REVIEW

Joanna Martin, *Kingship and Love in Scottish Poetry, 1424-1540*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008. Pp. 200. \$124.95 (Hbk). ISBN 9780754662730.

With much of the body of criticism concerning medieval Scottish literature favouring the instructional aspects of the works in question, Joanna Martin carves out a niche for her own approach to this period in her monograph *Kingship and Love in Scottish Poetry, 1424-1540*. While acknowledging that moral and instructional themes are ever-present, Martin argues that discourses of love should not be considered thematically inferior but are, rather, quite central and inarguably linked to the politics of the period. Her objective is to undertake a comprehensive study of the blend of love and politics in late medieval Scottish poetry. The book's introduction comprises a tight account of its arguments and objectives. It ties together the works with which Martin intends to deal in full, stating: 'They all share a concern with the impact of sexual desire on the king's governance of his realm and therefore establish a connection between the moral order of the self and good political rule' (p. 1). It acknowledges the range of approaches to themes of love and politics, and accounts for subtleties and variations.

Martin devotes chapters to *The Kingis Quair* and *The Quare of Jelusy*, *Lancelot of the Laik*, *The Buik of King Alexander the Conquerour*, Robert Henryson's '*traitie of Orpheus kyng*,' *The Thre Prestis of Peblis*, and *King Hart*. Each includes an examination of thematic discourses within the poem itself, links to contemporary works, broader cultural connections, and often a brief look at the manuscript tradition as well. Having declared in her preface: 'the critical approaches that govern the book are historicist and cultural,'

it comes as no surprise that close readings of the poems themselves are not generally included, or are given only a cursory glance. Martin demonstrates a firm and nuanced knowledge of political and courtly life in late medieval Scotland through the lens of the literature such an environment produced. The monograph closes with an epilogue concerning the poetry and the minority of James V, focusing on the poets David Lyndsay, John Bellenden and William Stewart, as well as William Dunbar. She concludes that the poetry of James V's early court is significantly more pessimistic than that of the fifteenth century when it comes to the monarch's potential for wise governance. According to Martin, Lyndsay, Bellenden, and Stewart 'carry forward, but also carefully revise, the fifteenth-century Scottish tradition of writing on love and kingship' (p. 178) building on literature of the past to shape that which follows.

Kingship and Love in Scottish Poetry, 1424-1540 fulfills what it sets out to do quite successfully. It is, indeed, a very complete and full survey of the major works (and some regarded as minor) of the period. Martin demonstrates proficiency through her attention to detail and her ability to draw connections between distinct phrases within poems to political approaches relevant to the historical context. Martin's textual analysis is often quite adept and intuitive, as in her discussion of *The Quare of Jelusy*: 'As if to emphasize this disempowerment both of complainant and auditor, the lady's lament is given no structural distinctiveness through a change of stanza form or manuscript decoration, and is simply recorded amid the same heroic couplets as the poem's prologue' (p. 32). This synthetic reading of both the textual layout and the text itself is one of the book's many strong moments. One point of criticism surfaces with Martin's discussion of *The Quare of Jelusy*, which states: 'the narrator offers female self-governance as a positive exemplum, devoid of the sort of complex anti-feminist irony which colours some fifteenth-century "defences" of women' (p. 35). This use of 'anti-feminist' is again invoked in an examination of *The Buik of Alexander the Conquerour* and

its sources and analogues: 'The anti-feminist depiction of Olympias's desires for Nectanabus in the *Roman de Toute Cheualerie* and Middle English *Kyng Alisaunder* is completely avoided by the Scottish writer' (p. 71). The term 'anti-feminist' is anachronistic in a discussion of a cultural period in which both the critical and political theories of feminism did not exist. A poet or work cannot be strictly opposed to something (as 'anti-' implies) that has not yet developed.

On a pragmatic note, this monograph could have benefited from footnoted translations of the scattered Latin and French phrases appearing throughout (pp. 20, 81, etc.). The readership being already quite focused, such a minor attempt to make it more accessible would be judicious. In general, however, Martin's monograph is a success. Her contribution spans the fields of medieval Scottish literature, politics, and history. She brings new approaches to each of these areas and demonstrates effectively where her analysis fits and how the poems with which she deals reflect both forward and backward in their tradition and time period. *Kingship and Love in Scottish Poetry, 1424-1540* is a very in-depth and thorough survey of late medieval Scottish poetry, and thus is an essential resource to scholars, students, and enthusiasts of the field.

Megan Cavell
University of Western Ontario