

Reviews

Reed, Helen H., and Trevor J. Dadson.

La princesa de Éboli: Cautiva del rey. Vida de Ana de Mendoza y de la Cerda (1540–1592).

Madrid: Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica y Marcial Pons Historia, 2015. 539 pp.

Two distinguished scholars of early-modern literary history have come together to examine and contextualize the remarkable life of Ana de Mendoza y de la Cerda (1540–1592), the Princess of Éboli (hereafter Éboli or Doña Ana). Reed and Dadson anchor their study in the primary-source documents they compiled and glossed for an earlier partnership, the *Epistolario e historia documental de Ana de Mendoza y de la Cerda, princesa de Éboli* (Madrid, Iberoamericana; Frankfurt am Main, Vervuert, 2013). A collaborative spirit towards scholarly labors animates the book. As the authors explain in the preface, Reed had prepared a biography of Éboli in an initial draft in English. Dadson then joined her, translating this text into Spanish, adding material from his own archival work along the way. The authors also take great care to recognize the works on which they build, most notably Gregorio Marañón's classic biography of Antonio Pérez and Esther Alegre Carvajal's series of studies on the Princess of Éboli.

Reed and Dadson's foremost aim is to peel away the layers of myth and caricature that have accumulated around Éboli. In theater history, a particularly durable fiction took shape when Giuseppe Verdi—following Friedrich Schiller—transformed a complicated noblewoman from the storied Mendoza family into a Romantic character informed by stereotypes of Spain, blending motifs of Moorish allure with the darker visions of Inquisitorial oppression associated with the Black Legend. In his *Don Carlos* (debut 1867), Éboli is a secondary character who complicates the tragic love story, as she vies with Isabel de Valois for Don Carlos's love. The crowning moment of this mezzo-soprano part is the "Veil Song" of Act 2 ("Au palais des fées"; "Nel giardino del bello" in the Italian version). In Hispanic studies, Éboli has also assumed a somewhat villainous profile as the estranged patron responsible for subjecting Teresa of Ávila to Inquisitorial scrutiny.

To provide an accurate assessment of the full life in all its complexity,

the authors present ten chapters organized with the precise chronology of traditional biography. Thus, they begin with a first chapter on “Familia, infancia y educación de Ana de Mendoza,” continuing with nine more chapters focused on the following milestones: betrothal and marriage to the up-and-coming courtier Ruy Gómez de Silva (Chs. 2–3); the court of Isabel of Valois (Ch. 4); the organization of Pastrana as a ducal village (Ch. 5); her widowhood and fateful entanglement with Antonio Pérez (Chs. 6–7); and finally, the murder of Juan de Escobedo and the resulting imprisonment (Chs. 8–10).

Theater scholars will find Chapter 4 (“En la corte de Isabel de Valois”) of special interest, with its analysis of documents that record the emergence of a sophisticated palace theater in the milieu of Philip II’s third queen consort. Isabel of Valois sponsored over forty performances by professional actors between 1561 and 1567 in the room of the Alcázar palace known as the “salón de comedias o saraos.” Éboli, as a close contemporary and companion of the French queen, was a key protagonist among the court *damas* who acted in “invenciones teatrales” on such occasions as the feast of the Epiphany in 1564. The alluring portrait of Doña Ana in pastoral costume by Sofonisba Anguissola (ca. 1565) records the extent that popular literature informed the courtly pastimes. But the levity and sophistication here would contrast with the horrific consequences of Don Carlos’s mental unraveling. Indeed, the chapter closes with the double tragedies of the royal heir’s death while imprisoned by his father and the young queen’s death in childbirth. Here, Reed and Dadson draw attention to the letter of condolence Éboli writes to Isabel’s mother, France’s queen mother Catherine de’Medici. They assess the document in terms of Éboli’s own experience of losing several children and also in relation to her acute sense of political vulnerability at court (178–79). In turn, Chapters 5 and 6 confront the fraught relationship with Teresa de Ávila. Éboli’s path crossed with Teresa’s as she and Ruy Gómez worked to transform the provincial town of Pastrana into a ducal city. Reed and Dadson argue that the friction between the two women must be examined with an awareness of Teresa’s other conflicts with noblewomen who supported her reform project. Here too, they consider the editorial history of the *Libro de las fundaciones*, noting that the unfavorable account of Ana de Mendoza’s patronage was, at least in part, the result of Teresa’s calculated revision of the text in 1575. By this time, Ruy Gómez de Silva was dead and the Carmelite leader would have found it expedient to align herself with his rival at court, the Duke of Alba.

