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**Queen of Heaven: The Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin  
in Early Modern English Writing**

Dan Breen

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[See table of contents](#)

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many challenges. The edited volume is an excellent addition to scholarship on the history of early modern religious women and will be of great interest to scholars of religion, gender, and literacy in post-Reformation culture.

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**Grindlay, Lilla.**

*Queen of Heaven: The Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin in Early Modern English Writing.*

Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018. Pp. xi, 297. ISBN 978-0-26-810410-8 (paper) US\$45.

However one understands the process and politics of the Reformation, the practice of Christianity in England in 1600 was certainly characterized in part by a series of dramatic absences relative to the practice of Christianity in 1500: purgatory, devotion to the saints, and the Mass itself, among others. How did individual believers, for whom the transformation of devotional practice changed so dramatically within their lifetimes, respond to such losses? Lilla Grindlay's *Queen of Heaven* enters this conversation by focusing on one of the most prominent elements of late medieval Christianity displaced by the Reformation, namely, devotion to Mary, particularly in her role as Queen of Heaven. For Grindlay, this displacement, even as late as the early seventeenth century, was not complete, and not simply because of the intensity of Marian devotion among English Catholics. As Grindlay shows, Mary as Queen of Heaven remained influential in Protestant discourse in polemical and literary texts, and also, fascinatingly, in some devotional works. As such, this version of Mary stands as a useful index for assessing the full complexity of confessionalization in Elizabethan and early Jacobean England.

The book conducts its study along two lines of inquiry. The first is constituted by the still-dominant critical narrative to which Grindlay is responding. Mary, this narrative holds, effectively vanishes from the devotional landscape over the course of the Reformation, as a relic of medieval Catholicism. While acknowledging Mary's reduced presence in the reformed liturgy, Grindlay argues that she became instead a subject of dramatic contestation, as

both Protestant and Catholic writers and readers struggled to define her role in relation to the changing religious landscape. This struggle serves as Grindlay's second line of inquiry, and the central analytical focus of the book. In general, Protestant critiques and Catholic defenses of Mary as Queen of Heaven tended to generate two different versions of the figure: a "Catholic" Mary, who was assumed bodily into heaven and crowned there (this version of Mary served as a rallying point for English Catholics and as a polemical target for Protestants), and a "Protestant" Mary, most fully intelligible as God's "humble handmaid" (44). This distinction, however, proved to be deeply unstable, as the figure of Mary as Queen of Heaven possessed a symbolic and political resonance that defied flat, ascriptive categorization. Grindlay's Mary is both icon and iconoclast, subverting and expanding beyond the capacities of the political and symbolic vocabularies that are deployed to contain her.

The polemical effort to define "Catholic" Mary as a usurping or domineering queen, in relation to the domestic and subservient "Protestant" Mary, was inconsistent. In a particularly excellent chapter on early modern English writing by and for women, Grindlay demonstrates that critiques of Marian devotion did not necessarily produce versions of Mary that were represented as admirable primarily for their passivity. Both Dorothy Leigh and Aemilia Lanier, in Grindlay's reading, generate remarkable depictions of the Virgin as imbued with a spiritual power that extends far beyond the limiting parameters of the "humble handmaid" figure. Here, Grindlay generates strong evidence for one of the book's compelling supplementary claims that male Protestant writers sought to redefine Mary's role only in part for theological reasons. The Protestant demotion of Mary from her position in medieval Christianity at the top of the hierarchy of saints, exercising a uniquely powerful intercessory office with Christ, suggests a complementary political anxiety about feminine agency, one that seems all the more discernible by its relative absence in Leigh and Lanier.

In English Catholic writing, the subject of the book's last three chapters, the attention to the Queen of Heaven is of course different in kind, and yet Catholic treatments of Mary also reveal discursive and devotional fissures. In the poetry of Catholic convert Henry Constable, for instance, the repurposing of Petrarchan love poetry as a medium for Marian devotion ultimately evolves its own distinct spiritual and symbolic vocabulary. The combination of Mary and the beloved of the sonnet tradition results here in an act of anti-Petrarchan

iconoclasm. Similarly, the ostensibly Protestant Sir John Harington's "Fifteen Several Disticks" borrows many of the conventions of Catholic poetry on the subjects of Mary and the rosary, but stops just short of the expected identification of Mary as the Queen of Heaven. The result is a new form of Marian poem that resists simplistic confessional categorization. Mary's symbolic power, and the aesthetic and spiritual capacities of this power, are most fully evident in Grindlay's account of Robert Southwell's poems on the coronation and the assumption. Here, she shows that the Queen of Heaven serves as a compelling locus of devotion, but also of reflection, as Southwell's version of Mary proves integral to his poetic meditations both on the passion and, perhaps, on what he suspected to be his own impending martyrdom.

Grindlay's book is timely and valuable, and remedies an important gap in Reformation studies by encouraging its readers to consider more nuanced accounts of cultural loss. As wide-ranging as the Reformation certainly was, it is just as certain that forms of devotion rarely disappear altogether, and *Queen of Heaven* illustrates a variety of ways in which a particular aspect of Mary is contested, translated, and redeployed in multiple discursive and confessional contexts. Just as significantly, Grindlay's book makes it clear that there is much more to be done on the subject. The notion that the confessional struggle over the nature of Mary's role is in many ways also a struggle about feminine political agency would be well worth further study, especially in the context of the mid-sixteenth century, which saw the publication by Queen Katharine Parr of the influential devotional work *Lamentation of a Sinner*. Medievalists and early modernists in history, literature, and religious studies will find this book extremely useful and compelling.

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