

*England in Europe: English Royal Women and Literary Patronage, c.1000–c.1150*, by Elizabeth M. Tyler. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017. Pp. 464. ISBN: Hardcover, 9781442640726; ePub, 9781487513382; PDF, 9781442685956.

Elizabeth Tyler's long-awaited *England in Europe* redefines our understandings of eleventh-century European literature. This startling, nuanced, and wide-ranging work mixes gender and geography, language and genre, to argue that medieval studies must "radically revise our established understandings of eleventh-century English literature by including women and changing our chronological and geographical parameters" (5). Tyler's primary evidence comes from two texts, the *Encomium Emmae Reginae* (hereafter *EER*) and the *Vita Edwardi Regis* (hereafter *VER*), but her conclusions will affect our understanding of all of European literary history in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

Tyler contextualizes her close analysis with the notable point that scholars of medieval England have traditionally ignored the *EER* and *VER* as "texts written by foreigners for women" (9), and thus somehow not worthy of critical regard. She places both texts in what she terms the "Roman story-world," the set of classical allusions and themes useful for medieval aristocrats engaged in the building of dynastic origins. Latin functioned as the language of this world as well as the bridge among all the vernaculars at northern European courts. Latinate, literate, and multilingual, aristocratic women moved between nations in marriage alliances and then patronized literature in their new environments. Tyler's focus on these women redefines the conversation about eleventh- and twelfth-century literature from narrow, nationalized literary history to pan-European cultural discourse directed by powerful women. In Tyler's paradigm, English dowager queens Emma and Edith become emblematic of the women creating a pan-European literary culture.

Chapter 1 uses the Old English Boethius, Old English Orosius, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, *Apollonius of Tyre*, and the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle* to "illustrate the centrality of the Roman story world to written secular literary culture" (18). After defining the ways that Anglo-Saxon England was thus "on the cutting edge of the latest developments in continental Latin literature" (49), Tyler proceeds to detailed analysis of the *EER* and *VER* and the social, political, and cultural implications of those texts for the English and other northern European courts.

Tyler does not avoid accusations of the *EER*'s historical inaccuracy (indeed, she refers to the text's "fact-free account" of many of the events surrounding

Cnut's ascent to the English throne) but instead interrogates "the Encomiast's improvised and often confused though never unsophisticated exploration of the boundary between history and fiction" (99). Throughout, Tyler emphasizes the centrality of the aristocratic female patron as a shaper of the text and its cultural purposes; Emma's multilingual, multimarital, and multiloyalized presence creates the text and asserts her power along with her version of events. Tyler's intricate close reading connects the *EER* to Virgil and Ovid, ultimately arguing persuasively for Emma as a figure of Augustus, the imperial patron of the *Aeneid*, and dismissing previous understandings of this dowager queen as a passive recipient of the text.

Similarly, the *VER* provides for its female, royal patron a distinctively inaccurate version of the events of Edward's life and death; the *VER* ignores the Norman Conquest entirely and attempts to gloss over what Tyler reads as Queen Edith's precarious situation at Wilton Abbey post-1066. Throughout, Tyler sees Edith to be an active agent in the creation of the text; like Emma, Edith was a multilingual, highly literate, and deeply engaged patron.

In her analysis of the *VER*, Tyler focuses almost exclusively on the poems that punctuate this prosimetric text. Most crucially, her readings show the ways that the poet uses the Roman story-world to undermine the presumed pro-Godwin slant of the prose sections; for example, she explicates the *VER*'s references to Polyneices and Eteocles and the House of Atreus to show how those references raise questions about fratricidal conflict and even cannibalism. As such, Tyler sees the *VER* as an "unstable" text with conflicting loyalties and judgments rather than a unified narrative celebrating the Godwins. In addition, Tyler argues for two other important and new understandings of the *VER*.

First, Tyler steps outside much of the current debate about the author of the *VER*; that debate, largely framed and defined by Frank Barlow in his editions of the *VER* (1984 and 1992), has focused on the Flemish monks Goscelin and Folcard as potential authors. With her focus on the poetry and its allusions to the Roman story-world, Tyler argues that the poet must be understood as "situated in the context of the famous Loire school" (137). She engages in extended discussion of both Folcard and Goscelin to show that neither of them could have written the *VER*, although it is evident that Goscelin (author of the prosimetric *Vita Edithae*, ca. 1080, also composed at Wilton Abbey) certainly knew it. Tyler thus sees Queen Edith, often figured as Dido (154) or as the allegorized Concord (185) in the classical allusions in the *VER*, to be calling on the most cutting edge of literary technique and style for the text narrating the rise of her birth family and the life of her husband.

Second, Tyler's analysis shows that Edith's immediate audience—the royal and aristocratic female residents of Wilton Abbey—did not support Edith's and the *VER*'s version of the events surrounding the Norman Conquest. Tyler's reading of Goscelin's *Vita Edithae* and *Liber Confortatorius* “reveals that Wilton was deaf to her [Queen Edith's] own presentation of herself as the chaste wife of the holy Edward. . . . her version of events, however striking from a literary and theological perspective, was ultimately unpersuasive” (232). Tyler's work shows Edith as an outsider even in the religious house that educated her; like much of post-Conquest England, Wilton was simply “eager to disassociate itself from the Godwine dynasty” (215).

*England in Europe* closes by extending the lineage of Emma and Edith throughout northern Europe in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Tyler connects female literary culture, female literacy, and female literary patronage throughout England, Scotland, Flanders, Denmark, Kiev Rus', France, Lotharingia, and Normandy in the aftermath of the Conquest and ultimately to twelfth-century European literary culture as a whole. Throughout this monograph, she exposes the weaknesses of more traditional national or linguistic or masculinist categories in discussion of European medieval literature. This groundbreaking work reorients the conversation around eleventh- and twelfth-century literature in productive and provocative ways.

Mary Dockray-Miller  
Lesley University