Elizabeth: The Last Ten Years of Her Reign

A Study from the perspective in Shakespeare’s English History Plays

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Preface

In reading of history, a soldier should draw the platform of battles he meets with, plant the squadrons and order the whole frame as he finds it written, so he shall print it firmly in his mind and apt his mind for actions. A politque should find the characters of personages and apply them to some of the Court he lives in, which will likewise confirm his memory and give scope and matter for conjecture and invention. A friend to confer readings together most necessary.¹

The new historiography called “politic” history’, which prevailed parallel to the decline of the English chronicle in the late sixteenth century, is characterized by Tacitus’ style of writing history. He put forth that the causes and effects of history were human nature rather than providence or fate, and could therefore have had implications ‘as the guidebook of political life’ for those who were engaged in the public service to the commonwealth, or in the term used by the Roman rhetoricians like Cicero, ‘viri civiles’.² A good example was Sir Henry Wotton, who was taken into friendship with Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, from the mid 1590s. Secretary to this notable lord though he was, Sir Henry thought it advisable to leave England quickly and privately to avoid getting involved in Essex’s revolt in 1601, which is what prudent statesmen would do for their safety.³ Thanks to his foresight, Sir Henry successfully kept himself out of danger by anticipating the fall of the Earl of Essex.⁴

William Shakespeare’s English History Plays written and performed in the 1590s, at the end of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, played a significant role in the public theater by teaching the lessons of history to those who were involved in public service to the commonwealth.⁵ Ten Plays originally named ‘Histories’ so that the importance of the 1590s could be represented, later merged into the traditional genres and were long underestimated until the first half of
the twentieth century when ideas, politics, and culture in the Elizabethan period were again paid attention to. By reading Shakespeare’s history as related to the contemporary religious and political issues at the end of the Elizabethan period, this book aims to demonstrate that Shakespeare’s English History Plays can serve as useful information for subjects who had to survive in difficult times, which made this new genre evolve.

For Queen Elizabeth I and her subjects, religion and royal succession must have been the two most important concerns throughout most of her reign. Religious settlement was always related to the risk of war with the great Catholic monarchies such as Spain, and the royal succession was complicated by the fact that Elizabeth was the unmarried female monarch with no heir. Shakespeare started to write his history plays with *Three Parts of King Henry the Sixth*, and came to an end with *Richard III*. These history plays are about the seemingly old but new theme that must have concerned his contemporaries the most in 1590s: that is, the succession of Queen Elizabeth. Shakespeare captured the audience’s increasing interest in the Tudor genealogical tree of the old Queen with no direct heir; whereas, he superficially commemorated the birth of the Tudor dynasty so that the rise and fall of Richard the usurper could divert attention from the uncertain succession of the first Tudor king who claimed to be the true successor to the House of Lancaster. In the early 1590s at the very closure of the First Tetralogy the origin of the Tudor genealogical tree was proudly declared. It was successfully constructed by the royal marriage between Henry Tudor (the plausible Lancastrian claimant) and Elizabeth of York (the heiress of the House of York), and then showed one ‘union rose’ blooming highest above in the Tudor Family tree, in order to predict the coming of Elizabeth the Virgin Queen, who would finally unite a pair of the red and white roses.6)

Next, Shakespeare considered what a tyrant king is like, by representing Richard III, the most humorous caricature of a tyrant king in English history, and then he turned his eyes further back in history to King John. It is well known that the Petition of Right initiated by Sir Edward Coke in 1628 was based on the Magna Carta of 1215. Although it was not evident only in the representation of the riot by English nobles that Shakespeare preceded the idea of constitutional monarchy symbolized first in Magna Carta, it should be clear if we consider the significance of the deposition scene of *Richard II*, which must have been written after *King John*.7)

In *King John* and *Richard II*, Shakespeare showed how the riot against the tyrant king was justified and the disposition of the tyrant king in detail on stage in the public theater. It might be bold to say that the political speculation encouraged in a public theatre might have helped to develop mentality that let the British people approve the execution of Charles I in 1642, but
I would like to suggest that Shakespeare meant to suppress such radical speculation and wrote the three plays of the two parts of *Henry IV* and *Henry V* with King Henry IV having an unquiet reign and his own son Prince Hal as the true savior of his realm. That is, as at the very end of *King John*, Prince John, the heir apparent who can redeem his father’s misrule, is expected to be a good king by the rioting nobles, and so Shakespeare seems to show his audience that the next king after the old Queen, will bring better times. That’s why the unquiet reign of King Henry IV, whose claim to the throne was weak, is represented very much like that of Queen Elizabeth’s, whose legitimacy to the English throne was always challenged by the more powerful claimant Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots. The great difference was that Henry IV had an heir of his own flesh and blood, but Queen Elizabeth had none.

