Passing under a tessellated ply-wood portcullis to enter 'Revel Grove' and attend the Maryland Renaissance Festival, held in the Baltimore suburb of Crownsville, crowds of eager 21st–century revelers are greeted by none other than a faux Henry VIII, six feet plus in height, twenty stone, fists at his hips, legs akimbo in colossus fashion, and dressed in as authentic Holbein garb as a theater costumier can supply. Surrounded by similar and as lavishly-bedecked courtiers, amidst Tudor-style potemkin buildings housing shops and food stands, he welcomes the assorted collection of tourists (in shorts, jeans, t-shirts, sunglasses), and fantasists (in tights, monks habits, chainmail, fairy wings and push-up bodices just waiting to be ripped), to a day of juggling, jousting, sword-swallowing, wench-drenching, lute playing, madrigal singing, Shakespeare spectating and presumably time-travelling entertainment, not to mention the inevitable turkey leg mauling and ale drinking that makes all the rest so much more interesting. Harking back to the Eglinton tournament held in Scotland in 1839, the American renaissance fair phenomena blossomed initially in California (where else?) in the 1960s. Now dozens are held throughout the year throughout the United States. Though actually an eclectic mix of medieval, renaissance, fantasy, sci-fi and pantomime, these events, their settings, and their participants are all part of the ongoing phenomena of 'Tudorism' that has developed in Britain, Europe and the world since the time those five monarchs of England (Henry, Henry, Edward, Mary, and Elizabeth), who it seems never referred to their dynasty as 'the Tudors', reigned in the late 15th and 16th centuries. One assumes that would be the claim made by the authors included in this anthology of essays, though surprisingly no scholarly piece examining the modern renaissance fair experience appears in the book. Nevertheless, this eclectic and/or interdisciplinary collection includes discussions of Victorian horror stories in penny magazines, musical influences on Ralph Vaughan-Williams and Benjamin Britten, religious sectarianism, George IV, architecture, French historical painting, Charles Laughton, a type of homoerotic fan-fiction called 'slashing' and the *The Tudors* television series. There isn't much about the actual Tudors, though, except a transcript of the lecture given by David Starkey as part of the Colston Research Symposium regarding 'Tudorism' held in 2008, which provided the basis for the book, in which he states that in the case of Henry VIII, at least, 'we are dealing not simply with image, not simply with myth, not simply with soap, we are dealing with reality' (p. 268). However, as with the modern renaissance festivals, the subject of most of this book is, indeed, the images, myths and soaps inspired by the personalities and events of the 16th century, and the way contemporary culture ever since has co-opted them as an exotic setting for presentist expressions and concerns.

Indeed, the Tudors have been a particular subject of popular fascination from their own time to the present. Shakespeare's *Famous History of the Life of King Henry the Eight* burned down the Globe, and one could easily burn a weekend by watching the multitude of Tudor-based films produced since the 1960s, from the Oscar winning *A Man For All Seasons*, to the less successful *Lady Jane*, to *Mary, Queen of Scots,*

followed by more than six hours of Keith Michel in the *Six Wives of Henry VIII* and another marathon with Glenda Jackson as *Elizabeth R*, then round off the whole eye-wearying experience watching Cate Blanchett in *Elizabeth* and *Elizabeth: The Golden Age*. One could also add Helen Mirren's turn into the mix, and Anne-Marie Duff (*Elizabeth: The Virgin Queen*) and Ray Winstone's *Henry VIII* for Granada if it was a long weekend. Two versions of the Boleyn girls and three seasons of *The Tudors* could immolate a summer. Amazon lists over 13000 book hits when querying 'Tudor Dynasty'. Google registers over 3 million results, though outnumbered by the Stuarts, with more than twice as many at 7,830,000. The Saxe-Coburgs only get around 200,000. Starkey's lecture, which acts as the conclusion to the volume, credits this perpetual fascination to various factors: thanks to developments in royal portraiture we know to some extent what the Tudors looked like; their lives were intrinsically interesting and apt for story-telling; and the period was indeed, with a nod to his mentor G. R. Elton, a revolution in government (though he argues that Elton doesn't quite understand why or how this revolution happened). There's not much on the Tudor Revolution in the preceding essays but there is plenty on the art and the storytelling.

