
**Reviewed by** David Dean

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This book is a considerable scholarly achievement and deserves to be on the shelf of every Elizabethan historian. Marcus, Mueller and Rose have produced a collection that will almost certainly become the definitive edition of Elizabeth's writings. It has no competition as far as the literary works are concerned and, although it provides the reader with only a selection of Elizabeth's letters, these can be considered both representative and important. Most historians will already be familiar with the parliamentary speeches, as they appear in T.E. Hartley's three volumes of parliamentary proceedings.[1] Even so, it is instructive to view the speeches in the broader context of Elizabeth's writings offered in this collection. This volume is clearly aimed at a general audience, and scholars will undoubtedly wish to consult the editors' edition of autograph compositions and foreign language originals, also published by the University of Chicago Press.[2]

The collected works are divided into four chronological sections. The first contains letters, poems and prayers of the Princess Elizabeth, 1533-1558. With the second section we enter the vibrant, unsettled and often dangerous period from her coronation in 1558 to the collapse of the Northern Rebellion and its aftermath in 1572. The third section falls naturally between the parliamentary assaults on Mary, Queen of Scots and the execution of the Duke of Norfolk in 1572 through to the Armada. The last section, from 1588 until her death in 1603, begins with her triumphant speech at Tilbury and ends with her prayer on the eve of the Azores expedition. Within each section the works are divided into speeches (there are none surviving from 1553-1558), letters, poems and prayers. On occasion useful supporting documents supplement the main works, as, for example, her servant Ashley's examination over the Seymour affair, Wentworth's speech on the "liberties" of the Commons, and the letters from James VI which complement those he received from Elizabeth. The editors supply explanations of potentially confusing phrases, identify persons mentioned or alluded to, and offer descriptions of the texts themselves, including discussions of provenance, and note important variant readings. Texts have been modernised.
We first encounter the Princess with her letter to Queen Katherine Parr, written on 31 July 1544, in Italian. It reveals at once the strength and depth of the editor's scholarship, for this is the letter in which the Princess Elizabeth speaks of her "exile." Marcus, Mueller and Rose argue that this should not be taken literally; it does not prove that Henry banished Elizabeth from his court. Rather, the Princess is writing from St. James' Palace, while Katherine was at Hampton Court. Henry himself, of course, was fighting in France. The point is well made, from the standpoint of common sense, the editors' sensitivity to the nuances of language, and to their attention to the general tone of the letter itself; it reflects the extraordinary care that has gone into this work at every turn.

What of the writings themselves? Elizabeth's early letters, to Queen Katherine Parr, Henry VIII, and to Edward VI, reveal her considerable learning, if they occasionally seem rather clumsy (particularly the awkward letter to her father for which she might be excused). Two letters accompanied her own translations of Marguerite of Navarre's *Miroir de L'ime Pcheresse* and John Calvin's *Institutes*, both gifts to the Queen. The letters often show a keen sense of time and place, especially the endearing letters she wrote to the frequently ill Edward VI: "What cause I had of sorry when I heard first of your majesty's sickness all men might guess, but none but myself could feel" (p. 36). A letter to Thomas Seymour demonstrates the carefully chosen words and direct turn of phrase characteristic of her writings. Flirtation between the two forced Elizabeth's departure from the household Seymour shared with his wife, the now dowager Queen Katherine. Seymour had evidently apologised for failing to fulfil some promise, an apology she declares unnecessary: "For I am a friend not won with trifles, nor lost with the like." She ends insisting that he remember her to his wife (p. 19).

The keen political sense demonstrated in these early letters, was not lost when Elizabeth became Queen. Witness her words to Mary Stuart urging her to pursue to the utmost the murderers of Lord Darnley: "I exhort you, I counsel you, and I beseech you to take this thing so much to heart" (p. 116), or the tender tone she adopted with Mary's son James VI when writing to him "disavowing her privity to the execution of his mother" (pp. 296-7).

On the other hand she comes across as rather patronising in her letters to him in the 1590s. In those to her favourite, the Earl of Leicester, she fluctuates from the furious -- "We could never have imagined (had we not seen it fall out in experience) that a man raised up by ourself and extraordinarily favored by us, above any subject of this land, would have in so contemptible a sort broken our commandment in a cause that so greatly toucheth us in honor" (p. 273, after he had accepted the governorship of the Netherlands contrary to her orders) -- to the very familiar -- "Rob, I am afraid you will suppose by my wandering writings that a midsummer moon hath taken large possession of my brains this month" (p. 282, only six months later).

There is a certain poignancy to read in her letter to Mary in 1570, "We could never have imagined (had we not In your letter I note a heap of confused, troubled thoughts, earnestly and curiously uttered to express your great fear and to require of me comfort" (p. 121). But herein lies a problem. This letter was drafted by Sir William Cecil and it is difficult to see where the claim to Queenly authorship lies, here, and in several other letters. Certainly her voice seems to come through at times, as in her letter to Henry IV of France on hearing that he has converted to Catholicism: "Ah what griefs, O what regrets, O what groanings felt I in my soul at the sound of such news" (p. 370). And there is deep emotion in her letter to the Earl of Derby urging him to reconcile with his wife and to the Lady Norris, con-
soling her on the death of her son. Even humour emerges on occasion, as when she addresses Lord Mountjoy as "Mistress Kitchenmaid," he having compared his task as Irish deputy to such a female servant (p. 399). Nevertheless, the issue of who composed what -- Queen or ministers -- cannot be resolved satisfactorily and makes any selection of "Elizabeth's letters" problematic, as the editors are careful to point out.