In *Henry V*, the very hope for a flesh-and-blood young king of British nationality can be admitted. On the other hand, Shakespeare thought the role of the Chorus in this play needed to act as a kind of yoke on the audience’s free imagination, so that political speculation pursued in the public theatre could be avoided.

Finally, Shakespeare engaged himself in *Henry VIII* with the same theme that he took up in the 1590s: that of royal succession. After the Queen died, the great family tree of the Tudors made from the Yorkists and Lancastrians was gone, and on its stock the branch of the Stuarts was grafted to produce royal fruit. *Henry VIII*, with a great hope for royal fruit promised at the end of Act V, is a different kind of English History Play as an epithalamium for Queen Elizabeth, who produced no royal fruit.

Chapter 1 History Plays as a New Genre in the Sixteenth Century

In 1623, seven years after William Shakespeare died, the first collected edition of his plays known as the First Folio, was published by two of his fellow actors John Hemings and Henry Condell. On the title page of this edition published according to ‘the true original copies’, with the portrait of Shakespeare engraved as the frontispiece, the full title reads ‘Mr. William Shakespares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies’, which introduces ‘Histories’ as a new genre, compared to the traditional archetypes of tragedies and comedies. As Emma Smith points out, dividing Shakespeare’s 36 plays in the ‘Catalogue’ into three categories is ‘one of its most significant critical legacies’ as these three genres classified in the First Folio are still now used for Shakespeare criticism.⁶

‘Histories’ mean the history of English past, strictly speaking, ‘the plays dealing
especially with the history after the Norman Conquest. Their themes are specific, but their definition itself has not been clear. Some of the plays regarded as English History Plays include the word ‘tragedy’ in their titles in earlier printed editions. ‘Most of the English histories centre their action on the reign of a monarch, the narrative ending with his death’. For example, Francis Meres, who made the first critical statements about Shakespeare’s plays, in his Palladis Tamia (1598), generically classified some of his English History Plays as tragedies as follows:

As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for Comedy and Tragedy among the Latines: so Shakespeare among y’ English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage; for Comedy, witness his Ge’lume’of Verona, his Errors, his Love labors lost, his Love labours wonne, his Midsummer night dreame, & his Merchant of Venice: for Tragedy his Richard the 2. Richard the 3. Henry the 4. King John, Titus Andronicus and his Romeo and Juliet.

The criticism by Meres, who highly estimated Shakespeare with seemingly less knowledge of classics than other University Wits, must have seemed very unique to his contemporaries whose primary source for dramatic theory was Aristotle’s Poetics. In fact, as Ben Jonson, one of Shakespeare’s contemporaries, apparently commented on Shakespeare’s English History Play in the prologue to Every Man in His Humour (performed in 1598 and published in 1601),

or, with three rusty swords,
And help of some few foot-and-half-foot words,
Fight over York and Lancaster’s long jars;
And in the tiring-house bring wounds to scars.
He rather prays you will be pleased to see
One such, today, as other plays should be.

Where neither Chorus wafts you o’er the seas; (Prologue 9–15)

Jonson believed, according to the critical standard of Aristotle’s Poetics, Shakespeare’s mimetic art was not mature enough to represent nature. Jonson objected to Shakespeare’s free and easy way with nature’s representation especially in his English History Plays and romances because Shakespeare broke the principle of the three unities. Meres’s seemingly unusual criticism is basically the same as Jonson’s. As the title of the chapter “A Comparative Discourse of our English Poets, with the Greeke, Latine, and Italian Poets” indicates, Meres seems to have tried to canonize English poets compared to the classics. So it is probable that his standard of criticism was inherited from the Western critical tradition of Aristotle’s Poetics, because he chose
Henry IV, the play combined with comedy, as a good example of Shakespeare’s tragedies.\textsuperscript{13}

