One Mistress and No Master: Elizabeth I and Her Use of Public Personas to Gain and Maintain Power

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ONE MISTRESS AND NO MASTER:
ELIZABETH I AND HER USE OF PUBLIC PERSONAS
TO GAIN AND MAINTAIN POWER

by

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B.A. December 1997, Old Dominion University

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Old Dominion University
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MASTER OF ARTS

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OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY
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ABSTRACT

ONE MISTRESS AND NO MASTER:
ELIZABETH I AND HER USE OF PUBLIC PERSONAS
TO GAIN AND MAINTAIN POWER

Michael J. Davye
Old Dominion University, 2000
Director: Dr. Annette Finley-Croswhite

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the evolution of the personas that
Elizabeth used to gain, hold, and wield power during her reign as Queen of England.
These personas were most likely conscious constructs created to deal with the problems
Elizabeth faced as ruler of England. She had been bastardized by her father, Henry VIII,
and, therefore, was considered by many to have no legitimate claim to the throne. But
this problem was almost insignificant in contrast to the problems she faced trying to
assert her authority as a female monarch. Elizabeth realized the prevailing wisdom of the
time was that a woman was not ordained by law or by God to rule a kingdom. She was
also aware of the common belief that women were innately inferior to men and, thus,
intellectually incapable of ruling.

It was in the context of these beliefs that it can be argued Elizabeth initiated a
process of self-invention—recreating herself in the public mind through a series of
 personas which allowed her to transcend the restrictions placed on her by her gender.
During the course of her reign, Elizabeth was able to recreate herself as Protestant savior,
strong prince, military leader, and Virgin Queen, placing herself outside any recognizable
contexts of the time. This thesis will attempt to show that Elizabeth created these
personas so that she could deal with the world on her own terms. She desired to place
herself beyond reproach so she could rule as she chose.
This process of self-invention allowed Elizabeth to rule effectively for over forty years without having to share power with a consort. It was also this self-invention which eventually weakened her court in the last decade of her reign, creating factions and discontent which led to open rebellion. This discontent would appear to be the result of Elizabeth coming to believe in her personas and, thus, no longer seeing a need to give recompense to her nobles. Elizabeth’s belief that her magnificence alone would keep her nobles loyal was a grave miscalculation.
For
John B. Davye,
Robert Porter Bostick,
and Fr. Michael Reagan.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Elizabeth I has come down to the twenty-first century in the guise of an a semi-divine being. Many historians seem unable to deal with Elizabeth without making her into an avatar, the creator of a golden age for England. This Elizabethan Age exists, too often, for many scholars as a fairyland of chivalry, poetry, and science, where Elizabeth presided over a near-perfect England. When one encounters the word Elizabethan, a multitude of images come into play: the Armada, Shakespeare, Francis Bacon, Jesuits, recusant Catholics, and the splendor of Hampton Court. One of the most enduring images of the era is Elizabeth as Gloriana Regina surveying the Elizabethan world from a divine height.

Elizabethan has become more than just an adjective relating a time and place (1558–1603 England) or even an attitude or ambiance (The Fairie Queen and the tiltyard); it is also a description of the person Elizabeth. To describe Elizabeth as Elizabethan may seem redundant to some, ridiculous to others, but it is apropos to those scholars who have tried to examine her life and reign. Elizabeth the person has, in many instances, been obscured by the Elizabethan personas she and various historians created.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the reasons behind and evolution of the various personas that Elizabeth used to gain, hold, and wield power during her reign as Queen of England. These personas are examined here as constructs created to deal with

several problems she faced as ruler of England. Elizabeth had been bastardized by her father, Henry VIII; therefore, she was considered by many to have no legitimate claim to the throne. This problem of legitimacy was almost insignificant in contrast to the problems she faced trying to assert her authority as a female monarch. Elizabeth realized the prevailing belief of the time was that a woman was ordained neither by law nor God to rule a kingdom. She was also aware that it was commonly believed women were innately inferior to men and, thus, intellectually incapable of ruling.

It was in the context of these beliefs that Elizabeth initiated what seems to have been a process of self-invention—a process of recreating herself in the public mind through a series of personas which allowed her to transcend the restrictions placed on her by virtue of her sex. It will be argued that Elizabeth recreated herself in various ways in order to refute these beliefs and restrictions. She constructed personas wherein she presented herself as being outside any recognizable contexts of the time. It was through this process of self-invention that Elizabeth was able to create her own context where she would have to be understood. As the years of her reign wore on, differing situations demanded that Elizabeth change her personas, but the constant was that her self-invention was intended to keep her outside of and above the traditional expectations concerning women, especially a woman in the role of ruler.

Before going any further, it must be noted that there is no extant record of Elizabeth explicitly saying she intended to create a series of public personas to help her circumvent the obstacles she believed impeded her claim to the throne and her desire to rule alone. There are, however, numerous remarks made by Elizabeth that strongly imply her realization of the dilemma of trying to rule as a single female monarch and also show
how she intended to deal with her situation. Her comment that "we princes are set on
stages, in the sight and view of all the world duly observed" (chapter 5, p. 101) implies
she saw herself as an actor; one who assumed roles. Her speech in 1563, referencing
Parliament’s concern for the succession, in which she states that she will remain single
and childless until God or the good of the realm dictates otherwise (chapter 3, p. 53),
points to a realization of her dilemma and hints at the possibility she would have to make
herself into something new if she was to rule alone. This “something new,” a single,
female monarch, eventually becomes a kind of national symbol in the Virgin Queen.

It would seem Elizabeth was conspicuously silent about recreating herself in a
series of personas for at least two reasons. The first is that she probably realized arguing
to justify her ability to rule would be ineffective, and she undoubtedly needed to foster
belief in and acceptance of her ability to rule. Second, it seems likely Elizabeth drew
upon the portrayals of writers and dramatists to create her personas. It appears Elizabeth
allowed the arts of the time to make her argument for her. This alludes to the idea that
while Elizabeth may have appeared silent, she was speaking through her actions and by
fostering artistic portrayals of her which reflected her desired appearance to the world.

Elizabeth’s silence, it is argued below, was a form of consent in reference to her portrayal
in the arts. There was a popular Elizabeth maxim *qui tacet consentire* which translates as
silence gives consent. If Elizabeth had any reservations that the portrayals of her in the
arts did not serve her purposes, she would not have attended these plays, nor allowed the
publication of the various literary works which had her as a subject. The case of the
printer John Stubbs (chapter 4, pp. 87–8) bears this out. It appears that Elizabeth’s
creation of personas was as pragmatic and situational as it was a deliberate and well-planned scheme.

Elizabeth may have been silent on the matter of the creation of her personas, but her actions were not. One can follow the development of her actions and see the evolution of her personas. One simply needs to follow the development of her role of the Virgin Queen concomitant with the marriage suits of Robert Dudley and Francis of Alençon. Elizabeth never says she will definitely not marry and will become an otherworldly Virgin; but, various dramas and literatures presented over the time of these suits show the evolution of this ideal Virgin Queen figure. Elizabeth sometimes guides and sometimes follows these publicly presented depictions of her; it would seem she believed that to become her argument (in the form of a strong, single, female ruler) was more effective than simply making her argument. By presenting herself in the manner in which she wished to be accepted instead of trying to persuade all of England to accept her through rhetorical propaganda, Elizabeth not only made this persona a de facto reality, but she was able to woo her public through the emotionally persuasive medium of theater and the arts. The fact that one can trace the evolution of Elizabeth’s personas with artists’ portrayals of her in drama and literature of the time makes a strong argument for the idea that Elizabeth conceived and executed her personas.

For over forty years, this process of self-invention allowed Elizabeth to rule effectively on her own terms, without having to share power with a consort. The last decade of Elizabeth’s rule, however, was marked by the appearance of bitter factional discontent at Court which eventually led to open rebellion by the Queen’s one time
favorite, the Earl of Essex. This discontent was a result of Elizabeth’s increasingly inconsistent patronage of her nobles.

By the 1590s the most lavish praise of and service to the Queen was no longer the certain route to money and position it had been in previous decades. Judging by her extreme limiting of patronage in the 1590s, it appears Elizabeth may have come to believe her nobles would remain loyal to her simply because they loved her and were in awe of her as if she were a deity, and that largesse had become largely unnecessary. The Queen’s arbitrary and much-lessened patronage and her indulgence of her favorite of the time, the Earl of Essex, made Essex a rallying point for increased discontent and allowed Essex the opportunity and potential support to believe he could make a successful bid to remove Elizabeth from power. In the last decade of her reign, Elizabeth did not adapt to the changing climate at Court and actually created the climate which culminated in Essex’s rebellion. Also, the arbitrary nature of Elizabeth’s largesse and her indulgence of Essex may have reinforced the image that Elizabeth had worked her entire reign to dispel—that of the fickle and frivolous woman. The infighting at Court and the resultant inability to enact any sort of serious policy may have been influenced by this as well.

