renaissance figure George Ferrers.

Robert Bucholz is a Professor of History at Loyola University, Chicago. He is the author of *The Augustan Court: Queen Anne and the Decline of Court Culture* (1993) and, with Newton Key, *Early Modern England, 1485–1714: A Narrative History* and *Sources and Debates in English History, 1485–1714* (2004). He is also the Director of the online Database of Court Officers, 1660–1837: http://www.luc.edu/history/fac_resources/bucholz/DCO/DCO.html.

Sarah Duncan is a PhD candidate at Yale University. She is currently teaching at Spring Hill College in Mobile, Alabama, and is completing her dissertation, "'A queen and by the same title a king also': Gender, Power, and Ceremony in the Reign of Mary I." Her work appears in *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* and in the forthcoming *Elizabeth*

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I and the "Sovereign Arts": Essays in History, Literature, and Culture. Her research interests include gender politics and Anglo-Spanish cultural relations at the court of Mary I of England.

Timothy G. Elston is the Chair of the Department of History and Social Sciences at Newberry College. Dr. Elston earned his PhD from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln where he focused his academic interests in late medieval and early modern England, emphasizing women's history. Among Dr. Elston's previous publications is an essay on Catherine of Aragon and Juan Luis Vives in the edited collection *"High and Mighty Queens" of Early Modern England*.

Amy Gant recently completed her MA in history at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. She is interested in the history of religion and religious publications in seventeenth-century England. Her essays have appeared in *The Encyclopedia of Women in the Renaissance*.

Elaine Kruse is the Huge-Kinne Professor of History at Nebraska Wesleyan University. She is the author of a number of articles, including "Passion, Property, or Politics? The Implications of the Kornmann Affair," "The Blood-stained Hands of Catherine de Médicis," and "The Woman in Black: The Image of Catherine de Medici from Marlowe to Queen Margot." She is currently at work on a book on divorce during the French Revolution.

Amber Harris Leichner is pursuing her PhD in American literature at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln with a focus on the recovery of early twentieth-century women writers. Her poems have appeared in *The Dos Passos Review*, *Relief*, and elsewhere. Her chapbook *Just This Proof* is available from FootHills Press.

Carole Levin is the Willa Cather Professor of History at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. She has coedited a number of collections, including *"High and Mighty Queens" of Early Modern England: Realities and Representations* and *Elizabeth I: Always Her Own Free Woman*, both published in 2003. She is the author of *"The Heart and Stomach of a*

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King": Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power (1994), *The Reign of Elizabeth I* (2002), and *Dreaming the English Renaissance: Politics and Desire in Court and Culture* (2008). With John Watkins, she is the coauthor of *Shakespeare's Foreign Worlds: National and Transnational Identities in the Elizabethan Age* (2009).

Shannon Meyer is a PhD candidate in history at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, where she specializes in early modern English women's history. Her essays have appeared in *The Encyclopedia of Women in the Renaissance*.

Michele Osherow is a Clinical Assistant Professor of English and Associate Director of the Dresher Center for the Humanities at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. She also serves as dramaturge for the Folger Theatre in Washington DC and for other professional theaters. She is the author of *Biblical Women's Voices in Early Modern England* (2009).

Anna Riehl, Assistant Professor of English at Auburn University, received her PhD from the University of Illinois at Chicago. She is currently working on a book manuscript titled "The Face of Power: Early Modern Representations of Queen Elizabeth I." Her research and teaching interests lie at the intersection of early modern literature, visual culture, history, and cultural studies, with a special focus on the body, visual rhetoric, Elizabeth I, court culture, and gender issues. Her essay "Eying the Thought Awry: The Anamorphosis of John Donne's Poetry" is forthcoming in the journal *English Literary Renaissance*. Another essay, "Persuading the Prince: Raleigh, Keymis, Chapman, and The Second Voyage to Guiana" is forthcoming in the collection *Tudor Court Culture*. Dr. Riehl's research has been sponsored by an American Association of University Women's Educational Foundation Dissertation Fellowship, English-Speaking Union Scholarship, and a University Fellowship at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Lisa Schuelke is a PhD candidate in history at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, where she specializes in women's history and has published articles in this field, including "Overcoming Obstacles: Marguerite

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Linda S. Shenk is an Assistant Professor at Iowa State University, where she teaches Elizabethan court poetry and drama. She has published on Elizabeth I as a learned queen; Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex; Shakespeare; and the seventeenth-century mnemonician John Willis. She is currently working on a book manuscript titled "Learned Queen: The Imperial Image of Elizabeth I," a project that investigates the political ramifications of Elizabeth's learned persona both as a strategy of her own image-making as well as a persona useful to her internationally ambitious court figures as they pursued their own expansionist agenda.

Marjorie Swann, Associate Professor of English at the University of Kansas, specializes in Renaissance literature, feminist criticism, and material culture studies. She is the author of *Curiosities and Texts: The Culture of Collecting in Early Modern England* (2001). She is currently working on a book about the frustration of reproductive sexuality in Renaissance culture and literature, as well as a study of Izaak Walton's *The Compleat Angler*.

John Watkins is a Professor of English, Italian Studies, and Medieval Studies at the University of Minnesota. Associate editor of *The Journal of British Studies*, he is the author of *The Specter of Dido: Spenser and Virgilian Epic* (1995), *Representing Elizabeth in Stuart England: Literature, History, and Sovereignty* (2002), and numerous articles on premodern literature and culture. With Carole Levin, he is the coauthor of *Shakespeare's Foreign Worlds: National and Transnational Identities in the Elizabethan Age* (2009). He is currently finishing a book on marriage diplomacy in medieval and early modern Europe.

Michelle A. White is the UC Foundation Associate Professor of History at the University of Tennessee, Chattanooga. She is the author of *Henrietta Maria and the English Civil Wars* (2006) and presently is at work examining English cases of sedition for the period 1646–48.

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Richardine Woodall received her PhD from York University, where she teaches English literature. Her area of specialization is the literatures of the English Renaissance, in particular Shakespearean drama. Her research focuses on the ways in which Western fictions have superimposed such categorizers as the "female" and the "east" onto the historical Cleopatra such that she has become a cultural icon in Western culture. She has published articles on representations of Cleopatra and on blacks in British literature and history.

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