String and Bull have organized the essays in pairs on either side of two free-standing pieces on perceptions of sectarianism in the Tudor church and the influence of Tudorism on the Regency period. The paired essays include discussions of Victorian Tudorism, Tudorsim in music, architecture both in Britain and outside of Britain, painting in England and France, and two discussions of the Tudors in film. In his essay, 'Revisiting the olden time: popular Tudorism in the time of Victoria,' Peter Mandler turns the Whig version of the 'olden time' and the legacy of the Tudors as a top-down political movement that moved the English polity progressively forward with its distancing from the Catholic Church and its experimentation in expanded Parliamentary authority on its head. He argues that Tudorism in the 19th century actually portrayed the 16th century as a time of popular unity where social divisions were narrow and economic prosperity was widespread. Victorian Tudorism allowed the many (perhaps 99 per cent) to occupy the English national story. Mandler states that this view manifested a Tory counter to Whig individualism ,comparing it head-spinningly to 'the spirit of E. P. Thompson in the 1960s …' (p. 33).

Billie Melman continues this revisionist turn in 'The pleasures of Tudor horror: popular histories, modernity and sensationalism in the long nineteenth century'. Broadening the perspective and setting a pattern for the juxtapositions of the following chapters, she starts with Japanese author Natsume Soseki's recollections of a visit to the Tower of London in 1900, referring to the walls where, he writes, 'The blood of the sixteenth century has, I think, oozed out. From inside the walls even the groans are audible' (p. 36). Focusing on representations of Tudor London and its Tower, Melman asserts that horror became a motif of Tudorism in the 19th century, emphasizing a continuing discourse between urbanization and modernity and England's 'sensational' past. Though, like Mandler,

this conflicts with a Whig version of rural Arcadia in the 16th century, it does not dismiss it. Rather, Melman argues for a more complex understanding of the perception of multiple Tudor universes existing as parts of the milieu of Victorian culture. As such, she portrays Tudorism as a multi-faceted cultural phenomenon whose 'images, attitudes and sensations' shift kaleidoscopically within and over time and place. Stephen Banfield and Suzanne Cole each provide essays on English music in the 19th and 20th centuries that looked to the Tudor era for inspiration and definition. Banfield's 'Tudorism in English music, 1837–1953', examines the early music revival in Britain from its beginnings with Robert Pearsall's piece for four voices, 'My bonny lass she smileth,' (1836) to Ralph Vaughan Williams *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* ('the zenith of Tudorism in English music') at the turn of the 20th century to the failure (according to Banfield) of the opera *Gloriana* (1953) composed by Benjamin Britten. Banfield concludes that the early music revival in both high and low forms of music represented an expression of British nationalism by promoting the Tudor era in music, at least, as a golden age of Englishness. This essay should be read near a piano as Banfield includes illustrations of sheet music to enhance his argument. Cole's focus, while on ecclesiastical music, nevertheless continues the theme of Tudorism as national expression ,as is self-apparent from the title of her contribution, ' 'A Great National Heritage': the early twentieth-century Tudor church music revival'. This adds to Banfield's work by discussing the publication of the multi-volume edition of *Tudor Church Music* in the 1920s, initially edited by the controversial Richard Runciman Terry, organist and choirmaster of Westminster Cathedral, exposing the unfortunate dark side of sectarianism in national identity formation even amongst the ranks of English musicologists. Sectarianism is the explicit subject of the late Patrick Collinson's 'Through several glasses darkly: historical and sectarian perceptions of the Tudor Church'. Like Melman, Collinson suggests a more complex understanding of English 16th–century Christian practice than that of a simple reading of the Elizabethan Settlement. It has become a commonplace, however, to read historians as slaves to their own contemporary viewpoints and interests in terms of the subjects they chose and the interpretive judgments they bring. From A. F. Pollard's pre-First World War portrayal of Henry VIII as a Bismarckian/Nietzchean *Übermensch* who grasped the hem of the zeitgeist's garment and led it in the right direction, to J. J. Scarisbrick's 1960s evaluation of the iconic monarch as a destructive failure who wasted money on wars rather than more productive and beneficial social programs, historians have found the Tudors amenable to contemporary interpretative biases. Collinson's assessment (which comes from a dean of Elizabethan Reformation Studies) that historians of the Tudor church also suffered from such presentist biases is a bit disappointing, as is Steven Parissien's piece on George IV's Tudorist fantasies about himself and Henry VIII. Not that the information Parissien provides isn't amusing, or that it fails to contribute some interesting information on the nature of Tudorism during the regency period, but the eccentricities of George IV and his uses and