To place the reign of Elizabeth I in context, it is necessary to examine the ideas of historians who have contributed to the study of Elizabeth. Several of these historians have presented Elizabeth in the contrived Elizabethan form as she would have presented herself four centuries ago. What can seem like a recurring desire among modern historians to view Elizabeth in Elizabethan terms can be traced back to the first historical works dealing with Elizabeth as their subject, the most prominent among these being the works of John Foxe and William Camden. Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments* is, ultimately, a
Protestant martyrology.\(^1\) Foxe's work was first published in 1563, in the early days of Elizabeth's reign. The work was initiated as a Protestant reaction to the reign of the Catholic monarch, Mary Tudor. The finished version of Foxe's work, issued in 1563, portrays Elizabeth as a Protestant heroine protected by God who becomes the Chosen savior for England after surviving her Catholic sister's violently repressive reign.\(^2\)

Various editions of Foxe's work published by current Evangelical presses continue to take Foxe at his word—seeing his opus as a nonpartisan and accurate historical account. These publishers echo Foxe's assertion that Elizabeth was chosen by God to restore Protestantism to England.\(^3\) The vast majority of contemporary historians, however, see the value of Foxe's work as record of the religious discourse of mid-sixteenth-century England. The lasting image he created was of a staunchly pious, Protestant Elizabeth who delivered England from the decadent Catholicism of her half-sister, Mary Tudor. One can see this version of Elizabeth in the work of the Regency-period author Lucy Akin and the 1998 movie *Elizabeth* starring Cate Blanchette.\(^4\)

William Camden's work, *Annales rerum Anglicarum et Hibernicarum Regante Elizabeha* (typically translated as *The history of the most renowned and victorious*

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\(^1\)This is evidenced in the unabridged title of Foxe's work. John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments of these latter and perilous dayes touching matters of the Church, wherein are comprehended and described the great persecutions & horrible troubles, that haue bene wrought and practised by the Romish Prelates, speciallye in this Realm of England and Scotlande, from the year of our Lorde a thousande, unto the tyme nowe present* (New York: AMS Press, 1965).

\(^2\)Foxe, 672-9.

\(^3\)This is clearly evidenced in the Calvin College editions of Foxe's work and the edition printed by the notoriously anti-Catholic Chick Publications.

Princess Elizabeth, late Queen of England, seems to provide the basis of many, if not the majority, of the biographic and historical works about Elizabeth until the 1980s. Camden’s Elizabeth is made out to be the model of Protestant zeal, fiscal conservatism, and constitutional propriety. Subsequent authors from the Edwardian writer A. F. Pollard to J. E. Neale and the venerable Sir Geoffrey Elton have drawn upon Camden’s Elizabeth as their starting point. The problems inherent in Camden’s work are addressed by Christopher Haigh in Elizabeth I. Haigh points out that Camden’s presentation of Elizabeth as frugal, moral, and a parliamentarian monarch was an idealized portrait painted in reaction to the fiscal, moral, and absolutist excesses of the Court of James I. Camden’s Elizabeth spent treasury money on national defense, not sycophantic court favorites as James I did on George Villiers, First Duke of Buckingham. Camden’s Elizabeth was a nostalgic mirror of past times held up to the corrupt present of Stuart self-indulgence. His Annales quickly became the standard reference on Elizabeth until the 1960s.

J. E. Neale and G. R. Elton stand as giants in the field of Tudor English studies. Neale’s Queen Elizabeth I (first published as Queen Elizabeth in 1934) was considered by many to be the standard biographical work on Elizabeth until the 1980s. His work,


7 Christopher Haigh, Elizabeth I (London: Longman, 1995 [1988]).

8 Haigh, Elizabeth I, 167–8.

Elizabeth I and Her Parliaments,\textsuperscript{10} was one of the premier works on Tudor government until Elton and other scholars demonstrated that a significant percentage of Neale’s research may be markedly flawed.\textsuperscript{11} This will not surprise those who have read Neale; they will undoubtedly have noticed the absence of footnotes in Queen Elizabeth I and the dearth of them in his other works.

G. R. Elton, however, is still considered by many historians to be the premier historian of Tudor government. Elton’s Tudor Revolution in Government is dated but continues to be referenced by political historians.\textsuperscript{12} Elton’s account of the English reformation has been referred to as a top-down approach, meaning he saw the English reformation as driven by the Government and certain members of the Church hierarchy. He believed that individuals such as Thomas Cromwell, Edward VI, and Thomas Cranmer, as well as various laws, such as the Acts of Supremacy, were the main instruments of the change from Roman Catholicism to a Church of England. Elton also thought that the popular acceptance of the new Church was rather rapid except in the far north of England. His model of an essentially politically driven English reformation, however, has been most recently challenged by Christopher Haigh in his work English Reformations.\textsuperscript{13} Even though Elton’s work is coming to be challenged more often,


\textsuperscript{11}Haigh, Elizabeth I, 113, 118.


\textsuperscript{13}Christopher Haigh, English Reformations: Religion, Politics and Society under the Tudors (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). Haigh approaches the reformation in England from the perspective of the bottom, from that of the common people. He investigates parish (continued...)
historians still agree that his work must be dealt with when beginning any examination of Tudor England.

What Neale and Elton have in common is the way in which they approach the reign of Elizabeth I. As mentioned above, they were influenced, albeit to lesser or greater extents, by the work of William Camden. Neale cut his Elizabeth from an almost wholly Camdenian cloth. His Elizabeth, at times, came across as more an archetypal national hero than a historical figure being examined by a scholar. She was a pious Protestant zealot, military leader, scholar, economic genius, and parliamentary politician extraordinaire. This is not to say that Neale distorted the facts; it is more that his writing style belied his overwhelming adoration for his subject. Neale did not gloss over Elizabeth's confrontations with Parliament, but portrayed Elizabeth as achieving almost everything during her reign through Parliament. This not only made Elizabeth into a proto-constitutional monarch, but also one who for all her glaring contradictions was best understood in purely political terms.

Elton, conversely, dealt with Parliament (1558–1603) in the context of Elizabeth, examining the workings of Tudor England within the framework of its government by sifting through mountains of related documents. Elton came to see Elizabeth and her relationship with her Privy Council as being the premier political agency of the time.

Neale and Elton saw Elizabeth as an almost purely political entity, a person to be understood by distilling the political documents of the time. Both men failed to see that

(...continued)

records to see how many of the legislated reforms were actually put into effect. Through his researches, he has found that it was not until the middle of the reign of Elizabeth that the majority of the English people accepted the reforms of Edward VI and Archbishop Cranmer. Haigh ascribes this to Catholicism being connected to the idea of foreign threats in the wake of the plots organized by recusant Catholics against Elizabeth.
Elizabethan government, as most everything else during Elizabeth's reign, was influenced or driven by Elizabeth's personas, not her policy.

Elizabeth's reign cannot be reduced to a series of Parliamentary debates as Elton had us believe. Nor was it controlled by Parliament as Neale argued. To understand Elizabeth and Elizabethan England, historians must start with Elizabeth, which is not to lay the achievements of forty years at the feet of a single individual or to edify her as a hero, but to attempt to understand her influence and her use of power.

As stated earlier, Elizabeth gained, maintained, and exercised power through self-created personas which forced all perceptions of and interactions with her onto her own self-conceived ground. This would imply that Elizabeth was always conscious of how her actions were perceived and recorded. Therefore, the official record of Elizabeth's actions must be considered with a critical eye. The belief that archival research alone, without analytical and critical paradigms, will yield an accurate portrait of Elizabeth is flawed.

The first writer of note to deal with Elizabeth outside the traditional, political contexts was Lytton Strachey. His Elizabeth wielded power through her image and personality instead of as a politician or national hero. Strachey's account, *Elizabeth and Essex* (1947), has been discounted by many contemporary historians as being more a literary work than a work of history. There is some truth to this claim. Strachey's work did wander into the prosaic, and it indulged in perhaps too much Freudian analysis of Elizabeth and Essex. But, what is often overlooked is the vitally important and revelatory picture of Elizabeth as consummate actor that Strachey brought his readers.

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Strachey's Elizabeth is a monarch who is deliberate in all she does. He showed Elizabeth's greatest asset in power was her demeanor in dealing with her ministers and courtiers. Traits which other historians have cited as foibles, such as her infamous indecision, were portrayed by Strachey as, most likely, being consciously created tools of control. Strachey was quick to point out that Elizabeth had almost total sway over her Privy Council, and, contrary to Neale, Parliament was her instrument, not vice versa. For Strachey, Elizabeth's power and how she used it was her persona. It was also in Strachey that one saw Elizabeth as a person capable of mistakes. Strachey masterfully presented the destructive dynamic between Elizabeth and Robert Devereux, Second Earl of Essex. His account was of an aging woman who had come to believe too much of her own propaganda and the younger man who played into her vanity, blinding her to his recklessness and ambition. Strachey's work broke with the hero/savior and political models of Elizabeth. He introduced a less-romanticized Elizabeth whose glory was not innate, but a consciously contrived act of consistently fostered and lived propaganda.

Until the 1980s Strachey's portrayal of Elizabeth remained the minority view, historians preferring political and heroic portrayals. However, in 1983, a Columbia graduate and former college professor, Carrolly Erickson, changed Elizabethan historiography dramatically. Erickson's book, *The First Elizabeth*, presented a very different Elizabeth from that which had been seen before. The Elizabeth was at least a

recognisable human being in a difficult situation, not a *dea ex machina* able to solve all
problems if only she tried."\(^{16}\)

Erickson went several steps further than Strachey by claiming to have found a
flawed and even mediocre Elizabeth beneath the gilded Queen which previous
scholarship had created. Erickson's work caused much debate in academic circles and
initiated a new phase of Elizabethan scholarship. This is not to say that subsequent
scholars necessarily took a dim view of Elizabeth, as Erickson did, but they did attempt
to deal with her as a more complex, contradictory, and imperfect human being. It seems
that the majority of subsequent scholarship has drawn upon a combination of Erickson's
Elizabeth as human and imperfect and Strachey's account of the Queen as a self-invented
and conscious manipulator of public and historic perception.

