

Stephanie Trigg, *Shame and Honor: A Vulgar History of the Order of the Garter* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012). Print, 322 pp., \$55.00, ISBN: 9780812243918.



Review

The Order of the Garter was founded on Edward III's chivalric dream to have an Arthurian band of knights united at a round table. This Order has been politically shaped and manipulated, almost mythologised, but seemingly remained a constant for the last six hundred years. *Shame and Honor: A Vulgar History of the Order of the Garter* by Stephanie Trigg attempts to explore the relationship between the origins of the Order, the social ritualistic space inhabited by the Order, as well as its medievalist characterisations. As an academic in the ARC Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions at the University of Melbourne, Trigg also strives to examine the presence of emotions, like shame, in this ritualised space. Importantly, Trigg unravels the symbolic and mythologic blurring of this old institution and consequently focuses on its origin stories, combing meticulous detail from contemporary literature, chronicles and early histories to show the evolving meaning of the Order. Drawing attention to the Order and its widening legacy, consequently *Shame and Honor* becomes definitive as a modern text examining and revising the history of this institution. Most importantly, it opens up new discussion and considerations in the area of chivalry, masculinity and medieval institutions, and the development of a legacy that succeeded into the modern era.

This text is an interdisciplinary consideration of the topic of the Order, using both historical and literary analysis to understand the development and social constructs at play in the order's structure, hierarchy and internal relationships. That being said, understanding that Trigg's professional groundings are within the discipline of English Literature, and that of her literary framework, is important to the reading. Whilst it is presented as a history, the in-depth analysis based around

objects, texts and actions somewhat penetrates too deeply and tends to lean towards the speculative at times. One example is the consideration of the garter itself. This is especially the case when Trigg considers the nature of the garter being placed on a man's leg an indicator of cross-dressing or even symbolic of rape, which may be a step too far. The object is naturally a women's garment; yet as a visible object, the garter, being worn below the knee atop male stockings, clearly transforms into the masculine. Trigg provides an off-hand reference to the idea presented by historian Richard Barber that the garter as 'reminiscent of the belt used in the investiture of a knight' (p. 70), but dismisses it without further comment. The over emphasis on the garter as feminine, and therefore un-masculine, overtakes Trigg's analysis of the Order itself, becoming problematic to her overall consideration of the order itself, detracting from the main argument.

The undeniable strength of this text is the consideration of medievalism in the modern period and during the medieval period. Trigg has an ability to weave and reiterate the ideal of medievalism (the attempt to recreate an idealised medieval past) over an increasingly large timeframe. The text considers the Order's place in modern society almost immediately, quoting Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh on the modern garter ceremony — it being nothing more than rational lunacy. Trigg seems to be saying that the ritual of the garter by this point is merely symbolic of modern monarchy and nobility; those within the garter do not gain any power thus. However, Trigg places the foundation of Edward's Order of knights in the context of reinventing an idealised medieval past, or in Trigg's words: 'it seems to permit the expression of desire for what the medieval past should have been like' (p. 71). In a way, Trigg constructs an image of Edward III, and all those monarchs who employed the ceremony and ritual of the garter, as reaching out to an unobtainable and idealised past, or a golden age which seemingly did not exist — medievalism within the medieval period, as it were, which is a revolutionary contribution. Accompanying this idea, Trigg continually reiterates the cultural imagination,

medievalism and the 'mythology' of it all streams throughout the text and plays wonderfully against the idea of chivalry, medieval idealism and commemoration. Whilst she concludes that the attempts to demedievalize the institution and that the ritual space has moved into the twentieth century, there is a continual pull and link with the medievalism at play.

Overall, *Shame and Honor* investigates its subject with respect and in-depth consideration, utilising its sources to produce an excellent work, one which will undoubtedly be central to the studies that will invariably follow.

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