political significance of queens-regent. The narrative is rife with casual sexism. He pays attention to women's beauty, rivalry, reputation, chastity, and sexuality, and notes without comment that royal brides were inspected physically. Men's sexuality, however, is mentioned briefly when trying to explain the lack of a male heir, and then only in terms of chaste marriages or possible homosexuality. The sexist language is particularly glaring when he blames queens who give birth to daughters and calls them "failed mothers" (64). This phrasing demeans the mothers themselves and ignores the work of geneticists who inform us that it is the father's DNA that determines the sex of the child. Bartlett feels the pain of the frustrated king who wanted a son, but is blind to the pain of the rejected mother, and he indulges in a flawed retrospective diagnosis when he deems a queen who does not have children as "sterile" (68). Bartlett is admirably steeped in the medieval sources, but his prose is an uncanny replication of the medieval men he quotes.

At its core, this book is predicated on a narrowly paternalistic definition of the term *political*. In the conclusion, Bartlett argues that "ruling dynasties were not biological units but political ones" (433). With this one phrase he undercuts the promising title of the book. For him, dynastic politics remain a king's domain and the blood of the "family firm" that matters most bears an XY chromosome.

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The Borgia Family: Rumor and Representation. Jennifer Mara DeSilva. London: Routledge, 2020. xii + 304 pp. $150.

True confessions time: I agreed to write this review because my department head's nickname for me used to be "Lucrezia," which was short for Lucrezia Borgia, because he said I had a poison pen. I decided it was time to find out whether there was any merit to that analogy. I was not disappointed: this book is an excellent surgical instrument for separating fact from fiction. The Borgia family, who were actually Spanish—*Borgia* is an Italianization of the original surname *Borja*—have done more to perpetuate the Black Legend of Spanish cruelty than any other single family through the centuries. I had visited their family home near Valencia, the most memorable aspect of which was Saint Ignatius Loyola's walking stick, permanently on display. His walking stick presumably ended up there because of San Francisco de Borja, one of his closest companions, who was instrumental in founding the Society of Jesus. But mention the Borgias among the general educated public, and Saint Francis is not the first person that comes to mind. In fact, most people would be surprised—to put it mildly—to learn that a canonized saint sprang from the same pool of DNA as this rogues' gallery of bastardy, murder, and intrigue.

The strong suit of this volume is its bridging of high and low culture, as well as its dual focus on pedagogy and scholarly research. (I never thought I'd be writing a review

in *Renaissance Quarterly* of a volume containing intricate discussions of the *Assassin's Creed* video games.) One of the most delightful essays is a report by William Keene Thompson on a *Reacting to the Past* role-immersion game he wrote and then used in his classroom. With this kind of material to work with, if we cannot manage to hold our students' interest, then we do not deserve to keep our teaching positions. The book's treatments of popular culture phenomena are laudable and entirely in keeping with the new generation's emphasis on cultural studies.

Another strength of this book is its foregrounding of previously understudied Spanish material, such as the many variants of a ballad composed to commemorate the young Juan de Borja's (the Duke of Gandía's) murder. This study by Clara Marías incorporates orally transmitted knowledge—including ballad variants only extant in communities of the Sephardic diaspora—to interrogate what it was permissible to say, and not say, about who was likely responsible for the young man's death. A different Spanish angle is taken by Alexander Mizumoto-Gitter in a fascinating essay about the accidental death of Cesare Borgia in Spain and how his successive funerary monuments served to establish—and then sever—ties of the ruling family in the Kingdom of Navarre with the glamorous Borgia clan. The fact that he was disinterred from his original sepulcher in a church and literally kicked out onto the street to be buried beneath the ground where passers-by would have to tread over his body speaks volumes about the originary sacralization and subsequent desecration of his memory. That this exhumation was probably ordered by a converso of Jewish descent with a grudge against Cesare's father Rodrigo Borja, later Pope Alexander VI, brings into sharp focus the ethnic politics of the Iberian Peninsula in the years subsequent to the Edict of Expulsion proclaimed by the Catholic Monarchs in 1492.

The volume's weaknesses are the same ones which characterize many essay collections: somewhat uneven quality, and above all deficiencies in proofreading (my favorite blooper was the misspelling of Philip Massinger's name, which somehow became Messenger, undoubtedly through an overly zealous automated spellcheck). Originally these papers were presented at the Kings & Queens Conference 7 at the University of Winchester in 2018 in response to the topic "Sex, Sin and Madness: The Borgia Family in Early Modern and Modern Popular Culture." This origin for the project perhaps explains its slant toward popular culture.

Ideologically, this volume participates in a broader trend, readily recognizable to postmodern audiences, which might be described as an attempt to rehabilitate historically demonized figures. Here we are assured that in fact Lucrezia Borgia was an honorable woman, and that the efforts to depict her otherwise were part of a smear campaign directed at her conniving male relatives. At least now I have a comeback to use with my department head.

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