The idea of creating a self-invented persona to serve one's purposes in the
manipulation of public perception for political power is well articulated by Stephen
is an examination of the relationship between the publicly-expressed self and the culture
which surrounded it. Greenblatt's work examines the interplay between persona and
culture, attempting to trace the reciprocal influence of each.\(^ {17}\) He wants to show that
what historians perceive as the "life" of an individual is, in many respects, a mask created
to achieve various goals within the social norms of the time.

Greenblatt's account of Elizabeth is one where she and all those around her
engage in an elaborate series of fictions in which no one really believes, but which are

\(^{16}\) Haigh, *Elizabeth I*, 175–6.

\(^{17}\) Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*
used to gain prominence and power. It is as if Greenblatt sees the Elizabethan world as an elaborate competition where the participants try to outdo each other in manners, audacity, and courage. The winners achieve power, dignity, and recognition by the Queen. The Queen, of course, outdoes them all, remaining above the fray as the dominant figure of the day. Greenblatt states that "kingship always involves fictions, theatricalism, and the mystification of power." His Elizabeth is the ultimate expression of these ideas. For Greenblatt, everything in Elizabeth's reign "was calculated to enhance her transformation into an almost magical being, a creature of infinite beauty, wisdom, and power."

Greenblatt does not deny the opulence or splendor of Elizabeth or things Elizabethan, he just wants to remind historians that this splendor was contrived propaganda, an expression of power, and a mechanism to maintain that power. Where other historians had found Elizabeth innately wondrous and the Elizabethan Age a natural outgrowth of her greatness, Greenblatt found a culture where self-consciously created artifice was the tool to gain power and also the symbol of that power. Subsequently, Christopher Haigh's work picks up on Greenblatt's survey of ideas of power and its expression in Elizabethan England, focusing on some of the specific artifices used by Elizabeth and others to gain and maintain power.

In his 1995 book for Longman's Profiles in Power series, *Elizabeth I*, Haigh emphasizes Elizabeth's use of power and its effects on various aspects of her reign. He

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18 Greenblatt, 165–6.

19 Greenblatt, 167.

20 Greenblatt, 167.
tracks her expressions of power and how they affected her relationships with the Church, the People, Parliament, the Court, and other entities.

Haigh does discuss an Elizabeth who creates personas as tools with which to wield power in new and unexpected ways; but, the problem with Haigh’s work is that he does not fully explain the historical basis for his comments that Elizabeth and Elizabethan England were the products of personas created as propaganda. When dealing with Elizabeth’s failings, Haigh presents them not as innate and horrible personal shortcomings in the vein of Carolly Erickson, but as byproducts of her seemingly contradictory methods of wielding power. Haigh does not diminish Elizabeth’s achievements; but, he always reminds the reader that he believes Elizabeth was a conscious propagandist, and the glory of Elizabethan England was, many times, a contrived illusion. Haigh’s work on Elizabeth seems to be the most incisive, realistic, balanced, and methodologically sound of the many works on the subject. Yet, it is the lack of explanation in his passing comments regarding Elizabeth’s personas which influenced this thesis.

In comparison to the brevity of Haigh’s work (under 200 pages), Alison Weir’s 1998 book, The Life of Elizabeth I, is a large biographical work of almost five hundred pages. Weir’s work is a strange mixture of scholarly research and pop psychology.21 She spends a great deal of time discussing whether Elizabeth really loved Robert Dudley or not, if she in fact conspired to kill Dudley’s wife, and if she was a true Virgin Queen—all topics designed to appeal to the general reader more than the academic. She does, however, make one rather startling discovery—a letter that suggests Elizabeth had sex

with Sir Christopher Hatton. Weir found the letter, written by George Dyer to Hatton, which suggests Hatton and the Queen shared some form of sexual intimacy, possibly intercourse, and the Queen's subsequent regrets would be a problem for Hatton. This letter from Dyer is one of the only extant pieces of documentary evidence that explicitly states Elizabeth was sexually active. Weir's accomplishment in uncovering this letter is marred by the fact that she does not document any of her sources. The reader has no idea how or where she found it or any of her other evidence, thus rendering the book almost useless to scholars.

Hopefully, this thesis will draw upon the best aspects of the above-mentioned works and will add something significant and useful to the ongoing pursuit for an understanding of Elizabeth and her reign. To aid the reader, a synopsis of the chapters is provided below.

Chapter two will examine Elizabeth's accession to the throne in the context of her legitimacy as a female, formerly bastardized monarch against the background of western discourse about the nature of women. Also, various ideas and paradigms relating to concepts of individuality and self-invention will be discussed and placed in their historical context.

Chapter three deals with Elizabeth's consolidation of power upon her accession to the throne. It traces the initiation and evolution of her self-invention within the context of legitimizing herself as a Tudor monarch and her answers to those who did not believe a woman was fit to rule, especially John Knox. This chapter also follows Elizabeth's method of avoiding all requests and expectations that she marry.

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Weir, 290.
Chapter four traces the evolution of her persona of the Virgin Queen. This chapter follows the evolution of this persona in the ironic context that it develops as a byproduct of the two great romantic entanglements of her life, her relationships with Robert Dudley and Francis of Alençon. Elizabeth’s relationships with these two men are examined in the context of how literature and drama, presented in support of their marriage suits, actually created an acceptance for Elizabeth’s persona of the Virgin Queen. What was intended to woo Elizabeth made her into an untouchable icon of chastity. This was the genesis of the image of Elizabeth as a chaste and Dianic semi-deity to be worshiped, one whose health and chastity reflected and insured the health of the realm of England.

Chapter five examines the Court of Elizabeth in its idyllic period between the mid-1570s and 1588. The veneration of Elizabeth as the Virgin Queen through ceremony, court ritual, and the arts is discussed. The focus of the chapter is Elizabeth’s uneven patronage which led to factional discord among those who felt they had been overlooked at Court. Finally, Elizabeth’s relationship with Robert Devereux will be examined. The effect of Devereux’s charm on the vain and aging Elizabeth blinded her to his ambitions and potential in becoming a rallying point for those who felt slighted by Elizabeth. This chapter concludes by discussing Devereux’s revolt against Elizabeth and why she did not curb him earlier. Chapter six will present a summary of the main points of the thesis and the conclusions drawn from the investigation of this thesis.

Elizabeth I and her reign have been the subject of countless books and articles, even a BBC television series, *Elizabeth R*. There have been many versions of Elizabeth offered to the world: hero, Protestant saint, politician, self-inventing chameleon,
shortsighted mediocrity, and master propagandist. Each one of them holds, to lesser or greater extents, valuable insights into Elizabeth and the so-called Elizabethan Age. This thesis aims to tie together many of these seemingly disparate threads of scholarship.
CHAPTER II

TO SUFFER A WOMAN TO RULE:
ELIZABETH AND EARLY MODERN DISCOURSE
CONCERNING THE NATURE OF WOMEN

On 14 January 1559, Elizabeth Tudor, daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, entered London followed by a procession of her ladies-in-waiting and the most powerful magnates in England in order to be crowned Queen of England, Ireland, and France. The death of her half-sister, Mary, had made Elizabeth the foremost claimant to the throne of England. Elizabeth was the most desirable choice not only because she was the daughter of Henry VIII, but also because her Protestant credentials stood in marked contrast to the reactionary Catholicism of her predecessor, Mary Tudor. From the moment of Mary’s death, Elizabeth and her supporters came to believe it was imperative to cast Elizabeth in stark contrast to her sister in order to gain the support of the populace for a female and formerly bastardized ruler.

Elizabeth entered the City of London as a “Protestant savior,” to quote John Guy, cast in the role of Deborah, “the judge and restorer of Israel.”¹ In a series of pageants staged throughout the day, England’s “Deborah” symbolically salved the wounds that had been inflicted on the land. During the first pageant of the day, Elizabeth sat on a throne garnished with white and red roses with a banner proclaiming “the uniting of the houses of York and Lancaster.”² During this ceremony, a child read a long poem praising Elizabeth as the savior of England for being not only the living embodiment of

²Guy, 250.
Henry VII’s defeat of Richard III and the ensuing end of the so-called War of the Roses, but also as the maintainer of that peace in years to come.

Both heirs to both their bloods: to Lancaster, the King, The Queen to York; in one the two houses do knit. Of whom, as Heir to both, Henry the Eight did spring, In whose seat, his true Heir, thou Queen Elizabeth! dost sit!

