

Ilona D. Bell. *Elizabeth I: The Voice of a Monarch.*

Queenship and Power. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. xv + 207 pp. index. illus. \$85 (cl), \$26 (pbk). ISBN: 978-0-230-62105-3 (cl), 978-0-230-62106-0 (pbk).

Anna Riehl. *The Face of Queenship: Early Modern Representations of Elizabeth I.*

Queenship and Power. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. xv + 248 pp. index. illus. bibl. \$80. ISBN: 978-0-230-61495-6.

While Elizabeth Tudor has always occupied a central place in both the academic and popular imagination, the recent availability of her speeches, letters, and poetry in excellent, easily accessible editions by Steven W. May and the team of

Leah S. Marcus, Janel Mueller, and Mary Beth Rose, has revitalized the study of this most famous of Tudor monarchs, as exemplified by the two books under review. Ilona Bell's *Elizabeth I: The Voice of a Monarch* and Anna Riehl's *The Face of Queenship: Early Modern Representations of Elizabeth I* nicely complement each other, the former dealing with what Elizabeth spoke or wrote, the latter with what others spoke or wrote about Elizabeth. Put together, they not only demonstrate the extraordinary vitality of present scholarship on Elizabeth I, but add further depth to the extraordinary impact she had at the time. Four hundred years after her death, we have yet to fully appreciate Elizabeth I's impact on her contemporaries.

The overarching thesis of Ilona Bell's *The Face of Queenship* is that over the course of the first half of her reign, "Elizabeth's words and actions disturbed conceptions of sex and gender and challenged the patriarchal assumptions underlying politics and marriage" (xii). Mainly (although far from exclusively) focusing on the key issue of marriage, Bell proposes that Elizabeth's insistence on determining whether to marry, whom to marry, and what would happen if she chose to not marry went beyond extraordinary: "It is difficult to imagine and impossible to overstate just how radical those demands were" at the time (46). Bell's book has two sub-theses. First, Elizabeth's private poems and public speeches follow from and echo each other: "The dense, ambiguous language of Elizabeth's parliamentary speeches recycle many of the defensive strategies developed in the Woodstock epigram" (54). Second, Elizabeth's insistence on marital choice overlapped with, and to a certain extent encouraged, popular and courtly challenges to misogyny. Looking at Isabella Whitney's *Copy of a Letter sent to her Unconstant Lover* (1567), Sir Edmund Tilney's *A Brief and pleasant discourse of Marriage* (1568), and *A Letter sent by the maydens of London* (1567), Bell argues that these texts collectively "show Elizabeth's politics of courtship merging with the popular controversy about courtship and rapidly acquiring a controversial life of its own" (137–38).

To these ends, Bell gives us eight chapters that illustrate how, through speech, poem, or spoken word, Elizabeth creates her own voice as a sovereign. Her poem in response to Raleigh's lyric complaint, "Fortune hath taken thee away," provides a case in point: "By appropriating the politics and poetry of love, which were both traditional masculine preserves, and calling attention to the fact that she was not on the object of male desire or the subject of male discourse but also the agent or speaker, Elizabeth's lyrics disrupts ordinary gender categories [and shows Elizabeth] as impatient with shop-worn Petrarchizing and as attuned to anti-Petrarchan innovation as were later Elizabethan poets such as Sidney, Spenser, Shakespeare and Donne" (23). Another example: faced with the petitions from parliament begging Elizabeth to marry, Elizabeth simply could not say no, as that would be seriously impolitic. Therefore, her responses employ "the moral discrimination, enigmatic multiplicity of meaning, incisive verbal wit, and self-reflective form devised in the two Woodstock epigrams" (105; the most famous epigram is: "Much suspected by me / Nothing proved can be. / Quod Elizabeth, the prisoner").

Nobody, I think, could be better at parsing the multiplicity of meanings in Elizabeth's poems than Ilona Bell, who is not a close reader, but a *micro*-reader, attuned to how the slightest shifts in tense, mood, or diction affect meaning. In her sublime analysis of Elizabeth's sublime poem, "On Monsieur's Departure," after situating this work within its manifold contexts, Bell begins by elucidating the first line ("Since from myself another self I turned"): "As a conjunction, 'since' implies that the act of turning away was the precipitating event that set the poem in motion. As an adverb, 'since' suggests that the emotional 'discontent' and verbal constraint the poem struggle to comprehend and contain occurred after Monsieur was 'turned away.' As the poem's only past tense verb, 'turned' acquires further causal force that seems all the more definitive due to its place at the end of the stanza's final, rhyming couplet" (152).