Chapter 7 examines the relationship between Doña Ana and the royal secretary Antonio Pérez. Parting ways with Gregorio Marañón, Reed and Dadson conclude that the two were indeed lovers (309). The couple’s intimacy led to a chain of intrigues and miscalculations that culminated in

the murder of Juan de Escobedo and, in time, their imprisonment as alleged co-conspirators in the assassination. Reed and Dadson marshal a range of documents to elucidate the complex network of allies and adversaries behind the murder and its tardy investigation by Philip II. I quote one passage to give a sense of the authors' profound grasp of the court context:

El primero era el arzobispo Quiroga—amigo de Pérez y de Ana—, el segundo, otro eclesiástico muy inteligente, Antonio Mauriño de Pazos, presidente del Consejo de Castilla. Pazos era un abogado licenciado de la Universidad de Salamanca y del Colegio de San Clemente de Bolonia. Era doctor en Derecho civil y canónico y había servido como rector de la Universidad de Bolonia desde 1549 hasta 1562. Entre 1562 y 1577 fue inquisidor en Sevilla y Toldo. Ni Ana ni Antonio tenían razones por temer una investigación judicial llevada por estos dos hombres. (328)

We can appreciate in this passage why so many theorists of the period used the metaphor of the labyrinth to describe court careers in Habsburg Spain. Given the intertwining power channels of state and church, of universities and law courts, actions or calculations in one specific arena are often impossible to examine in isolation from events in other ones. Readers will be richly rewarded for wading through these waters, but they are thick with details and best entered with slow, unhurried attention.

Alternately, each individual chapter can be read by itself and includes all the necessary documentation to stand alone. Yet the ten chapters examined in sequence provide a gradual and steady accumulation of insight. Indeed, a notable achievement of this book is how the authors convey a thorough grasp of how things worked in Habsburg Spain, while showing a sensitivity to the rhetorical tone and linguistic nuances of their epistolary sources. An example of what is gained in a study informed by the craft of literary studies is Reed and Dadson's examination of the conflict-ridden marriage of Doña Ana's parents in Chapter 3 ("Matrimonio *in absentia*: Ruy en Inglaterra y Ana en la Corte de Valladolid, 1554–1559"). Drawing on letters and account books, the authors recount a cloak-and-dagger escape from the court's temporary residence in Valladolid one Christmas Eve. Doña Ana, three months pregnant, fled to the Castle of Simancas along with her mother, Doña Catalina de Silva. There, Doña Catalina penned a letter to her son-in-law then residing in London with the crown prince (the future Philip II), denouncing her faithless husband in strikingly blunt terms. But while the aggrieved Doña Catalina wrote to Ruy Gómez, her daughter was betting on

a card game. Reed and Dadson do not merely reconstruct this Christmas drama for its enticing plot points. Rather, they reflect on the implications with respect to subjectivity. Of Doña Catalina's epistolary strategies, they note: "En sus cartas a Ruy, finge obediencia, pero al mismo tiempo explica por qué ha de desviarse de los deseos de su marido y de su padre, que en todo caso eran diferentes, o casi" (105). This analysis typifies a pattern in the book, where critical assertions emerge from a careful compilation and examination of the documentary evidence.

A similar analytical framework characterizes the authors' treatment of the culminating episode of Ana's life—her imprisonment on orders from Philip II for her role in the murder of Escobedo. Since scholars have long agreed that the king himself was complicit in the assassination plot, Reed and Dadson strive to understand how and why Doña Ana became a target of royal fury. The authors conclude from a series of letters that Ana confided too much in elite privilege. Among other documents, they cite detailed instructions from her to a gardener in Pastrana as evidence of a fateful insouciance. But the intricate instructions for cultivating fruits, vegetables, and ornamental plants also attest to a sharp mind and an abiding commitment to *vivir noblemente*. These qualities would transcend her eventual misfortune (330). But the consequences of Éboli's hubris were dire. Philip II ordered a severe prison regime, where her bed chamber was remade into a small dungeon. She spent the last two years of her life in this ghoulish confinement. But to her dying days, Doña Ana remained deeply engaged in aspects of family administration.

