

using Ovid as a practical handbook for harm. Worse yet, they literalize Ovidian transformation in the form of mutilated human bodies. In Barret's subtle and fascinating reading, *Titus Andronicus* (c. 1588) stages a *sotto voce* critique of centuries' worth of training in reading the classics in moralizing fashion: the play parodies and ironizes reading the *Metamorphoses* as a spur to action. *Cymbeline* (c. 1611), in contrast, draws not from classical texts but from English's peculiar grammar to invent a narrative time that is "future perfect" (163): characters anticipate a future valuable for the stories that, in that prospective time, they will have been able to tell. Cleopatra, however, dreads seeing herself portrayed at Caesar's triumph by "saucy lictors" and "scald rhymers" because those comedians' extemporaneous performances, like the couplets of the ballads they sing, are all too predictable and reproducible (*Antony and Cleopatra*, c. 1607). Shakespeare associates the untrammelled future not with extemporaneous performance but with the kind of ekphrastic scripting that only Shakespeare himself can produce: Enobarbus's depiction of Cleopatra on her barge, or Iachimo's of the tapestry in Imogen's bedroom. The days of future past in which Shakespeare invests his theater require what John Keats would call a state of mind "capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts" (letter to George and Thomas Keats, 1817).

In an epilogue, Barret contrasts Adam's initial postlapsarian hope to remain in Eden in a static eternity of mournful nostalgia with the wandering, inconclusive mode of romance with which *Paradise Lost* (1667) ends. I wished to hear more about how John Milton's epic crafts open-ended futurity. (One thinks of the multiple alternative worlds Satan bypasses, not stopping to ask who inhabits them.) Barret tends to focus intently on a few moments in each work rather than on larger structures and multiple incidents. But this is perhaps the point. A malleable future cannot be found everywhere in a literary work, for then we would know to expect it. And then we would have a narrative that imprisons itself rather than seeks *Paradise Lost's* exit into a world of limitless, untold futures.

Katherine Eggert  
 University of Colorado Boulder  
[Katherine.eggert@colorado.edu](mailto:Katherine.eggert@colorado.edu)

TIMOTHY BOLTON. *Cnut the Great*. Yale English Monarchs. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017. Pp. 272. \$40.00 (cloth).  
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In *Cnut the Great*, a much-needed biography of one of Anglo-Saxon England's most successful rulers, Timothy Bolton presents an accessible and thorough, if at times flawed, interpretation not just of Cnut's reign but of northwestern Europe, especially Scandinavia, during the late tenth and early to mid-eleventh centuries. After introducing the many and varied sources that inform our understanding of Cnut and the world in which he lived, Bolton begins, largely due to a lack of evidence for his subject's childhood years, with an overview of Danish society in the tenth and eleventh centuries. By examining the family that came to dominate southern Denmark in the tenth century, Bolton establishes the power and precarity of the dynasty built up by Cnut's grandfather, Harald, and father, Swen.

An account of the conquest of England by Cnut's father follows. Here Bolton presents a readable synthesis of earlier scholarship, emphasizing the formative nature of the events of 1013 on the young Cnut, and his skill and fortune in 1016, when he conquered England. Bolton delves into the charter material and skaldic verse to show how Cnut skillfully handled the "mare's nest" (93) of competing interests at his court, rewarding some through

lands, titles, and proximity to the king and punishing others through exile and execution. With the exile of Thorkell the Tall, perhaps the most powerful figure in England after Cnut himself, we see Cnut's eyes turn northwards, and his activities in the "hornet's nest" (129) of Denmark and Norway pick up the narrative. While the evidence for this period of Cnut's life has been the subject of excellent and extensive study, Bolton weaves together his own idiosyncratic narrative by drawing on the evidence of pottery, coinage, skaldic poetry, confraternity books, and thirteenth-century prose sagas to enrich our understanding of contemporary Scandinavia.

A chapter considering Cnut's dealings with the rulers of continental Europe follows, and Cnut's later life, including these episodes and his final years as ruler of England offer Bolton the opportunity to develop the biographical elements of the study, emphasizing Cnut's skill as a strategist and negotiator. The biography ends with a brief overview of the years of instability following Cnut's death, setting the stage for the reign of Edward the Confessor.

Bolton's biography follows his *The Empire of Cnut the Great* (2009) and a number of articles considering the Anglo-Scandinavian elite in the eleventh century: his knowledge of the period remains impressive. Bolton gathers together diverse and difficult evidence and with it weaves a narrative of Cnut's career, successfully showing Cnut to be a hegemonic king, skilled in being "all things to all men" (128) across very different territories. His handling of the Scandinavian material is certainly the key strength of the work. Bolton makes optimistic and bold arguments for the utility and value of prose saga evidence, and if at times his reasons for doing so are unconvincing, the material nevertheless presents thought-provoking additions to our knowledge of Cnut. In writing a biographical study Bolton is obviously hampered by the limited evidence, but does an excellent job of bringing out Cnut's personality, particularly focusing on his skill in negotiation, fluid cultural identity and ruthlessness in battle.

