**Elizabeth I in Writing: Language, Power and Representation in Early Modern England.** ed. Donatella Montini and Iolanda Plescia. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. xviii + 254 pp. Hardcover $99.99, eBook $79.99. Hardcover ISBN 978-3-319-71951-1, eBook ISBN 978-3-319-71952-8.

A number of lively essay collections on representations of Elizabeth I have appeared since 2000, including *The Myth of Elizabeth*, ed. Susan Doran and Thomas S. Freeman (2003), *Goddesses and Queens: The Iconography of Elizabeth I*, ed. Annaliese Connolly and Lisa Hopkins (2007), and *Representations of Elizabeth I in Early Modern Culture*, ed. Alessandra Petrina and Laura Tosi (2011). *Elizabeth I in Writing* is distinctive in foregrounding the Queen's own acts of authorship, capitalising on the four-volume Chicago University Press edition of Elizabeth's works edited by Janel Mueller and others (2000-2009), and Steven W. May's 2004 edition of *Selected Works* by the Queen. These important publications have made reliable texts of Elizabeth's major works more accessible than ever before, and many of the essays in this new volume take up the opportunity for serious critical discussion of the Queen as a writer. Others bring to light, sometimes for the first time in print, less familiar texts by and about Elizabeth. Overall, a broad picture is presented of Elizabeth's prolific and complex self-representations across genres including translations, letters, prayers, and poems.

The collection begins with two excellent essays by the distinguished scholars Brenda Hosington and Alessandra Petrina, both writing on Elizabeth's Latin skills. Hosington discusses neo-Latin writings of the early years as princess: four familiar letters to Elizabeth's brother Edward, two dedicatory letters to her father and brother, and translations of works by Katherine Parr and Bernardino Ochino. Hosington's attentive analysis of the young royal scholar's nuanced word-choices and phrasing is richly revealing, and demonstrates her understanding from an early age that rhetorical skill, especially in Latin, was a marker of

authority and an instrument of power. The essay thereby initiates two recurrent themes of the volume: how Elizabeth used writing to negotiate various relationships, throughout her life, in which the personal and the political intertwined in complex ways; and where, if anywhere, in her writings we can find insight into Elizabeth's private self.

Petrina notes that, despite a common modern preoccupation with original works as sites of 'authenticity', in fact it is often in Elizabeth's translations – her selections of source-texts, her lexical choices, the casual style of her later translations – that we seem to come nearest to insight into her mind. She writes perceptively that the sixty-year-old Queen's hasty, vigorous translation of Boethius in 1593 – apparently undertaken simply for her own satisfaction – suggests that 'the queen was more interested in the *act* of translating than in the resulting version' (40); throughout Elizabeth's life, she evidently found the processes of handling language to be a source of profound pleasure. Her translation the previous year of Cicero's *Pro Marcello* is placed by Petrina in the contexts of both her personal writing career, and the wider sixteenth-century reception of Cicero, followed by some fascinatingly meticulous analysis of her word-choices and their political implications.

Mel Evans takes an innovative corpus-linguistic approach to Elizabeth's letters, exploring the differences of vocabulary, conventions, and tone between scribal and holograph letters (that is, in the Queen's own hand). There is illuminating examination of some hybrid letters which combine elements of both type, revealing the rhetorical effects achieved by conforming to, or deviating from, the conventions of different epistolary genres; for example, by moving strategically between the 'royal we' and the singular 'I'. Unfortunately Evans has a distracting habit of matching plural nouns with singular verbs, and *vice versa*; while the next essay, by Donatella Montini, on prayers attributed to Elizabeth, contains some typographical errors in its transcription of a prayer from a 1569 print edition ('left' for 'lest', 'ithall' for 'withall', 26). Both essays continue the quest for the 'true' or 'private' Elizabeth

while simultaneously and intelligently problematising that quest. Cristina Vallaro, by contrast, seems too ready to read the poem 'On Monsieur's Departure' as evidence of Elizabeth's 'personal despair' (115) at the ending of the courtship negotiation with the Duke of Anjou, rather than a performance of personal despair as strategic political manoeuvre. Vallaro's reasons for associating John Dowland's lute-song 'Now O now I needs must part', published in 1597, with the French marriage negotation of 1579-82, are also less than convincing.

