ing requests, writing letters, and acting as a mediator between her servants and the people who lived on her possessions. But the story that Murphy tells is not limited to the diplomatic or political rule of Felice; it is rich with the fascinating “material” details of the everyday life of a Pope’s daughter, such as the clothes she wore, the tapestries she bought to decorate the walls of her residences, even the recipe for teeth cleaning that she asked for and the utensils and pottery she used in her palaces.

To be able to reconstruct Felice’s life so vividly, Murphy put together the disparate pieces of an intricate puzzle. Felice was not completely forgotten by history—she left traces of herself in a page of Castiglione’s *Cortegiano*, in the diplomatic correspondence of ambassadors, in the diaries of the Venetian chronicler Marin Sanudo, in the works of Agnolo Firenzuola, in letters by Isabella D’Este, and more detailed accounts in the collections of papers in the Orsini archives, such as her will and inventory of her possessions. The author’s treatment of all these different threads is careful; when she is not able actually to document a moment of Felice’s life, she speculates on the most plausible and historically informed hypothesis. In sum, Murphy sheds new light on the lives of powerful early modern women, the concept of “female rule,” gendered *virtù*, and female independence.

This book’s narrative style and informed content will attract both a scholarly audience and a more general public. All interested in early modern Italy and early modern women will be able to read it as a fascinating biography set in the “century of queens”; for once it is not Elizabeth I that dominates the pages but “a pope’s bastard child.”

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This collection of essays approaches widowhood in the early modern period in terms of ritual and representation, unlike previous scholarship
which examined the social, economic, and cultural issues of widowhood. The diversity of scope and of geography of the essays is particularly noteworthy, giving the volume great breadth. Levy’s volume is comprised of an introduction, thirteen interdisciplinary essays, and an afterward. These essays, as Levy states, “read widowhood as a catalyst for the production of a significant body of visual material—representations of, for and by widows” (1) and “seek to newly re-view the circumstances and experiences of early modern women through the lens of visual culture” (2). In her introduction (“Widow’s Peek: Looking at Ritual and Representation”), the editor outlines the premise of the thematic organization of the essays into four distinct parts. Each group describes the visual context and nuanced “framework in which widowhood was constructed, celebrated, censored and commemorated” (7).

In Part I, “Representing Widowhood: Mourning Models,” the three essays address the didactic use of images to present the ideals of widowhood. The first essay, by Catherine Lawless, examines how the imagery of widow saints was adopted by third orders to promote ideals of female lay piety in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Florence and considers the tensions between social expectations for widows and the actions of saintly models. In the second essay, J. S. Helt argues that, although prints and documents pertaining to death rituals sought to reinforce gender politics in early modern England, women were not marginalized, as previously thought, but rather took a central position in the process of dying well and remembrance. Finally, Marina Arnold looks at printed funeral sermons in Protestant Germany and the creation of models for women. Her essay sheds light on the importance of women in the mourning ritual and in the family.

Shifting emphasis, Part II, “Re-presenting Widowhood: Fashionable Choices,” examines how widows manipulated their status to gain agency. Each of the three essays focuses on a powerful widow-regent or widow-empress and her use of portraits or words to create a particular self-image. In the first, Joyce de Vries outlines how Caterina Sforza cleverly constructed her image as the widow of Girolamo Riario and again as a Medici widow in order to gain power and transgress the rules of widowhood. While Elizabeth McCassney discusses how images of a grieving, tearful
widow in texts and prints served as a political basis to legitimize Marie de’ Medici’s authority as regent of France, Michael E. Yonan discusses the portraiture commissioned by Hapsburg Empress Maria Theresa as a way to assess her self-fashioning as empress-widow to define her imperial identity.

Expanding on the concept of agency, the four essays in Part III, “Widowhood and Representation: Building Memories,” consider widows’ patronage of large-scale sculptural and architectural projects, taking into consideration motivations and means of empowerment. Holly S. Hurlburt uses Dogaressa Agnese da Mosto Venier, the first woman to commission a monumental wall tomb in Venice, to demonstrate how her tomb was intended to construct an identity related to, but separate from her husband. As executed by her son, however, it became a memorial for his family. Margaret of Austria was more successful in asserting agency through her patronage of the funerary foundation at Brou, although her plans changed as Margaret evolved from royal widow to regent. Here architectural style functioned as a mode of political discourse. Bess of Hardwick’s hands-on approach to the architecture and decoration of Hardwick Hall is the subject of Sara French’s essay. Bess used Hardwick to create a proper image for herself by operating outside the traditional role defined for women. Finally, Stephanie Fink de Backer’s examination of the patronage activities of widows in sixteenth-century Toledo suggests the importance of Spanish widows’ status as legally free agents who occupied a central position in their family and society. Their patronage combined spiritual motivations and personal dynastic concerns.

The three essays in the volume’s final section, “Widowhood and Re-presentation: Constructing Histories,” consider what widowhood represents, “broadcasting our understanding of the interplay of widow and representation” (13). By examining images of Rome personified as a bereaved, lamenting widow, Cristelle Baskins considers the larger issue of the disjunction between the methodologies of art history and social history, attempting to draw iconography and social history together. Focusing on portraits of widows in sixteenth-century Florence, Allison Levy points out that portraits try to fix a widow’s position in the social order, yet ambiguous, multiple meanings inherent in widowhood and representation make it impossible to
situate widows within set boundaries. Finally, Amelia Carr investigates the significance of a mislabeled relic of St. Leopold and the resistance of widowed Elizabeth of Austria to Hapsburg marriage strategies.

Expanding on the discussion of widowhood and visual culture into the contemporary world, Levy’s afterward (“Last Rites: Mourning Identities (?)”) is provocative as she draws on modern widows, like Jacqueline Kennedy, and the construction of the monumentalized body and memorial to address issues about mourning. Levy calls for a critical reassessment of the “particular, often ambiguous, status of widowhood and the ways in which it has been and continues to be represented” (252).

This theme of the ambiguities and tensions implicit in the meanings of widowhood and representation is a thread that runs though the entire volume. The essays embrace a wide range of media as well as types of widows. The strength of this collection lies in its broad geographical and chronological scope: the essays also reflect a diversity of critical approaches and examine widowhood and visual culture from multiple perspectives. Given this diversity, it would have been useful to have a general bibliography at the end of the volume, even though Levy does discuss books on widowhood in her introduction (5–7); though a minor point, it would have enhanced the expansiveness of the collection and allowed the reader easy access to material otherwise buried in the footnotes of each essay. Nevertheless, this is an exceptional volume and adds considerably to the literature on widowhood.

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Valerie Traub’s The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England exemplifies the generous rewards to be had when a scholar is willing to set about the odd mischief of starting over. In Traub’s case, the new trajectory