Unlike the critical tendency of dramas that form of art was highly evaluated with the three unities central to the decorum of dramaturgy, this new genre challenged by the seemingly uneducated man became integrated into the archetypical genres since the publication of the First Folio. For example, Nicolas Rowe, the first editor of Shakespeare, in his preface of the 1709/10 edition of the works of Shakespeare, also dared to point out that ‘His Plays are properly to be distinguish’d only into Comedies and Tragedies. Those which are called Histories, and even some of his Comedies, are really Tragedies, with a run or mixture of Comedy amongst ’em,’ and it is mainly because of his indifferent attitude towards this new genre and its definition, that Rowe regarded Roman history plays as ‘Histories’.\textsuperscript{14} Rowe, who regarded the three unities as ‘the regularity of those written precepts’, had the same critical standard that Ben Jonson in Elizabethan times and John Dryden (‘the father of English criticism’) in the seventeenth century had.\textsuperscript{15} Rowe criticized Shakespeare for his disproportionate balance between art and nature. If Rowe happened to estimate highly Shakespeare’s English History Plays written beyond the limits of time and place, then Rowe’s admiration for Shakespeare’s genius was for the very portraits of English historical characters which Shakespeare created with his poetic imagination apart from the three unities as accurately as the historians.\textsuperscript{16}

The preceding example that focused on Shakespeare’s masterful portrayal of human nature, which Rowe admitted in his English History Plays, can be found in the work by Ben Jonson himself who referred to Shakespeare with sarcasm. In addition, it is very interesting that the evaluation of a particular character in The Devil is an Ass (1616) excels Rowe’s admiration for Shakespeare’s genius in creating historical characters.

Mer. By m’faith you are cunning i’ the Chronicle, Sir.
Fit. No, I confesse I ha’t from the Play-bookes,
And thinke they’re more authentique. Emphasis mine\textsuperscript{17}

In News from the New World Discovered in the Moon (1620), the masque performed a few years later in Elizabethan court, Jonson even made Chronicler confess that he could not tell the truth.\textsuperscript{18} If he used the word ‘the Play books’, it cannot be admitted that Jonson praised the plays openly and highly. Jonson never hesitated to show not only the distrust of the players, but also the disgust with their performance at the public theatre. Although such dramas could hardly be called ‘legitimate’, they were favored by audiences. Cicero defined historiography, as ‘history, which bears witness to the passing of the ages, sheds light upon reality, gives life to recollection and guidance to human existence, and brings tidings of ancient days, whose
voice, but the orator's, can entrust her to immortality' (emphasis mine). Whereas, Jonson seems to have expressed his opinion that plays are more authentic, and considering what made Jonson say the above, the excellence of Shakespeare's characterization in his English History Plays cannot be overlooked. As Andrew Gurr pointed out, in the sixteenth century the term 'acting' as the academic term originally applied to orators or academic actors. It is not until the early seventeenth century when a new technique of characterization developed that the performance of the common players came to be remarkable to such an extent that the noun 'personation' is needed. Frank Kermode also pointed out that the technical skills of the players' performances enabled Shakespeare to create more complicated characters.

Samuel Johnson, one of the best Shakespearean critics in New Classicism of the eighteenth century, showed his respect for the traditional principle of the three unities in the Preface and Notes to The Plays of William Shakespeare (8 vols: 1765) and pointed out Shakespeare's deviation from 'the art of writing'. Yet, Johnson also praised Shakespeare for his characterizations, so that he judged that 'Shakespeare is the poet of nature'.

Dr. Johnson pointed out that Hemings and Condell, player-editors who divided 36 plays of the First Folio into three genres, seemed unable to distinguish Shakespeare's works 'by any very exact or definite ideas', and commented especially on Shakespeare's English History Plays as follows:

History was a series of actions, with no other than chronological succession, independent on each other, and without any tendency to introduce or regulate the conclusion. It is not always very nicely distinguished from tragedy. There is not much nearer approach to unity of action in the tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra, than in the history of Richard the Second. But a history might be continued through many plays; as it had no plan, it had no limits.