There is a strong Italian flavour to this volume, with both the editors and a number of contributors sharing this nationality. It is fitting that much exciting work on Elizabeth I in recent years has been presented by Italian scholars, given the Queen's own well-attested love of the Italian language. Here, two essays depart from the theme of Elizabeth's own writings, but make distinctive contributions to scholarship on representations of the Queen, by introducing little-known Italian materials. Carlo M. Bajetta and Guillaume Coatalen present an edited text and translation of three Italian works in manuscript – a letter and two sonnets of congratulation on her accession – addressed to Elizabeth by Celio Magno, a young Venetian intellectual, in early 1559. The short critical introduction shows how these documents shed light on both early Elizabethan developments in panegyric, and the Queen's early reputation for proficiency in Italian, though I would have liked to know more about Magno's possible motives for praising the new English Queen, particularly as a citizen of a Catholic state praising a Protestant monarch. Also of great interest is Giovanni Iamartino's chapter on Gregorio Leti's admiring but gossipy 1693 Italian biography of Elizabeth, widely read across Europe in multiple reprints and translations. As Iamartino shows, Leti repeatedly characterised Elizabeth as an actress, and again it would have been good to see more discussion of the contexts for this, given that there were no professional actresses in England in Elizabeth's time, and that the reputation of actresses in the England (and perhaps Italy?) of

the 1690s was so morally dubious. Translations of passages from Leti also tend to be a little clumsy and unidiomatic (e.g. 'Her nice face' for 'un volto bello', 154-5).

An essay by Iolanda Plescia productively compares the multilingualism of the courtship letters of Henry VIII to Anne Boleyn, and of Elizabeth to Anjou. However, Nadia Fusini's detection of traces of incestuous anxiety in Elizabeth's youthful translation of Marguerite of Navarre's *Le miroir de l'âme pécheresse* (*The Mirror of the Sinful Soul*) is derivative of Marc Shell's work, and sometimes inattentive to historical accuracy. What does it mean, for example, to call England 'Shakespeare's isle' (200) in 1544, more than two decades before the playwright's birth, and half a century before he would start writing? It is also asserted that Elizabeth gave an 'investiture speech' at her first parliament at which she displayed her coronation ring 'as though it were a wedding ring', and declared her marriage to England (212). In fact, as several historians have pointed out, this speech was a cameral reply to a parliamentary delegation in response to a petition from the Commons urging Elizabeth to marry. Moreover, the Queen's supposed theatrical display of her coronation ring as a symbol of her marriage to the nation is first recounted by William Camden in 1615, twelve years after her death, and is almost certainly a retrospective embellishment of the scene. This detail also suggests a lack of dialogue between contributors to the volume: how does Fusini's Elizabeth, traumatised by her parental history and staunchly committed to virginity from her youth, relate to Vallaro's Elizabeth, distraught and grieving for the loss of her French suitor?

The closing essay by the prolific Elizabethan scholar Carole Levin, who also co-edits the *Queenship and Power* series in which this volume appears, draws on a characteristically rich array of sources to explore the fruitful theme of the rituals and meanings of Elizabethan gift-exchanges. However, it sometimes strains a little to accommodate itself to the 'writing'

theme of the volume as a whole, for example by casting its definition of 'gifts' rather widely to include promises and advice.

Overall, then, this is an essay-collection with some unnevenness and inconsistencies, but still with a number of new approaches and some fresh materials to interest the scholar of writing about, and especially by, this remarkable Queen. The volume certainly helps to advance the case for Elizabeth to be studied not only as a monarch, but also as an impressive author, translator, and linguist, wielding language skilfully in a multitude of ways in order to manage both political and personal relationships (which in any case, for her, were frequently overlapping categories). However, any quest for the 'real' Elizabeth in her writings still remains, for this reader at least, largely unsatisfied, and probably impossible. Instead we can marvel at the ingenuity of her strategic textual disclosures of an apparently private or authentic self.

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Contributor's note

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