Stacy S. Klein. *Ruling Women: Queenship and Gender in Anglo-Saxon Literature*. University of Notre Dame Press, 2006. pp. xiii + 282.

As the title leads us to expect, Stacy S. Klein's book analyzes the roles of literary queens in Anglo-Saxon texts. The subtitle might also lead us to expect a book entirely dependent on gender theory, but Klein refuses to restrict her critical point of view to one school of thought. Instead, *Ruling Queens* uses a wide variety of approaches, including not only gender theory, but also historicism, cultural analysis, and audience reception. Klein even makes use of typology, on the basis that typology was a tool often used by medieval writers to compose the works (pp. 7-8). The result is an eclectic but effective and interesting analysis of literary queens.

Klein argues, overall, "Anglo-Saxon writers used legendary royal wives to model cultural ideals of queenship during a historical period in which queenship was itself undergoing profound changes and to participate in the creation of ideologies of gender, family, spirituality, and politics which were both instantiated in and extended far beyond the rarified realm of the royal palace" (4). Chapter 1 explores Bede's use of queens–or rather, disuse of queens–in conversion narratives of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Klein here demonstrates the role of queen as peaceweaver between the clergy and the king, and the king and God. But Klein's work here also shows convincingly the marginalization of queens as agents of conversion in the *Historia* by comparing it to lesser-known contemporary documents. Chapter 2 examines Cynewulf's *Elene* in light of Anglo-Saxon ideologies of queenship, and considers Elene herself as a model of queenship, a part of overall Anglo-Saxon social structure, and a part of gender hierarchy. Elene, in Klein's analysis, becomes a link in a complex social system; she serves Constantine but rules others, and she acts as the center of the Christian community. Chapter 3 posits that *Beowulf* uses various queens (including Grendel's mother) to question the masculine heroic code dependent on strength and deeds and to explore prescribed gender roles. This chapter explores the heroic code in depth and also considers the relationship of Hrothgar and Beowulf to the heroic code and to feminine behavior. Chapter 4 analyzes Jezebel (in his translation of *Kings*) as a social critique not only of queens and their increased influence in political affairs, but also of the counselors at the court of Æthelræd the Unready. Chapter 5 continues with another of Ælfric's translations, *Esther*, and explores *Esther*'s depictions of queens Esther and Vashti as an attempt to define queenship and as a commentary on the problems of divorce and concubinage during the cultural flux of the Danish invasions and Benedictine reform. The chapters, while referring to others on occasion,

are not interdependent and could be read separately by scholars doing focused research or could be assigned to graduate students working on a particular text.

Klein's arguments are generally sensible, solidly grounded, and well aware of recent scholarship and contemporary primary texts. When possible, Klein makes good use of historical and cultural evidence, but such evidence is not always easily available. Klein openly and frankly discusses in Chapter 2 the limitations of historical and cultural approaches to many Anglo-Saxon texts–in this case, Cynewulf's *Elene*–whose composition cannot be reliably dated or located: "If we are unable to locate the text either temporally or geographically, how, then are we to historicize and understand the cultural work performed by Elene, or indeed any character within the poem?" (57). Such work, as Klein notes, is often easier with prose texts, which we can more reliably date and place (p. 57). Although Anglo-Saxon scholars generally are aware of this problem, I had not heard or read a formal discussion of it before. Klein's thorough and concise comments on the issue will hopefully lead to a wider and more open discussion of the problems and perhaps of how to innovate or adjust historical approaches when exact dating is impossible. Klein's elegant solution, in the case of *Elene*, is to explore differences between the text and its source, reasoning that Cynewulf's changes may indicate some cultural tensions of his time.

Klein's eclectic theoretical approach to the Anglo-Saxon texts prevents two problems which often bedevil modern critical works. The first is the tendency to wrench texts to fit a theory, instead of using theory to explicate the texts, a problem often vexing literary studies too enamored of one methodology. Klein sidesteps this problem with her use of various theories; when one theory will not or cannot help explain the representation of queens in a text, she moves to another. Because Klein does not indulge in long theoretical discussions or excessive use of jargon, the move from one theory does not distract from her explications. Instead, the use of theory follows the needs of the explications, rather than dictating them. Klein also consciously avoids the trap of attributing unflattering representations of women to medieval misogyny alone. Instead of falling into this mindset, one that often and understandably plagues medieval feminist scholarship, Klein looks into other causes of derogatory depictions: politics, culture, history, source material, audience reception, and adaptation and translations issues. For instance, Klein's analysis of Ælfric's Jezebel concludes that Ælfric's depiction, more vilified than the original Biblical account calls for, is more a critique of evil counsel–a pressing issue in the time of King Æthelræd–than of queens or of women or of women's speech or intellect (p. 128).

The apparatus of the book is adequate to its task and includes bibliography,

notes, and index. The notes are quite extensive, and while they occur after the text (instead of as footnotes), the notes are handily labeled by page. The book has but one plate, an illustration of King Cnut and Queen Ælgyfu, which Klein analyzes to establish her topic in her introduction. Similar plates with similar analyses in other chapters would have been highly interesting and relevant, but, of course, appropriate illustrations may not have been extant or available. Despite its strengths, *Ruling Queens* may disappoint readers on two counts, however. Firstly, Klein confines historical Anglo-Saxon queens, such as Æthelflæd of Mercia, to passing references. Such figures may be beyond the scope of her study, which focuses on *literary* queens; however, both the title *Ruling Queens* and the promise to consider cultural and historical influences raise the expectation of longer discussions of historical figures. It was in fact surprising not to find a chapter on queens in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Secondly, the very eclectic theoretical approach inevitably necessitates long discussions of other textual and historical issues: conversion, politics, heroics, peaceweaving, hagiography, counsel, and translation, to name a few. Klein even admits this problem in her final chapter (pp. 191-92). These discussions are, however, necessary to understanding Klein's analysis, and are not digressions so much as pathways to her conclusions.

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Katharina M. Wilson and Nadia Margolis, eds. *Women in the Middle Ages: An Encyclopedia*. Greenwood Press, 2004. 2 vols. pp. xxxii + 510 (v. 1); xviii + 486 (v.2), continuous pagination; illus.

Reference books, by their nature, are not meant for cover-to-cover reading. They are consulted for basic information about a subject. Their designation as reference books implies that the information they contain is credible. It is unlikely that the people who turn to reference works read the editorial information that sets out the work's aims, criteria for the selection of the content, and arrangement of the material, but it is that material that provides a reviewer with a standard by which to measure how well the work meets its objectives.

The editors and contributors of *Women in the Middle Ages* have produced an excellent reference source in terms of both content and presentation. As Nadia Margolis' introduction clearly and concisely explains, *Women in the Middle Ages* is intended to situate the history of women in the European Middle Ages in a global context and to do so in terms that make the information both accessible to undergraduates and general readers and useful to upper-level students and faculty.

The tradeoff for providing this global contextualization and setting a