

00.03.22, Kipling, Enter the King

[The Medieval Review](#) baj9928.0003.022

00.03.22

Kipling, Gordon. *Enter the King: Theatre, Liturgy, and Ritual in Medieval Civic Triumph* New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. Pp. xv, 393. ISBN: 0-198-11761-2.

Reviewed by:

Lorraine Attreed

Holy Cross College

latticeed@holycross.edu

Gordon Kipling offers a rich and thoughtful contribution to cross-disciplinary studies in this work on late medieval civic rituals. Perhaps its true greatness lies in its insistence upon the intelligence and complexity of these rituals, the men who created them, and the messages deliberately but often subtly communicated to their noble and royal subjects. Kipling has harsh words for those like Huizinga and Chambers who dismissed pageantry as vain, trivial, and lacking in coherent ideas. Although his focus on the artistic and especially the liturgical components of the entry rituals is a welcome one, he sometimes goes too far in wanting to downplay their political meaning. Granted, scholars such as Sydney Anglo and Roy Strong made groundbreaking contributions with such emphasis, in works neglectful of interdisciplinary approaches, but it is impossible to understand the meaning and intention of civic rituals without reference to the political context of host and visitor alike.

Kipling knows this, and usually provides readers with sufficient background to make sense of the liturgy chosen and imagery presented. A few lapses, however, lead to unwarranted confusion. Margaret of Austria's 1501 Genevan entry (182) garnered such a negatively-themed pageant that one yearns for as full an explication as Mary of Scotland's ritual receives four pages later. Likewise, the reception of Charles VII into Paris in 1437 as a sinner to be judged makes more sense than Kipling realizes if the king's political relations with his capital are examined, most easily with the help of M. G. A. Vale's biography. [1] Kipling can also seem unaware of how much light he is shedding on political situations, as in his description of Katharine of Aragon's 1501 entry into London. Identified with the evening star Hesperus, the princess's image is subsumed into her bridegroom's superior constellation during the pageant. No matter how many levels of interpretation Kipling perceives in the script of this ritual, the message smacked of personal and ethnic discrimination which, if her parents heard about it, may explain their frosty approach to future diplomatic relations.

Chapter One, "The Idea of the Civic Triumph," introduces the Advent theme at the heart of all these entry rituals, paralleling the coming of a king or lord with the advent of the Savior. As both mystical writings and constitutional theory proclaimed, kings sought union and identification with Christ, presenting themselves as the head and spouse of the realm just as Christ espoused the Church. In an interpretation heavily influenced by Clifford Geertz, civic triumphs thus become metaphysical theater, expressing a view of the ultimate nature of reality. Following an examination of Richard II's 1392 pageant effecting a reconciliation with London, the second chapter explores the difference between the joyful First Coming and the more serious Second Advent in majesty and judgment. Through the example of Duke Philip the Good's reconciliation with the rebellious Bruges, Kipling draws on the gospel lesson that would have been read on that particular day to explain key elements of the pageant. Even more intriguing is the subtle way in which the citizens of Bruges manipulated imagery to turn the duke's thoughts from punishment to forgiveness. Kipling does not pursue the idea here or elsewhere that these pageants could have strongly subversive elements, challenging individual rulers and their principles of power, but he is always clear on the high

level of intelligence driving the imagery and staging. He continues to insist that the political content of such pageants is not to be overestimated: "the devisors of the show carefully subordinate political commentary to ritual exposition." (114) This may be one of the few ways in which he underestimates the intelligence, craftiness, and subtlety of the civic organizers.

Chapter Three examines "The Civic Triumph as Royal Epiphany," and tracks the gifts given to kings as part of their urban welcomes. Kipling reminds us that Epiphany was a season celebrating three miracles: not only the arrival of the three magi, but also Christ's baptism and the changing of water into wine, all of which were believed to have occurred on the same date which happened to have coincided with Octavian's greeting as Augustus for the first time, following his entry into Rome having defeated Antony and Egypt in 27 B.C. Henry VI's entry into London in 1432 witnessed extensive gift-giving to the child-king: "Henry receives homage, accepts symbolic gifts, works a miracle, is blessed by the Trinity, is declared the fulfiller of prophecy, is visualized allegorically, restores the fallen city to its prelapsarian purity. Visual signs, scriptural signs, and voices declare him to be the Expected One. Like Christ the King, he ascends to the celestial Jerusalem." (168) In its exploration of the full range of possible techniques for staging an epiphany, this pageant entered city records as the definitive model for England's civic triumphs.

It is only at this late stage in the book that Kipling reveals two key difficulties that affect the entire interpretation. He rightly observes that few contemporaries witnessed the complete arc of the staging and symbolism of these pageants. Citizens could see no more than one or two episodes of the entire pageant as fairly immobile members of the crowd in the streets; only the monarch and possibly courtiers traveling with him saw the entire ritual unfold as its authors intended, and in certain circumstances they may not have understood the language in which it was presented. Does a ritual possess a different meaning because so few are present to witness it? The answer may be unknowable. Kipling does not even broach the question of whether the royal/noble subject was educated well enough to understand the intended message. The second problem may not have to remain insoluble. It is clear that medieval liturgists played vital roles in pageant design and scripting. Who were they? What was their training? How broad was their intended audience? How subversive were their intentions? Pierre Gringore was an important designer of Paris triumphs during the late fifteenth century to whom Kipling dedicates some 45 pages of references, but his identity remains a mystery. Henry Hudson, designer of York's pageant welcoming Henry VII, was a parish priest in a village fifteen miles from York: how had he gained the necessary training for ritual scripting? Kipling has clearly established that these were writers of intelligence and sophistication, and the reader understandably wants to know more about them.

