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The Subject of Elizabeth: Authority, Gender and  
Representation (review)

Retha M. Warnicke

Renaissance Quarterly, Volume 60, Number 1, Spring 2007, pp. 285-286  
(Review)

Published by Renaissance Society of America



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makes even clearer the roles of prominent women — Marguerite de Navarre, Katherine Parr, and Elizabeth I not least among them — in facilitating these exchanges.

CARRIE F. KLAUS  
DePauw University

Louis Montrose. *The Subject of Elizabeth: Authority, Gender and Representation.*

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006. xii + 342 pp. index. illus. bibl. \$64. ISBN: 0-226-53473-1. *Honorable Mention, the Phyllis Goodhart Gordan Book Prize for 2005-06.*

A prominent literary expert who has published extensively on the English Renaissance, especially the Elizabethan period, Montrose has based this book on substantial research he has completed over the last twenty-five years, although most of the writing is recent. A New Historicist, he is not concerned with universal themes in the traditional literary canon but with power relationships, the projection of authority and the challenges to it, that can be found in the historical record. His evidence is mostly texts and visual imagery utilized in other disciplines, but his results differ from findings in those fields because he relies on literary analysis for his interpretations. Unlike historians, he is not seeking to determine the truthfulness of a document as, for example, whether one detailing the aging Elizabeth's aversion to mirrors is actually correct. He seeks rather "to interpret the textual and iconic archive of subjective perceptions and ideological appropriations of the Queen" (247). The result is a fascinating, significant account of her representation as a woman ruler in a patriarchal society and of her councilors' attempts to take political advantage of her gender while simultaneously working to contain its perceived frailties. Occasionally Montrose's statements are provocative, as, for example, when he suggests a recent Justice Department opinion approving the use of torture in the United States was less humane than Richard Topcliffe's justification for torturing Catholics.

The book is divided into five parts, each highlighting different forms of representation: Tudor dynastic portraiture, religious conflict and the ruler's sacralization, the manipulation of the royal body, attacks on royal symbols and statements about her body, and, finally, problems created by her advancing age. Noting for dynastic reasons that in speeches the unmarried queen identified herself with her father and in paintings she was associated with him, Montrose speculates that her personal feelings about him must have been "profoundly ambivalent" (36). As the wife of Philip II, Mary, her older sister, did not emphasize her Tudor dynastic position, probably deliberately associating England with the Habsburg Empire. In portraits, she was painted alone or with Philip.

Montrose finds gender-coding in other portraits: for example, the two youthful images of Elizabeth and her brother, Edward, attributed to William Scrots. Edward holds a dagger in his hand while standing in a pose similar to Holbein's

famous one of his father, but although echoing her brother's posture, Elizabeth holds a book in her hands rather than a dagger. Her finger is inserted into the volume, which represents intellectual accomplishments normally not associated with femaleness that she, as queen, proudly displayed when demonstrating her excellent language skills.

During religious controversies over idols, concerns were raised about whether her subjects were worshipping her. When Archbishop Edmund Grindal ordered the crosses upon churches' rood beams be replaced with the royal arms, Catholics protested he was substituting Elizabeth for God. Catholic symbolism, in fact, was adapted to honor the queen, who was increasingly endowed with a sacred aura, particularly during the accession day celebrations, which Catholics criticized for replacing the feast of the Virgin Mary's nativity. Montrose denies that serious Protestants literally worshiped Elizabeth, for her cult was politically calculated, representing a discourse "both shared and contested by the monarch and her courtiers" through which they "negotiated their complex interrelationships" (113).

An ongoing question was whether she would marry. Lord Burghley argued that she needed a husband and children "to avoid contempte in her later years" (211). In the 1590s, to forestall or neutralize that contempt — which was linked to the succession issue — attempts were made to conceal her aging. The allegorical portraits of her — which were carefully monitored, however — could be given, according to Montrose, the Neoplatonic interpretation that they were meant to represent visually her inward virtues. During audiences, she was attired in jewels and elaborate costumes, which dominated the reports of her overawed observers. Impatient with a woman's rule, many of her subjects welcomed James VI's accession. Noting the failure of James's initiate to "absorb" her "charisma," Montrose's ends his text with the comment, "the measure of its failure is our endearing attraction to the subject of Elizabeth" (252). This important interdisciplinary work offers invaluable insights into her culture and will be of interest to all Elizabethan scholars.

RETHA M. WARNICKE  
Arizona State University

Retha M. Warnicke. *Mary Queen of Scots*.

Routledge Historical Biographies. New York: Routledge, 2006. xii + 304 pp. + 9 b/w plates. index. illus. tbls. chron. bibl. \$19.70. ISBN: 0-415-29183-6.

In this highly detailed biography of Scotland's only queen regnant, Retha Warnicke examines the life of Mary Stewart through the lens of a cultural historian rather than a political historian. Consequently, Warnicke has attempted to distance her own work from that of earlier biographers such as Antonia Fraser, Jenny Wormald, and John Guy.

After the introduction, Warnicke divides her book into nine chapters dealing with various periods of Mary's life. Chapters 2 and 3 focus on the years of her