abuses of history have been fairly well chronicled by Scottish historians writing about his coronation in Edinburgh and the key stage management role played by Sir Walter Scott in royal image-making. Perhaps this is why the editors buried the piece in the middle of the book rather than choosing a more chronologically apt placement for it ahead of the Victorian essays at the beginning.

The creation of national identity continues to be the focus as the book turns to two works on Tudorism and architecture. Jonathan M. Woodham makes a strong case that mock Tudor architecture in the 20th–century continued the Victorian principle that 'form follows meaning' rather than form following function. Woodham attempts no revision in regard to the meaning of the Tudor era invoked by the tableware and buildings he uses to illustrate his essay. Here is a conscious and explicit rejection of the urban and the industrial modern by a turn to the England of rural vistas and Stratford-on-Avon-like towns used as an appropriate 'heritage' style, even in the manufacture of dolls houses. More fascinating is how this style expanded across the globe in a Tudorist diaspora from its use in low-cost townhomes in Maryland, United States, to high rise apartments in Manhattan, to shop fronts on the Mall Road in Shimla, to Ye Olde Smokehouse, Tana Rata, Malaysia. Around the world, Tudoresque architecture, according to Andrew Ballantyne and Andrew Law in 'Architecture: the Tudoresque diaspora', 'has become emblematic of Britishness and it is to be found around the world wherever that quality is valued' (p. 179). The authors provide plenty of examples to prove their point.

The editors decided, when presenting the two essays dealing with Tudor representation in painting, to start beyond the borders of the Tudor state with Stephen Bann's 'The Tudors viewed by French romantic artists.' But Bann's essay goes well beyond Tudorism as well. Generally, his subject is that of *historicisme* in the first half of the 19th century, though he does particularly use Tudor subjects, most famously Delaroche's *Execution of Lady Jane Grey*. In fact, this essay, and the choice of paintings cited, including Richard's *Valentine de Milan, Grieving for her Husband, Assassinated in 1403 by John, Duke of Burgundy*, Delaroche's *Death of Elizabeth* and *Cromwell* (peeking at the beheaded Charles I's corpse in his coffin) along with the disembodied *Head of a Queen* by an unknown French artist makes a perfect complement to Billie Melman's Tudor horrors.

Which brings us back to Henry VIII. Tatiana C. String's own contribution to *Tudorism* demonstrates the uniformity in representation of Henry since the young Holbein included the middle aged monarch's portrait along with that of his parents and his third wife in the Whitehall mural (1537). She writes,

Holbein's crystallization of Henry's physicality in the Whitehall Mural portrait has activated generations of artistic imaginings about Henry. In effect, his body is made to read like a passage of thick description: royal power and thrusting masculinity are unequivocally reified by Henry's sheer size, the aggressiveness of the legs astride posture, and,

undeniably, by the voluminous codpiece set at the meeting of two triangular forms that define Henry's body. (p. 205)

So, it seems, in the case of Henry VIII, String doesn't complement but rather contradicts Melman's shifting 'images' thesis. String provides a series of examples, in the best empirical manner, of various representations of Henry (and even Edward VI) in the same Holbein pose. Despite the setting and/or the situation artists, advertisers, actors or Renaissance fair mannequins have placed him from the 16th century to the present as proclaiming the same message across time- the construction of 'an appealing past' (p. 221).