Therefore as civil war and shed of blood did cease; When these two houses were united into one: So now, that jar shall stint and quietness increase, We trust, O noble Queen! thou wilt be cause alone!³

These verses were intended to strengthen the new Queen’s tenuous position on several levels. They pointed out that it was the relatively new Tudor dynasty, of which Elizabeth was now the head, that had ended the dynastic struggle between the Houses of Lancaster and York which had plagued England in the fifteenth century. These verses also declared that Elizabeth was the legitimate heir of Henry VIII; this was important in that both she and her half-sister Mary had been declared bastards in favor of their half-brother, Edward. Elizabeth’s new legitimacy was important in answering potential rival claims to the English throne such as those of her cousin Mary Stuart. In the eyes of many of the time, especially John Knox, Mary Stuart, who was Catholic, a scion of the Guise family, future wife of Francis II of France, and heir to the throne of Scotland, bore all the marks of a papist Antichrist. It was against such threats that Elizabeth appeared to defend England as Deborah had defended Israel. Finally, these verses stress that only by maintaining Elizabeth on the throne of England would peace and prosperity endure.

Another pageant of the day found Elizabeth on a dais clad in parliamentary robes, holding a scepter and surrounded by a tableau that read "Deborah, with her estates, consulting for the good government of Israel." Again, a child, symbol of newness and purity, recited verse special to the occasion,

Jabin, of Canaan King, had long, by force of arms, Oppressed the Israelites; which for God's people went: But God minding, at last, for to redress their harms; The worthy Deborah, as judge among them sent.

Typical of Reformation rhetoric of the time, the Protestant English saw themselves as the true Church, the inheritors of God's favor initially bestowed upon the Israelites. The Marian return to Catholicism and concomitant repression of so-called Protestant heresy was seen in terms of the trials God's chosen were put through in the Old Testament and, at times, the persecution of the early Christian Church by the Romans. Elizabeth (Deborah) was sent by God to bring Protestantism (Truth) to English Protestants (the Children of Israel) and defend them from ignorance, superstition, and Catholicism (sin).

Thus it was through pageant and conscious propaganda that Elizabeth I was legitimized as a Protestant queen to rule over England on the day of her coronation. This process did not stop after her coronation, but continued throughout her reign of forty-five years. It was not because of questions of religious confession or dynastic legitimacy that Elizabeth had to create continually and maintain a public self of pseudo-mythical proportions; it was because she was a woman cast in the role of a prince.

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5Guy, 250.
This process of self-invention eventually created for Elizabeth a position which placed her outside of and above the majority of the common, male-created conceptions of women’s roles and capabilities, especially in the context of rulership. Through this continual process of self-invention, Elizabeth created personas wherein she was able to avoid questions of marriage and the succession by creating an image of self which made embracing these institutions (marriage and children) a threat to her virtue and that of the realm. This enabled Elizabeth to hold the throne of England for more than forty years, to rule relatively free from male-domination, and to exercise the seeming freedom of action and autonomy which was normally reserved for her fellow male monarchs.

QUESTIONS OF METHOD

Before going any further, it is important to address some of the methodological problems inherent in dealing with “historical women” as Gerda Lerner refers to women in her essay “Placing Women in History: Definitions and Challenges.” Elizabeth I is what Lerner refers to as a “notable woman,” one whose influence on events was much greater than the majority of women contemporary to her; thus, she stands out in marked contrast against the background of her times. Because she was Queen of England and reigned for forty-five years, there are thousands of pages of documents from Elizabeth’s lifetime dealing with her life and reign. Being a woman of the highest social class, Elizabeth could read and write (several languages) and we have her letters and personal documents, as well of those who were close to her at Court. So it would appear that it

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7 Lerner, 145.
would be very easy to examine Elizabeth’s life and actions in great detail considering the wealth of so-called primary sources.

Multiple problems confront the historian of Elizabeth I. Elizabeth kept no private diary. We do have a multitude of Elizabeth’s letters both private and official, but they can be read in a variety of ways. They must be dealt with carefully considering what appears to have been Elizabeth’s deliberate creation and maintenance of various public personas. Do these letters show the real Elizabeth or the Elizabeth she wanted shown? Both are true in varying degrees. A close examination reveals both the official and personal Elizabeth.

Many historians might counter that the wealth of material from those at Court with Elizabeth would provide less biased sources which could be cross-referenced with the sources from Elizabeth. The problem lies in the fact that almost every one of these sources is male. If, as hypothesized earlier, there was still an ongoing debate about women’s ability and right to govern, and many in England subscribed to the views of Fortescue and Knox, it is very likely that many of those around Elizabeth, even if they accepted her right to rule, held many of the gender biases so common at the time. To be more specific, when we read accounts from the hands of men close to the Queen, such as Robert Dudley, Robert Cecil, or the Earl of Essex, commenting on the indecisiveness, vanity, fickleness, or spite of the Queen, we must ask whether these are accurate accounts of her demeanor and actions or slight vilifications of the “woman” on the throne. Many of the disparaging comments made about Elizabeth by those around her and those visiting the Court mirrored the stereotypical shortcomings and foibles of women often cited in polemics of the day. Knox, Fortescue, and others, including Shakespeare, saw
women as fickle, obstinate, willful, vain, and irrational. Were these men commenting on
the Queen or on having to serve under a woman whom they described in the general
terms of the day relating to women? Were these comments an attempt to make sense to
themselves (and others) of what was going on at a female-governed Court or were they
accurate reports? The answer would seem to be both.

But if these records of the Queen’s actions and demeanor were simply the
expression of personal resentments for having to be ruled by a woman, there would not
be the consistency of description of the Queen’s actions and reactions about certain
events that is evidenced in the material. Upon close scrutiny of the sources, one finds
several accounts of the same event describe the actions and reactions of the Queen very
similarly. These descriptions of the Queen’s demeanor can be safely assumed to be true.
Thus, it is reasonable to surmise that while some of the male-dominated primary source
material dealing with Elizabeth, her actions, and demeanor might have expressed gender
bias, some of it was also a fairly accurate account of Elizabeth’s actions and personality.

WESTERN DISCOURSE ON WOMEN AND ELIZABETH’S ROLE

To understand fully the milieu of the gender-role debate that was ongoing in
sixteenth-century England and how and why Elizabeth I adopted the course of conscious
self-invention, it is important to understand the evolution of the debate in the West over
the nature of women. The works to be examined in this were not chosen at random to
create a simple chronological history of ideas of gender discourse in the West. They

8The “West” meaning Europe, including Greece and Byzantium, but not the Arab world
or Asia.
have been chosen because they represent the genesis of the discourse, its evolution, and are the most cited works in this centuries-long debate.

The Western discourse about the nature of women begins with the works of Aristotle. Aristotle’s world view was one that was based in the context of opposites: dualities such as act/potency, hot/cold, perfection/imperfection, etc. It was in this context that Aristotle attempted to understand woman as the opposite of man and not a complimentary opposite as found in Eastern thought.\(^9\) Aristotle believed woman was opposite to man in that she was inferior; where man is hot, active, and perfect, woman is cold, a potentiality, and inferior. For Aristotle, woman was seen as a potentiality in that she could have been a man but was left unfinished by nature, imperfect. The male was seen as hot and active, and to couple with a woman and have a female child was believed to be the result of a lack of generative heat in the semen. This lack of heat was womanly, passive, and imperfect; therefore, a female child was the result.\(^10\) For Aristotle, nature was always moving, teleologically, towards a perfect final cause, and man was the perfection of the human species and of all animals. So for a man not to be created in the act of sex was a mistake and an imperfection in nature.\(^11\)

Aristotle’s view of women remained the standard philosophical and theological view of women until the thirteenth century when the work of St. Thomas Aquinas appeared. In his magnum opus, *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas proposed that it would seem woman should never have been created in the first place, “for [Aristotle] says (De


\(^11\)Aristotle, 94.
Gener. ii, 3), 'that the female is a misbegotten male.' But nothing misbegotten or
defective should have been in the first production of things. Therefore, woman should
not have been made in the first production."\textsuperscript{12} This statement put Aquinas in a quandary
because if woman were an imperfection present at the Creation, then either God made a
mistake or Aristotle was wrong. Aquinas had to explain the existence of woman in an
Aristotelian context and make sure that both God and Aristotle (whom Aquinas often
confused) were correct.

Aquinas’s answer was that woman was created in order to help man—not in the
context of a helpmeet as Aquinas was quick to point out, since he thought man to be a
better helper to man than woman, but that woman had been created to help man create
other men through the procreative act.\textsuperscript{13} Her sole purpose was to create more perfection
of nature, more males. It seems that, according to Aquinas, if a woman failed to give
birth to a boy, she has failed at her only purpose for existence. This Thomistic view of
women persisted into the Renaissance and, in certain circles, until the twentieth century.

The scientific and medical views of women in the Classical and Medieval periods
were not much different from the philosophical views of Aristotle and Aquinas. The
Roman physician Galen (c. 129–199) had a profound influence on Western medicine until
the Renaissance and, in some cases, until the mid-seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{14} Galen agreed
with Aristotle that woman is passive, cold, and imperfect and went on to say that her

\textsuperscript{12}St. Thomas Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologica} [book on-line], translated by the Fathers of the
English Dominican Province, 1947, Question 92. Available [Online]:

\textsuperscript{13}Aquinas, Question 92.

