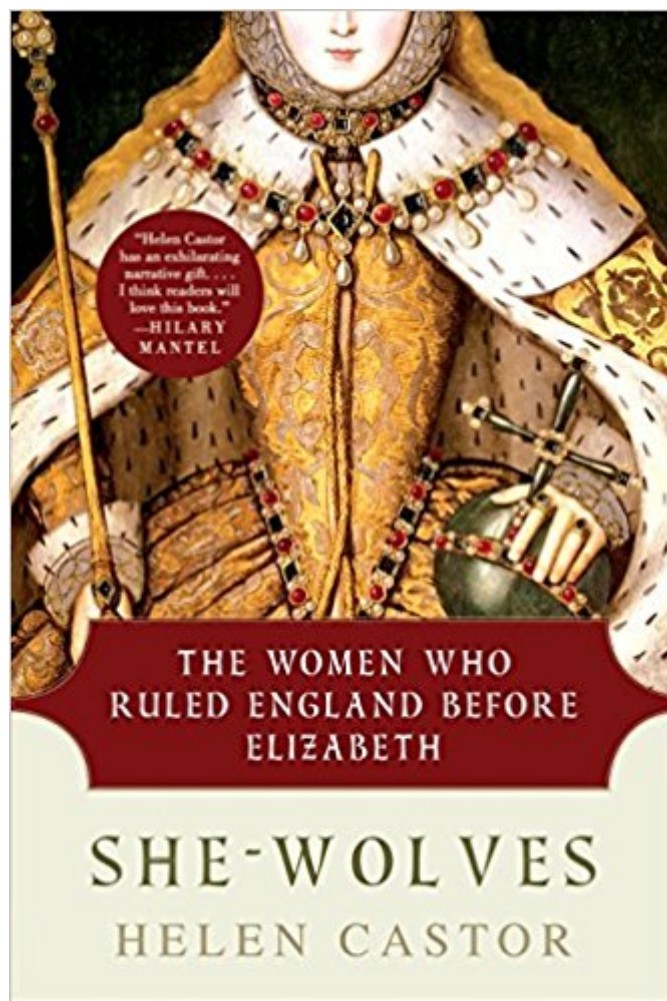


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She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth



Synopsis

“Helen Castor has an exhilarating narrative gift. Readers will love this book, finding it wholly absorbing and rewarding.” —Hilary Mantel, Booker Prize-winning author of *Wolf Hall* In the tradition of Antonia Fraser, David Starkey, and Alison Weir, prize-winning historian Helen Castor delivers a compelling, eye-opening examination of women and power in England, witnessed through the lives of six women who exercised power against all odds—and one who never got the chance. Exploring the narratives of the Empress Matilda, Eleanor of Aquitaine, Isabella of France, Margaret of Anjou, and other “she-wolves,” as well as that of the Nine Days’ Queen, Lady Jane Grey, Castor invokes a magisterial discussion of how much—and how little—has changed through the centuries.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

From England’s durably popular dynastic history emerges this quartet of finely characterized portraits of would-be or actual female monarchs prior to those of the House of Tudor. Displaying precise perceptions of political contexts, often expressing herself in archly sardonic turns of phrase, Castor presents Matilda, daughter of Henry I and mother of Henry II; the latter king’s celebrated consort, Eleanor of Aquitaine; Isabella, who overthrew her hapless husband, Edward II; and Margaret of Anjou, a redoubtable contender in the War of the Roses who was vilified by a Tudor propagandist named Shakespeare. Interpreting hostility in historical sources about these women,

Castor shows how they confronted their central problem in playing the power game, asserting a notional right of female succession to the crown against an array of prejudices against so preposterous an idea. Banned from leading armies into battle, each of them exhibited political acuity in inspiring support for her bid from magnates who could fight for her cause. The subsequent turns of fortune will fasten royalty readers to Castor's lively narrative. --Gilbert Taylor --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"Helen Castor's very readable *She-Wolves* is . . . full of beautiful, imperiled ladies; fearless knights; and remarkable, often unbelievable turns of fortune. . . . Castor is a fine scholar and an equally fine storyteller." (Cleveland Plain Dealer) "[Helen Castor is] an accomplished and elegant historian." (Miranda Seymour, New York Times Book Review) "A gripping book . . . *She-Wolves* is a superb history of the powerful women who have surrounded England's throne, combining blood-drenched drama, politics, sex and swordplay with scholarly analysis, sympathy for the plight of women and elegant writing." (Simon Sebag Montefiore, Daily Telegraph (London)) "A fascinating biography of four powerful English queens" | An insightful look at issues still relevant today, related by an accomplished historian and storyteller." (Kirkus Reviews) "Castor's deep research will please European, military, and women's historians, while [her] tight storytelling makes this unusually fine royal history enjoyable reading for casual readers." (Publishers Weekly (starred review)) "Beautifully narrated . . . learned and exciting. This is medieval history at its best." (Evening Standard) "Castor skillfully combines this analysis with driving narratives, using vivid details from contemporary chronicles to bring those distant days alive. *She-Wolves* makes one gasp at the brutality of medieval power struggles and at the strength and vitality of the women who sought to wield royal power." (Jenny Uglow, Financial Times) "Exceptional, even inspirational reading." (BookPage) "Castor has done a masterful job of outlining the burdens these women faced. . . . Readers of popular history of British royals will enjoy their immensely human stories." (Library Journal) "A fascinating biography" | An insightful look at issues still relevant today, related by an accomplished historian and storyteller." (Kirkus Reviews)