Highly estimating the great kings represented in some of his plays, Dr. Johnson on the whole underestimated Shakespeare's English History Plays as a series of historical events. Yet it should be noted that Dr. Johnson recognized they are completely different in genre from his Tragedies or Comedies. That's why, even though they deviate from the three unities, he could judge the description of characters in Shakespeare’s English History Plays as follows:

His histories, being neither tragedies nor comedies, are not subject to any of their laws; nothing more is necessary to all the praise which they expect, than that the changes of action be so prepared as to be understood, that the incidents be various and affecting, and the characters consistent, natural and distinct. No other unity is
intended, and therefore none is to be sought.  

According to Dr. Johnson, Shakespeare was a great poet so familiar with human nature that he was able to depict people as they were. Thus, Dr. Johnson’s literary comments on Shakespeare’s characters are said to have a great influence on the Romantic character criticism of the nineteenth century with the Bardolatry prevailing. Character criticism, beginning with Maurice Morgann in his essay *An Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff* (1777) and developed by William Hazlitt in *Characters of Shakespear’s Plays* (1817), is one of the most influential forms of nineteenth century Shakespearean studies. Its negligence of the fictional framework of dramas and its attention to dramatic characters made it possible to search deeply the inside of characters as if they were real.

As you can see in the skeptical reply from Dr. Johnson prompted by Morgann’s defense of Falstaff, character criticism concerns not Shakespeare’s English History Plays as a new genre, but as specific dramatic characters with strong character traits. It is not until the early twentieth century when character criticism began to be criticized, that the importance of recognizing Shakespeare’s English History Plays as a distinctive genre was overlooked.

David M. Bergeron pointed out ‘All criticism of the histories emanates from E. M. W. Tillyard’s pioneering work *Shakespeare’s History Plays* (Chatto & Windus, 1944), whether one agrees or disagrees with it.’ As one of the major achievements of re-evaluation of Shakespeare’s English History Plays, we cannot forget E. E. Stoll and his historicist approach to Shakespeare’s plays, that studied Shakespeare’s plays as fictions by bringing into clearer light onto Elizabethan theatrical conventions than on the dramatic characters. Then, in the mid twentieth century, a new critical movement focusing on the politics and political culture represented in Shakespeare’s English History Plays, called attention to the significance of ‘Histories’ as the new genre first recognized by Hemings and Condell.

Let us here observe the newest genre of plays, called ‘Histories’, recognized as very alike, but totally different from the traditional genres by contemporary players. The order of the Histories appeared in the Catalogue of the First Folio and the chronology below determined by E. K. Chambers will help us with the recognition of this newest genre.

1596–97  *The Life and Death of King John.*
1595–96  *The Life & Death of Richard the second.*
1597–98  *The First part of King Henry the fourth.*
1597–98  *The Second part of K. Henry the fourth.*
1598–99  *The Life of King Henry the Fift.*
1591–92  
*The First part of King Henry the Sixth.*

1590–91  
*The Second part of King Hen. the Sixth.*

1590–91  
*The Third part of King Henry the Sixth.*

1592–93  
*The Life & Death of Richard the Third.*

1612–13  
*The Life of King Henry the Eighth.*

It is Felix E. Schelling who showed that more than 150 plays with their subjects drawn from English history were written from 1562 to 1642, some 80 plays of which appeared in the decade between 1590 and 1600, and maintained ‘the popularity of the Chronicle Play should find its origin in the burst of patriotism and the sense of national unity which reached its climax in the year 1588 and stirred England to meet and to repulse the Spanish Armada.’ With the exception of *Henry VIII*, almost all of Shakespeare’s English History Plays were written and performed in the 1590s. So as Nicolas Grene points out ‘There hardly was any such thing as an English history play in the professional theatre before 1590; there was a marked falling off in the genre after the turn of the century’; thus, it seems right that Shakespeare’s English History Plays should be closely connected to the years of the 1590s. In the 1590s, when the chronicle or history plays were the most popularized expression of patriotism and national unity, Shakespeare’s English History Plays must had given the generic traits, which caused Hemings and Condell to refer to some of Shakespeare’s plays as ‘Histories’, and distinguished his plays from English chronicle plays. And then it might be well concluded that it is the factors in the 1590s that caused this difference.

If we turn to the socio-political situation in the 1590s, it is evident that the burst of patriotism prompted by the Spanish Armada was short and frenzied and ‘Fear of further Armadas darkened the 1590s.’ In fact, the threat of another invasion was feared so much that an expedition to Cadiz was planned against Spanish armament in 1596. The last decade in Elizabeth’s forty-four-year reign looked troublesome both at home and abroad, different from ‘the golden dayes’ praised by Sir John Davies in his acrostic poems, all of which spell out ‘Elizabeta Regina’ if you read the first letter of each line vertically.

