

The Emblematic Queen: Extra-Literary Representations of Early Modern Queenship

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Debra Barrett-Graves

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Estelle Paraque

This collection of essays edited by Debra Barrett-Graves provides new ways of interpreting the symbolic images through which Renaissance queens shaped their identity and royal authority. In bringing together different approaches and sources, the authors use the methodologies of several disciplines: literature, history, art history and cultural studies. As Barrett-Graves explains in the introduction: ‘The chapters in this book provide interdisciplinary analyses in the areas of art, literature, and history to illustrate just how pervasive emblematic references were both in informing material culture and in creating unique identities’ (p. 1). An interest in the way that queens used material cultures to their own advantage is fashionable.⁽¹⁾ The originality of this collection of essays remains in how authors shed light on the important role of emblematics in Renaissance material culture and how they impacted queen’s identities (p. 7). Several queens are studied from different backgrounds and time periods: Caterina Cornaro, queen of Cyprus (1454–1510), Queen Elizabeth I of England (1533–1603), Mary Queen of Scots (1542–87), Anne of Denmark (1574–1619) and Spain’s Maria Luisa de Orleans (1662–89).

From commissioned paintings to written plays and royal masques, the authors focus on these self-representations or controlled representations of royal power. Readers of *The Emblematic Queen* have the opportunity to see queens under another light, not as women in a male-dominated world but as women who understood enough about the importance of images to impose their voice and identity through them in original ways.

The collection is divided into seven chapters. Barrett-Graves's introduction sets out the ways in which emblems 'served to express wealth, power, and values in the Renaissance' (p. 6). Other studies have closely looked at emblems and their roles in the early modern period but the strength of this collection is to link those emblems to the political, religious and cultural roles of queens and how they served them as much as kings. Another strength of this collection is the different queens each chapter focuses on. From the famous Queen Elizabeth I of England to the lesser-known and less-studied Caterina Cornaro, queen of Cyprus, the authors broaden the scope of the importance of emblems and their role in the representations of queens.

Chapter one focuses on Caterina Cornaro who was queen of Cyprus from 1474 to 1489. Liana De Giorlami Cheney's writing style is smooth and precise. De Giorlami Cheney first explains that Caterina Cornaro was a great queen and that she was a 'humanist, and a patron of the arts' (p. 11). She also emphasises her physical charms (p. 11) and echoes the work of Jo Eldridge Carney who argues how important beauty was for queens. (2) Caterina Cornaro was used by her family to secure political and commercial alliances in the Mediterranean. She was even deposed by her own Venetian family as she became overly populist and threatened to build up a demotic following of her own (p. 17). The author concentrates on the emblems linked to the queen's representations after her abdication and then, on how Caterina played a role in shaping the image of a cultivated woman who 'with fortitude and courage met adversity in marital and political circumstances' (p. 28). De Giorlami Cheney looks at how the queen's abdication was represented on canvas. The essay points to the difficulties of female rule. Perhaps it would also have been possible to compare the paintings to other emblems of the queen, maybe sculptures or statutes that appeared after her death as a tribute to her glorious days?

In chapter two, Cassandra Auble looks at Queen Elizabeth I's precious stones and jewels as an important part of the queen's monarchical authority. The essay is very well structured and Auble explains how the historiography regarding the Virgin Queen's 'methods of statecraft and self-representations' was incomplete without a work analysing what kind of 'roles precious stones and jewelry played in shaping the political perceptions of Elizabeth' (p. 36). Elizabeth 'was not a monarch unique in her passion for luxurious jewels and clothing' (p. 37); her father and sister also understood how well they could express regal authority. In her essay, Auble strives to unpack the symbolisms of jewels and gemstones and their role in shaping the queen's identity as well as expressing her royal authority. The strength of this essay is that it does not only look at the jewels as a beauty accessory but shows how Elizabeth valued them and used them as a powerful political device: 'Elizabeth realized that jewels could function as more than a fashion accessory; they were tools that could convey the prosperity and stability of England and her monarch' (p. 48). This work is therefore very valuable for anyone interested in the queen's self-representations.