I had eagerly awaited the release of this book and waited until I could take my time and read it slowly- taking notes if I wished. I wasn't disappointed! The book begins with a genealogy of the

Tudor Succession and as Edward VI is dying. The book is an utterly fascinating, eminently readable, treatise about the tradition of female rulers prior to the time of Elizabeth I. Included are: Matilda: Lady of England 1102-1167 Eleanor: An Incomparable Woman 1124-1204 (long lived indeed!) Isabella: Iron Lady 1295-1358 Margaret: A Great and Strong Labouring Woman 1430-1482 and, as the book returns to the time of the Tudors and the death of Edward VI, in "New Beginnings" Mary and her disastrous marriage with Philip of Spain. The book ends as Elizabeth I is handed the reins of government and becomes both the King and Queen of her kingdom. Each section is preceded by both a genealogy as well as a map of the Kingdom as it existed at that point in history. Very helpful while you are reading about the constantly changing boundaries of the various countries. The genealogies really made me realize how small the pool of available spouses for royal marriages really was at the time. Papal dispensations for consanguinity matters must have been a steady source of revenue for the Church! Ms. Castor has an uncanny ability to write non-fiction that reads as enjoyably as fiction. I was sorry when the book ended - wanting more of this truly riveting history. The struggle of female rulers really was the beginning of the fight for women's rights and the fact that these amazing, talented, strong women managed to rule as they did is a wonder. I wonder how many modern women would have the tenacity and determination to breach the boundaries of proper 'etiquette' as these female rulers did. It boggles my mind at how strong and focused they must have been. No doubt they would be the sort of successful women who would, to this day, be called She Wolves, baracuddas, or another word that begins with the letter b----. I wished that the book had more illustrations - but then I always wish that. I always want more images to pair with the words in a book. The included 8 pages of color images are well done - but more would have been better (of course!) This book will, I think, hold wide appeal to history buffs - especially those who are Anglophiles as I am, as well as for people who study women's rights and societal issues. I will be on the pre-order list as soon as I hear about Helen Castor's next book!

I enjoyed this book very much. One of the best history books I've read recently (and I've been reading many!) Fascinating, well-written, lively, a must for anyone interested in medieval European history, especially but not limited to the intersections of gender roles and power. (It's not "just" women's history ~ I would recommend it to anyone interested in this period in Europe.) I learned a great deal about figures I already knew (such as Eleanor of Aquitaine) and discovered some other figures I had never heard much about. Castor does an excellent job of piecing together portraits of these women and men from sources that she admits are limited in more ways than one. Making the most of her source material without stretching beyond it, she shows these women as active

participants in the events of the time (not just passive brides with land attached), without losing sight of the very real limitations they encountered. Intelligent, insightful and objective analysis, and entertaining as well. My understanding of politics and power in medieval Europe was enriched by this work, and the stories of these women are truly unforgettable.

There are already many excellent reviews on this site regarding this splendid offering from Helen Castor who presents succinct yet sufficiently detailed synopses of the lives of four remarkable queens of England. Her starting point is the death of Henry VIII's son Edward, leaving the country to face the prospect for the first time of being ruled by a woman, Henry's surviving daughter Mary I. Castor then circles back to the stories of much earlier royal women who almost achieved sovereignty but were thwarted by the overriding belief that "the weaker sex" was not capable of ruling independently of a man who would legitimize her power and control of the country. Having just finished rereading Penman's books about Matilda (Maude), her son Henry II and his wife Eleanor of Aquitaine, I wanted to remain immersed in this fascinating period of English history and read about these women from a different point of view. Castor is very clear about why the women she discusses were deemed to be "she wolves," yet she never becomes strident in her criticism of a world so incapable of recognizing the worth of these women who strove for power, yet ultimately failed. Very easy reading and quite accurate and informative. Highly recommended for lovers of medieval history.

I am usually not an avid non fiction reader, however, while trying to research my ancestors I came across this book. I decided to buy it just to read about Eleanor of Aquitaine but I discovered so much more! This book reads like a novel. The author brings these amazingly intelligent and powerful women to life. These royal women survived childbirth, illness, war, you name it and and lead long productive history changing lives. I highly recommend this book not only for the historical value but for pure inspiration for trying times.

Professor, Helen Castor, again enlightens her readers with new insights and different focuses regarding English and French Medieval history! Highly entertaining and informative, it was difficult to put down and sad when it was completed. The women who ruled and attempted to rule England, usually in a role other than directly as the monarch of England, was fascinating. Either by death, capture of the British king or by physical or mental disability of the ruling king, a vacuum was created and the women who were either the next heir in line for rulership or the king's consort, for

various motives, attempted to take command. Can hardly wait until her new book on Joan of Arc hits the market, for sale.

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