Helen Hackett. *The Elizabethan Mind: Searching for the Self in an Age of Uncertainty*. **New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2022. 448 pp. ISBN 9780300207200. $35.00 hardback.**

By Laura Seymour

As the study of the humanities threatens to become ever more exclusionary owing to rising costs and workplace precarity, keenly priced and approachable studies are becoming an increasingly welcome sight to many. *The Elizabethan Mind* generously shares Helen Hackett's learning in a manner accessible to both academics and general readers, enucleating an enormous collection of sources about Elizabethans' thoughts about thinking. Readers of *The Spenser Review* may be particularly attracted to Hackett's discussions of the imagination, and of the distinct opportunities for depicting minds offered by soliloquies compared to allegorical personification of the mind's constituent parts and attitudes. *The Elizabethan Mind* introduces itself as a contextual guide to the era that enables us better to understand Elizabethan literature; its premise is "that we cannot fully understand the works of William Shakespeare and his contemporaries without knowledge of the differences between their ideas about the mind and our own" (15). But, as Hackett shows, some Elizabethan minds are more open to us than others.

Leap rearward eighty years to E.M.W. Tillyard's *The Elizabethan World Picture*, which asserted a bedrock of commonplace ideas that most educated Elizabethans shared and refused to dispute and which, Tillyard argued, remained untouched by the era's contrastingly-trivial religious controversies. *The Elizabethan Mind* makes two different moves. First, Hackett's subject-matter is not Elizabethan concepts but Elizabethan notions of the mind itself: the entity which created and entertained these concepts as well as being shaped by and understood through them.

Second, Hackett explodes any notion of Elizabethans as a consistent group sharing unassailable entrenched beliefs. As Hackett shows, Elizabethans did not consider Elizabethans homogenous, and their proliferating notions about the mind were inflected by theories of race, gender, governability, writing and the book trade, and the supernatural. In proving this, Hackett lets hundreds of Elizabethans speak for and about themselves and to and about each other.

The Elizabethan Mind begins and ends with *Hamlet*, almost proverbially a climacteric in cultural representations of the mind. *Hamlet* is initially useful to Hackett as an example of why her investigation is needed; though *Hamlet* seems "remarkably modern" (2) Hackett argues, it is best understood as an Elizabethan play, for "we miss vast and important dimensions of the play if we are unaware of Elizabethan theories of the mind" (2–3) especially regarding melancholy. Then, the book pans out to the varying Elizabethan depictions of minds that informed *Hamlet* and other literary works of the period. Part I, "Mind and Body," deploys medical, literary, and spiritual frameworks to detail how the mind worked with and against the body. Part II, "Marginalised Minds," deals first with the minds of women, to whom the mind-body theories delineated in Part I "were applied with particular force" (115). Canacee in *The Faerie Queene* appears here as an example of a desirable virtuous woman in male discourse, able to regulate both her inward and outward self. Valuably, Hackett devotes substantial time to illuminating women's translations, and tropes of translation and translating as feminized. This is followed by a chapter on Africans in Elizabethan England, presented as a key case study drawn from white Elizabethans' several racialized "others." Expounding geohumoral theories of race and temperament, Hackett emphasizes the contrast between the documented African presence in Elizabethan England and the lack of documentation of these sixteenth-century African people's minds in their own words; as she writes, "although Africans were living among English Elizabethans, often in the intimate spaces of their home, their lived experiences, states of mind, and sense of themselves remain, frustratingly, largely inaccessible to us" (163).

Part III, "Disturbances and Discipline," analyzes minds permeable to possession and celestial influences, imagination, and politics of the mind. Hackett delineates the contested position of poetry within theories of fancy and imagination. For example, she examines moments when poets and playwrights ask their audiences and readers to "'imagine'" (251). Part IV, "Writing the Mind," begins with a chapter on

life-writing (which includes autobiographies, portraits, love-notes, sonnets, and prose) before returning to *Hamlet* as "a point of convergence for many lines of thought about the mind that had developed throughout the Elizabethan period" (314). Hackett distinguishes *Hamlet* from the morality plays and allegorical interludes that were so popular and pervasive in Elizabethan England, because Hamlet's "self-division" and "entirely inward-looking soliloquies" (316) differ from allegories and moralities' personification of different parts of the mind. However, Hackett emphasizes that *Hamlet* was not the first play to represent the mind in dialogue with itself, adducing *Doctor Faustus* and *The Spanish Tragedy*. She situates *Hamlet* within Shakespeare's career-arc, tracing an etiology in characters like the Bastard and Falstaff who combine characteristics of Morality play Vices with an ability if not to reflect on themselves then to "deconstruct" (326) ideas like Honor and Commodity. Next arises Brutus in *Julius Caesar* whose soliloquies convey a psychological state of sleepless self-righteousness that might resonate with our own. *Hamlet* appears as a culmination in this lineage: "most social interactions in the play encourage us to seek hidden purposes and concealed thoughts, framing and cohering with the many moments of soliloquy" (329).

