

REVIEWS

Julia Gelardi. *Born to Rule: Five Reigning Consorts, the Granddaughters of Queen Victoria.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005. Pp. 480. Cloth, \$29.95; ISBN 0-312-32423-5.

Born to Rule is the story of the lives of five very different women tied together by a single thread, their relationship to Queen Victoria. As granddaughters of the supreme European monarch of the imperial age, these women had upbringings that befitted their station in life. Well aware that their marriages would be of great political benefit, each carried out her dynastic duty with poise and grace. The similarities end there, as Alexandra of Russia, Marie of Romania, Sophie of Greece, Ena of Spain, and Maud of Norway took separate paths that led them away from their grandmother towards very diverse fates.

Gelardi's text is painstakingly researched. She includes a wealth of genealogical material, timelines, and an extensive bibliography. Her list of primary sources includes personal interviews, unpublished letters, and memoirs, which, when coupled with her secondary sources, represent extensive research and ample material for any scholar interested in this topic. Far from being solely concerned with the lives of the five women, the text, through their lives, delves into the period from 1869 (the birth of Maud) to 1969 (the death of Ena). Taking into account the interconnected nature of the royal families of Europe (due in large part to Victoria's line), *Born to Rule* presents a complex picture of foreign affairs across an entire era.

The complexity of the story also presents a challenge to the reader. Instead of presenting the women one by one, Gelardi weaves an integrated account of their personal and political lives. This choice at times makes for tedious and difficult reading. Jumping back and forth from woman to woman can be confusing and a bit disconcerting, particularly since the author not only makes the leaps from chapter to chapter, but within each chapter as well. Of course, there is a huge amount of information to synthesize; Gelardi's well-intentioned motivation is to create a seamless view of the period. Although the concept in general works, the reader must be prepared for a sometimes fragmented narrative. In an attempt to keep the reader from becoming confused by Victoria's extensive family tree, Gelardi provides frequent and complex genealogical information within the text. The numerous names (and, of course, nicknames) and marital ties, however, at times only serve to further frustrate the reader.

The fascinating nature of the connections between the branches of the family, though, is reason enough for anyone interested in nineteenth-century politics to read this text. Perhaps even a graduate course on the period, or World War I, could successfully have this text as a required reading. It is far too dense, however, for undergraduate students. The personal tales of Victoria's granddaughters are full of intrigue, success, failure, and tragedy. At one end of the spectrum stands Maud of Norway, who had a happy, uneventful reign, raising only one child, a son, who became the much-loved and long-lived King Olav V of Norway. At the other end stands Alexandra, last Czarina of

Russia, whose life was full of tragedy and sorrow and whose son was fated to be murdered, along with his family, never to claim the throne. The details in between are what make this text so compelling and rich.

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Paul Addison. *Churchill: The Unexpected Hero.* Lives and Legacies Series. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. Pp. vii; 308. Hardback, \$25.00; ISBN 0-19-927934-9.

It now seems that as much has been written about Winston Churchill as any figure in history. One writer recently observed that the Churchill field was getting so overcrowded that writers needed a very good reason for adding more paper to the total. Not surprisingly, authors have been finding their reasons to write on in specialization or, as the case with David Addison, with a slight twist in focus.

The story line is irresistible: The Great Man of the Twentieth Century, whose life seemed an interesting disaster—at best—until he was 65! For someone both lionized and reviled, whose career hit great heights and great depths, Churchill presents a fine opportunity for what Addison proposes—a brief biography seen “in parallel” with the history of the reputation, or, as the author puts it in his prologue, “the epic struggle between Churchill and his critics.” The book is an outgrowth of Addison’s Churchill entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, and the author has written elsewhere about the social and political life of Britain in this period. For students and teachers who are particularly interested in that struggle, or would like to get a relatively quick overview of a long, interesting life and a varied, tumultuous career, Addison’s book is smartly condensed and focused.

The book has a number of strengths. Addison provides a convincing knowledge of context and a nuanced sense of judgment, two valuable qualities in assessing a life many love or hate. He aims primarily to explain rather than judge. But he’s not afraid to expose flaws: Addison sees the man even at his greatest moments of triumph as World War II prime and war minister as still often a reckless and impulsive leader. The book is particularly helpful in taking readers through the whole Dardanelles disaster, which dogged Churchill’s reputation more than almost any other event. Addison helps untangle the complex mix of myth and reality, of bad luck and bad decisions (and who actually made which) that led to Churchill getting sacked early in the First World War as head of the Admiralty. The section, too, on Churchill’s mix of reactionary and progressive labor views in the years between the wars is fascinating. Who would have imagined Winston Churchill discovering “triangulation” in 1920! And Addison’s treatment of the iconic statesman of 1940 and beyond deftly balances insider stories and the hardening outside legend.