Given Reed and Dadson's illumination of this story, we can expand the conclusion historian James Boyden reached in his biography of Doña Ana's husband (*The Courtier and the King: Ruy Gómez de Silva, Philip II, and the Court of Spain*, University of California Press, 1995). Boyden noted the enduring paradox of the Portuguese nobleman's court career. That is, despite ultimately losing power to the faction led by the Duke of Alba, the house of Pastrana that he built with the profits and prestige accumulated in the service of Philip II outlasted the Habsburg dynasty by over a century (156–57). After taking stock of the insights from Reed and Dadson, we must modify Boyden's conclusion to insist on the Princess of Éboli's protagonism in this clan's durability. From her adolescent marriage to the bedroom prison of her final years, Ana de Mendoza mobilized litigation, noble ostentation, court patronage, and alliances with provincial aristocracy to bolster her family's honor, secure advantageous marriages for her children, and sometimes just to survive. This power to endure included survival through ten pregnancies and the loss of several young children, including her first-born son who died from head injuries sustained after falling from a servant's arms. It also included the degenerative eye illness that prompted

her to don the eye patch immortalized in the pastoral portrait of circa 1565 by Sofonisba de Anguissola.

From start to finish, Reed and Dadson document this energy and resilience with dense, document-driven exposition and insightful analysis, buttressed at every step by quotations from letters and other archival documents. This expansive style offers readers without prolonged access to archives a chance to savor the language and rhetoric of epistolary communications in the mid-sixteenth century. But it also requires diligent and sustained attention, in contrast to more synthetic biographies targeted to general readers. Compare, for instance, this expansive study with the concise, narrative-driven biography of Don Juan de Austria in Bartolomé Bennassar's *Don Juan de Austria: Un héroe para un imperio* (Madrid, Ed. Temas de Hoy, 2000); James Boyden's above-mentioned biography of Ana's husband, Ruy Gómez de Silva; or even Geoffrey Parker's recent update of his classic biography of Philip II, *Imprudent King: A New Life of Philip II* (New Haven and London, Yale UP, 2014). A non-specialist reader or a graduate student just starting a research project on this period might want to first consult these prior studies for a more general orientation. Regardless of how one approaches the Éboli biography, it has major implications for the understanding of early-modern Spanish society. The authors demonstrate how a noblewoman claimed agency where none was explicitly granted to her, notwithstanding her lofty rank. They also provide one of the most lucid illuminations available of the workings of aristocratic finances. I would, however, suggest some nuance to the adjective *renacentista*, which they deploy to characterize a range of practices associated with the high nobility and with ambitious denizens of the court. For instance, they use this term to assess how Doña Ana's goal of endowing a female religious community in keeping with family traditions led to discrepancies with the city council of Pastrana, who sought to organize an institution to reform prostitutes ("mujeres públicas"): "Evidentemente, los valores renacentistas de Ana acerca de la belleza, la educación y la religión, desarrollados mientras vivía en la corte y reforzados por su contacto diario con mujeres instruidas y cultas, no fueron compartidos por el ayuntamiento de Pastrana que tenía que considerar y resolver temas más prácticos y mundanos" (288). Later, the authors describe Antonio Pérez as "un petimetre extravagante renacentista, pero también un coleccionista de arte con un gusto exquisito, como Felipe II" (307). The idea of *renacentista* might be more precisely characterized in terms linked to courtiership, elite subjectivity, or noble living patterns.

For *comedia* studies, the book offers a detailed portrait of the brief reign of Isabel de Valois as Philip II's queen consort, when a court theater first emerged in Habsburg Spain. Though the queen's death in 1568 would give way to three more somber decades in the reign of Philip II, the idea that

spaces for women's *ocio* could be a sphere for political agency—intimated by Isabel of Valois and Ana de Mendoza—would come into full flower in the court of Philip III in the early seventeenth century. Queen Margarita of Austria's commissions of Lope de Vega to compose *La hermosa Ester* (1610) and *El premio de la hermosura* (ca. 1611) for palace performances would build on this notion. A more diffuse but equally enticing point of connection to theater studies is the view of the paradoxical vulnerability of the loftiest elite, a point conveyed through Reed and Dadson's subtitle of "the king's captive." While playwrights of the seventeenth century could not explicitly recount the story of the Princess of Éboli and Antonio Pérez, the recurring fascination in the *comedia* with the perils of *privanza* often echoed this real-life drama. Again, the privado's downfall in Lope's *La hermosa Ester* comes to mind.

In closing, a word of gratitude is in order for the editorial sponsorship that made this book possible. A co-publication by the Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica and Marcial Pons, the study benefits from its enticing presentation in a well-edited paperback edition. The felicitous typographic choice of rendering block quotes of letters in a cursive font underscores the connection between the archival originals cited and the scholarly analysis. One hopes, however, that the editors will reconsider the series title of "Los hombres del Rey." This conception of statecraft as a masculine realm is implicitly refuted by Reed and Dadson's tour-de-force biography of the "cautiva del rey."

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