Hackett's concern with the move from allegory to inward soliloquy will naturally be of interest to many readers of *The Spenser Review*. As we have seen, Canacee materializes to illustrate notions of female disorderliness, and Edmund Spenser crops up within *The Elizabethan Mind* to exemplify various other points in Hackett's argument. Hackett's engagement with Spenser includes discussion of his appreciation of the difference between the outward visible self and the neoplatonic beauty of the inward self to which poetry might give us privileged access in the *Amoretti*, and his description of self-regarding and self-knowing Genius in *The Faerie Queene*. Hackett's most sustained discussions of Spenser deal with the psychomachia around the Castle of Alma and its relation to Spenser's colonial worldview (266-68), and the ways in which Phantastes illuminates Elizabethan questions of imagination, poetry, divine inspiration, disorder, and self-governance.

Hackett then reads soliloquies as representations of private thought, wherein the soliloquist represents themselves to themselves. As she explains,

> Shakespeare mobilises soliloquy, in combination with other dramatic techniques, to endow Hamlet with a mind that is in constant flux and tumult, opaque to others and unfathomable even to Hamlet himself. In this, he comes as close as any author in the history of literature to representing how it feels to have a mind.
> (335)

I am often struck by the suggestion that the way to make a literary portrayal of a character's mind realistic is to represent that mind as tumultuous and opaque (at least on first sight) to we readers and audience members and, crucially, to the character themselves. Historically, many readers and literary critics have been rather loath to accept that we understand ourselves better than *Hamlet* can; assuming that Hamlet's mind is opaque both to him and to us reassures many of us that there are hidden depths to discover both in this text and in ourselves. As Hackett mentions, Sigmund Freud's work and practice informs various worldviews wherein we do not entirely know our own minds (and, I add, that our selfhood is validated and sustained by its relation to the text of *Hamlet*). A contrasting argument might be constructed, however, from some of the other sources in *The Elizabethan Mind*, not least Spenser. I found very thought-provoking in this context Hackett's discussion of allegorical texts, and work like John Davis's *Nosce Teipsum*, which suggest a certain visibility and knowability to the mind: though we may not understand the mystery of its creation, the mind is something we should and can examine right down to its darkest corners. It is conceivable that we moderns' predominant experience of our own minds is not a sense of awe and confusion at our own thought processes, but that rather we develop what we deem to be clear narratives and explanations for what we think and why. We tell ourselves that, by self-searching, these narratives increase in clarity and authenticity. We might (and indeed may be encouraged by a therapist to) see our mind in personified parts that talk to, war with, and protect each other. Can *The Faerie Queene*, I wonder, be more realistic than *Hamlet*?

Hackett delineates two key goals for this book: to cast light on Elizabethan literature by analyzing "Elizabethan concepts of the mind" and simultaneously "by throwing our own very different ideas and assumptions into relief [to] give us a clearer awareness of what the mind means to us today" (15). The Epilogue returns to this, stating that "the project of this book has been mainly to explore the difference between Elizabethan ideas about the mind and our own" (342). *The Elizabethan Mind* amply elucidates Elizabethan concepts of the mind, bountifully providing its readers with the promised context to help them understand Elizabethan literature. Moreover, throughout, Hackett demonstrates—on an array of texts from "Of Monsieur's Departure" to *Astrophil and Stella*—the kinds of readings that arise when we pay attention to Elizabethan concepts of the mind. Throughout Parts I–IV it is generally

our job as readers to figure out the differences between Elizabethan concepts about the mind and our own, and we may come up with conclusions as varied as we are thinkers. However, the Epilogue introduces some modern ideas about the brain, saliently psychoanalysis, and 4E cognition, and draws on Matthew Walker's popular recent book *Why We Sleep* (2017) alongside Mary Thomas Crane's *Shakespeare's Brain* (2001), which I am sure for several scholars was the inception of their cognitive-theoretic interest in Shakespeare. In its largely exclusive focus on Elizabethan theories of the mind, *The Elizabethan Mind* offers something distinct to, for instance, Miranda Anderson's *The Renaissance Extended Mind* (2015). Anderson's book, throughout, compares early modern and modern cognitive theories, integrating the two to examine the human mind in action and its relation to the external world. When she introduces modern ideas of the mind, Hackett does not present them as a definitive answer to Elizabethan conundrums but rather as elements of an ongoing process of discovery that variously returns to, derives from, and challenges Elizabethan ideas. Though the main discussion starts and ends with *Hamlet*, Hackett concludes that it is not *Hamlet* but the mind itself that defines the Elizabethan era as a moment (341). This enjoyable book will enable readers to understand this moment more richly than before, through its diverse company of Elizabethan voices.

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