



***Young Elizabeth:
Princess. Prisoner. Queen.***

By Nicola Tallis

London: Michael O'Mara Books, 2024

Reviewed by: Johanna Strong



Young Elizabeth: Princess. Prisoner. Queen. By Nicola Tallis. London: Michael O'Mara Books, 2024. ISBN 978-1-78929-519-1. xxxiv + 398 pp. £25.

In a field arguably saturated with works on Elizabeth I, Tallis' biography of England's second crowned queen regnant confidently establishes itself as a necessary publication, providing renewed academic engagement with the sources relating to Elizabeth's early life and highlighting Tallis' thoroughness as a researcher. *Young Elizabeth* successfully introduces readers, as was Tallis' aim, to "both a girl and a young woman whose place in the world [wa]s uncertain" and whose life was "last substantial[ly examined] more than two decades ago" (xxxiv). Re-examining the material relating to her first twenty-five years of life, *Young Elizabeth* provides an updated biography of the future Elizabeth I, focusing on her religious, political, educational, social, and personal environment and the ways in which they shaped her into the queen she became. Covering well-known events such as Elizabeth's birth, her bastardisation in 1536, the scandal associated with Thomas Seymour, and the various plots with which her name was linked during Mary I's reign, Tallis' biography also delves into the lesser-known details of Elizabeth's early life, placing oft-used sources in conversation with each other in a refreshing way. As such, though it inspires further questions on the period covered and occasionally strays from its focus, Tallis' book is a timely examination of the humanity behind the monarchy as evidenced through the events of Elizabeth's childhood and adolescence and the ways in which these prepared her for queenship.

Tallis' care in her research is immediately visible in the endnotes and in the fact that those of most chapters are dominated by primary source material. She has evidently spent much time in the presence of these sources and has skilfully woven them into the narrative presented. Indeed, her bibliography further highlights the extent of the research pursued to create this updated biography of Elizabeth's early life and demonstrates Tallis' clear positioning, for an academic audience, in the existing field. For a general audience, the scope of the bibliography provides a starting point for further engagement with the themes and events covered in *Young Elizabeth*. On the whole, Tallis balances nuancing the primary sources' context and perspective for academic readers with keeping the narrative accessible to a wider audience, strengthening the impact of this work as it straddles both academic and trade markets.

Where this work sometimes stumbles, though, is in this balance between academic and general readership. Where a scholarly reader might feel that the discussion

surrounding some aspects of the primary sources is overly simplified, general readers might find beneficial the extended contextualisation of key moments. Given Tallis' skill in creating an engaging yet complex narrative, there is scope for an accessible discussion of the limitations of sources, for which an academic reader might look, while maintaining an overarching narrative which is easy to follow, as a trade book necessitates. This tension exists particularly in Tallis' remarks, or the lack thereof, on the perspectives of the primary sources used; a remark on Chapuys' "naturally hostile" attitude towards Elizabeth is but one example of a seeming dismissal of the utility of outwardly Catholic perspectives on Elizabeth (22) while the narrative arc, later, seems to take the Protestant John Foxe and his *Acts and Monuments* at face value (78). The intended general audience, however, is clearly at the centre of narrative decisions for this work as Tallis' detailed contextualisation of key moments provides clarity for those who may be unfamiliar with broader Tudor history. For example, the overview of both Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn's childhoods and the details provided surrounding Anne's fall from power situate Elizabeth in her familial and political contexts and therefore allow greater examination of their influence on Elizabeth's own life (4–14, 44–51).

Again signalling the unmistakable rigour in her research, Tallis' engagement with primary sources detailing Elizabeth's political and educational development in the 1540s and 1550s encourages further questions, both contributing to the existing field of research while leaving open other avenues of study. For example, it is well-known that Juan Luis Vives' *De institutione feminae christianae* strongly influenced the future Mary I's education—which Tallis notes (78)—but further discussion of the role this text directly or indirectly played in Elizabeth's education, if at all, could have added further nuance to the examination pursued in this work and would have served as an insightful comparative element between England's first two crowned queens regnant. Similarly, a passing remark that Mary received more in Henry VIII's will than Elizabeth could have been extended to discuss the reasons for this, further developing our understanding of Elizabeth's position at Henry VIII's death (171). Additionally, the final years of Mary I's reign and Elizabeth's accession to the English throne feel rather rushed, invoking more questions than providing answers. The discussion of Elizabeth's consolidation of power in 1558 prior to Mary's death mid-November could be more rounded with greater analysis of who was gathering around Elizabeth and with whom she was in contact. Acknowledging that perhaps this information is not extant, is inaccessible, or is perhaps better situated in an academic article, a brief note to that effect would have resolved this reviewer's questions on the topic. In all,

however, the number of further research questions which Tallis' work solicits highlights the engaging nature of this book and the attentive way in which Tallis has contextualised Elizabeth in the political, religious, economic, social, and educational environments of the time.

A detailed biography which prioritises primary sources and effectively provides an overarching narrative of the future Elizabeth I's first twenty-five years of life, Nicola Tallis' *Young Elizabeth* successfully positions itself as a reference piece both for scholars of Tudor monarchy and queenship and for the wider public interested in Tudor history. Appealing to those with an interest in this future queen's life, this work serves both as an introduction to the woman who would become the 'Virgin Queen' and a considered survey of the extant primary sources and the ways in which they paint a picture of this historical figure, sometime princess, sometime prisoner, but foremost Queen.

JOHANNA STRONG

Independent Scholar