INTRODUCTION: TALKING ABOUT SCHOLARS AND POETS TALK ABOUT QUEENS

Carole Levin

Queens from the ancient period through the Renaissance have always held a special fascination. We are interested in the historical lives of queens, how they were represented in later chronicles and histories, and the different ways they are embodied in later drama and literature. This collection focuses on a range of queens, from early mythical queens to those of the Tudor period. Queen Elizabeth I is central to two essays but she is in the background in a number of others. What makes this collection unique and of especial appeal is that there are not only analyses of queens and their representations in history and literature, but recent creative depictions of these queens as well. By pairing scholarly essays with contemporary poems and creative pieces about them, the collection intends to demonstrate the ongoing relevance and immediacy of these powerful women: whether fictional or factual, these queens continue to be compelling figures.

Some of the queens in this collection are mythological such as Hecuba, wife of King Priam and Queen of Troy. Other early queens include Cleopatra, the famous final independent pharaoh of ancient Egypt who was the lover of the Roman Anthony and the first century Iceni queen Boudicca, who fought the Romans to protect the freedoms of Celtic peoples against the invading Romans. The essays in this collection consider how these queens were understood in

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the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As well as ancient queens, there are essays about such medieval queens as the Empress Matilda, the woman who fought to be queen of England after the death of her father Henry I, and Henry VI’s consort, Margaret of Anjou, who also fought to hold England for her husband and her son. With Margaret as well the focus is on her representation in early modern chronicle and drama. Sixteenth-century English queens are also examined—wives of Henry VIII, his daughters Mary and Elizabeth who, unlike Matilda, were able to be crowned and rule in their own right, and their cousin Mary Stuart, queen consort of France, queen of Scotland in her own right until her forced abdication. The final queen under consideration is the Irish chieftain and leader, Grace O’Malley, popularly known as the pirate queen.

In her essay on Hecuba Marguerite A. Tassi examines how in the English Renaissance Hecuba is, in Arthur Golding’s words, the “Queene of moother’s all,” and the importance of empathetic relations to a mother’s mourning. Tassi pursues the question of what kind of ethical empathy for the fallen Trojan queen performed for those in the Elizabethan age. Paired with Tassi’s essay is her own poem, “Hecuba’s Dream,” and Darla Biel’s poem, “Hecuba Laments.” Andrea Nichols looks at depictions of Cleopatra in the reign of Elizabeth and presents the connections by early modern playwrights of Cleopatra and Elizabeth. Her essay is paired with Erika Stevens’s poem “Grand Unified Theory.”

Katarzyna Lecky also deftly relates connections made by sixteenth-century chroniclers between the first-century Briton queen Boudicca fighting invaders and building nationalism, with Elizabeth I. Paired with this essay is M. Wells’ poem, “The Queen Iceni Seeks Andraste.” The connection between the Iceni queen and her sixteenth-century counterpart is explored in comic fashion in Carole Levin’s short play, “The Heart and Stomach of a Queen.”

Charles Beem compares and analyzes the rather negative historical reputation of the Empress Matilda with her attempts to create a positive public image for herself within the male feudal society over which she attempted to assume leadership. Dennis Henry’s short play, “Maude and Ellie Play Chess,” portrays a clever, dominant queen mother in her old age.

Just as historians have been harsh in their assessments of Matilda, so too were many early modern historians unforgiving in their portrayal of Henry VI’s queen, Margaret of Anjou. Carole Levin finds that while these negative descriptions of her ruthless nature had