After the death of Sir Francis Walsingham in 1590, the factional conflict between the Earl of Essex and Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury grew more intense, and the repeated publication of the seditious books by the Jesuits (cf. *A Conference about the Next Succession to the Crowne of England* by Parsons the Jesuit, under the name of Doleman) stimulated anew discussion of the royal succession which had been forbidden since Elizabeth’s accession.

There were many other difficulties in the decade for the Queen and her regime. For
example, the Queen, as one of the princes of the Protestant League, was forced to engage in the war to assist Henri IV, King of France, and the suppression of the Earl of Tyrone's rebellion in 1595 resulted in a heavier tax burden because of the large amounts of money withdrawn from the Treasury for these conflicts. To make the matters worse, the revolts in the counties of Kent, Sussex, and Norfolk continued to break out because of long-term bad harvests, and apprentice riots happened even in London. In the years between 1594 and 97, 'the most sustained and severe inflation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries' hit England. Consequently the Queen Elizabeth became a bitter disappointment to her people.

However, disappointment was not new to the Queen's subjects. Although the young Queen Elizabeth had been expected to settle the long-term religious conflicts so much that John Foxe called the Queen Elizabeth 'this mild Constantinus' after the Emperor Constantine in the 1563 edition of Acts and Monuments, the disappointment to her people was already found early in her reign. In fact, with her personal mottos: 'Semper eadem' or 'always the same' and 'Video et taceo' or 'I see, and say nothing,' Queen Elizabeth firmly believed that 'amity' and "love" between cousins and dynasties' was the most appropriate solution to the national crisis caused by the religious conflicts and royal succession. Thus, her domestic and foreign policies seemed inflexible and delayed to her councillors, which made one of her councillors express his disappointment at her inflexibility.

It is, therefore, important to take a close look at the partnership between Queen Elizabeth and the Privy Council. John Guy asserts that 'Under Edward IV and Henry VII the Council became a real governing institution' and Carole Levin points out briefly the role played by the Privy Council as follows:

By the end of Henry VIII's reign the Privy Council had established its importance to the monarch: it advised the ruler on policy, carried out responsibility for general administration and public expenditure, and coordinated the work of the different agencies of government. The councillors were supposed to serve the king and the commonwealth as well. For example, even though Thomas Cromwell made politically significant 'revolutionary' achievements in Henry VIII's reign for establishing the theory and practice of Tudor government, he never went beyond the boundary of personal service for his prince. However, in the reign of Elizabeth when England faced a more serious national crisis because Elizabeth was a female monarch, her councillors had to mediate between personal service to the monarch and public service to the state or commonwealth. As 'a group of politicians to form a collective, quasi-organic and, for
some considerable time, stable governing group’, they presented advice to their Queen or, if she refused to take their counsel, with the help of Parliament, tried to compel the Queen to act for the commonwealth, but frequently in vain.\(^\text{46}\)

It was natural for Queen Elizabeth as the reigning monarch to depend upon the amity and love between the dynasties if any direct solution had to be made, but, on the other hand, her councillors aimed at unity in the British Isles that might be established by the prevalence of Protestantism and the similarities between England and Scotland in culture and language, which they believed that would be the most effective means of defense against Catholic countries. It is not too much to say that their political awareness might have helped to create a primitive stage of the nation-state in Britain, accompanied by the emergence of nationalism at that time. Her councillors may have contemplated the possible political future of the British Isles temporarily without the Queen: a ‘monarchical republic’.\(^\text{47}\)

The growing tension between the Queen as the reigning monarch and her councillors on the political issues resulted in discontent among her people. In fact, in the 1590s public expectations for the Protestant King James VI of Scotland as the heir apparent to the throne of England, had grown all the greater than ever before, because of the Queen’s old age. Carole Levin points out as follows:

The events of the 1580s and 1590s drove Elizabeth into a policy that went against her instincts and England into a period of war that had grave repercussions, and made the English people far more critical of their monarch.\(^\text{48}\)

The last decade of the fifteenth century seems to have been difficult, as if the Queen’s reluctance to take drastic action caused social anxiety and disorder to increase.