\textsuperscript{14}Maclean, 32.
desire for sex is the result of an urge to become complete by coupling with the male. For Galen, the physical body was a malleable thing in that not only did a lack of generative heat in the sex act produce the imperfect, meaning woman, but a lack of appropriately manly behavior could cause "the male body to collapse back into a state of primary undifferentiation. No normal man might actually become a woman; but each man trembled on the brink of becoming womanish."15

Galen believed that the generative heat Aristotle believed was necessary for the creation of the "perfect" male was a tenuous thing that had to be consciously maintained. "It was never enough to be male: a man had to strive to remain 'virile'."16 This led (according to the historian Peter Brown) other second-century writers to advocate the exclusion of all "womanish" traits from male behavior. Men had to eradicate "all telltale traces of 'softness' that betray . . . the half-formed state of woman."17 It seems that the work of Galen and the multitude of his subsequent adherents could be seen as a starting point for the conscious creation of gender-specific social roles. It could be argued that the continuation of belief in these gendered social roles resulted from science not advancing much past Galen and his contemporaries until the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. One can imagine a physician advising parents to eradicate feminine traits in their son lest he fall into a state of womanliness or undifferentiated sexuality.


16Peter Brown, 11.

17Peter Brown, 11.
Aristotle, Aquinas, and Galen were not alone among early Western writers in their discussion of the nature of woman. Among the Latin and Greek Christian Fathers, the inner "nature" of woman was a much discussed topic. In this "religious" context, the inherent physical imperfections of woman were not of concern, but her supposed inherent moral weakness and potential for leading men into sin was emphasized. It was with St. Paul that the discussion of the nature of women within a Christian context first began. Paul did not specifically single women out as threats to salvation, so much as he did sex. Paul considered sex a defilement of the spirit and a distraction from the worship of God. He advocated total sexual abstinence as the way of living a God-centered life. But Paul realized that many Christians would not be able to live a life of sexual continence so he made a place for sex within the bonds of marriage. In his First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul makes his oft-quoted and sometimes misinterpreted statement that "it is better to marry than to bum." Paul makes this statement because if there has to be sex in the Christian community, it must be within the sanctity of marriage, done within a God-context, or it is simply sin. St. Paul does not single out women as the instigators of sexual sin, as do later writers; he simply indictsex itself.

It is St. Paul's emphasis on sex as something to be avoided as a doorway to sin, if not a sin in itself, that prompted Tertullian (c.150–240) to take the discourse a step further. Tertullian publicly renounced sex with his wife and even wrote a treatise addressed to his wife where he admonished her to put away lust and lead a celibate life. Taking Paul's message of celibacy to a new extreme, Tertullian came to believe that sexual craving and enjoyment had no place in the lives of Christians, even within

\[18\] Henry Chadwick, The Early Church (New York: Penguin USA, 1990), chap. 2.
Tertullian went even a step further and became one of the first Western writers to directly blame women for leading men into sexual indulgences when they might have otherwise been strong enough to resist. He makes women into semi-demonic beings, casting them in the role of the “devil’s door.” For Tertullian, it was through the conduit of women that Satan entered into the soul of the Christian man and was thus free to wreak spiritual havoc. The influence of Tertullian’s portrait of women as corrupters and slaves of lust can be seen in innumerable subsequent works on the nature of women, from the works of St. Jerome and Augustine to the witch literature of the medieval and early modern periods. One can also find Tertullian’s influence in Calvinist tracts and academic treatises on the nature of woman into the late seventeenth century. So it seems that the blame for the idea of women as inherently licentious, sexual corrupters of otherwise pious men could be laid at Tertullian’s door.

Before moving onto the early modern period and focusing on the marked shift in the discourse on the nature of woman, it is important to first deal with a long-raging historiographic debate. This debate starts with the nineteenth-century German historian Jacob Burckhardt’s seminal work, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*. Burckhardt’s work was the first modern study of the Italian Renaissance and focused on ideas of cultural identity. (As of this writing, in this author’s opinion, there is no better general text to introduce readers to the milieu of Renaissance Italy.) Burckhardt forwarded several revolutionary ideas in his work about women’s social status in the Renaissance, perceptions of women in the Renaissance, and the idea of the individual.

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19 Peter Brown, 78–9.

Burckhardt made the revolutionary assertion that “to understand the higher forms of social intercourse in this period, we must keep before our minds the fact that women stood on a footing of perfect equality with men.” Burckhardt followed this incredible statement by assuring and instructing his readers that they “must not suffer [them]selves to be misled by the sophistical and often malicious talk about the assumed inferiority of the female sex, which we meet with now and then in the dialogues of the time.”

It would seem that he expected persons examining the discourses about women in the Renaissance to discount the polemics that assert anything but equality with men. Burckhardt supports his assertion of gender equality in the Renaissance by pointing out that the education given to women of the upper classes was the same as that of men. In some respects, as will later be evidenced, Burckhardt is correct in pointing to a sometime equality in the education of women. What he fails to notice is that while women may have been well-educated in the fashion of men, there was much debate on what they were supposed to do with this education. Even the most enlightened scholars suggested that while education of noble women was good for their soul, any real use of that education in a public context was a danger to it.

The editors of the anthology of Renaissance scholarship, *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses Of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, Margaret Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers find Burckhardt’s above-referenced assertions incredible and open the introduction of their work with his assertion and their refutation of it. Ferguson et al. respond by citing the work of the seventeenth-century

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21 Burckhardt, 292.

22 Burckhardt, 292.
Venetian nun, Arcangela Tarabotti, who asserts that her sex is in no way free or equal with men. In her treatise, *Simplicity Deceived or Paternal Tyranny* (1654), Tarabotti enumerated the obstacles constructed by men to keep women from engaging in public intellectual endeavors. Tarabotti writes, ironically, “I who know may freely testify . . . [that when] women are seen with pen in hand, they are met immediately with shrieks commanding a return to that life of pain which their writing had interrupted, a life devoted to the women’s work of needle and distaff.”

Ferguson et al., present a persuasive counterpoint to Burckhardt’s assertion of Renaissance gender equality, not by arguing that the polemics against women he discards are credible, but by letting the women of the past speak. If Burckhardt’s assertions were truly representative of the experience of upper-class women in the Renaissance, why would women of the period, or even in later, supposedly more progressive times, tell us that their lot is nothing like what Jacob Burckhardt would have his readers believe? Women like Arcangela Tarabotti, Christine de Pisan, Jane Anger, and a host of other women who had phenomenological, lived experience with the period which the mid-nineteenth-century Burckhardt was only able to look back on tell us that even privileged women were far from being equal with men or even being considered capable to operate in the public sphere without the “guidance” of men.

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24 Simon Shepherd, ed., *The Women’s Sharp Revenge: Five Women’s Pamphlets from the Renaissance* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985). This is an excellent source of early modern English women’s views on what they saw as their position in society.
Burckhardt forwarded another new and controversial idea in his book on the Renaissance, arguing that it was during the Renaissance that the idea of the individual, as understood in modern terms, came into being. He believed that prior to the Renaissance, “man was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family, or corporation—only through some general category.”

Burckhardt goes on to say that it was in Renaissance Italy when all this first began to change.

The literary critic Stephen Greenblatt has argued against this idea of an immediate and simple transition from the communal conception of self in the Middle Ages to a centralized, self-conscious individual with the advent of the so-called Renaissance. Greenblatt argues that the idea of the individual was extant during the Renaissance in the context of what he calls the “prodigious and the perverse,” not as a modern, stabilized individual such as Burckhardt envisaged. The prodigious and the perverse are those individuals that stand out in marked contrast to the culture which surrounds them. Thomas Heller, editor of the anthology in which Greenblatt’s work appears, explains the prodigious and the perverse as “the prodigy [being] the monstrous oddity, the individual in hyperbolic form, which calls the prior cultural order into question by exposing new possibilities. Its perverseness assaults the naturalness of preexisting classifications by drawing attention to their contingency.”

The common response to the “prodigal perverseness” of women denying their own supposed

25Burckhardt, 100.


27Heller, 4.
imperfection or of encroaching on traditionally male privileges was to assert that women were foolishly trying to thrust away nature.28

This idea of “prodigious perversion” is very similar to the conscious self-invention that Elizabeth instigated throughout her reign. Elizabeth made herself into the prodigious oddity, woman in hyperbolic form. By standing out against convention, this hyperbolic woman created social space that became the norm.29 Moreover, Elizabeth’s strong rulership and obvious ability showed the cultural contingency of such traditional beliefs toward women. It was shown that the limitations on women were a social construction, not the result of women’s supposed innate inferiority.

When approaching the discourse on the nature of woman and her ability/right to govern at the beginning of the sixteenth century, it becomes clear that, contrary to Burckhardt, there have always been men and women conscious of their individuality. This was not a sudden occurrence during the Italian Renaissance. It is also clear that women were not on any sort of equal footing with men during the Renaissance. Judging from the preponderance of literature on the subject of women generated by men and women, the lot of women was anything but equal with that of men. What can be argued is that it was in the sixteenth century when the discourse about women shifted markedly.

In the early sixteenth century, the “humanists” began to question the received wisdom about the nature of women. Writers such as Desiderius Erasmus, Sir Thomas More, Juan Luis Vives, and others began to discuss and eventually advocate the education of women in the same manner as men. Before this time, if women were

28Peter Brown, 18.

29Heller, 4.
"educated" at all, it was in the so-called womanly arts of needlework, music, poetry, and other "arts" geared entirely toward attracting a prosperous husband. These women were, of course, of the gentry and prosperous merchant classes. The humanists believed that the health of the soul was directly related to the health of the mind and that one must intellectually stimulate the mind to appreciate and know the world as God's creation through plumbing the mysteries inherent in it, not by accepting received wisdom.