However, Bell's history at times could use strengthening. To give a few instances, Henry VIII did not "renounce" Roman Catholicism (1); rather, he rejected the pope's authority in England. He had no quarrel with Church doctrine or theology, unless it got in the way of something he wanted. Bell repeatedly stresses the seemingly radical and unprecedented nature of Elizabeth's insistence on determining whom and when she would marry. But while unusual, Elizabeth's actions were not unique: Mary, Queen of Scots, in 1561, told the estates of Scotland that she considered herself "at liberty to marry where and whom she lists" and that she would not negotiate "with her subjects concerning her marriage." (See my *Royal Poetrie: Monarchic Verse and the Political Imaginary of Early Modern England* [2010], 62.) Bell quotes Robert Filmer's *Patriarcha* as a "classic exposition" of patriarchal political theory, adding, "Not surprisingly, Filmer's treatise was published after Elizabeth's death" (49). Not surprising at all, because Filmer was fifteen in 1603, and the earliest date given for the composition of *Patriarcha* is 1630. Most importantly, I think, Bell exaggerates the omnipresence of misogyny, which she calls "the default setting" of early modern discourse (86). Thus Bell frequently cites John Knox's infamous *First Trumpet Blast against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558) as representative of the normative view of women. But she does not add that Bishop John Aylmer immediately refuted the book, or that Knox himself sent numerous apologetic letters to Elizabeth. (She never answered him.) Strangely, Bell provides a great deal of evidence demonstrating how misogyny, while obviously a major presence, was nonetheless countered by other discourses. Bell grants, for example, that Shakespeare's plays "repeatedly represent [misogyny] as mistaken" (87), and then one has the amazing spectacle (fully explored by Bell) of the Maidens of London representing themselves and their employers as "integral, interdependent members of a common household body" (122). At times, one wishes that Bell had paid more attention to her own evidence.

If at times Bell's history is a little wobbly, her analysis of Elizabeth's speeches and verse is truly exemplary. Indeed, Elizabeth has finally found a reader worthy of her poems, and *Elizabeth I: The Voice of a Monarch* is a landmark book.

Anne Riehl approaches Elizabeth from the opposite perspective. Instead of focusing on how Elizabeth constructs her authority, Riehl focuses on how Elizabeth was constructed by others. Certainly, this territory has been gone over before, most notably by Louis A. Montrose in *The Subject of Elizabeth* (2006). But the originality of Riehl's book lies in her concentrating on Elizabeth's face, because, as she writes, "the face emerges as a site of power and means of empowerment: epistemological, political, and even divine" (6). Thus she examines how Elizabeth's face, as well as the faces of other Tudor monarchs along with the attendant parts (hair, eyes, nose, etc.) gets treated by various painters, diplomats, and poets. After an exploration of the iconography of earlier Tudor royal faces (chapter 1), which establishes that both kings and queens were judged by their looks (a problem for the plain Mary Tudor), Riehl moves on to examining "the circulation of social and diplomatic references to Elizabeth's beauty" (38) that includes an excellent section on the political and personal threat posed by Elizabeth's contracting smallpox, since the disease not only threatened her life, but also, if she survived, her looks (chapter 2); a fuller account of the diplomatic treatment of Elizabeth's looks (chapter 3); the literary treatment's of the same and how such writers as Spenser and Lyly deployed the "indescrivability topos" to negotiate the tensions between describing the queen's actual features and the unchanging body politic (chapter 4); and finally, a close examination of Elizabeth's portraits (chapter 5) that contains a masterful discussion of Nicholas Hilliard's theories of painting.

The final chapter also contains the most original and important pages in this book. After noting that "the trajectory of Elizabeth's portraiture is circular rather than linear, with a return to youthfulness that simultaneously rewrites the decaying visage of the aging ruler" (150), and how critics have focused on the later portraits featuring "the queen's preternaturally youthful face ready to bloom into a smile of happiness" (163), such as the Rainbow Portrait, Riehl ends her book by looking at the "rare and lesser known examples of Elizabeth's face ravaged by time and sorrow" (162–63). Not every portraitist contributed to the Cult of Elizabeth, and the image of Elizabeth by Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger, painted in 1592, of a woman gazing "at the viewer with acceptance of her ravaged state, her dignity unshaken, and a smile hidden in the corner of her mouth" (164) continues to haunt and disturb. Occasionally, Riehl overstates the case. I doubt if Mary Tudor's "inability to forge and sustain a reputation of being a beautiful queen" had more to do with her "failures as a monarch" (34) than with her habit of burning Protestants alive. Even so, Riehl's *The Face of Queenship* delivers an important supplement to the work of Roy Strong and others who have focused on the weirdly idealized portraits of Elizabeth in the 1590s, and like Bell's *Elizabeth I: The Voice of a Monarch*, this book should become essential reading for everyone interested in untangling the many mysteries of Elizabeth.

PETER C. HERMAN  
San Diego State University