

of these figures varies considerably, as she acknowledges, and the concerns that linked them (including a recurrent interest in the parable of the unjust steward to regionalism to penitence to multilingual urban literary circles) range widely, but their collective portrait, gleaned from both explicit references and contextual clues to the writers' professional lives and training, help us to see how "clerical vocational crisis" (86) gave rise to literary riches.

In the second section, Kerby-Fulton turns to primarily anonymous authors, the clergy who lived, prayed, copied, and sang at cathedrals and who left traces of their underused professional energies and skills in the form of lyrics, cathedral histories, drama, and (in the final chapter) *St. Erkenwald*. Her attention to unbeneficed clergy and their lived experience makes this section clearly continuous with the first, but she paints a more focused and coherent picture, working through evidence that conveys a specific milieu and gradually builds an account of its pleasures, productions, and annoyances. Her account of the *Second Trial before Pilate* of the York Cycle, the Tilemakers' Pageant, is particularly engaging and persuasive; Kerby-Fulton shows how the vicars choral of the cathedral, owners of two city tileworks, produced and sponsored a play that is "heavily inflected with the language of both common law and canon law in anglicized form" (233), bringing new resonance to the "ecclesiastical density" (236) of the pageant's wordplay.

The complexity and reach of *The Clerical Proletariat* stretch beyond what its covers can quite contain, and there are moments when the reader has the sense of scrambling to catch up with a lively conversation already underway among people well versed in its intricacies or when a point made somewhat glancingly or briefly in the text turns out to have a much more substantial underpinning in the footnotes. Kerby-Fulton manages the abundance by careful cross-reference, but because her argument relies on the accumulation of examples and many points are closely interlinked, this results in frequent recurrences of "as we shall see" or "as we have seen"—often helpful, but also at times distracting. The interwoven structure, however, becomes more understandable and productive as one comes to recognize the book's long gestation (350n7, for example, thanks Carter Revard for sharing a work before its publication—in 2001) and Kerby-Fulton's reliance on a lifetime's worth of rich archival and conceptual work. Her expertise on professional scribes, on William Langland's "reformist apocalypticism" (174), on Middle English manuscripts in their full material context, and on books under suspicion, among many other topics, comes extensively into play here.

Late in *The Clerical Proletariat* Kerby-Fulton characterizes cathedral histories as "weaving an unlikely number of strands, some slender, into a strangely hybrid kind of whole cloth" (268). This makes for a delightfully apt description of her own book if we stipulate that "whole cloth" is not intended to indicate any disrespect for the tapestry thus created. By bringing W. A. Pantin's "submerged" clerics (2) into view as authors while submerging the reader in their world, Kerby-Fulton makes newly visible to literary scholars a whole milieu whose effects on medieval English literary production have only now, with her work, begun to be fully appreciated.

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K. J. KESSELRING and NATALIE MEARS, eds. *Star Chamber Matters: An Early Modern Court and Its Records*. IHR Conference Series. London: University of London Press, 2021. Pp. 220. \$55.00 (cloth).
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Edited by K. J. Kesselring and Natalie Mears, *Star Chamber Matters: An Early Modern Court and Its Records* is the product of a two-day conference held at Durham in July 2019 to discuss recent work on the Court of Star Chamber, a Crown tribunal that tried civil and criminal cases

from the late fifteenth century until its dissolution in 1640 but whose name is still, to this day, a by-word for arbitrary government. In their introduction, Kesselring and Mears establish their purpose in studying the court for its own sake rather than adjudicating on whether it deserves its negative historical reputation or should instead be praised for any contemporary “popularity” (13–15). Indeed, Kesselring and Mears provide a very helpful set of reflections on how, exactly, historians measure popularity of a law-court: whether by case numbers alone (always tricky to count) or by the proportion of “common” people (11) served (inevitably difficult to delineate). They conclude that Star Chamber was popular in neither of these senses within the broader course of the legal system, and so historians’ energies are more helpfully expended by using this court as a way into a tumultuous historical period and the people who lived through it. The eleven chapters that follow do just this, proceeding from the early Tudor years right up to the Long Parliament.

Broad scope notwithstanding, *Star Chamber Matters* is closely informed by the material remains of Star Chamber. Opening the contributions is Daniel Gosling’s overview of the collections at the National Archives and elsewhere, updating and superseding the guide produced decades ago now by John Guy in light of recent improvements to the digitization and cataloguing of the records (John Guy, *The Court of Star Chamber and its Records to the Reign of Elizabeth I* [1985]). Gosling also encourages readers to look not just at the pleadings and depositions with which historians are most familiar but also the warrants for writs, the diets of the judges, and extant transcriptions taken from the records by near-contemporary scholars. Accordingly, the rest of the contributions advance creative readings of well-studied Star Chamber materials and novel examinations of more overlooked documents too. Clare Egan explores the material qualities of the libels that are still appended to bills; Hillary Taylor explores the fuller breadth of pleadings to reconstruct the experience of defendants, who are often lost by the wayside in our focus on petitioners and petitions; and Kesselring overcomes the problem of missing decrees by deploying the Exchequer lists of fines for their summaries of Star Chamber judgments on forced marriages.