Sir Thomas More and the Dutch humanist Erasmus initiated the specifically English discussion of the nature of woman and her need for education. Judith P. Jones and Sherianne Sellers Seibel explain humanism, specifically the humanism of More and Erasmus, beautifully and concisely in their essay "Thomas More's Feminism: To Reform or Re-Form." For Jones and Seibel "[More and Erasmus] . . . emphasized the importance of the individual, committed themselves to the cultural and moral advantages they felt to be inherent in an understanding of classical literature, and opened doors to facets of human character in Western culture which had seldom been explored."30 Jones and Seibel add, however, the following caveat: "But [More and Erasmus] tried to keep their potentially revolutionary ideas within the bounds of a society defined by the Catholic Church."31 One of these revolutionary ideas was that women were intellectually capable of being educated in the same manner as men.

Thomas More hired an array of humanist tutors for his children and insisted that his sons and daughters be educated in the same fashion. When one examines selections from his correspondence concerning the education of his children, it becomes evident


31Moore, 68.
that More believed the humanistic education of women would produce "persons of moral [and] intellectual superiority." In a letter to one of the many tutors he employed for his children, More makes it plain that his ultimate goal is producing virtue through the attainment of wisdom. More tells the tutor "to put virtue in the first place among the goods, learning in the second; and in their studies esteem most whatever may teach them piety towards God, charity to all, and the modesty of Christian humility in themselves." It is clear from this letter that More believed in the education of women, because they have a soul, just as men do, and education is a soul-edifying process.

It is not just his desire to train Christian souls that motivated More's belief in female education; his favorite child was the highly intelligent and precocious daughter, Margaret. He writes to her tutors, "Let her understand that such conduct delights me more than all the learning in the world. Though I prefer learning joined with virtue . . . if you take away moral probity, it brings nothing else but the notorious and noteworthy infamy, especially in a woman." In this passage, one sees not only the humanist More concerned about his daughter's education and soul, but also of society's opinion of her. This concern about perceptions of educated women echoes the concerns of many other writers of the time, such as Vives, about the appropriate roles for the educated daughters of the wealthy. More differs from other humanists in that he does not share their beliefs

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32Moore, 69.


34More, 107.
that the intellectual gifts of women should be "kept in the home, out of the sight of men."  

More would share his daughter Margaret's letters with various people at Court and was truly interested in and supportive of her intellectual development. The experience of the leading people in England being present at Court watching More's daughters, Margaret and Elizabeth, disputing philosophical premises in Latin would do more good for opening the discourse about the nature of women and their ability to rule than any polemic of the time advocating the rights of women. It should also be noted that even though More became the enemy of Henry VIII and was executed, the memory of his daughter's accomplishments would still be in the minds of many of those who were at Court for Elizabeth's ascension to the throne.

Desiderius Erasmus, friend of Thomas More and humanist scholar, had lived in More's household and seen the education of Margaret and her siblings. He was so impressed by what he saw that he referred to More's household as "Plato's Academy on a Christian footing." This experience, and his own innate suspicion of received wisdom, led Erasmus to question the long-standing social conventions about woman's supposed moral laxity and intellectual inferiority. Writing explicitly against many of the ideas of the late Medieval world view, Erasmus wrote that women's role in society was not simply to serve as sexual objects or to remain uneducated because they were

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35 Moore, 70.

36 Alison Plowden, Tudor Women: Queens and Commoners (New York: Atheneum, 1979), 34.
incapable of learning. In his *Education of a Christian Prince*, Erasmus argues for the education of women and a place for women in civilized society in addition to marriage.37

In his work, *Concerning the Aim and Method of Education*, Erasmus writes that "men" are not born, but made, that Nature produces a "crude mass," "an unformed creature whose mind is a *tabula complanata* (blank slate) upon which the world writes."

This is why it is so important for a child, male or female, to receive a proper Christian humanistic education.38 For Erasmus, as quoted in Hoffmeister, humans were simply a potentiality "having within [them] both the capacity to become a truly rational creature and the equal capacity to degenerate to the level of the beasts."

It was because of his suspicion of the received wisdom of the Middle Ages (due in large part to his new translation of the New Testament from the Greek, which revealed a multitude of errors in St. Jerome's Vulgate) and his concern that humanity not descend to the level of wild beasts that Erasmus, in several of his major works, advocated educating women in the same manner as men. The influence of Erasmus's writing, both in Continental Europe and in England, should not be underestimated. His was considered to be the premier intellectual of his time; the major Courts of Europe all vied to employ him and most of his works went through several printings. Many contemporary scholars trace the expansion of the discourse about women to include ideas of education and rulership to the works of Erasmus. This is not to say that Erasmus had transcended the gender biases


39 Hoffmeister, 88.
of his time. When he mused about the proper use of this education by a virtuous woman, he asked what her place in society should be, but offered no concrete answers. Like other humanists of his time, Erasmus wanted to educate women but could not seem to find a place for the educated woman outside the home.

This was the very dilemma that the Spanish humanist Juan Luis Vives (1492–1540) could not seem to solve. Vives was chosen by Catherine of Aragon to be the tutor of her daughter, Mary Tudor. Vives was renowned for his then radical policy of educating men and women alike. This is doubly strange when one recalls the oft-mentioned conservatism of Catherine of Aragon. According to some historians, this demonstrates that humanist ideas were available and had some influence in early sixteenth-century Spain. One could even argue that Catherine of Aragon set the precedent of female education at the Tudor Court from which a young Princess Elizabeth would later benefit.

While Vives did advocate the education of both sexes, he also made a connection between assertive female speech and unchaste behavior. In what historian Deborah S. Greenhut considers the standard for later Tudor books of conduct, *The Education of a Christian Woman*, Vives states that in order for a woman to appear chaste and good she should remain silent. Vives said,

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it neither become a woman to rule a school nor to live among men, or to speak abroad, and shake off her honesty . . . if she be good, it were better to be at home within and unknown to other folks. And in the company to hold her tongue demurely. And let few see her, and none at all hear her.43

There are historians, Carolly Erickson among them, who will point to the above statement by Vives and discount above assertions that Catherine of Aragon was not a complete reactionary and that Vives was no different in most in his beliefs about women, only that he differed in their education.44 But this education made all the difference. Mary Tudor was anything but reticent or silent in her short reign of five years. Her training in rhetoric, language, law, and the sciences served her well, and one could argue that Vives's council to remain silent helped her survive the ever-changing political climate to become Queen after the death of her brother, Edward VI.

What is most important about Vives's work is that beyond the influence of various intellectual ideas, there began a concrete tradition of education of Tudor women with Mary Tudor. The ideas of educating women in a like fashion with men were now being put into practice with conspicuous personages, princesses of the blood. In the persons of Margaret More and Mary Tudor there were now prodigious persons who stood out in marked contrast as aberrations and challenges to the existing ideas about women which were trafficked in sixteenth-century England. These challenges were the result of the work and ideas of the humanists More, Erasmus, and Vives. It was their willingness to question convention, to go against the grain and put their "new" ideas into action which opened up a new area in the debate over woman. Even if these men, Vives

43Greenhut, 44.

especially, retained many gender biases, they were still extremely important in that they made the important first openings towards recognizing the talents of women.

The Continental Reformers Martin Luther and Jean Calvin were also involved in the discourse about the nature of women and their potential for education. In his work To the Councilmen of Germany, Luther seems to echo the sentiments of Erasmus and More, believing women should be educated as men are. He saw Christian-based intellectual education engendering morality in society at large and in the future generations. To have a virtuous Christian community, Luther said its members must be educated.45 Throughout his writings, Luther also advocated a rudimentary universal education, literacy, so that all Christians could have direct access to the Scriptures and find salvation through reading the revealed word of God. Luther wrote, “Even women and children can now learn from German [vernacular] books and sermons more about God and Christ . . . than all the universities, foundations, monasteries, the whole papacy, and all the world used to know.”46 Luther believed that women were not the inherently evil, lascivious beings of conventional late Medieval wisdom, but worthwhile souls, whose works were sanctified by God. Luther also believed, according to Heiko Oberman, that it wasn’t “unmanly for fathers to wash diapers and make beds.”47 Luther saw marriage, women’s work, sex, and a host of acts judged common or venal in the eyes of Rome as things that, if done morally and in a consciousness of God, were holy. Luther is also important in


that, unlike More, Erasmus, and Vives, his ideas about the education of women appear to be universal, transcending all class considerations. These radical ideas were discussed throughout Europe and England and had an important influence on the discourse about women.

Jean Calvin, the French-born Swiss reformer, agreed with Luther that all Christian souls should be educated to the extent of being able to read Scripture, but there the similarity stops. Calvin appears not to have been influenced by Luther’s belief in the holiness of women’s work or that women had anything to contribute outside of the home. In fact, Calvin seems to use Tertullian as his guide in taking the measure of women. Though he stops short of declaring women the “devil's door,” Calvin does reiterate that it was the custom in Tertullian’s time “that a woman . . . [was] not permitted to speak in the Church, nor yet to teach . . . [nor] claim to herself any office of the man, not to say of the priest.” Calvin’s view of women was firmly planted in the pre-Renaissance tradition and had as much influence as Luther’s opposite ideas, if not more, in England. It is in England that one sees Calvin’s doctrine taken to a radical extreme in the person of John Knox.

