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Queen Anne: Patroness of Arts
James Anderson Winn
(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Review by:
Julie Farguson

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Queen Anne: Patroness of Arts. By James Anderson Winn. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. ISBN 978-0-199-37219-5. xxi + 792 pp. £30.

Over the three hundred and two years since her death, historians have generally given Queen Anne a bad press. Much of the historiography covering the reign of the last Stuart monarch (r. 1702-1714) ignores her as a political actor, concentrating instead on personal and physical characteristics or her relationships with female courtiers such as Sarah, duchess of Marlborough. Sarah's self-serving perception that the queen had "no Original Thoughts on any Subject," (*The Private Diary of William, First Earl Cowper, Lord Chancellor of England*, ed. E.C. Hawtrey (1833), 49) was uninformed, and lacked intelligence, continues to dog Anne's reputation as queen. James Winn's book joins a growing body of scholarship that challenges traditional views on Queen Anne, making us look afresh at one of the most underestimated women in British political history.

Using the biographical format, and centring his narrative on the various courts she attended, Winn guides readers through Anne's life. To those scholars who know this period of history well, some of this – in outline at least – will be familiar ground. The territory Winn charts in the early chapters is less travelled. This particularly applies to the section on the Denmarks' court in the 1690s. Rich in new discoveries, these parts of the book are especially revealing. Each chapter begins with a vivid description of a royal event, from the celebrations at the Restoration court in the days following Anne's wedding in the summer of 1683, to a performance of Giovanni Bononcini's opera *Camilla,* staged at St James's Palace on 28 August 1707. The chapters then move backwards and forwards across a two to three year period of Anne's life that surrounds the event in question. Winn also works outward from the court to include politicians and courtiers in his analysis, along with the writers, artists, and performers who dominated the contemporary scene. Winn has an impressive command of the political history of the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and he incorporates fascinating details, not only on the politics of the period, which were fractious and difficult, but also on the social lives of the elite. The main focus of Winn's book, however, is the works produced by poets, painters, and musicians for the queen. Some of these came about as the direct result of Anne's patronage, although many other interested parties, such as Sidney Godolphin, commissioned pieces for the attention of the monarch. As Winn points out, politics and the arts were fused during this period, and politicians used whatever means possible to promote their views.

The book has been meticulously researched and the result is a magisterial work, written with deftness and vivacity. Winn is a literary scholar and his prowess at textual analysis comes to the fore as he forensically dissects well-

known poems, such as Pope's *Windsor Forest*, but also less familiar texts, such as the words recited during a pageant in Wiltshire, held in Anne's honour during her 1702 progress. But Winn pays greatest attention to opera and mu-sic. Anne loved music, and it played an important part in her life before and after she became queen. Musicologists such as Donald Burrows have already written on some of these aspects, often in specialist books and journals. Winn, however, unearths new material, providing twenty-eight examples of musical scores in the text with links to a companion website where readers can hear the samples being beautifully played and sung. In placing musical performances centre stage, Winn demonstrates the enormous significance of singing and instrumental music to the cultural world of Queen Anne and her courtiers, and the political culture of the age. By scrutinising Anne's musical and literary patronage, and examining and re-examining her correspondence with figures such as the Marlboroughs, the woman that emerges from these pages is far more nuanced intellectually and culturally than previously realised.

Still, there are a few irritations. Winn is very astute when it comes to the emotional and political dynamics of the royal family, but some aspects of his characterisations of William and Mary are not terribly convincing. To claim that William's apparent "disdain" for the arts in England meant that he was "incapable of recognizing [the] allegorical message[s]" (200) conveyed in poetry and printed texts seems unlikely. William received an excellent education in the Dutch Republic, had been used to receiving allegorical poetic tributes as prince of Orange and stadholder, and it is reasonable to conclude that he understood the intricate meanings behind many of these texts. The same applies to work produced in England. It is simply untrue to say that William was "disinterest[ed]…in all things artistic and intellectual" (252). To assess William's patronage in reference to his English ancestors, with their delight in poetry, music, and the theatre, is to underplay the influence of his Dutch up-bringing on his political concerns and cultural interests. William was an active patron – in England and the Dutch Republic – and in the main he focused his attention on the visual arts and architecture. The same is true of Mary, although from 1688 onwards, her activities were confined to England. William and Mary acquired and remodelled the house that became known as Kensington Palace, commissioned major extensions to Hampton Court Palace, employing artists from across Europe to create decorative schemes that can still be seen today, and at the time of his death there were plans afoot to make significant alterations to Windsor Castle. There was nothing like this level of building activity on royal domestic architecture in Anne's reign, a deficit that contemporaries noted as it was so out of step with the endeavours of other European courts. William's patronage activities were different from Anne's, reflecting the political

realities he faced, as much as his personal preferences. In representational terms, being king of England while functioning as stadholder of the Dutch Republic required a delicate balancing act. To commission poetry or other cultural works that drew on traditional divine right iconographies, in the way that Anne could, risked the alienation of the political elites in William's homeland.

Also, there are a few issues with Winn's use of visual evidence. Like many historians before him, Winn recounts the tale that Anne's robes for her first appearance in parliament were based on a portrait of Elizabeth I, and he describes Anne's robes in detail (282). In the way of all monarchs of the early modern period when they attended parliament formally, Anne wore crimson velvet robes edged in ermine. Yet the colour plate that is meant to illustrate this point shows Elizabeth in her golden coronation robes (plate 13), despite the existence of a portrait of Elizabeth dressed in her red parliamentary robes, as demonstrated by Roy Strong and others. As the colour plates are gathered in the centre of the book, and one hundred pages further on from this section, some readers may miss this slippage, especially as plate 14 shows Anne in her golden coronation robes, quietly and inaccurately implying these robes were also imitated. For those who pay close attention to visual sources and notice such inconsistencies, this will grate. While Winn is scrupulous and convincing in his documentation of musical and literary patronage, his handling of visual evidence in some instances is less assured. Winn states that following the execution of Monmouth and Argyle in 1685, James II "had a medal struck" by the medallist Regnier Arondeaux, an artist "normally employed by Louis XIV" (117). According to Winn, this medal indicates James II's "disregard for the feelings of his countrymen, both in his political actions and in his choice of artisans and images" (117). Tracing the precise provenance of medals is notoriously difficult. Winn provides no evidence of James II's involvement in the production of this medal, and neither a bust of the King, nor the wording of its inscriptions, proves he commissioned it. Scholars have shown that William III and Louis XIV employed Arondeaux, in Louis's case largely through the efforts of the Comte d' Avaux, his ambassador to the United Provinces; but there is no evidence that James commissioned medals from him. Perhaps this was a one off, but Arondeaux was Flemish, spending most of his career working in the Netherlands, and it is entirely possible that William commissioned this medal in support of his father-in-law; especially as he provided James with military assistance during the rebellion, and the suppression of Monmouth's uprising was of mutual dynastic interest. Later in the book we are told that in 1712, following his discharge from all his posts, the Duke of Marlborough "chose to express his response to being dismissed in a visual medium [and] he asked Kneller to paint his portrait" (575). Again, Winn provides no evidence that the Duke of Marlborough commissioned this politically charged portrait, so in the absence of any proof, the identity of the patron must remain uncertain. Drawing conclusions on the provenance of

any artwork without documentation is risky, and can be inadvertently misleading.

Despite these criticisms, Winn has successfully navigated the thin line between scholarly argument and compelling historical storytelling to create a work that sheds new light on Anne and much else besides. The book is a major achievement and will be essential reading for scholars working on later Stuart court culture.

JULIE FARGUSON
University of Oxford