

Renaissance and Reformation
Renaissance et Réforme



Queenship at the Renaissance Courts of Britain: Catherine of Aragon and Margaret Tudor, 1503–1533

Janice Liedl

Volume 42, numéro 2, printemps 2019

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1065137ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065137ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (imprimé)

2293-7374 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Liedl, J. (2019). Compte rendu de [Queenship at the Renaissance Courts of Britain: Catherine of Aragon and Margaret Tudor, 1503–1533]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 42(2), 200–202.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1065137ar>

about the love and desire of women characters from Ovid's *Heroides* (195). Seneca provided three models for the climax of a tragedy (230). In discussing ghosts and spirits in Shakespeare, Bate examines, for instance, Plutarch in relation to *Julius Caesar* (235–38).

For those not educated in the British or colonial elite, based on classics well into the twentieth century, Shakespeare became a classic (275–76). Through him, we still get something of a classical education. Bate is excellent at discussing text and context, Shakespeare and his contemporaries as well as the classics. Bate's style is elegant, his learning informative, and his book rich beyond what a review can tell.

JONATHAN LOCKE HART

Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies

University of Toronto

Beer, Michelle L.

Queenship at the Renaissance Courts of Britain: Catherine of Aragon and Margaret Tudor, 1503–1533.

Martlesham, UK: Royal Historical Society / Boydell Press, 2018. Pp. xv, 185 + 4 charts. ISBN 978-0-86193-348-8 (hardcover) US\$90.

The history of early modern British queenship is dominated by studies of the two Tudor queens regnant, Mary and Elizabeth, and the six wives of Henry VIII. Michelle L. Beer argues that the model for Renaissance queens that these women followed was well-established in the early sixteenth century, as shown in the experiences of Catherine of Aragon, Henry VIII's first and longest-lasting wife, and her sister-in-law, Margaret Tudor, who reigned in Scotland as the consort of James IV and briefly as regent to their son, James V. Beer reconstructs these queens' courtly conduct using a wide range of sources, particularly manuscripts at the National Archives, Kew, and the National Records of Scotland, Edinburgh. She shows how the women asserted their identities and importance at the courts and beyond in nuanced yet assertive ways. Beer's work is an impressive achievement, given that much of the queenly households can be reconstructed only through a determined synthesis of fragmentary remains and tangential documentation.

Beer grounds Catherine of Aragon's and Margaret Tudor's understanding of the roles and opportunities of British queenship in the legacy of their immediate predecessor, the first Tudor queen consort, Elizabeth of York. The first chapter details how Elizabeth's queenship served as a model for both of the younger women as they established their own households. While acknowledging other female influences in the court of Henry VII, particularly that of his mother, Margaret Beaufort, Beer contends that Elizabeth of York, through both her household and her courtly functions, significantly shaped early Tudor diplomacy and ceremony. Meticulously documenting how practices and personnel migrated from Elizabeth of York's household to those of her daughter and daughter-in-law, Beer depicts a stable base for the practice of Tudor queenship from the dynasty's earliest days.

This legacy animates the next two chapters considering the material and social cultures supported and embodied by the two queens. Dress, amply documented in wardrobe and livery accounts, expressed the particular magnificence of the queens as worthy consorts for their royal husbands. Beer delves into the question of pregnancies and how these were approached as opportunities to express, through furnishings, relics, and rituals, a distinctive and queenly legitimacy. Both women were deeply involved in the grand entertainments of tournaments, pageants, and courtly pastimes. Catherine's magnificence as a Tudor queen comes clear as Beer discusses how she used ceremonies to evoke both her Spanish heritage and her English status during the Field of Cloth of Gold in the summer of 1520. Margaret, who married young and lacked financial as well as political independence in the Scottish court, struggled in comparison to exert her own queenly magnificence without being accused of vanity and excess.

When it comes to questions of princely patronage, Beer argues that while kings were central to the practice, these queens also played a significant role. Both Margaret and Catherine exercised much of their patronage through their husbands. Beer reminds readers that Catherine had a distinct advantage in that her dower estates provided substantial income as well as a number of available positions to reward courtiers and cement loyalty. Margaret, on the other hand, was far more financially dependent on her spouse, whose officials paid her expenses in a Scottish court which offered few forms of independent patronage for royal women.

The English and Scottish experiences of queenship appear less distinctive when Beer turns to the question of religious culture. Here, both women embodied orthodox and popular practices of pre-Reformation piety through public devotions that frequently took place before some sort of audience. Beer's analysis of almsgiving, particularly the Royal Maundies, shows how closely these queens' performances of piety were linked to their Tudor royal status. Both queens bore only one royal child to live past infancy and sought to alleviate their concerns regarding fertility through well-publicized pilgrimages. Beer concludes her volume with a consideration of the two queen's regencies and how their different experiences reflect the opportunities of the English court versus the relative limits of the Scottish court regarding the queenly exercise of authority.

Michelle L. Beer has crafted an impressive analysis documenting the common culture of British Renaissance queenship in the early sixteenth century while acknowledging the particular challenges of the English and Scottish courts. Some readers may be frustrated by Beer's omission of other contemporary royal women such as Mary Tudor Brandon, who briefly reigned as queen of France, and the many influential queens of continental Europe who provide further context for British royalty. Beer's analysis also assumes great familiarity with the early Tudor court and the lives of these queens. Nevertheless, *Queenship at the Renaissance Courts of Britain* is an invaluable resource for advanced students and researchers assessing the early modern court or the gendered exercise of power in Renaissance culture.

JANICE LIEDL

Laurentian University

Daybell, James, and Svante Norrhem, eds.

Gender and Political Culture in Early Modern Europe, 1400–1800.

New York: Routledge, 2017. Pp. xiv, 240. ISBN 978-1-138-667420-6 (paperback) \$49.95.

One of the most rewarding aspects of James Daybell and Svante Norrhem's collection of new essays is the breadth of topics, locations, original approaches, and above all archival material presented in meticulously and deeply researched chapters. The book addresses a complex interplay between subjectivity, women,