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*Gloriana's Rule. Literature, Religion and Power
in the Age of Elizabeth*

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The fourth centenary of Queen Elizabeth's death was an excellent opportunity to study not only the figure of the monarch but also her historical and cultural importance in books (Dobson and Watson 2002, Doran and Freeman 2003, Walker 2003, Watkins 2002), exhibitions (Doran 2003) and conferences (Jansohn 2004). *Gloriana's Rule. Literature, Religion and Power in the Age of Elizabeth*, edited by Rui Carvalho Homem and Fátima Vieira, is precisely the result of a meeting of scholars hosted by the University of Porto in 2003, where, on the occasion of this anniversary, the myth of *Gloriana* was interrogated – in the editor's words – from a wide variety of viewpoints and critical approaches. But this is not merely another book in a long list of works devoted to one of the most attractive personages in English history; what, in my opinion, makes it interesting, is that even though the title apparently restricts the study to the Elizabethan period, there is an intended dialogue with the present, both in historical and critical terms. Rui Carvalho makes it clear in the introduction to the volume contextualizing this collection of twelve articles in the long history of Anglo-Portuguese relations and the mutual enrichment between both countries.

The articles cover several aspects related to Elizabeth I, ranging from religion, politics and marketing to artistic areas such as iconography and literature, including also some reflections on the image of the Queen abroad. J. Carlos Viana Ferreira (163-171) provides the religious background analysing the conversion “of one of the most Catholic countries into the most hostile to Catholicism” (163) throughout the sixteenth century; he remarks the importance of one of the policies fostered by Henry VIII as a result of his legislation in favour of his supremacy: the rewriting of the English past, to which a Manichean view is applied, so that Protestants were considered the absolute good (related to the early Apostolic

religiousness) and Catholics the absolute evil, identified with the apocalyptic Antichrist; it is in this light that works such as Bale's and Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* should be regarded, according to the author. M. Zina Gonçalves de Abreu (151-161) and Thomas Healy (25-42) focus on Elizabeth's choice of the *via media* from two complementary points of view: while the former tries to discover the religious convictions that lie behind her attitudes to Protestants and Catholics, the latter studies the effects of that attitude on reformists, who felt that their expectations of a Protestant rule were disappointed. M. Zina Gonçalves de Abreu finds three main reasons for the Queen's demeanour: her humanist upbringing, the bad experiences she had under both Protestant and Catholic rulers, and her political goals – trying to avoid the Catholic rage as well as to get the Protestant support for her legitimacy in the throne. The resulting panorama is, according to Gonçalves, one in which Elizabeth "persecuted the English Protestants in a more unyielding manner than her Catholic subjects" (159), treated – she insists – with leniency; and, paradoxically, her bet for moderation resulted in a radicalization of Protestantism. This conclusion can be contrasted with Healy's survey of the reformists' puzzlement at their Queen's religious policy as is manifest in Dekker's analysis of the catastrophes happened in 1603 in *The Wonderfull Yeare* or in the way the image of the Queen changed in the diverse editions of Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*: from the potential martyr and "fulfilment of the divine plan" to a tyrant against bishops or even the merely-referred-to (and never-seen-in-action) Gloriana of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. Therefore, it is this feeling of "wonder" or uncertainty that Healy detects in Elizabeth's Protestant contemporaries rather than a more radical attitude to her.

T.H. Charlton (173-186) devotes his contribution to the political principles of Elizabeth's reign, in particular, the political control she exercised which, in Charlton's view, was contrary to the humanist and Ciceronian idea of *vita activa*, the active participation of citizens in public life. The Queen's restraints of this type of activism is epitomized in her reactions to two texts on the Alençon affair: John Stubbs's *The Discovery of a Gaping Gulf* (printed in 1579) and a private letter by Sir Philip Sidney. Stubbs, who thinks that the opinion of the English people should be taken into account in such a momentous matter, will trigger the 1581 censorship legislation, as its printed character might mean a threat to Gloriana's stability – a fear

that Sidney's letter, full with flattery and compliments, does not entail, as it circulated only in restricted circles.

Elizabeth's awareness of the importance of the public image has been agreed on since the seminal books of Frances Yates (1975) and Roy Strong (1977, 2003), and has led to a long list of works on Elizabethan iconography and its propaganda purposes. This critical tendency is likewise reflected in this collection of essays. Two of them, by Carol Chillington Rutter ("Show Me like a Queen: Elizabeth among the Players", 61-81) and Aimara da Cunha Resende ("Mass Culture, Elizabeth's Representation of Androgyny and Shakespearean Reconstructions", 207-220) coincide in quite a new and interesting approach, inasmuch as they find parallels between Gloriana's manipulation of her image and some present-day marketing and populist strategies used by politicians (da Cunha Resende 210-11) or by monarchs such as Elizabeth II (Rutter 61-2). Both found their analysis on the well-known notion that Elizabeth I felt the need of being acknowledged as a rightful monarch – notwithstanding her ascendancy and her gender. Rutter points out that one of the Queen's favourite means of achieving public recognition was "seeing herself, like an actor, set upon a stage" (62), as in pageants and progresses;¹ and though she forbade the representation of living persons onstage, several female characters resembling her appear in many plays, usually imitating her character or, in Shakespeare's works, meditating upon her role in characters like Titania or Cleopatra. Da Cunha Resende points out that one of the most important marketing strategies used by Elizabeth was to turn weaknesses into strengths, a double-faced way of looking at things apparent in the Queen's attitude to entertainments and in the exploitation of androgyny, which is reflected in many Shakespearean women; the last part of her essay is an interesting review of them and their success as a result of their androgynous character and their capacity for *double entendre*.