Her speeches, particularly the relatively well known ones to Parliament, offer words which we know caused men to weep with joy and, on occasion, to quake in their boots. She could be disarmingly direct. "I am already bound unto a husband," she was noted as telling the House of Commons in 1559 after they had petitioned her to marry, "which is the kingdom of England, and that may suffice you. And this," quoth she, "makes me wonder that you forget, yourselves, the pledge of this alliance which I have made with my kingdom." (p. 59). The artfulness so evident in her famous Golden Speech at the end of her reign was there from the very beginning. And scorn there could be. Those present at the joint delegation of the two Houses in 1566, required because the issue of her marriage and the succession had been raised, must have paled on hearing "I muse how men of wit can so hardly use that gift they hold" (p. 93).

Elizabeth made good use of her knowledge of classical authors and the scriptures and she was adept at the metaphor, the allusion, turns of phrase. She reminded the Commons in 1563 that she was not unmindful of their safety: "as I trust you likewise do not forget that by me you were delivered whilst you were hanging on the bough ready to fall into the mud -- yea, to be drowned in the dung" (p. 72). Of Mary Stuart she commented, to the assembled members of both Houses, that had the matter of Mary's treachery been simply between the two Queens -- "if it had pleased God to have made us both milkmaids with pails on our arms" -- she would not have consented to the Scot-tish Queen's execution (p. 188). All of her auditors on such occasions were men, and Elizabeth's willingness to use her sex to instruct, chastise, and persuade is, as one would expect, quite evident in her writings.

To the Commons in 1563 she announced: "The weight and greatness of the matter might cause in me, being a woman wanting both wit and memory, some fear to speak and bashfulness besides, a thing appropriate to my sex. But yet this princely seat and kingly throne wherein God (though unworthy) hath constituted me" (p. 70). Or consider her 1590 letter to Henry IV of France: "It may be that you will disdain this advice as coming from the fearful heart of a woman, but when you remember how many times I have not showed my breast too much afraid of pistols and swords that were prepared against me, this thought will pass" (p. 363).

Most revealing are the prayers and poems, but here, too, there is a problem of authorship since, for example, only two poems survive in Elizabeth's own hand. Some of the prayers are quite specific, as in her prayer to the Almighty soon after the defeat of the Armada: "lowliest thanks; and not the least for that the weakest sex hath been so fortified by Thy strongest help" (p. 424). Quite fascinating are the prayers she apparently wrote to comfort herself on a daily basis, as in the prayers "For wisdom in the administration of the kingdom" and "to make before consulting about the business of the kingdom." It was here, at her most personal, that the Queen took pleasure in composing prayers in Italian, Spanish, Latin and Greek. So too her poetry, from the slightly smug "Much suspected by me/Nothing proved can be," etched into the glass window of her chamber while imprisoned at Woodstock in 1554-1555, to the pleasure she obviously took in writing poems such as "When I was fair and young" in the 1580s and the complex twenty-seven stanza French poem, c. 1590.
*Elizabeth I. Collected Works* is a considerable achievement of scholarship, the product of years of careful and meticulous research, transcription and editorial work, and it seems ungrateful to offer any criticism. All three editors are prominent and well-established scholars in English Renaissance studies, and on occasion, their judgement betrays a certain unfamiliarity with the work of historians. Thus, for example, few scholars of Elizabeth's parliaments will be surprised to learn that Elizabeth sometimes spoke extemporaneously and had her speeches written out by those who had heard them, correcting and amending as she saw fit. "Revisionists" will be discomforted to read that Wentworth's famous three questions to the House of Commons led to "much protest by the House about the infringement of their traditional liberties" (p. 94, note 3). Perhaps this reviewer has missed something, but it seems odd to claim that an accurate version of the 1567 closing speech has been provided "for the first time" (p. xxii), when it appears in Hartley, from the same manuscript, and his text indicates deletions, substitutions and additions more clearly.[3]

One would hope all historians would share their conviction that variations of a given speech are informative, whatever the tendency has been on the part of literary scholars to seek "ideal" composite versions, a project which the editors thankfully resist (pp. xix, xxi). Although on occasion the context of a particular text is established, it would have been beneficial in many more instances. Some readers will undoubtly miss a favourite letter here and there. Perhaps the editors, who now possess an enviable knowledge of, and familiarity with Elizabeth's writings, might be persuaded to contemplate a complete collection of her letters, including those they felt to be too "routine and formulaic" (p. xv) to be included here, and perhaps even an extended discussion of the literary qualities of her translations which some of these letters accompanied.

It would be remiss to end this review without congratulating the University of Chicago Press, for it has done a fine job with this book. Printed on high quality paper with a very readable font, handsome dust jacket and eighteen very presentable black and white illustrations, it even offers those rarities these days, a hardcover inscribed with a flamboyant initial letter "E," headbands, and even a place ribbon. The pictures include the expected (Scrots's portrait of the young Elizabeth, the title page of Saxton's *Atlas*, Gower's Armada Portrait, Elizabeth in her coronation robes) and the less obvious (two delightful choices from the Queen's prayer book, a miniature of the Duke of Alenon and one of Elizabeth herself). Portions of five letters, five speeches, a poem and a prayer are presented with such clarity that one could put them to good use in a palaeography class. Quite simply, anyone interested in Elizabeth or her reign will take a good deal of pleasure from owning this book and we owe a great deal of thanks to its editors for providing us with such a commendable edition of her writings.

Notes:


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