When Women Ruled the World: Making the Renaissance in Europe. By MAUREEN QUILLIGAN. New York: Liberight Publishing Corporation, W. W. Norton & Company, 2021. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. ix, 289.

Maureen Quilligan's *When Women Ruled the World: Making the Renaissance in Europe* (2021) is a revisionist history of the Renaissance and early modern period, arguing that the sixteenth century witnessed a unique European geopolitical sphere, shaped mainly by the collaborative activities of four powerful queens: Mary and Elizabeth Tudor of England, Mary Stuart (Queen of Scots), and Catherine de'Medici (queen regent of France for her three sons). Quilligan, a celebrated Renaissance scholar of women and literature, contradicts traditional historical portrayals that oblige viewers to see these queens as lone adversaries driven by personal animosity. Instead, she speculates that the queens were aware of their shared position as female rulers in a world dominated with powerful men and actively fostered a culture of mutual respect and deliberate union.

The author's subtle argument in the book is that the androcentric, traditional historical description of 16th-century European female monarchs as competitive and inimical to each other by nature is inaccurate. Male-centric narratives and scholarship ultimately misjudged the interpersonal and power dynamics of the four queens. Indeed, the book begins by observing John Knox's outrage in his 1558 treatise, *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, regarding the record number of women holding supreme governmental power in 16th-century Europe as "A. Repugnant to nature. B. Contumely to GOD. C. The subversion of good order, if all equity and justice" (ix). Rather, the author interprets these queens as a "regiment" who actively encouraged and shielded each other through the exchange of meaningful gifts, which the author refers to as "inalienable possessions" (xii). Quilligan's overall argument centers on the complex web of these inalienable possessions that bound these queens.

She carefully examines the exchange of things, ranging from costly jewelry, baptismal fonts, and embroidered textiles to lettered books and poems. These gifts were not just signs of cordiality but consciously chosen instruments of statecraft and acts of solidarity. It is here how these women interacted with each other, specifically through the gifts that they gave, particularly since the "reciprocity of exchanges is fundamental to most social connections and so gift-giving is a signal ritual in demonstrating […] loyalty" (108). These gifts, Quilligan illustrates, served as a means of language to speak the queens' political agendas, consolidated power, and negotiated the complexity of European power in the shadow of an institutionally patriarchal world and increasing challenge posed by the Protestant Reformation. The author unveils the fascinating agency and political acumen exercised by these women in the shadow of traditionally male-told histories.

She structures her book in thematic order by dynastic houses, with part one starting with House Tudor. The first part introduces Mary Tudor's succession after the death of her brother, Edward VI, confounded by her Catholic faith in a kingdom dialectically divided between Protestant (or, more specifically, Anglican) and Catholic. When accused of conspiring in the Protestant Wyatt Rebellion, Mary imprisoned her half-sister Elizabeth in the Tower of London. After pleas from Elizabeth to provide her counterevidence of treason, Mary required that physical proof be brought against Elizabeth, none of which materialized. When Elizabeth refused to confess to her association with Wyatt, Mary placed her under house arrest for two years, neither condemning nor exonerating her. When Mary's supposed pregnancy is determined false, confirming her bareness, it was at the encouragement of her husband, Philip II of Spain, that Mary should allow her half-sister back into court. With the death of Mary, Elizabeth's reign began with the bold refusal to marry Philip II. She adorned imperial jewelry to demonstrate that

she, by her right, did not need her father's, Philips's, or New World's possessions to wear them. Elizabeth would have to contend with another Mary, Mary Stuart, her cousin, as queen of Scotland.

In part two, House Stuart, focuses on Mary Stuart (later Mary, Queen of Scots) and her troubled reign in a kingdom where Scottish lairds coalesced around John Knox's Presbyterianism and collectively ruled independently in her absence as Dauphine of France. She gives birth to a son who would succeed the royal line in Scotland and England. William Cecil, Elizabeth's Protestant advisor, fearing a possible return of Catholicism, made strides to manipulate an impending danger the Catholic Mary posed to England. When it comes to inalienable possessions, Elizabeth offered Mary a baptismal font made from twenty-two pounds of gold. Mary, in turn, asked Elizabeth to name her newborn son. It speaks on unity and toleration between Protestant and Catholic monarchs. Ultimately, Mary Stuart would be forced to abdicate, escape captivity, and seek protection from her cousin in England. Cecil orchestrated her forced abdication by connecting her marriage to Earl of Bothwell as harlotry and evidence as a supposed co-conspirator in Lord Darnley's murder, Mary's first husband. After nineteen years of house arrest, Mary became the focus of several plots aimed at assassinating Elizabeth. Based on the evidence doctored by Cecil, Elizabeth reluctantly agreed to put Mary on trial for treason, of which Mary was found guilty. However, Elizabeth hesitated to sign the death warrant. After much pressure from her advisors, particularly Cecil, Elizabeth finally signs the death warrant, but did not intend to send it to Fotheringhay Castle that imprisoned Mary. However, Cecil and others sent the letter to Fotheringhay without Elizabeth's knowledge. Mary, Queen of Scots, was executed and Elizabeth not informed until afterwards.