Chapter three might be the most original essay of this collection as it highlights unnoticed aspects of Elizabeth I's portraiture. The author Catherine Loomis looks at the portraits which were seen by the queen's subjects and not those which are seen today and which have already been examined with meticulous scrutiny. Thus, Loomis is interested in 'the queen's image as it was found on coins, on broadsides, on legal documents, on the frontispiece, or in historiated capitals of widely available books' (p. 53). However, the reason for the originality of this essay does not only reside in the sources Loomis decided to have a look at but also on what kind of emblems and symbols she reveals to be the queen's. Loomis notices that in the portraits she uses the queen sat but that 'Elizabeth's knees, although hidden under the drapery of her gown or robes, are spread, her legs wide open. In early modern English culture, as in many contemporaries cultures, such posture was suspect: the open legs promised sexual availability or licentiousness' (p. 53) but then argues that 'in classical and Byzantine sculpture, seated goddesses and empresses usually appear with open knees and legs, just as their male counterparts do' (p. 55) which also works 'as a reminder of the children

they are able to bear or have borne' (p. 56). Through different analyses and interpretations, Loomis highlights the strength of these representations of the queen and how they enabled her to impose a god-like authority. She also shrewdly links Elizabeth to her male counterparts and suggests that the queen played with male attributes to define a unique female kingship. This essay reveals new perspectives in terms of monarchical representations.

In chapter four, through varied sources Debra Barrett-Graves links Mary Queen of Scots to the emblem and icon of a mermaid and reveals the different implications of such a representation. In particular, she proposes another way to interpret The Mermaid and the Hare placard that was supposed to represent Mary and Bothwell after Lord Darnley's assassination. Barrett-Graves goes further in her interpretation of this placard and shows that it was not merely about Mary's reputation as a harlot, but more an attack on her religious beliefs and foreign origins: 'On the surface, the Mermaid and the Hare placard seems to convey rather straightforward meanings, but the iconography associated with its symbol suggests greater interest than mere concern over illicit and promiscuous behaviour' (p. 79). After analysing the placard and its implications, the author also looks at the impact of this placard in Edmund Spenser's characterisation of Acrasia. Through different representations of the Scottish queen from an English eye, Barrett-Graves pays attention to the emblems used in literary materials to represent the Scottish queen in a way that secures the English commonwealth and argues that 'Wanton-ladie', 'seductress', 'enchanteresse', and 'witch' – some of the epithets Spenser bestows upon the figure of Acrasia in *The Fairie Queene* correspond to the manner in which contemporary Protestants would have responded to Mary, Queen of Scots' (p. 87). She also explains how Spenser used allegorical representations of emblems in order to make people relate to them as individuals and as a community.

Chapter five focuses on the martyrdom and memory of Elizabeth Curle's portrait of Mary Queen of Scots. In this essay, Marguerite Tassi explores the meanings and stakes of Curle's portrait of the Scottish queen and highlights the complex interpretations of a painting which plays the role of both *lieu de mémoire* and Mary's martyrdom. Tassi argues that this portrait plays a more important role than only highlighting Mary's martyrdom but also displays a means to celebrate the Catholic faith. She also proves that this painting is one of its kind in terms of artistic and commissioning aspects (p. 107). Tassi has different goals in this essay. First, she wants to show that 'The portrait's idealized Catholic vision of Mary embodies the collective religious memory of the persecuted group and makes visible the specific desire of one of its members to identify herself with that memory' (p. 108). Then the author argues that Mary 'was denied control' of 'memorial statuary and epitaph' (p. 112) and that it was 'left to the living' such as her son James Stuart and Elizabeth Curle who assisted her at her execution. Therefore, they 'shaped memory into images and rhetoric that suited their own or a particular group's interests in a given historical moment' (p. 113). However, Tassi's argument is not based only on Mary as a figure of a martyr but also on Elizabeth Curle's reasons for commissioning such a portrait of the former Scottish queen. Tassi also draws a link between Antwerp and Mary's status as a martyr and the role that the people from this city played in Mary's posthumous representations (p. 120). As she argues, the city had a taste 'for depictions of martyrdom' (p. 121). Therefore, Tassi shows how important this portrait commissioned by Elizabeth Curle was, not only for the memory of a Catholic community persecuted in England and in the Netherlands but also for the posthumous representation of Mary Stuart as a symbol of Catholic devotion through centuries (p. 126). This is a very engaging and fascinating essay which tells more about Elizabeth Curle's own devotion than Mary's in the end.

