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Review of Maria Perry, *The Word of a Prince: A Life of Elizabeth I from Contemporary Documents*

Carole Levin

University of Nebraska - Lincoln, clevin2@unl.edu

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Maria Perry. *The Word of a Prince: A Life of Elizabeth I from Contemporary Documents*. Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 1990. 352 pp. \$39.

As Lacey Baldwin Smith suggests in his 1975 biography, *Elizabeth Tudor*, the appetite for books on Elizabeth I never seems to be satisfied. This is even more true today. Within the last few years we have the publication of Susan Bassnett's *Elizabeth I* (1988), Christopher Haigh's *Elizabeth I* (1988), Lisa Hopkins' *Elizabeth I and her Court* (1990), and Christopher Hibbert's *The Virgin Queen* (1991). And now added to the list is Maria Perry's *The Word of A Prince*. Bassnett and Haigh each take a particular stance. Bassnett is concerned with evaluating Elizabeth from a feminist perspective and Haigh's is a study of Elizabeth's use of political power. Hopkins' book is the most disappointing; based on basic secondary sources, it has nothing new and no useful scholarly apparatus. Hibbert's study is agreeably and accessibly written but again lacks notes; it may well find a solid popular audience. Maria Perry's book takes much more care than Hibbert's but is also not saying much that is particularly fresh. Beautifully put together with magnificent illustrations. Perry's work has more the feel of a coffee-table book. What Perry, a professional actress, has done is to gather well chosen documents and string them together into a biographical narrative.

Perry's great contribution is giving the reader Elizabeth in her own voice. Perry decided to do the book after performing "The Speeches of Queen Elizabeth I," and her enthusiasm for Elizabeth is obvious.

While Perry obviously read widely as she researched her book, she did not always choose her secondary sources wisely and ignores much recent work. For example, her main source for Mary Stuart is Antonia Fraser's biography. Perry would have done better to have read Jenny Wormald's *Mary Queen of Scots: a Study in Failure* (1988) and Michael Lynch, ed., *Mary Steward: Queen in Three Kingdoms* (1988), for a more negative but historically sound picture of Mary Stuart. Equally, Perry accepts as given W. K. Jordan's 1970 theory, as "recent research" (p. 80), that in 1553 Northumberland was trapped in a conspiracy in which Edward VI was the prime mover. But more recent than Jordan's study is the work of Dale Hoak, who argues forcefully and convincingly that the scheme to alter the succession originated with Northumberland not the dying boy king ("Rehabilitating the Duke of Northumberland," in R. Tittler and J. Loach, eds., *The Mid-Tudor Polity*, 1980).

Some of Perry's choices for her primary sources, and the way she interprets them, are odd also. She discusses the opposition to the Alençon marriage, including John Stubbs's *Gaping Gulf*. She describes the punishment meted out to Stubbs, stating he fainted when his hand came off, but "Page [the book seller] suffered more courageously" (p. 238). Perry had obviously not consulted Camden here, who described the scene with great vividness, telling of Stubbs taking off his hat with his other hand and saying "God save the Queen," *before* his faint.

Some of Perry's assumptions about Elizabeth are questionable and suggest pop psychology. I am not convinced that Elizabeth wept easily, nor would I characterize her as a "gentle creature" (p. 83). In reference to how Elizabeth treated Katherine and Mary Grey Perry argues that "Elizabeth's own experiences as heiress to the throne . . . had left her with fears about the succession that were bordering on paranoia" (p. 167). One might wish for more evidence for any of these assertions. Equally one might question the statement that Philip "always treated Mary Tudor with respect and gentleness" (p. 96n), or that early in Elizabeth's reign it was "the most natural thing in the world" for Philip to look on Elizabeth as "family" (p. 149). On the other hand I believe Perry may well be

right that it was Elizabeth's hurt ego over Dudley's secret marriage that impelled the relationship with Alençon.

Perry's book is surprisingly slight in dealing with the Earl of Essex and the final decade of the reign. Her tone is often non-scholarly, and the language she uses is sometimes irritatingly filled with slang. The source notes at the end are not as easy to follow as numbered notes, though they make the text cleaner. Yet despite these criticisms, this is a handsomely produced book with some wonderful passages in Elizabeth's own words and fine descriptions of her by her contemporaries. Anyone interested in Elizabeth will thoroughly enjoy *The Word of a Prince*; scholars, however, will not learn much that is new.

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK, NEW PALZ Carole Levin