In part three, the Medici, focuses on the queenship of Catherine de'Medici, who, unlike the three other queens, ruled as the mother and regent of three kings. Born into the Medici family, through Italian and French bloodline, Catherine initially played a less prominent role in French court politics, sidelined by King Henry II's mistress, but began to assert her influence after her husband's death and the subsequent regency of her sons. As tensions between Catholics and Huguenots escalated, she attempted a policy of religious tolerance. Catherine's primary goal was to maintain the power of the Valois dynasty and a unified France. However, with waning control over her volatile second son, Charles IX, in favor of the Huguenot admiral, Gaspard de Coligny, who proposed attacking the Netherlands (hence, declaring war on Spain), she devised a political strategy. To prevent an unnecessary and catastrophic war, she lifted a royal ban on blood feuding to instigate a political assassination on Coligny that can be blamed on the de Guise family, the latter more than willing to do. Her calculated political move attempted to minimize necessary casualties but unleashed an unprecedented carnage that culminated in the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre. Despite the religious violence during her third son's reign, Henri III, Catherine continued to seek political solutions to the religious divisions. Catherine commanded Pierre de Ronsard, a renowned French poet, to write a book dedicated to Elizabeth, which went as far as to defend female-led monarchial rule. To an extent, she became a quasi-mentor to both Elizabeth and Mary, warning that patriarchs of the Reformation would upend their collective rule as female monarchs. Her role Quilligan refers to as "mother to the three 'real' queens" (186). In terms of inalienable possessions, Catherine commissioned the eight Valois Tapestries to commemorate her projects, such as buildings, parks, and cultural festivities, during her reign as Queen-Regent.

In part four, the Hapsburgs, centers on not a queen but King Philip II of Spain. Philip installed several female relatives into positions of power throughout Europe to cement Hapsburg rule. In a surprising reversal, unlike the Protestant figures who influenced, manipulated, and added external pressure on Elizabeth and Mary Stuart, Philip attempted to reinstate the dominance of the Catholic faith in England and stake his claim to the English via a will by Mary Stuart, who named him her heir. With Elizabeth's refusal in hand of marriage, thereby losing an alliance with England, and privateering of Spanish treasure fleets by Francis Drake, Philip used Mary's regicidal execution as a *casus belli* to invade England. Through the then-colossal Spanish Armada, his attempts failed catastrophically to achieve either of his goals, due primarily from his excessive micromanaging and poor communication between his top commanders.

Quilligan stands on the shoulders of decades of feminist scholarship that attempted to recover women's voices and experiences from androcentric history. One of the most powerful strengths of the book is the anthropological approach in which Quilligan treats her subject. While she emphasizes the cooperative nature of these queens' relationships, she does not shy away from their strategic maneuverings, mainly concerning dynastic rulership. The queens' recognition of a shared female identity and a common stake in maintaining their dynastic power often worked above personal animosities. The author's key sources, like individual letters and gift accounts, lend substantial credibility to what she is arguing. The core methodology is based on employing novel anthropological theories on women's material gift-giving. The gift exchange is employed to build social distinction and, ultimately, political authority among the women and their kin over many generations.

The book is not without its potential points of disagreement and issues. Some would argue with the extent to which these queens truly "ruled" in an era still dominated mainly by

patriarchal structures. While she presents a strong case for their profound impact, the relative power still arguably rested with male advisors and institutions built over centuries by patriarchal rulers. Another glaring issue with book is its structure, given its inconsistent, to-and-fro timeline, which inevitably causes tedious and unclear repetition. If Quilligan provided a genealogical map, it helps to visually discern all the convoluted royal lineages and blood ties.

Quilligan's book is an insightful contribution to Renaissance scholarship. Focusing on the often overlooked relationships between four powerful sixteenth-century queens, she offers a new perspective on a pivotal period in Renaissance and early modern European history. Her meticulously researched and illustrated book is a must for anyone interested in the Renaissance, women's history, and the entangled dynamics of power and realpolitik.