Chapter Four, "Third Advent: Grace in this Life and Afterward Glory," examines rituals with far darker themes of judgment, penance, and apocalyptic warning. Pageants that exemplify these themes include Charles VII's coronation entry into Paris 1437, which as mentioned above would have benefited from further political analysis of the capital's complex relationship with the French monarchs. Queens' advents are more fully studied in a later chapter, but Katharine of Aragon's stellar apotheosis finds mention here, as does Margaret of Anjou's London coronation triumph as a staging of her symbolic death to encourage "royal reflection upon duty and obligation rather than privilege, upon the exercise of virtue rather than power." (201) Although several Continental examples are offered, Kipling finds a strong British preference for Third Advent themes: "only in England do we find a consistent preference for civic triumphs devoted in their entirety to the dramatization of the soul's judgment and apotheosis." (223)

Although pageants with these dark themes did exist, monarchs definitely preferred to be cast as the glorious Christ of the Fourth Advent come to reward the faithful and establish the kingdom of God. Chapter Five examines such rituals with their rich and often sensual imagery of marriage and consummation replete with garden imagery of the *hortus deliciarum*. Themes of subversion and manipulation arise again in the examination of Philip the Good's 1458 entry into the formerly-rebellious Ghent. Pageant planners carefully studied the Bruges triumph of 1440 (recounted in Chapter Two) and presented both stern and forgiving models to Philip by tableaux that showed that wrathful responses to supplicants' pleas were foolish and ignoble. A large open space in the city sheltered a re-enactment of Van Eyck's recently completed Ghent Altarpiece, which forced Philip to abandon his haughty demeanor and join the crowd in the worship of the Lamb.

The final chapter gives full attention to "The Queen's Advent," a challenge to pageant devisors who could not present a female as a type of Christ. The examples Kipling provides show strong emphasis not so much on the glories of the Virgin's Assumption and Coronation, but on docile, modest, retiring virtues appropriate for a subordinate role. The only power a queen could claim on her own was that of *virgo mediatrix*, not to threaten or compete with the king's power but to direct his justice to the benefit of the people: "her powers of mediation depend upon her scrupulous refusal to assert royal authority and her humble deference to her kingly spouse." (327) Only the pageants for Mary Tudor and Elizabeth display more forceful imagery, but given their late dates they may be the exceptions that prove the rule.

As a historian I could not help but note that Kipling's choices of printed sources, both primary and especially secondary, reveal the most unfortunate results of neglecting political factors. His reliance upon Hutchinson, Wolffe (misidentified in the text as Bernard rather than Bertram), and Wylie, for biographies of Richard II, Henry VI, and Henry V respectively (12, 85, 209), shows a certain lack of command of the historical literature, particularly that published in the last decade. Elizabeth Woodville's childbirth schedule (315, n. 48) is incorrect, not a small detail since her condition relates directly to the theme he is trying to discern from her entry pageant into Norwich. [2] More frustrating is his reliance upon the Records of Early English Drama (REED) volumes for their editions of passages from city council records. REED entries are impeccably edited, but devoid of all context, consisting only of selections pertaining to pageantry without regard for the full political and social background of urban society. The York material in particular suffers from such an isolated examination (134-39); Coventry

pageants gain balanced coverage with the use of both the REED volume and the older edition of the city's leet book (315-18). These are not just the quibbles of a political historian who would have written the book differently, but the observations of an admirer of Kipling's goals desirous of benefiting from the richest possible examination. Characterized by deep learning and serious analysis, *Enter the King* enriches our knowledge of the history, literature, and theology of urban rituals in the closing decades of the Middle Ages.

NOTES

[1] *Charles VII* (London, 1974), especially chapter 7, "The Ceremonial King."

[2] The childbirth information is not to be found in Kipling's cited source, which he has misread regarding the month of the queen's entry into the city if he contends she was pregnant at the time.

Issue

[2000 Reviews](#)

Section

Reviews

Author Biography

Lorraine Attreed

Holy Cross College

Medieval Review Support Fund



Information

[For Readers](#)

[For Librarians](#)

[Open Journal Systems](#)



Copyright © 2020

The Trustees of [Indiana University](#)

[Privacy Notice](#) | [Accessibility Help](#)

Affordable, stylish & functional—Kipling toiletry bags are a lightweight lifestyle essential. Enjoy free delivery & returns on all orders. Shop now! A Kipling toiletry bag will see you right! Roomy and filled with compartments to help keep you organised, they make the perfect home for all your favourite products. Our toiletry bags come in a wide range of sizes and styles, so you can choose a matching set for your bathroom essentials and your makeup. Pop a small one in your handbag for those items you simply can't travel without, or toss one into your luggage and jet off on your next adventure! Although the royal entry as a formal ceremony can be traced back as an unbroken tradition from late Classical times through to the Renaissance, Kipling begins where the royal entry adopts pageantry as its essential

medium in the late fourteenth century. Year: 1998. The file will be sent to your Kindle account. It may takes up to 1-5 minutes before you received it. Please note you need to add our email km0@bookmail.org to approved e-mail addresses. Read more. Most frequently terms. Gordon Kipling offers a rich and thoughtful contribution to cross-disciplinary studies in this work on late medieval civic rituals. Perhaps its true greatness lies in its insistence upon the intelligence and complexity of these rituals, the men who created them, and the messages deliberately but often subtly communicated to their noble and royal subjects his focus on the artistic and especially the liturgical components of the entry rituals is a welcome one provides readers with sufficient background to make sense of the. liturgy chosen and imagery presented Characterized by deep I