Knox was a Protestant exile living in Europe. He had spent time in Calvin’s Geneva and was greatly influenced by Calvin’s teachings. He drew upon the works of Aristotle and Calvin’s emphasis on Tertullian when formulating his ideas about women and their place in society, more specifically their right and fitness to govern over men. Being a zealous reformer, Knox had plenty of reasons to fulminate against the rule of


\[49\] Calvin, vol. 2, 525.
women. His native Scotland was ruled by the Catholic Regent, Mary of Guise. In addition, Mary Tudor had initiated, in England, a repressive regimen to eradicate the Protestant reforms of her brother Edward VI, and in France Catherine de Medici was a powerful regent. From Knox's perspective, female rule equaled Catholicism, which, for Knox, was the same as the reign of the Antichrist.

According to A. N. McLaren, Knox saw himself as a watchman, "like the prophet Ezekiel, similarly placed by God to watch over his people and flock."\(^{50}\) Knox expressed this sentiment when he published *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* in 1558, during the last months of the reign of Mary Tudor. Knox saw his *Blast* as a warning against the evil of female rulership in the form of a direct revelation from God. In the preface to the *First Blast*, Knox said "I am assured that God hath revealed to some in our age, that it is more than a monster in nature that a woman shall reign and have empire over man."\(^{51}\) Knox was so vehement in his attack on the idea of female rulership that he departed from his usual practice of relying solely on Scripture to undergird his arguments and even drew upon the work of Aristotle. He mixes Aristotle and the so-called common beliefs about women to state that "Nature doth paint them to be weak, frail, impatient, feeble, and foolish, and experience hath declared them to be inconstant, variable, cruel and lacking the spirit of counsel and regiment."\(^{52}\) But,
his main argument was still based on what he sees as the multitude of ways that God had “pronounced universally” that women are subject to men and therefore not capable or worthy of holding positions of authority.

Knox’s Blast was not simply the result of a revelation from God nor was it created on the spur of the moment. It was the culmination of several years thought. Ever since Mary Tudor ascended the throne in 1553, Knox had been worried about the problem of gyneocracy, rule by women. In March 1554, he wrote to the Swiss reformer, Henry Bullinger, and asked his opinion on whether it was lawful for a woman to rule. Bullinger replied that it seemed to him women were ordained by God to be subject to men, but that if a woman was set to rule under the laws and customs of a certain place, then she must be allowed to rule. Bullinger, in turn, wrote to Jean Calvin, who supported Bullinger’s view, but added that female rulership was probably a manifestation of God’s displeasure with a people or that, as in the case of Deborah, God might raise up a woman as an example to lax and indolent men. It is interesting that it was the guise of Deborah which Elizabeth took on at her coronation in 1558, as if she were answering Knox with the words of his mentors. These answers did not please Knox, and he proceeded, in 1554, to publish a scathing and highly personal attack on Mary Tudor. This came, in part, because of his fear about the proposed “Spanish marriage” of Mary to Philip of

(...continued)


Spain. In fact, Knox’s attack was so venomous it worried members of his exiled congregation in Frankfort that Mary might take punitive action against them.\textsuperscript{54}

Knox’s \textit{First Blast} (1558) came to be seen as a potential problem by many of his followers for two reasons. They worried that it would bring the wrath not only of Mary Tudor, but Mary of Guise and Marie de Medici as well. Knox’s followers worried that the three sovereigns might now desire the destruction of Knox and his congregation. Second, and much more important, Knox’s work could not have been timed more poorly; Mary Tudor died in November 1558. This meant that the Protestant Princess Elizabeth was now Queen, and his \textit{Blast} would now be seen simply as an attack on her new and tenuous reign, not in its intended context as an attack on Catholic women rulers. Elizabeth never forgave Knox for the \textit{Blast} and suggested having him brought up on charges of \textit{lèse-majesté}.\textsuperscript{55} Knox’s work angered the new English Queen so much that in 1559, when Jean Calvin dedicated his commentary on Isaiah to Elizabeth, the work was denounced as a result of Calvin’s close relationship with Knox. Calvin even wrote to William Cecil trying to distance himself from Knox by claiming that he had tried to suppress the book. Elizabeth, however, was not mollified.\textsuperscript{56}

Knox responded to Elizabeth’s outrage with a multitude of explanations addressed to William Cecil as Secretary of the Privy Council, Jean Calvin, John Foxe, and to Elizabeth herself. He admitted to John Foxe that his emotions may have overstepped his better judgment, but when writing to Elizabeth he seems to be perplexed

\textsuperscript{54}Lee, 245.

\textsuperscript{55}McLaren, 235.

\textsuperscript{56}Lee, 275–8.
at her anger. Amazingly, not only did Knox fail to apologize to Elizabeth, he blamed her anger on her advisor’s machinations against him and the realm of England. Elizabeth never forgave Knox, even with repeated intercessions by Sir William Cecil on Knox’s behalf. It would also seem that Elizabeth never forgot Knox’s *Blast*.

Indeed, it could be argued that beginning with the pageants of her coronation, Elizabeth was working to discount Knox’s basic assertion that queens who were not obviously and continuously given legitimacy by God were nothing but tyrants, no matter what their earthly claims to power. Why else, one might ask, would Elizabeth have portrayed herself as the biblical Deborah on the day of her coronation? But it would be overly simplistic to say that Elizabeth was simply trying to discount Knox. More likely, she was working against the entire tradition of arguments that claimed women were intellectually, morally, and spiritually incapable, or disallowed from governing. This tradition may have gone all the way back to Aristotle, but Knox had made the most immediate and prominent argument in the public consciousness. While it is most important that the humanists had opened up the discourse to include the education of women of the upperclasses, these ideas were relatively new and had been disseminated only in the highest social strata. As for the ideas of universal education for the sexes, most English Protestants considered Luther suspect, if not an outright heretic. His ideas did not get much truck outside a very small circle of intellectuals. Puritan Protestants in England took their cue from Calvin and Knox, including their very traditional ideas about the roles of women and their right to govern. Elizabeth was well aware that the common belief about female rulership was very similar to that of Knox, whether for religious

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57 McLaren, 232.
reasons or those of tradition. But, she also must have known that the humanists had
made an opening for her, and using her humanistic education she chose a course of self-
invention which made her place as the head of state in England more secure.
 CHAPTER III
DEBORAH SITS IN JUDGMENT OF ISRAEL:
ELIZABETH’S ACCESSION AND CONSOLIDATION OF POWER

Elizabeth I came to the throne officially on 14 January 1559, and her coronation was consciously conceived by her and her supporters to be an allegory supporting and demonstrating her legitimacy to rule. It was also the beginning of the process by which she transformed herself into an Other, in the sense that she would be considered separate from and above normal women. She placed herself outside all conventional references and contexts. This meant that she was not to be measured by the standard wisdom of her time concerning women. The historian Christopher Haigh believes Elizabeth quickly realized that her major obstacles upon accession would be making her own decisions and having them obeyed. She “not only faced problems of policy, but problems of power . . . how [would] she wield the limited power she had?”¹ Elizabeth was also very aware of the experience of her mother, Anne Boleyn. Haigh theorizes Elizabeth knew not only that women were especially vulnerable in English politics, but that any ruler, whether man or woman, could be made the tool of Court intrigues. This would have been evidenced by the ease with which her father, Henry VIII, was persuaded to rid himself of Anne by her enemies at Court.² Elizabeth knew from the start that her reign would be a constant contest of her skills and ability to recast herself above the conventional fray against the will of the nobles and the Court.

¹Haigh, Elizabeth I, vi.

²Haigh, Elizabeth I, 3.
Whether presenting herself in the roles of Deborah, Judith, or the Virgin Queen, or allowing her courtiers to make her into the Faerie Queene, Diana, Astrophil, or other mythical entities, Elizabeth appears to have been operating from what was arguably a deliberate scheme to consolidate power in her hands, not simply to indulge her vanity. For Haigh, “the monarchy of Elizabeth was founded upon illusion. She ruled by propagandist images which captivated her courtiers and seduced her subjects—images that have misled historians for four centuries.”\textsuperscript{3} Haigh is right in asserting that many in the late twentieth century still believe in the wonders of the Court of the Virgin Queen. It is a testament to the effectiveness of Elizabeth’s self-invention and its propaganda supporting that invention that many view her in this way four centuries later. One wonders how effective Elizabeth’s public personas must have been during her reign.

When Elizabeth appeared at her coronation as the biblical judge Deborah, she was also following in a tradition of casting early modern monarchs in the role of Old Testament figures. Both Henry VIII and his son, Edward VI, had previously presented themselves in the roles of Solomon and David respectively. They were presenting themselves to the people as their saviors chosen by God to lead them in righteousness. The roles of Deborah and Judith, as utilized by Elizabeth, may be recapitulations of the roles played by her predecessors, but they are cast in a feminine light. By portraying herself as Deborah, the sole judge and restorer of Israel, Elizabeth was setting a positive precedent for female rulership in England. Elizabeth used these roles until the mid 1570s when images of her as figures from pagan mythology, such as Diana, came to

\textsuperscript{3}Haigh, \textit{Elizabeth I}, 7.
Whether as Deborah or Diana, "Elizabeth found it useful to remain a distant and allegorical figure" who was both prodigy in her conspicuousness (to paraphrase Heller and Greenblatt) and perverse in her ability to rule in spite of all the ideas to the contrary.

