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Review of *The Baker Who Pretended to Be King of Portugal* by Ruth MacKay

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Ruth MacKay. *The Baker Who Pretended to Be King of Portugal*.

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012. xxii + 300 pp. + 2 color pls. \$29. ISBN: 978-0-226-50108-6.

In this captivating study of the interdependent realms of fact and fiction, Ruth MacKay explores an episode in early modern Iberian history that could easily be found alongside any of the intercalated tales in Cervantes's *Don Quixote*: that of an itinerant *pastalero*, or baker, who pretended to be the long lost King Sebastian of Portugal. Sorting through the letters, chronicles, and inquisitorial documents of troubled monarchs, conspiring nobles, and restless religious, MacKay weaves together an impressive array of Spanish and Portuguese archival sources to re-create the conspiracy that surfaced in the Castilian town of Madrigal de las Altas Torres in 1594 and ultimately sought to remove Philip II from the Portuguese throne. Beginning with the premise that this "conspiracy relied on news" and that this news was circulated by the "startling number of people traveling along the Iberian peninsula's network of roads," MacKay shows that the stories crafted by the individuals in this case reveal their perceptions of the lived world and, more importantly, of the world they thought was possible (xxii).

The Madrigal affair, developed in response to Portugal's loss of independence after Sebastian's untimely demise, allows the author to explore early modern notions of nationhood, royal authority, religion, and gender through each of the primary

actors, around whom MacKay structures her study. The most well-known figure in this case is undoubtedly King Philip II of Spain, who was Sebastian's uncle and who had an additional claim to the throne through his mother, Isabel of Portugal. At the time that the Madrigal affair surfaced, "Philip was a busy, distressed man," dealing with his failing health as well as a series of military, fiscal, and constitutional crises (96–97). In MacKay's retelling, Philip is the overarching figure that unites each chapter, ever present as he struggles to ensure his own safe succession and to manage both the porous borders and the difficult message of empire.

Chapter 1 begins with Sebastian, establishing the context of both the forewarned catastrophe in Morocco — Philip II, along with most of the Portuguese nobility, had advised the young king against his plan — and the subsequent rumors of his miraculous survival. Through the famous Battle of the Three Kings, MacKay explores how Sebastian's religious formation informed his views of self and nation. Chapter 2 returns to Portugal, focusing on the political turmoil that resulted from Sebastian's death and the primary conspirators to block Philip II from assuming the Portuguese throne: don António, prior of Crato, and Fray Miguel de los Santos. In examining the political maneuvering that occurred, MacKay questions the usefulness of terms like *nationalism* and *patriotism* in regard to Portugal and Castile, but some readers may find her argument truncated. Chapters 3 and 4 move on to Spain, returning to Philip and his problems, chief among them being Gabriel de Espinosa, a commoner, ex-soldier, and itinerant baker, whom Fray Miguel may or may not have met in the 1580 siege of Lisbon, and a young nun named Ana of Austria, who turned out to be Sebastian's first cousin and Philip II's niece. Espinosa's tale reads like a picaresque novel and, as for Ana's story, although she was but "one of a long line of . . . noble girls to spend their lives in convents," the nun's tale reads more like a Byzantine novel than a legal case (she was unaware of her own identity and royal birth until she was about fourteen years old) (147). Behind them both was Fray Miguel, now vicar of Ana's convent in Madrigal, who appears to have patiently plotted the entire conspiracy for years, taking advantage of the "[r]uidos (noise) and *murmillos* (murmurings)" that were crisscrossing Philip's vast kingdoms (65). In these last two chapters, MacKay explores the thin boundaries between news and gossip, literature and history, and the effect this blurring has in the realm of politics and the state.

MacKay's study will appeal to sixteenth-century scholars with a variety of interests due to her overlapping topics of inquiry: Spain and Portugal, politics and religion, and history and literature, as well as gender, class, and questions of identity passing. Through her archival work, MacKay uncovers an early modern information superhighway, with but one of many hubs in Madrigal. As it turns out, both Spaniards and Portuguese, weary of war, plague, and economic crisis, were hungry for *novedades* (novelties/news) and people of all stations were surprisingly connected and eager to participate in its circulation. The Madrigal affair, with its entertaining twists and turns, offers valuable insights into both the quotidian and the transformational functions of stories in the material world.

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