Elsewhere, contributors look beyond the archival holdings by focusing on key cases, fruitfully exploring the place of Star Chamber in longer lawsuits. Louis A. Knafla charts a rape case in Snargate, Kent, as it was tried in formal and informal, local, and central forums. Emily Kadens offers a compelling metric for assessing the motivation behind simultaneous litigation, pointing out that the Star Chamber strand of the early seventeenth-century marine insurance fraud case that she tracks contained much less personal and circumstantial detail than did its iterations in Chancery and the London Assurance Chamber and so may have been designed only to force stays or judgments elsewhere. Other contributors turn to sources outside legal repositories altogether: in chapters on the Jacobean court by Simon Healy and Ian Williams, printed news and newsletters that reported Star Chamber goings-on are helpfully compared with the more perfunctory legal sources.

An admirable endeavor animating the contributions is the illumination of a wide range of issues and subjects through the Star Chamber archive. Although, as Kesselring and Mears state in the introduction, contributions about the classic Star-Chamber topics of riot, landscape, and popular politics were not adapted from the conference into the volume—partly a result of pandemic-related pressures—other flourishing lines of investigation take center stage instead. Gendered readings of litigation and law are given strong coverage in the front half of the volume, in essays by Deborah Youngs, Knafla, Sadie Jarrett, and Kesselring. In the process, important interpretive caveats are raised, particularly in the back-to-back chapters by Youngs and Knafla regarding the vague contemporary categorizations of “rape,” “ravishment,” and “abduction” on display in Star Chamber’s protection of young heiresses. Such observations contribute to a currently growing body of work on the problems and possibilities offered to women within the early modern legal system (Bronach Kane and Fiona Williamson, eds., *Women, Agency, and the Law, 1300–1700* [2013]; Alexandra Shepard and Tim Stretton, eds., *Women Negotiating the Boundaries of Justice in Britain, 1300–1700*, *Journal of British*

Studies 58: Special Issue 4 [2019]; Teresa Phipps and Deborah Youngs, eds., *Litigating Women: Gender and Justice in Europe, c.1300–c.1800* [2022]). Elsewhere, the physical and anecdotal accounts of libelous performances in the Jacobean Star Chamber are situated within the “spectatorial turn” in literary studies (138) by Egan, while examinations by Kadens and Healy of marine and bullion fraud look outward to the international implications of Star Chamber litigation.

Together, the contributions to *Star Chamber Matters* demonstrate the benefits to be gained from collaborative work on one (admittedly very rich) legal archive. Certainly, the early and mid-Tudor years get less attention than do the well-documented years of Elizabeth and James, and the essays coalesce around a few key subject areas (gender/marriage and fraud). Yet, the balance of detailed case studies by Jarrett, Knafla, Kesselring, Kadens, and Healy and the broader surveys of the archive and its demographics by Gosling, Youngs, Taylor, and Williams makes for a collection that proves the value of a single-court study for mixing the specific with the general. *Star Chamber Matters* will surely serve as an introductory text for the increasing number of graduate students working on petitioning and justice in early modern England and beyond. For those more well versed in law courts and their records, the contributions are thought-provoking too: on the machinations behind litigation, popular knowledge of the law and its processes, and how historians approach truth and fiction in the archives. Star Chamber undoubtedly still has much to offer scholars in the study of the “contested co-creation of ‘justice’” (17).

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K. J. KESSELRING and TIM STRETTON. *Marriage, Separation, and Divorce in England, 1500–1700*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022. Pp. 224. \$100.00 (cloth).
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Prior to the Restoration, there were only two types of formal divorce in England: annulment, granted if there was a previously unacknowledged bar to a union, and separation *a mensa et thoro* (from table and bed), granted to allow spouses to live apart without dissolving their marriage bond. In *Marriage, Separation, and Divorce in England, 1500–1700*, K. J. Kesselring and Tim Stretton observe that the English did not introduce full divorce after the Reformation, unlike all other Protestant jurisdictions, and they suggest that this was due in part to the complicating effects of coverture, the common law doctrine by which married women lost their independent legal existence, becoming *femes covert* (covered women), subsumed within the personhood of their husbands. Though this suggestion is credible enough, the reader might have been offered more technical details about the distinctive legal problems that could have arisen due to coverture. Kesselring and Stretton admit that the assemblies of some English colonies later managed to grant full divorces regardless of the inherited law of coverture (168).

Kesselring and Stretton begin with an analysis of lawsuits related to marital separation brought before the Privy Council, Court of Chancery, and Court of Requests, most of which concern property or maintenance disputes between estranged couples. They also discuss private separations arranged without reference to courts of any kind, which appear as early as the sixteenth century. In chapter 2, they discuss another selection of lawsuits brought before the Court of Star Chamber. It may not be quite right to say that Star Chamber could void marriages (53). They discuss *Dawes v. Sherman* (1604), in which a marriage contract is said to have been “made voyde” in Star Chamber because the wife was under sixteen and there was no parental consent, in contravention of 4 & 5 Philip and Mary, c. 8. The