

Bruce Webster, *Introductions to History: The Wars of the Roses*, London and New York, Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2004; pp.87; RRP \$30.95 paperback; ISBN: 1-85728-493-3.

The Routledge 'Introductions to History' series blurb promises to provide 'short, clear, self-contained and incisive guides to the student reader'. In this entry Bruce Webster, the historian known primarily for his work on Scottish government in the later medieval period, attempts to carry out this mission statement in regard to one of the most convoluted conflicts in later medieval political history: the Wars of the Roses. Synthesising a thirty-five year conflict for the English throne into eighty-seven pages is an obvious challenge, and one that raises perhaps the most perplexing question in regard to this book: who precisely is going to read it? Secondary and tertiary students would certainly be able to handle the longer, more detailed general texts on the period, such as John Gillingham's *The Wars of the Roses: Peace and Conflict in Fifteenth-Century England* and A.J. Pollard's *The Wars of the Roses*. It seems that this text would probably be more useful for students doing broader survey courses, who might require a quick guide to a significant conflict that they will not actually examine in any great detail in the course of their study.

Webster does a reasonable job of distilling the various issues and problems associating with studying the Wars of the Roses. He opens with a historiographical survey that gives the impression that all roads lead to K.B. McFarlane's work, not surprising given McFarlane's influence on the field and that Webster was McFarlane's student at Oxford. It would have been nice, however, to sketch out some of the historians who followed McFarlane, and to reflect upon the point made by Christine Carpenter in her 1997 work *The Wars of the Roses: Politics and the Constitution in England c. 1437-1509* that the 'McFarlane legacy' has at times been quite problematic.

From the historiography Webster moves to the events themselves, situating the origins of the conflict in the fallout from the Hundred Years War with France, then tracing the breakdown in the government of Henry VI, the triumph of the Yorkist usurper Edward IV in 1461 and the final overthrow of Richard III by Henry Tudor in 1485. The lack of citations beyond the occasional in-text reference is frustrating, and again highlights the problem for anyone other than a casual student using this text. Webster's coverage of the problems of central authority and the failings of government in the later medieval period is good, but brief, and the final section on the Tudor aftermath (and the propaganda issues involved with this aftermath) does allow students to see the main reasons why studying the fifteenth century can be so difficult. This text as a whole may prove useful for an undergraduate student wanting to learn about the conflict on a superficial level as part of a broader area of study. But for those wanting to engage with the Wars of the Roses more fully, other, better, texts are out there.

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