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Frontmatter -- Contents -- 1. Halting the Traffic in Women: Theoretical Foundations -- 2. Elizabeth I (with a Note on Marguerite de Navarre) -- 3. Sir Philip Sidney's Queen -- 4. Mary Sidney Herbert (with a Note on Elizabeth Cary) -- 5. Spenser's Britomart -- 6. Mary Wroth -- 7. Shakespeare's Cordelia -- Epilogue: Milton's Eve -- Notes -- Index -- Acknowledgments

Sommario/riassunto

Maureen Quilligan explores the remarkable presence in the Renaissance of what she calls "incest schemes" in the books of a small number of influential women who claimed an active female authority by writing in high canonical genres and who, even more transgressively for the time, sought publication in print. It is no accident for Quilligan that the first printed work of Elizabeth I was a translation done at age eleven of a poem by Marguerite de Navarre, in which the notion of "holy" incest is the prevailing trope. Nor is it coincidental that Mary Wroth, author of the first sonnet cycle and prose romance by a woman printed in English, described in these an endogamous, if not legally incestuous, illegitimate relationship with her first cousin. Sir Philip Sidney and his sister, the Countess of Pembroke, translated the psalms together, and after his death she finished his work by revising it for publication; the two were the subject of rumors of incest. Isabella Whitney cast one of her most important long poems as a fictive legacy to her brother, arguably because such a relationship resonated with the power of endogamous female agency. Elizabeth Carey's closet drama about Mariam, the wife of Herod, spends important energy on the tie between sister and brother. Quilligan also reads male-authored meditations on the relationship between incest and female agency and sees a far different Cordelia, Britomart, and Eve from what traditional scholarship has heretofore envisioned. *Incest and Agency in Elizabeth's England* makes a signal contribution to the conversation about female agency in the early modern period. While contemporary anthropological theory deeply informs her understanding of why some Renaissance women writers wrote as they did, Quilligan offers an important corrective to modern theorizing that is grounded in the historical texts themselves.