Shakespeare’s English History Plays, almost all of which were written and performed in this decade, exist in the milieu so English people could look back on the Queen’s reign and have high hopes for a new king. My aim in this book on Shakespeare’s English History Plays is to demonstrate how Shakespeare, with the great help of the public theater located in ‘the milieu of Elizabethan society’, wrote in his plays the political discontent felt by his contemporaries as well as the topical issues in her last decade, and in the end integrated them into his fiction of English history again.\(^\text{49}\)

Notes
1) Logan Peasall Smith 2: 494; See the epigraph quoted in Levy 1.
3) Walton 33.
4) Levy 14.
5) Kamps 22.
7) R2, ed. Forker 19; Alford 212; McLaren 220–27.
8) Smith 2.
9) Kewes 172.
10) Hattaway 3.
11) Meres 152; Greene 60–61; 1H6, ed. Burns I.4.41; Nash 60.
12) Yumiko Yamada 35–46 and 152.
13) Meres 147; See Stallybrass and Chartier 44; 2H4, ed. Humphreys xvi.
14) Rowe I. xvii and xxviii.
15) Rowe I. xxvi; Johnson, Samuel Johnson on Shakespeare 182.
16) Rowe I. xxviii.
17) Jonson vol.5.59.
18) Jonson vol.5.354.
19) Cicero II. ix. 36.
20) Gurr 99.
21) Kermode 53.
22) Johnson, Samuel Johnson on Shakespeare 122, 133 and 137–38.
23) Johnson, Samuel Johnson on Shakespeare 127.
24) Johnson, Samuel Johnson on Shakespeare 127.
26) Johnson, Samuel Johnson on Shakespeare 133.
27) Johnson, Samuel Johnson on Shakespeare 97.
28) The Life of Samuel Johnson VIII. 182.
29) Bergeron and U. de Sousa 78.
30) Hunter 155.
32) Shelling 39.
33) Apart from the two Tetralogies, although little attention has been paid to Henry VIII, I insist that Shakespeare wrote Henry VIII to consider two problems: the royal succession and religious problem.
34) Grene 7.
35) Levin 70.
36) Davies 129; See Frances Yates and Roy Strong for further information of the cult of Elizabeth.
38) Suzuki 28; Somerset 489.
39) Foxe I. vii; Doran & Freeman 173–74.
40) MacCaffrey, “Politics” 328.
41) Alford 41.
42) Brigden 286–87.
44) Levin 16.
46) Collinson, ”Monarchical Republic” 40; Guy, Tudor England 11; Levin 16; Alford 9–42.
47) See Patrick Collinson’s technical term ‘monarchical republic’: Cheney 116.
48) Levin 104.
49) Mullaney 38. ‘the threshold of the community’: Axton 89.

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* This article is a translation of the preface and chapter 1 from my Japanese book published in 2009.
(ABSTRACT)

Elizabeth: The Last Ten Years of Her Reign

A Study from the perspective in Shakespeare’s English History Plays

LEE Choon Mi

William Shakespeare’s English History Plays written and performed in the 1590s, at the end of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, played a significant role in the public theater by teaching the lessons of history to those involved in public service to the commonwealth. Ten Plays, originally named ‘History Plays’ so that the importance of the 1590s could be represented, later merged into the traditional genres and were long underestimated until the first half of the twentieth century when ideas, politics and culture in the Elizabethan period were again paid attention to.

This article is a translation of the preface and the first chapter of my Japanese book published in 2009. This article shows that my book aims to clarify that Shakespeare’s English History Plays could serve as useful information for the people of Shakespeare’s time who had to survive difficult times by reading the history represented in Shakespeare’s plays as related to the contemporary religious and political issues at the end of the Elizabethan period.
She was the last monarch of the Tudor period. Parents: Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn. Spouse: None. Illustration of Princess Elizabeth, about 10 years before she became Queen of England. (Photo by Time Life Pictures/Mansell/The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images). On the contrary: all this proved was what a great pragmatist Elizabeth was. Over the course of her reign the physical reality of Elizabeth’s weak, female and ageing ‘natural body’ had to be reconciled with the unerring and immortal ‘body politic’. To read more about Elizabeth’s make-up regime, click here (exclusive to The Library). Ironically, most of these cosmetics did more damage to the skin than ageing ever could.