The Queen Elizabeth I Society: The First Ten Years

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In 2001 Donald Stump asked me if I would like to help him create an organization for people studying Queen Elizabeth I. So much thoughtful and innovative scholarship had been done about Elizabeth I in the last decades of the twentieth century by people in a variety of disciplines that it seemed like the perfect time for a society to be formed. We wanted an organization that would be welcoming to graduate students as well as to senior scholars, and to scholars from a wide range of disciplines: literature, history, art history, music history, and the like. Thus was the Queen Elizabeth I Society born, with our first sessions at South Central Renaissance Conference in 2002 in St. Louis. In 2011 we celebrated our tenth anniversary of this founding, returning to St. Louis once again, with Donald and St. Louis University as our host. In the intervening years our organization has grown. We have a website. We sponsor many sessions, have our keynote speakers, offer the Agnes Strickland prize for best essays in the open sessions, awarding work by both graduate students and senior scholars. As well as our commitment to excellent scholarship, we are also dedicated to the joy we take in our work. At our conference every year we have an evening entertainment and an auction of what we claim comes from the queen’s attic.

This decade has seen an explosion of brilliant scholarship on Elizabeth I. Many members of our society have been a part of it. In 2009 Donald Stump and Susan M. Felch published the Norton critical edition on Elizabeth, Elizabeth I and Her Age, which in 2010 received the award for best book to be used for teaching by the Society for the Study of Early Modern Women. Scholarship produced for conference presentations has led to members working together on further scholarly projects. A session on Elizabeth I and Foreign Powers was held at the conference in 2008, with papers by Brandie Siegfried, Anna Riehl Bertolet, Nathan Martin, and Nate Probasco. Charles Beem used the four papers as a core set of essays for a collection The Foreign Relations of Elizabeth I (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

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We did a special issue of *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* in 2004 based on our 2003 meeting, which celebrated the four hundred anniversary of the death of Elizabeth. To celebrate the achievements of our organization, we are doing this second special issue. We have gathered together a number of our keynote presentations and Strickland winners of the last few years at the Queen Elizabeth I Society. The essays by Debra Barrett-Graves, Charles Beem, Catherine Loomis, Marguerite Tassi, and Jacqueline Vanhoutte were all presented as keynotes, while the essays by Daniel Ellis, Nate Probasco, and Mary Villeponteaux all had received the Agnes Strickland award for best paper in the open sessions. We have also included the essay of Paige Reynolds, one of our members. These essays show how thoughtful and wide-ranging the scholarship on Elizabeth and queenship has become.

This collection of essays adds to the scholarly discussion on queens in the Renaissance with work on history, literature, and art. While some of the essays address such canonical texts as *The Merchant of Venice*, others bring attention to little-known works such as those by George Ferrers. A number of them also address Elizabeth I's own writing. These essays have many connections between them showing the richness of the scholarship on queens.

Debra Barrett-Graves explores the significance of the images in the *Hampden Portrait* of Elizabeth I. Through her use of emblem books, such as Palmer's *Pooses*, she is able to find the meanings that Elizabethans would have understood but are much less well known today. Daniel Ellis argues that while Elizabeth could be clear and direct, since the time she was a child, she had learned the values of deferral and indeterminacy, and they became a central aspect of her rhetoric. Ellis examines the eleven-year-old Elizabeth’s translation, and the context of her life when she did it, of Marguerite de Navarre’s religious writings. *The Glass of the Sinful Soul* was a gift for Catherine Parr. By also examining her later speeches and writings, Ellis determines that the style the child used became a significant feature of her political rhetoric once she became queen. Jacqueline Vanhoutte uses John Lyly’s *Endymion* as a way into an analysis of late Elizabethan treatises that attacked the sexuality of aging men. As the queen aged, so did a number of the men of her court, such as Robert Dudley and Christopher Hatton. But while there were perceptions of older men being indecorous in love, Vanhoutte deftly shows that there was a complexity of contemporary reactions to the queen’s age, and by examining Elizabeth’s own words demonstrates that the queen herself was quite open about her age.