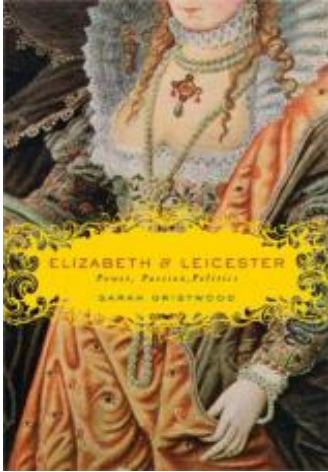

Elizabeth & Leicester: Power, Passion, and Politics

by Sarah Gristwood



About the Book

Few relationships fire our imagination like that of Elizabeth I and the Earl of Leicester, Robert Dudley --- the love affair immortalized in Philippa Gregory's *The Virgin's Lover* --- but nearly fifty years have passed since a book has been dedicated solely to their lifelong love.

Soon after Elizabeth became queen she scandalized the royal court with her passionate obsession with the married Robert Dudley. When Dudley's wife mysteriously died two years later, there was rampant speculation that Elizabeth and Dudley would marry. Instead, over the next decades they formed a working partnership and an intimate bond of mutual dependence. Robert advised Elizabeth, serving as her counselor, unofficial consort, and army commander. He guarded her sickbed and represented her on state occasions. But despite her devotion, Elizabeth humiliated him, made him act as a go-between with her other suitors, and tried to imprison him when he finally remarried. Fueled by scandal and intrigue, this royal relationship was never dull.

Elizabeth & Leicester is an intimate, startling portrait of two people who transformed their age. For those who adore reading about the royals and the many fans of the Emmy Award-winning miniseries *Elizabeth I* and feature film *Elizabeth*, this is a story of enduring love that continues to speak to us today.

Discussion Guide

1. Is it possible to judge Elizabeth's political and personal behavior from such a historical distance? How do the mores of her time warp our understanding?

2. Is it valid to draw comparisons between the situation Elizabeth faced - particularly when it came to choosing a consort - and the situation facing a powerful woman today? Are there any other lessons today's politicians could draw from her reign, and her techniques?
3. Do you think Elizabeth really did want to marry, or did her relationship with Robert Dudley (anomalous though it might be) satisfy all her needs in greater safety? How easy is it for us, today, to relate to the emotional side of her story?
4. Why are we so fascinated by the question of Elizabeth's virginity, and is it a serious topic for historical study?
5. How does the relationship of Elizabeth and Leicester challenge our expectations of the conventional romantic story?
6. Which of the screen versions of Elizabeth's romantic life seems to you the most realistic? The TV version with Helen Mirren and Jeremy Irons, which took the unusual step of daring to present them as mature lovers, with most of the passion spent? Or Cate Blanchett and Joseph Fiennes in *Elizabeth*? Do you think that the sequel, *Golden Age*, borrows the themes of the triangular relationship between Elizabeth, Leicester and Lettice for its tale of the queen, Raleigh, and Bess Throckmorton?
7. Which aspects of Elizabeth's life have been dealt with *least* successfully by the fictional versions on both page and screen? The blending of political and personal? The uncertainty about her sexual story?
8. Why is it so difficult to put conspiracy theories such as the murder of Amy Dudley, assassination of JFK, and the death of Lady Diana? How do people use particular theories for political or social advantage?

Author Bio

Sarah Gristwood is the author of several previous books of 15th- and 16th-century history, including *GAME OF QUEENS: The Women Who Made Sixteenth-Century Europe*, and *BLOOD SISTERS: The Women Behind the Wars of the Roses*. Her *ARBELLA: England's Lost Queen* and *ELIZABETH AND LEICESTER* both featured on the bestseller lists, and Sarah has also written a number of books on 20th-century figures from Winston Churchill to Elizabeth II.

A former film journalist contributing to the *Guardian*, *The Times* and the *Telegraph*, she now broadcasts regularly for Sky News, CNN and the BBC on royal and historical affairs, besides contributing to a number of documentary series such as "Royal House of Windsor" and "Secrets of the National Trust." A graduate of Oxford University, she is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society and of the RSA, who has been shortlisted for both the Marsh Biography Award and the Ben Pimlott Prize for Political Writing.

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