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Death & the Virgin Queen: Elizabeth I & the dark scandal that rocked the throne, Chris Skidmore (book review)

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British Royal Lore


Castor (fellow in history, Univ. of Cambridge; Blood and Roses: One Family's Struggle and Triumph During the Tumultuous Wars of the Roses) readabley recounts the lives of six women who exercised—or tried to exercise—political power in England prior to Elizabeth I: Matilda, granddaughter of William the Conqueror; Eleanor of Aquitaine; Isabella of France; Margaret of Anjou; Jane Grey; and Mary Tudor. The story of Elizabeth I's ultimate accession can be fully appreciated only when viewed in the context of these women's earlier struggles to hold power in a society where female rule was seen as grotesque and an immoral aberration. In light of source limitations and the bias of contemporary chroniclers, Castor has done a masterful job of outlining the burdens these women faced—public scrutiny and ridicule, imprisonment, incorrigible husbands, political manipulation—as they attempted to secure the political prizes that should have fallen to them had not their gender been an impediment to rulership. VERDICT Genealogical charts and maps will help general readers follow a narrative lacking scholarly apparatus or historiographical debates, which will be thus of less interest to specialists. Readers of this engaging book should appeal not only to beauty enthusiasts but also to students of corporate histories, who will relish the wealth of detail, providing enough context for lighter history reading on the lives of British monarchs and really good scandals.—Elizabeth Nelson, UOP Lib., Des Plaines, IL


The relationship between Elizabeth I and her favorite courtier, Lord Robert Dudley, was one of the more infamous aspects of Elizabeth's reign—and it became an even greater controversy when in 1560 Dudley's wife, Amy Robsart, was found dead at the bottom of a staircase, her neck broken. The strange circumstances provided fuel for speculation then and now: Was it an accident? Suicide? Or a murder arranged to leave Dudley free to marry the queen? Drawing extensively on historical documents, including the original coroner's report, only recently uncovered in the UK's National Archives, Skidmore (history, Bristol Univ.; Edward VI: The Last King of England) not only examines the various theories surrounding these long-standing questions but also provides an in-depth look at how Amy's death and Elizabeth and Dudley's relationship affected the early years of the Virgin Queen's reign. VERDICT Those hoping for an answer to this mystery will be disappointed, as Skidmore affirms that potential solutions rely too heavily on conjecture to be definitive. Nonetheless, owing to the wealth of detail, both academics and general readers with an interest in Tudor history will find much of interest.—Kathleen McCallister, Univ. of South Carolina Lib., Columbia

The likeliest audience is readers who already believe that Limbaugh is racist, sexist, and homophobic. Wilson (Patriotic Correctness: Academic Freedom and Its Enemies) has spent hours listening to Limbaugh broadcasts and reading transcripts. To illustrate how dangerous and extreme Limbaugh's ideas are, he examines the language he uses to describe women and minorities, dissects "Limbaughonomics," and documents the misinformation broadcast on health-care reform. Wilson decries Limbaugh's impact on civil political discourse. VERDICT With over 2000 footnotes, this book almost serves as a reference tool to document Limbaugh's extreme views. It provides more description than analysis and, with its extensive documentation, can be slow reading. Of interest to liberal readers and scholars concerned about Limbaugh's influence on American society and politics.—Judy Solberg, Seattle Univ. Lib.

ECONOMICS


Beauty became a huge business in the last century, largely through the pioneering efforts of Helena Rubinstein and L'Oréal creator Eugène Schueller. Brandon (Germes: The Lives and Times of the Real Jane Eyre) provides a deep, probing account of how their companies grew to dominate the world's first-ever, self-made woman tycoon. Her competitor and ultimate purchaser of her empire Schueller was himself of "humble" origins but through formal science study followed a very different path. Brandon skillfully proceeds from individual histories to explore the improbable phenomenon of bringing together the life's work of these business giants, whose goals, ethics, and backgrounds could hardly have been more incompatible. The final result was an enormously lucrative global enterprise. VERDICT This engaging book should appeal not only to beauty enthusiasts but also to students of corporate histories, who will relish the compelling aspects of the unlikely crossing of paths of two hugely successful entrepreneurs.—Richard Drezen, Brooklyn, NY
