

Kit Heyam, *The Reputation of Edward II, 1305–1697: A Literary Transformation of History* (Amsterdam University Press, 2020), hb, ISBN 9789463729338, €136.00.

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In an anonymous “genealogy” of all the kings of England published in c.1560, Edward II’s deposition is recounted as follows: Edward’s “ennemies ... tooke the king prisoner at the last and depyrved him of all his regaltie.” By contrast, the *Memoriall of All the English Monarchs* (1622), by “the Water Poet” John Taylor, devotes two of its eight lines on Edward to his murder by the red-hot poker. While the texts serve different purposes, there is a clear disparity in legacy. In *The Reputation of Edward II, 1305–1697*, Kit Heyam provides the “first attempt to trace, and to account for” the process by which Edward’s reputation “developed in medieval and early modern England” (10). Over the course of the book, Heyam interrogates the various accounts and re-tellings of Edward’s life, reign, deposition, and death that have come down to us, fruitfully complicating the distinction between history and literature in the process.

The book is structured thematically, with each chapter considering an aspect of Edward’s historiographical legacy, tracing the emergence of themes and their transition to orthodoxy across a range of forms and genres. In Chapter 1, Heyam emphasises the utility of the concept of “minion” when thinking about the sexual ambiguities that surround Edward and his male favourites. Likewise, they do a marvellous job of problematising simplistic definitions of sodomy, showing that the meaning of a text is rarely as straightforward as more literal and facile readings suggest. This analysis carries over into Chapter 2, which unpicks the emerging depiction of Edward’s sexual relationships with his favourites.

Chapter 3 focuses on the relationship between Edward and Piers Gaveston, emphasising the emotional nature of their relationship and the shift away from depictions of the pair as brothers. Chapter 4 analyses the varying levels of culpability in his downfall that writers expressed, with Heyam noting that as texts got further away from Edward’s life, they became more likely to apportion more blame to Edward himself.

Chapter 5, which analyses Edward’s use as political exemplum in the early modern period, recognises the novelty of Edward as England’s first deposed monarch, and is my favourite. Heyam journeys through the reigns of Elizabeth I (although I was surprised not to see more discussion of the links between the Earl of Essex and Edward’s favourites,

especially because, like Hugh Despenser the Younger, Essex was executed), Henri III of France, James VI & I, Charles I, and James II & VII (with Heyam noting that Edward's deposition proved useful within the context of the Exclusion Crisis and the so-called "Glorious" Revolution), all the while emphasising the way that "Edward's story was frequently used as an analogue for contemporary events" (177).

Chapter 6 analyses accounts of Edward's deposition and imprisonment, with Heyam paying close attention to the creative selection writers engaged in when telling this part of the story, which facilitated the emergence of Edward's reign as a *de casibus* narrative. The final chapter then considers the varying accounts of Edward's death by unpicking how the story that he was killed by a red-hot poker being inserted into his anus, which left no outward mark, was invented by one chronicler in the second quarter of the fourteenth century and quickly became the prevailing orthodoxy—to the point that despite Elizabeth Cary leaving it out of her prose history of Edward's life (written c.1627), it was *added* in the preface when it was published in 1680 (261). Heyam's careful discussion of the murder-method situates it within notions of honour and torment, rather than speculating on whether it was meant to be reminiscent of Edward's depraved sodomy, especially given that this story's emergence predated a firm acceptance of Edward's sexual "deviance."

The book includes a very useful appendix detailing 130 accounts of Edward II's reign from the period 1305 to 1697. This will be an incredibly useful resource for scholars, although I think arranging the appendix chronologically rather than by author/writer would have made tracking the shifting historiography easier. I also think some of the signposting throughout could have been trimmed, and while Heyam draws on an impressive range of scholarship, it is sometimes distracting to have Heyam's insightful readings mediated through the words of other scholars—most of whom do not have the deep familiarity with the primary sources that Heyam does. Nevertheless, these are obviously minor quibbles. This is an excellent piece of scholarship with which anyone interested in Edward II, premodern sexuality, memory studies, Marlowe, and textual transmission should thoroughly engage.

The book makes a number of important scholarly interventions that space does not permit me to detail, but I want to finish by drawing out two of them here. The first is the book's proper and thorough re-contextualisation of Marlowe's *Edward II*. In a lot of ways, Marlowe's play looms as an omnipresent spectre throughout the book: of all the texts Heyam discusses, it is the one with which readers will most likely be familiar. But, while acknowledging the innovations Marlowe made to the historiography of Edward II as it stood at the time of the play's composition, Heyam makes clear that the play "was not the end-point

of a process,” but rather that it “went on to influence chronicles in its own right” (283). By putting *Edward II* in dialogue with its predecessors and successors, Heyam casts new light on the play, and in doing so foregrounds how the play’s frank depiction of Edward’s sexual relationships with men was truly original.

The second intervention is a powerful call to continue the breaking down of the arbitrary boundaries between history and literary studies. Chronicles are *both* historical sources and literary texts, and they need to be treated and analysed as such; the same goes for plays and poetry. The example of Edward II shows that chroniclers were interested in chronicling history, but this interest was ultimately shaped by concern that their texts were sufficiently literary—that is, ensuring they were also exciting and pleasurable to read. Chapter 6, which discusses the varying moralistic and narratologically infused accounts of Edward’s deposition in chronicles, is a brilliant example of this duality. Whether or not Edward II was actually killed by a red-hot poker is largely irrelevant: we will almost certainly never know how he died, but what the invention of the story in the long *Brut* and its subsequent re-use, adaptation, and appropriation across four hundred years says about audiences and their tastes is much more interesting and revealing. The book ends with the formidable challenge for “our scholarship” to “undergo a literary transformation of its own” (283). Heyam’s book is a persuasive example of such a transformation, and I for one sincerely hope that this call is taken up.