



*The Image of Elizabeth I in Early
Modern Spain*

**Eduardo Olid Guerrero and
Esther Fernández (eds.)**

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As Susan Doran notes in her foreword to this collection, “Who would think there was any more to say about the image of Queen Elizabeth I?” (xi). This collection attempts to show that there indeed remains fertile ground to be tilled, especially concerning the representation of Elizabeth and Elizabethan England through Spanish eyes. The vast majority of contributors to this collection are non-Anglophone scholars, and their contributions are clearly intended to bring under-appreciated and under-valued sources to the attention of their Anglophone counterparts.

There is no dearth of scholarship on Elizabeth, as Eduardo Olid Guerrero’s meandering introduction emphasises. He points out one of the key similarities between the two nations’ historiography: just as anti-Spanish bias has impacted generations of English scholarship, so too has anti-English sentiment clouded Spanish views of Elizabeth. Olid Guerrero also sets up a recurring theme of the volume: where does anti-Spanish bigotry end, and anti-Catholicism begin?

The volume is divided into three parts. The first provides useful context to the relationship between the two nations. Magdalena de Pazzis Pi Corrales’s chapter offers a contextual overview of the relationship between England and Spain in the sixteenth century, beginning with the relationship between Henry VII and the Catholic Monarchs, Isabella I and Fernando II. The chapter traces the shifts in relations between the two nations, showing that the hostility between Elizabeth and Philip II was not a foregone conclusion. Pazzis Pi Corrales, in discussing the Black Legend, reminds us that Elizabeth was ultimately more adept than Philip at manipulating popular opinion. In a similar vein, Jesús M. Usunáriz discusses various Spanish accounts of Elizabeth and her reign from the sixteenth century through to the eighteenth century. These accounts, many of which were histories, generally depicted Elizabeth as a tyrant, emphasising her heretical beliefs, her apparent cruelty to Catholics, and made much of the ostensible licentiousness her image as the virgin queen was intended to hide.

The three Spanish prayers in Elizabeth’s *Christian Prayers and Meditations* (1569) are the subject of Valerie Billing’s chapter. While I am not convinced that the Northern Rebellion of 1569 influenced the prayers (given that the prayers were almost certainly published *before* the Rebellion), Billing skilfully draws our attention to the “pointedly violent language” that characterises the three prayers (130), further linking Spain and Spanish with the ‘evils’ of Catholicism. The section concludes with Mercedes Alcalá-Galán’s analysis of the theme of Spain in Elizabeth’s iconographic programme, especially in the aftermath of the defeat of the Armada. Replete with fascinating woodcut and portrait reproductions, the chapter unpicks a range of depictions of the Queen, showing how they responded to, or engaged with, the threat posed by Spain, although the extensive quoting from other scholars, and the somewhat forced readings of the portraits, dampen the overall analysis.

Part 2 is the first to really get to the meat of the volume’s subject. It opens with

Claudia Mesa Higuera's chapter that literally focuses on the visual depictions of Elizabeth in Spain and its territories. Intrigued by their relative absence, especially given the many textual descriptions of the Queen, Mesa Higuera focuses on the few surviving depictions of Elizabeth from the Low Countries—mainly medals. A useful synthesis, the absence of references to the figures in the text is frustrating, as is the repeated, anachronistic use of “Elizabeth I Tudor.”

Alejandro García-Reidy discusses the figure of Elizabeth in two works of Lope de Vega, both of which were published at a time when Anglo-Spanish relations were particularly fraught: his *La Dragontea* (*The Dragontea*, 1598), and *Corona trágica* (*Tragic Crown*, 1627). In *La Dragontea*, Elizabeth is greedy and grabbing; in *Corona trágica*, Elizabeth is a paranoid and pernicious queen hell-bent on destroying the innocent Mary, Queen of Scots. While the chapter is not particularly original, its various translations of Lope will be of great utility to scholars. Part 2 concludes with Jesús-David Jerez-Gómez's analysis of the popular poems and ballads written in order to bolster Spanish attempts to defeat England. Focusing on famous poets including Cervantes and Luis de Góngora, as well as those whose names are unknown to us, the chapter, with its extremely useful translations, shows how misogyny, licentiousness, and heterodoxy were at the core of Spanish propaganda against Elizabeth—an image that has lingered into the modern era.

The chapters in the final part discuss Spanish literary depictions of Elizabeth. Alexander Samson focuses on the histories of sixteenth-century England by Pedro de Ribadebeira and Nicholas Sander (the latter being a source for the former), discussing the accounts and plays that built on these histories—including Cervantes's *La española inglesa* (*The Spanish-English Lady*, 1613), which ignores the sexualised and moralising opinions more commonly voiced against Elizabeth. In his contribution, Adrián Izquierdo discusses the strikingly complimentary depiction of Elizabeth in Juan Pablo Mártir Rizo's *Historia trágica de la vida del duque de Biron* (*The Tragic History of the Life of the Duke of Biron*, 1629). A thought-provoking chapter, Izquierdo highlights the parallels drawn between the treason of the Earl of Essex and the treason of the Duke of Biron, with Elizabeth ultimately depicted as a wise and prudent monarch, irrespective of her gender or her religion.

The final chapter, by Esther Fernández, discusses two Spanish plays in which Elizabeth is a main character: Antonio Coello's *El Conde de Sex* (*The Earl of Essex*, 1633) and Juan Bautista Diamantés's *La reina María Estuarda* (*Queen Mary Stuart*, 1660). A highlight of the collection, Fernández deftly considers how the two plays navigate the conflict between Elizabeth the woman and Elizabeth the female king by “demythifying one of Spain's most feared enemies” (360).

Unfortunately, basic errors of fact are endemic throughout the book: some are minor, such as the claim that Mary I died in 1559 (88), or that Robert Dudley was the Duke of Leicester (256), while others are more concerning, such as the claim that Elizabeth of York was Mary I's mother (3). There is also a substantial amount of repetition across the volume, many of the chapters are weighed down by discursive endnotes, and the frustrating mix of in-text references and endnotes hamper the reading experience.

Despite its title, the volume is almost as much about the depiction of Elizabethan England in Spain as it is Elizabeth herself. While Elizabeth was closely associated with the defeat of the Armadas, these defeats went beyond just the English Queen, which the contributors do acknowledge, especially when they discuss the Anglophobia that fermented in Spain alongside English Hispanophobia. Perhaps a more upfront acknowledgment of this fact would have strengthened the chapters' discussion.

These issues aside, this volume will certainly be a useful reference work for both scholars and students. One of its greatest strengths is that it will bring a wide array of Spanish sources to the attention of Anglophone scholars—some for the first time. These kinds of international and interdisciplinary projects have much to recommend them, and as the editors explain in their introduction, this volume will hopefully spur new and innovative transnational studies into topics previously believed exhausted.

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