Another contribution on Elizabethan iconography focused on the feminine image is the article by Fátima Vieira (109-117), where she applies recent spatial and feminist theories; Toril Moi's distinction between "feminism" (as a political stance), "femaleness" (the biological traits) and "femininity" (culturally-defined

¹ The success of these processions in terms of propaganda has been recently questioned in a book that quite probably Rutter has not been able to consult for the printed version of her paper. See Leahy (2005).

characteristics) is rendered particularly fruitful for the widely-discussed androgynous iconography of the Queen. These images, according to Vieira, underline her cultural rather than the biological female features, and even when she calls herself a “king” or a “prince”, she does so “not because she wants to be recognized ... as a man, but because she wants to claim for herself qualities that are normally attributed to men” (116). Of course, as Vieira herself recognizes, this is not a very feminist standpoint, but these theoretical groundings give a new understanding of the social and cultural constraints that could have led to peculiarities of Elizabethan iconography.

Manuel J. Gómez-Lara’s article (83-107), also on iconography, presents an interesting, detailed and highly-documented comparative analysis of three different accounts of the same public event: Elizabeth’s pre-coronation procession as told by Richard Mulcaster, the Mantuan ambassador Il Schifanoja and Henry Machyn. Gómez-Lara is mostly interested in the interpretative disparities of the symbolic meaning of the Catholic-based imagery of the pageants which, though open by nature to several interpretations, is manipulated by the authors according to “their own political agenda” (98).

One more aspect that is discussed in *Gloriana’s Rule* has to do with reception, the image of the Virgin Queen transmitted abroad, studied by Paul Franssen (119-140) and Luz Santamarta Lorenzo (141-150). Franssen analyses the way in which Elizabeth is seen in the Netherlands, using as a starting point Yates’s statement that “the Protestant Dutch, seeking Elizabeth’s support in their quarrel with Philip of Spain, saw her in the same light as Foxe and Jewel, as the Royal Virgin triumphing over the Pope” (apud p.119). However, his detailed survey of literary texts, both contemporary to her reign and written in subsequent years, leads him to see that Yates’s assertion is only partially true, as after Elizabeth’s death a shift in attitude can be attested, no doubt the result of the new political circumstances: the 1604 peace treaty between England and Spain and the increasing political differences between Holland and England; thus, *Gloriana* will be no longer the exemplary ruler that might support the Dutch against the Spanish, but a more and more human character, exposed to flaws.

It is precisely a Spanish opinion on Elizabeth that is examined by Luz Santamarta, that of Guerau de Spes, ambassador in London (1568-71) after Diego Guzmán de Silva, highly esteemed by

Elizabeth. Santamarta shows that unlike him, Spes got involved in several Catholic plots, and that his letters reveal the low opinion he had of the Queen and her political counsellors, in particular Cecil who is, according to Spes, the person in charge of the government. Surprisingly enough, the image of Elizabeth transmitted here is that of a passive and weak person – though irritable – which contrasts with other contemporary (and mostly non-Catholic) views and modern analyses of her personality.

Two more articles complete the collection, both on literary aspects of the Elizabethan period. Katherine Duncan-Jones (43-60) studies how the events in the last years in the Queen's life had a crucial effect on the contemporary literary production. Her increasing paranoia took her to ban satires, epigrams and pornography, which led to an important burning of books, thus polarizing literature between popular, subversive texts and panegyric works; the middle course being Shakespeare. Duncan-Jones analyses the Shakespearean production in these years in the light of the contemporary events. Roderick J. Lyall (187-205) connects religion, poetry and politics in his paper on Henry Constable's sonnets with the poet's apparent sudden conversion into Catholicism after being an active Protestant propagandist. His remarkably in-depth knowledge of the textual evidence as well as of the author's life and connections allow him to establish a time line of the extant manuscript and printed versions, a convincing explanation of the arrangement of the poems and their association with the shift in the belief of this very particular instance of literary author.

In sum, *Gloriana's Rule* is a very rich collection in the wide range of aspects analysed, in the dynamic revision of the figure of Elizabeth, in the enlightening usage of the latest theories and methodologies and in the enriching dialogue between past and present, a clear exponent of one of the guiding principles of the humanist education in which Elizabeth was brought up, the Ciceronian *Historia magistra vitae*.

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