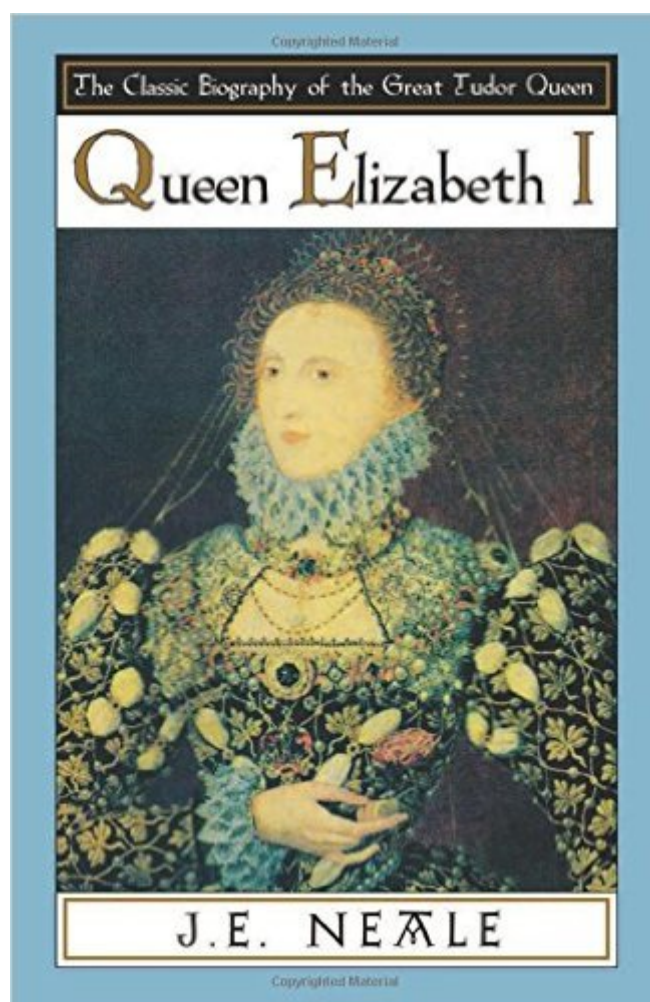


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Queen Elizabeth I



Synopsis

Long considered the definitive biography of the great Tudor Queen, this scholarly and immensely readable book won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for Biography and has been translated into nine languages.

Book Information

Paperback: 446 pages

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Customer Reviews

In recent years, Neale has been overshadowed a bit in the world of Elizabethan biography. More dry and less flattering works of the lady in question have eroded his mostly complimentary analysis of her, and his perspective has come to be regarded as old-fashioned. Yet even the harshest critics of Elizabeth acknowledge the debt owed to Neale. Thankfully, his erudition is strong, and, while newer, more skeptical biographies may challenge his love for that Queen, his scholarship must stand intact. I rather think that contrary historians have inverted the Neale perspective: they maintain that his worship for Elizabeth blinded him to her flaws. But, read this book. His admiration stems from his delving into the reign. He sees where Elizabeth goes wrong, but is always aware of her greater achievement, and brings home to the reader just how singular this monarch truly was. Moreover, the book is enjoyable. One feels and is moved by the author's own joy in his subject matter. Would that some modern biographies possessed this talent!

Although hardly a year goes by without someone new coming up with another biography on Queen Elizabeth I, this probably is the best of the lot. Many of the subsequent volumes that have appeared

after Neale generally owe him a debt of gratitude at least for assembling the basic facts of the life of the Virgin Queen. Elizabeth's life has been told many times, her parents, Henry VIII and Anne Bolyn's ill-fated marriage, imprisonment during the reigns of both siblings, Thomas Seymour (whose sister replaced her mother in Henry's bed-would any soap opera try this plot twist?), Thomas Wyatt, William Cecil, Robert Dudley, Mary Queen of Scots, the Spanish Armada, Shakespeare, and Gloriana. What Neale does quite well is to provide some real insight into the life of this the best of Britain's rulers and to place her actions in context. Some might think that Neale's treatment is too positive, I think the tone of the book is consistent with the greatness of this woman who, unlike her modern day namesake, ruled as well as reigned.

As someone with years of interest in Elizabeth I, a fascinating and complex monarch at a time when monarchs were really responsible for their countries, I have read almost every biography published in the last thirty years. This book clearly labels speculation as speculation and states as facts only information obtained from written material. It probably provides the clearest account of what actually occurred that we can obtain from this distance in time.

After having read everything I could get my hands on about Elizabethan England reading this book was very refreshing. Delving into the social and political realm of Queen Regina is what this book is all about. Well written and easy to read it gives a new perspective on the trials and tribulations of a very courageous and smart lady.

Dozens and dozens of Elizabeth biographies have appeared since Neale's. They range from fawning and highly subjective to harsh and unflattering. Yet even those writers dismissive of Neale's adoration for this queen cannot dispute his authentic scholarship. The man was an enormously respected historian, and his erudition forms the solid basis of his admiration. He sees Elizabeth in her own time, then draws the parallels needed to make that time, and what she accomplished within it, real to us. Perhaps most importantly: he writes with the hand of a gifted narrator, and with well-substantiated joy in his subject.

Neale's book comes from an older world of historical writing, and would not satisfy the demands of current historians. It tells the story of Elizabeth I as a loving tale of a personal friend, focusing on assessments (or presumptions!) about character. The book makes Elizabeth seem a strong and deserving leader. The book reveals little, though, of the details and especially the implications of

political decision-making. A war, or a raising of taxes, is seen as meaningful only as a development in some relationship between Elizabeth and some other nobleman. This work would be of almost no help to someone trying to understand the developments in English politics in the 1500s. As a personal drama, though, (perhaps as a soap-opera), this is an engaging and informative read.

A very elegant account of this subject, and well worth having beside Lytton Strachey's flamboyant account of Elizabeth and Essex. I don't know the field well, but it seems to have stood the test of time.

I just find it really interesting that Sir John Neale (the author of this book) was able to write a personal review for Queen Elizabeth I after having passed away some 24 odd years ago. Neat trick...

Anyways, very interesting book, although it does have a tendency to be slow in spots.

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