In chapter six, Effie Botonaki reveals how Anne of Denmark, queen consort of England and Scotland, used masques at court to be in charge of her representations. When previous works have focused on Anne's relation to masque as a "proof of her vanity and light-headedness", Botonaki highlights another way of perceiving them: a political device which allowed the queen consort to be in charge of her own image (p. 134). In this essay, two points seem to be striking. First and foremost, through masque Anne bypassed feminine ideals of her time and 'adopted the traditionally male role of the actor' (p. 150) as well as playing the role of the author. The second important point is that this essay probes how court masques helped queens to impose their own images and authority in their own way and therefore could be used as a powerful

political device.

In the last chapter, Antonio Bernat Vistarini and John Cull look at the interpretations of the hieroglyphs of Maria Luisa de Orléans's funeral exequies and their role as the emblem of the queen consort (p. 155). They examine the different representations through Maria Luisa's reputations. They explain that 'From the Spanish point of view, Maria Luisa's manly love of riding horseback, her fondness for the hunt, her passion for music, theater, and dance, and her exuberant vanity were also considered evidence of scandalous excess' (p. 159). Maria Luisa was not appreciated for these reasons but also as they explain because she failed to produce an heir. Therefore, in this essay, both authors explore the purpose of the queen's funeral exequies and to define the emblems. For Vistarini and Cull 'It is clear that the collective authors of the hieroglyphs sympathized with the struggles endured by Maria Luisa during her time in Spain, but at the same time felt conflicted by the enormous repercussions that her death caused for the perpetuation of the Hapsburg dynasty' (p. 171). In this essay, they highlight the paradox of these hieroglyphs which depict the queen as both 'an innocent victim' and 'a culpable scapegoat' and the different emblems used to refer to her tragic fate (p. 177).

In this well-documented and fascinating collection, the authors manage to highlight the pradoxes and difficulties inherent in seeking to define the emblems of Renaissance queens. As John Watkins argues in the afterword, 'emblems carried multiple significances' (p. 197), and the authors strive to highlight these and define their role in terms of royal assertion for queens. The sources are varied and the queens studied cover a large period of time. However, it would have been beneficial to have had a chapter on Mary Tudor and to see what kind of emblems she used or were used to represent her and if they were controversial at all. Indeed, in chapter two, Cassandra Auble reveals a very important aspect of Queen Elizabeth's self-representations and self-assertion of her royal authority. It would have been very interesting to compare the jewels exchanged by the Queen with those exchanged by Mary Tudor who seemed to understand the importance of jewels in politics as well and to highlight any differences or similarities between them and to look at the influences that both would have shared. Another queen's emblems which might have been considered are Henrietta Maria's, who had to distinguish herself from her husband and to make her children prosper as well as remaining loyal to him and her religion. The strength of this essay, though, is definitely that it opens 'unexpected avenues for future research' (p. 197) in both the disciplines of history, art history, and literature disciplines and shows how scholars from different disciplines can work together and produce a valuable and original contribution to the current historiographies.

Notes

1. Jo Eldridge Carney, *Fairy Tale Queens: Representations of Early Modern Queenship*, (New York, NY, 2012).[Back to \(1\)](#)
2. Ibid.[Back to \(2\)](#)

The author is happy to accept this review.

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