Sex appeal? Excluding David Starkey's lecture, *Tudorism* effectively ends with a bang. The last two essays investigate Henry VIII's role as sex symbol. The first is a revised reading of Charles Laughton's iconic portrayal of Henry in Alexander Korda's 1933 classic, *The Private Life of Henry VIII,* and the second, of course, examines the recent critical failure yet popular success of the Showtime television production, *The Tudors* (2007–10). When Greg Walker, the author of '"A Great Guy with His Chopper?": the sex life of Henry VIII on screen and in the flesh', watches Charles Laughton's Henry VIII he doesn't see the voraciously predatory, woman-eating alpha male popularly associated with this not-so-merry monarch. Rather, Walker contends that Korda and Laughton, for the sake of humour rather than historical revisionism, interpret Henry as an everyman befuddled by the feminine, bemused by his own masculinity and frustrated by his inability to score when everyone else in the court seems to be hitting home runs. Walker also sees the same Henry in Richard Burton's portrayal in *Anne of a Thousand Days* (1969). Even Ray Winstone has Henry come across as vulnerable man-child, despite (as appearing in the BBC television production of 2003) his violent outbursts, reign of terror policy, and presumed rape of Anne Boleyn on their marriage bed.

Both String and Jerome de Groot, the contributor of 'Slashing history: *The Tudors*', agree with most of the Showtime series' critics that the three season mini-series not only revises our view of Henry VIII but completely removes him from much historical fact. Short, slim, fit, sexy and vulnerable rather than big, fat, diseased, vulnerable and sexy (if you like that sort of thing), Henry cavorts and cuts through his Cosmopolitan cover wives in a court as obsessed with sexual conquest and depravity as that of Nero's. As de Groot points out, this isn't revisionism but deconstruction. While historians turn up their noses in disgust (Starkey refers to the series as 'vile'), de Groot thinks this is all good stuff. *The Tudors* is Tudorism in the 21st century, a cultural de-construct that, like historical novels, is 'conscious about [its] status as fabrication … [it] reconciles a desire to know the past with a self-consciousness about the unknowability of the past' (p. 249). Hayden White should be proud. *The Tudors*, then is the unrepentant product of post-modernist attitudes regarding historians' attempts to reconstruct the past. Unfortunately, just when things are getting fun, de Groot loses focus when he leaves Tudorism behind and ends up with an expose on 'slashing', an esoteric by-product of fan fiction where women, mostly, imagine characters, from

the Tudors to *Twilight,* hooking up in homosexual (for the most part) attachments – Henry slash Charles Brandon, George Boleyn/Francis Weston. Get it? Slashing? de Groot takes the reader from Tudorism to queer theory in a mere 14 pages.

Exploring the uses and abuses of history is nothing new. The editors point out in their justificatory introduction that 'medievalism', the study of the way the Middle Ages has been interpreted and portrayed by the moderns, has been the focus of several studies since the 1970s. The historical conundrum involves the placing of the Tudors in the appropriate period – are they medieval, or are they modern? When 'merrye England' is invoked by Lucky Jim, does he include Henry VIII in his lecture? When describing the influence and effects of medievalism on later eras does this include later imaginings of the Tudor past and its present application? String and Bull argue that the term 'Tudorism' answers these questions of periodization by 'carving out a new discursive space' (p. 1) which liberates the 16th century from the appellation of early modern while recognizing its uniqueness from the medieval but not as its opposite. Of course, this leads to the question of where this Balkanization of periodic 'isms' based on royal dynasties might end. For instance, should we continue the process with Plantagenetism, Stuartism, Hanoverism, Victorianism (already on board), or perhaps more accurately Saxe-Coburg-Gothaism? But why stop there? Why not Bourbonism, Napoleonism, Hohenzollernism, Hitlerism? Zhouism, Qinism, Tokugawaism, Mauryanism, Guptaism, Mughulism? Margaret Thatcher/Bloody Mary, anyone?