Yet *Cnut the Great* can make for difficult reading. Bolton's sometimes irascible attitude to other scholars' bubbles throughout the work, and his selective citation of existing scholarship that helped build the field of Cnut studies is often inscrutable: certain works and commentators are given undue focus, elsewhere seminal works are confined to cursory footnotes. Bolton frequently sets himself up as a (near) lone voice against "modern" scholars (3), but this combative tone ultimately weakens the work rather than strengthens it. Connected to this is Bolton's deliberately old-fashioned style of writing, which brings with it some undesirable tendencies, including focus on a binary ethnic identity divide between Scandinavians and English in north-western Europe that most commentators now treat with greater nuance and caution.

Secondly, while a broad view of Cnut's kingdoms is undoubtedly necessary in the biography of an early medieval king, digressions and at times bewildering levels of detail and investigation into peripheral people or questions disrupt the narrative and leave the reader perplexed as to their significance; this tendency will prove all the more confusing to the lay reader. Thirdly, while the chapter discussing the Continent and Cnut's relationship with the Frankish and German kings of this period presents some of the most interesting and original discussion, it is also problematic, and ultimately unconvincing. Bolton's argument that Cnut involved himself in a campaign to deny Conrad II the title of Roman Emperor before attending the same king's imperial coronation rests on a very optimistic imagining of Cnut's importance on the European stage. Elsewhere in the chapter, minor inaccuracies build to create the sense that Bolton is out of his comfort zone: Henry II is wrongly referred to as "The Emperor" in 1002 (171), Conrad II's imperial coronation is called an "imperial election" (171), while the king of France is said to have a "territorial base was at nearly the opposite end of Europe from [Cnut's]" (168). In this vein, while most typographical errors are insignificant, through an unfortunate slip Bolton claims that in 1036 "Godwine was arrested ... and subsequently blinded and incarcerated at Ely" (198). For the reader less well acquainted with the vagaries of the Anglo-Saxon interregnum, it will be a surprise when Godwine, revived, digs up the body of Harold Harefoot two pages later (200).

Despite its limitations, *Cnut the Great* is a valuable addition to scholarship, bringing together previously scattered or neglected evidence to create a holistic view of the king and

his times. For the interested general reader, the biography presents a comprehensive and informative interpretation of Cnut's life that will encourage repeat reading. For those familiar with his life there is perhaps more to disagree with, but Bolton nevertheless presents an interesting and thought-provoking view of Cnut's reign that will inform debate for years to come.

Alice Hicklin

*Friedrich-Meinecke-Institut, Freie Universität Berlin*

[alicehicklin@zedat.fu-berlin.de](mailto:alicehicklin@zedat.fu-berlin.de)

MICHAEL J. BRADDICK and PHIL WITHINGTON, eds. *Popular Culture and Political Agency in Early Modern England and Ireland: Essays in Honour of John Walter*. Studies in Early Modern Cultural, Political and Social History 26. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2017. Pp. 311. \$99.00 (cloth).

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Over the past four decades, John Walter has written brilliantly on a broad array of interconnected issues—on the politics of subsistence and the history of the state; on crowds and riots, protest and violence; on political agency and political consciousness; on gesture and gender; on religious commitment and confessional division; and on the entangled operations of power and resistance, legitimation, and negotiation. An accomplished essayist and master of the microstudy, he has been a key figure in the cohort of historians who have put the “political” back into social history; equally significantly, he has led the charge among a much smaller group of historians who have put the “social” back into high political history. The heavyweight list of contributors to this festschrift, *Popular Culture and Political Agency in Early Modern England and Ireland*, drawn from Walter's colleagues, collaborators, and friends, makes clear his significance in contemporary early modern studies. The fourteen essays collected by editors Michael Braddick and Phil Withington are short and suggestive rather than definitive, but they are uniformly interesting and range impressively across social, cultural, and political history, reaching back into the later Middle Ages and forward into the nineteenth century, but centering primarily on early modern England and Ireland.

Braddick and Withington cede responsibility for an overview of Walter's career to Keith Thomas, whose occasionally combative assessment contextualizes Walter's work in its Cambridge and Essex academic milieus, and in the new, anthropologically informed social history. Richard M. Smith and Paul Slack offer interesting papers on aspects of governmentality and the history of the state. Smith sketches out the later medieval social and political origins of a new set of relationships between the crown and the village elites it would come to depend upon to exercise power in the localities; while Slack explores how the economic and political crisis of the 1620s created conditions for an intellectual rupture that would transform how English governments would understand and administer the economy.

Alexandra Shepard and Amanda Flather explore women's agency within the gendered “grids of power” that structured early modern society. Shepard cleverly uses civil law depositions to reconstruct how women presented themselves as “earners and producers” (78), and suggests that women's self-conception as honest laborers with multiple responsibilities may have provided a legitimating script for participation in popular protest. Flather sketches a potentially fascinating argument about the gendered experience of Laudianism in the 1630s, suggesting that a distinctive female experience of the new ceremonialism shaped women's participation in a variety of anti-Laudian protests from refusing to be churched to acts of iconoclasm to formal denunciations of scandalous ministers.