

**The New Elizabethan Age: Culture, Society and National Identity After World War II**, edited by Irene Morra and Rob Gossedge, London and New York, I.B. Tauris, 2016, 348pp., £69.00 (hardback), ISBN: 978-1-78453-179-9

Irene Morra and Rob Gossedge's edited volume arrives during a period of increasing academic interest in the British monarchy, after a period of scholarly neglect of the subject in the early 2000s (analysis of the Princess Diana phenomena aside). Mandy Merck's *The British Monarchy on Screen*<sup>i</sup> and Matthew Glencross, Judith Rowbotham and Michael D. Kandiah's *The Windsor Dynasty 1910 to the Present*<sup>ii</sup> speak to the resurgence of interest in the popular history of the contemporary Windsor family, and this interest can perhaps be attributed to the approaching end of Queen Elizabeth II's reign and the accession of King Charles III. Popular culture has also embraced this revived interest: Netflix's *The Crown*<sup>iii</sup>, for instance, focuses upon the social, political and cultural shifts taking place in Britain upon the crowning of Elizabeth II. *The New Elizabethan Age* addresses these shifts, and the chapters explore a wealth of case studies including television, opera, ballet, theatre, film, children's literature, music, and many more, in order to ascertain how these impact/were impacted by the New Elizabethan Age.

The book begins with Morra and Gossedge's short introduction, as they outline the key themes running through the volume. The editors explain how notions of a New Elizabethan Age have often been forgotten, or dismissed as a 'curious, fleeting manifestation of media hype and nationalist, monarchist fervour' (p.1). However its importance should not be underestimated, they argue, and the themes established in the early 1950s to manufacture and maintain a sense of collective British national identity can still be perceived today. As the title of the volume suggests, Morra and Gossedge place a lot of weight on the meaning of a "New Elizabethan Age", and aside from a small section in Morra's concluding chapter about *Guardian* journalist Polly Toynbee's dismissal of the Elizabethan Age in comparison to the historical onus placed on the Victorian or Edwardian eras, they undertake no critique of its significance. The subsequent chapters also appear to take the term largely for granted, and as listed earlier, everything from the development of television to Arts Councils is explained in terms of its (sometimes tenuous) connections to the new monarch. Although this analysis is certainly illuminating, a critique of the concept would be a welcome addition to the volume.

The sixteen edited chapters are categorised into five sections: 'Origins and Legacies', 'A Family of Nations', 'Cultural Memory', 'Elizabethans Young and New', and

‘Shakespeare, Spectacle and Society’. With such a wealth of material, it is difficult to summarise the book’s full scope. There are, however, a number of highlights.

‘The ‘New’ Elizabeth and Scotland: The Royal Style and the British Constitution’ by Kelly de Luca, and ‘Wales and the Crown: Coronation, Investiture and Jubilee, 1953-2002’ by Rob Gossedge, and ‘The Elective Affinity of the New Elizabethan Nation’ by Arthur Aughey are a particular highpoint coalesced around the same theme. All three deal with often-neglected issues around national identity in the constituent nations of the UK, and they weave together a fascinating archive of materials from Elizabeth II’s Coronation and other key royal events in order to ascertain the various reactions to royalty across the UK. De Luca’s account of popular culture and political materials and Gossedge’s exploration of public perception, in particular, offer a wealth of valuable materials for monarchical scholars.

Chapter 9, ‘Young Elizabethans, Young Readers and An Incomplete Vision’ by Helen Phillips is also memorable. Focusing on children’s comics and magazines, Phillips begins by describing their engagement with the Coronation and then traces key publications throughout the late twentieth century to highlight prevailing themes. Her description of Coronation editions is invaluable to those interested in the contemporary monarchy, and her analysis makes interesting connections between both reverence and irreverence amongst popular publications.

Although the overall fit of some chapters is a little questionable – playwright Edward Bond’s contributions feel a little anomalous, for example – the variety of topics should be applauded. The chapters which deal broadly with the arts, such as Melanie Bigold’s ‘English Ballet: A National Art for the New Elizabethan’ and ‘The New Elizabethan Soundtrack’ by Stephen Banfield are a little left of field with their focus on ballet and music, respectively; however these contributions are a welcome variation on more traditional focuses on film, television and print media, and consider aspects of British culture which have rarely been theorised before. This also has the potential to open the book up beyond monarchical scholars to an audience interested in the social, cultural and political dimensions of Britain since 1952 in general; hence the book’s contribution to British cultural and social history is wide-ranging.

Overall, *The New Elizabethan Age* is a valuable contribution to monarchical scholarship. The wealth of themes and objects of study in this volume are bound to appeal to a range of historians, as well as to interdisciplinary researchers in the arts,

sociology, or media studies. As Morra and Gossedge have demonstrated, the time is certainly ripe for more monarchical academic analysis of this kind.

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<sup>i</sup> Mandy Merck (ed.), *The British Monarchy On Screen*, (Manchester, 2016)

<sup>ii</sup> Matthew Glencross, Judith Rowbotham and Michael D. Kandiah (eds.), *The Windsor Dynasty 1910 to the Present*, (London, 2016)

<sup>iii</sup> Peter Morgan, *The Crown*, (Netflix, 2016-)