

Michael Dobson and Nicola J. Watson. *England's Elizabeth: An Afterlife in Fame and Fantasy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. [xii] + 348 pp. \$29.95 Review by BRYAN N.S. GOOCH, UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA.

There is a temptation—not always easily rebuffed—to respond to real or apparent biographical lacunae with speculation and suggestion, to contemplate a whole picture, as it were, in a potentially convincing way, and the more prominent the figure, the greater will be the desire to fill the blanks. Elizabeth I, who was in many ways, one suspects, the conscious architect of her considerable mystique, is a splendid case in point (William Shakespeare is another): Michael Dobson and Nicola Watson, in their exhaustively researched and often witty *England's Elizabeth: An Afterlife in Fantasy*, offer a fascinating review of the responses, from the seventeenth-century to the present, in art, literature, and, more recently, film, to Elizabeth's life and reputation. Such an exploration not only quickly and clearly reveals the extent to which post-Elizabethans distinguish (or fail to differentiate) between fact, near-fact, and fiction—some of the more inventive treatments verging on the ludicrous and the funny (if one can suspend irritation at thinking of unwary audiences misled by fabulous and entertaining scenarios), but also the predilections, political, social, and moral, of the eras in which such reconstructions were produced.

The Introduction considers the range of variation in the portrayals of the Queen's mythic legacy, noting that not all approaches have been particularly positive (Gloriana could appear less than lustrous in some presentations), and offers an outline of the book's direction. Though not claiming inclusiveness—a wise precaution given the sheer volume of material—Dobson and Watson present a mass of documentation, certainly enough—and perhaps more than enough—to support their portrayal of changing reactions to Queen Bess, her character, and her private and public life. Even the portraits of the monarch's death, as they note, cast very different lights on that sombre occasion. The chronology ([32]-42), with its prefatory note and list of twentieth-century biographies, is a valuable

tool for the student of history and helps to keep the reader on sure ground as the authors take him or her into the often shady woods of re-creation and fantasy.

Chapter 1 focuses on seventeenth-century reactions, especially in the theatre, while the second chapter—"The Private Lives of the Virgin Queen"—moves to the eighteenth century and the fluctuations between seeing Elizabeth as a strong heroine, a female victim of her imposed role as Queen, and a thoroughly aggressive monarch. Her relations with Mary, Queen of Scots, and with Essex come into play, and pondering about these matters, of course, remains popular to this day. Part of the difficulty rests with the way in which one views the actions of both Mary and Essex, and, hence, the view of Elizabeth is necessarily altered accordingly. Was she, as some thought (and think), a sensitive woman, facing enormous conflicts on private and regal levels, forced into unpleasant action by virtue of clear threats to the throne; or were these two figures really victims of a hostile ruler determined to remove them under the guise of legal necessity? Was Essex's true problem his move from a position as attractive, romantic courtier to that of military failure and conspirator, and was the Queen's reaction more that of outraged, betrayed admirer than of objective monarch? Dobson and Watson do a thorough and intriguing job with their literary and artistic sources, and their material raises significant questions as it displays shifts in view across the decades.

The third chapter moves into the nineteenth century and its view of Good Queen Bess, the subject of souvenir and story for a legend-hungry, beef-eating public happy to believe in an heroic past depicted in drama and painting, leading to twentieth-century teaspoon portraiture and other desirable gift-shoppe items. At the very least, the Elizabeth myth, in its more positive configurations, was becoming a commercial boon, whether for the novelist (e.g., Walter Scott) or the purveyor of stories of the supposed Elizabeth-Shakespeare connections and accounts of the Queen's progresses through the counties. Dance where Elizabeth footed featly. Why not? It's all good, harmless fun even if facts seem to be continuously treated to a relentless stretch on the rack of fiction.

At least Dobson and Watson make every effort to keep the reader's eye on the historical ball, and thus the scope of an era's myth-mongering becomes a source of intrigue and fancy itself.

As the discussion moves to the Victorian period in Chapter 4, the authors review the Victoria-Elizabeth connections and comparisons and the political implications of a polished Gloriana as an accoutrement to a country and empire headed by a Queen and mother. Yet here again the Essex story play its role, and even Elizabeth, in the 1820s portrayed as scary and fraudulent (161) (consider the work of Mary Roberts and William Savage Landor) would again be in need of memorial rehabilitation, even in sentimental portrayals of her childhood (rather than as a vicious, sexless old woman), perhaps, as the authors suggest, to draw attention away from Victoria's increasing age and her mourning for Prince Albert (168). Chapter 5 continues the Victorians' restoration of Elizabeth as heroine and the virtues of the Elizabethan heritage, conjoined with religious (Protestant) renewal. While the issue of Mary, Queen of Scots, meanwhile would not go away (184), James Froude's *History of England* (1858-70) offered a more positive and, one might think, objective view (185). National pride was stimulated by Thomas Macaulay, espousing the notion of the Elizabethan Settlement and the hardiness of English seafarers, along with the work of the Parker Society, the Hakluyt Society, and authors such as Charles Kingsley with *Westward Ho!* (1855). The old Queen could now be seen by some to mark the beginning of a modern, outward-looking, and imperialistic England. The defeat of the Armada also comes to the fore, as does the German menace in the beginning of the twentieth century. Patriotism could—and did—appeal to ancient roots.

The ninth chapter focuses on more recent treatments, e.g., those of Lytton Strachey, the work of Virginia Woolf (including *Orlando* [1928]), Edith Sitwell, Margaret Irwin, et al., as well as Benjamin Britten's opera *Gloriana* (1953) and modern films (including *Shakespeare in Love* [262]), while the Afterword looks at a variety of North American reactions from the 17th-Century on, the acquisition of Elizabethan material by the Widener and Folger librar-

ies, and, again, film productions (e.g., involving Bette Davis and Errol Flynn in *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex* [1939], *The Virgin Queen* [1955, with Davis again]), etc. Even the foundation of the United States can be celebrated within the utterly flexible confines of Elizabethan myth—for pleasure, profit, and, indeed, patriotic indulgence. The book concludes with a set of textual notes (itself a valuable bibliographic source), acknowledgements, and an index.

While this volume may not be exhaustive in the sense that it covers all the attempts to treat (or mistreat) the life and legacy of the first Elizabeth, it is certainly more than adequate in covering the sequence of accounts/portraits in a variety of media. It is well thought out and well written—something, indeed, of a *tour-de-force*. It is a valuable contribution to the study of historical and fictional adaptation of a famous life and offers clear insights not only into the nature of the Queen, but also into revealing interpretations by later generations. Now, will there be yet more portrayal/renderings of Elizabeth and Essex (as Dobson and Watson point out (161), Essex at his death was 35, the Queen a mere 68) or the sad fate of Queen Mary? Probably. Are more really needed? That is another question, and the answer depends on the definition of “need.” Certainly, the implication of this book’s survey are that the story of Elizabeth and her associations and impact is marketable—indeed, profitable—and commerce will have its way, especially with mystique of such compelling allure.

David Colclough, ed. *John Donne’s Professional Lives*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003. xiii + 272 pp. \$75.00. Review by RAYMOND-JEAN FRONTAIN, UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL ARKANSAS.

John Donne has lacked neither for intelligent biography nor for engaged biographical criticism of his work, the most recent examples being Dennis Flynn’s effort to situate Donne within a specific religio-social context and M. Thomas Hester’s edition of essays examining the central role played by Donne’s wife, Ann More, in the poet’s emotional life and imaginative writing.