Soon after Elizabeth’s coronation, a concerted effort was made by the Queen and her supporters to consolidate her position on the throne and defend her from all threats. The immediate threats, in Elizabeth’s mind, were foreign powers such as France and Spain, disgruntled Catholic nobles, and rival claimants to the throne, including Mary Stuart. Elizabeth appears, however, to have believed that the most immediate danger to her reign was a seemingly widespread concern about her legitimacy to rule as a woman, and a general resentment and/or mistrust by the majority of the populace of England.

This is evidenced by the symbolism of her coronation and her swift and immediate answers offered to the criticisms of Knox and others. With all the above-mentioned threats, the last thing Elizabeth needed to contend with was her people wishing she was a male ruler or at least married and subordinate to a king.

The most conspicuous answer to those who would not have a woman as their lawful sovereign was made by the Protestant printer John Aylmer. Aylmer, like Knox, had left England during Mary Tudor’s reign for reasons of conscience. He returned to

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6 McLaren, 236–7.
England when Elizabeth came to power and was promptly made archdeacon of Lincoln. 

In early 1559, Aylmer published the tract, *An Harborowe for Faithful and Trewe Subjects against the late blowne Blaste, concerning the Government of Women wherein he confuted all such reasons as a stranger of late made in that behalf, with a brief exhortation to Obedience*(hereafter referred to as *The Harborowe* or *Harborowe*).

Aylmer’s work is not an attack on Knox so much as a defense of Elizabeth and an exhortation for Knox to reconsider his views. Aylmer expressly states that his intention is not to attack Knox but to present a “zealous” defense of the new Protestant queen. This is not to say that Aylmer wholeheartedly accepted the rule of a woman but that he realized the potential for stability in the realm and freedom of Protestant worship under Elizabeth.

Aylmer took no issue with Knox’s attacks on Mary Tudor or Catholic female rulers in general. He stated that Knox had erred in that he had moved “from the particular question [Mary Tudor et al] to the generall [all women], as though the government of the whole Sexe was unnaturall, unreasonable, unjust and unlawful.”

Aylmer was answering Knox because he had raised broad questions about the nature of women and their right to rule, questions which could undermine the new Queen’s hold on the throne. By focusing the debate in a religious context, not a political one, Knox had raised the stakes of the debate over female rulership to a point where God’s will and

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7 McLaren, 236.


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human salvation were involved. If civil authority did rest on divine sanction, which most politicians and theorists of the time agreed it did, then Knox’s argument that God would sanction no women to rule had dire consequences. It meant those who accepted the rule of a woman were thwarting God’s will and imperiling their souls. On a more immediate and pragmatic level, Knox’s arguments added legitimacy to removing Elizabeth from power on religious grounds.

Aylmer realized the context of and potential problems raised by Knox’s Blast. He understood that he could not simply refute Knox with arguments based in civil law, earthly tradition, or pragmatism; he had to answer Knox on his own ground. Aylmer used the same sources to refute Knox that Knox used to make his argument—St. Paul, Aristotle, and Plato. In using these sources, Aylmer would be not only arguing from a point of Scriptural and philosophic authority, but he would be unintentionally showing the arguments of the ancient authorities to be contingent in the sense that if the same authors can be used to make diametrically opposed arguments, they have no more intrinsic value or authority than any other argument.

Aylmer begins his argument in the Harborowe by addressing what he feels is Knox’s most salient argument, St. Paul’s prohibition against women being allowed to speak in the congregation. He agrees with Knox that this is a prohibition against women holding office, but, more specifically, the office of priest or preacher. He goes on to point out that Elizabeth is the governor, not the high priest of her people; therefore, she is

9Lee, 248.
within the bounds of God’s law.\textsuperscript{10} It is interesting to note in this context that Elizabeth never took the title of Supreme Head of the English Church.\textsuperscript{11} She must have been cognizant of the potential anger that the clergy and the populace might feel if she officially headed the Church. She was most likely aware of Aylmer’s argument as well.

Aylmer’s strongest argument is made against Knox’s assertion that being female is against the natural order of things. (This natural order is taken to mean something separate from the will of God.) Aylmer agrees that women’s capabilities are less than those of men, as evidenced by the work of Aristotle, but he goes on to argue that one should not infer from this that Aristotle meant they were incapable of doing anything or lacking in virtue. The writer goes on to point out that Aristotle said women had the same virtues as those found in men; therefore their moral character could not be less. Aylmer winds up this phase of his argument by pointing out that if St. Paul said women should rule their houses, tend businesses, and govern over men in these houses, and if the home is a little commonwealth according to Socrates, then why can they not rule a kingdom? If the rule of women were against nature, then they would either be debarred by Scripture or rendered incapable by their own ineptitude from ruling even the home.\textsuperscript{12} Aylmer explains it is only because of social customs that women are prohibited to rule, not because of God’s law or Nature. Aylmer believed what is called natural must also be universal, and if women are considered capable of leadership and rule only in the context

\textsuperscript{10}McLaren, 238–9.

\textsuperscript{11}Philippa Berry, Of Chastity and Power: Elizabethan Literature and the Unmarried Queen (London: Routledge, 1989), 65.

\textsuperscript{12}McLaren, 240.
of the home and business, then it cannot be divine or natural law that prohibits them from
governing a state, but rather tradition and/or the will of men.\textsuperscript{13}

Elizabeth’s reaction to Aylmer’s work is unclear, unlike her violent reaction to
Knox’s \textit{Blast}. It can be assumed that since Aylmer’s work was widely published and was
considered the premier work in defense of female rulership in England, Elizabeth must
have been aware of it. Also, she would have taken action against Aylmer if she had
disliked it.

Although Aylmer’s work was the first tangible response to Knox’s \textit{Blast}, one
should not assume that Elizabeth was letting others defend her against those who would
not be ruled by a woman. Directly after her coronation, she took personal action to begin
consolidating her power. Like Aylmer, she did not intend to legitimize her rule by giving
reasons for its legitimacy; instead she took traditional beliefs and arguments about the
nature of women and used them to her advantage. But, where Aylmer used the
arguments of his opponents and showed how they actually argued for female rulership,
Elizabeth took ideas of marriage and chastity and used them to remain single and outside
the council of men. She did not attempt to explain her right to rule; she attempted to
circumvent the arguments on both sides. By using traditional beliefs about marriage,
chastity, and womanhood in entirely new ways, Elizabeth was able to step outside of the
debate and create a persona where she was above the fray and could rule as she chose.
She became an Other for whom no standard criteria about the behavior or roles of women
and, at times, mere mortals, could be applied.

\textsuperscript{13}Lee, 252–3.
THE QUESTION OF MARRIAGE

John Guy argues in his work, *Tudor England*, that the most pressing issue in 1558–59, was the so-called Religious Settlement. In the eyes of the bishops and members of Parliament this may have been so, but for Elizabeth, the most important question was to avoid being forced into a marriage not of her own choosing. It is well known that Elizabeth would not deign to be ruled over by anyone—not Parliament, Privy Council, or husband. A emissary from the Scottish court remarked in 1564, “Your Majesty thinks that if you were married you would be but Queen of England, and now you are both king and queen.” In response to Robert Dudley’s pushing of his marriage suit, Elizabeth was also reported to have exclaimed, “If you think to rule here, I will take a course to see you forthcoming. I will have but one mistress and no master!” From these statements it becomes clear that Elizabeth was trying to avoid marriage, because she wanted to govern her own affairs and those of England.

But it was not a simple task for a woman, even the Queen of England, to remain unmarried. Lisa Hopkins asserts that in mid- to late sixteenth-century England, “there was no such thing as a single woman. Women were classified as either married or going to be married.” Marriage was considered such a *de facto* and “natural” occurrence that there was an old proverb saying old maids, lacking children to lead them into heaven, would be punished for defying the natural order by leading apes in Hell. The prevalence of this belief is evidenced in Shakespeare’s *Taming of the Shrew*. Katerina tells her

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father, Baptista, that because he loves her younger sister Bianca better and is trying to marry her off first, that Katerina will be destined to "lead apes in hell."\textsuperscript{17} Elizabeth could not openly appear to spurn the supposed natural order of things, but she did not suffer to be ruled.

It is commonly believed that soon after her accession, Elizabeth swore an oath to remain a virgin the rest of her life. She is supposed to have done this when a delegation from Parliament came with a petition asking her to choose a husband and marry. This incident appears in William Camden’s seventeenth-century biography of Elizabeth,\textsuperscript{18} but is found nowhere in the papers of William Cecil, Camden’s supposed source. According to Camden’s account, Elizabeth responded to the delegation’s request by replying:

> But now that the publick care of governing the kingdom is laid upon me, to draw upon me the Cares of Marriage may seem a point of inconsiderate Folly. Yea, to satisfie you, I have already joyned myself in Marriage to an Husband, namely, the Kingdom of England. And Behold . . . the Pledge of this my wedlock and Mariage with my Kingdom. (And therewith she drew the Ring from her Finger and shewed it, wherewith at her Coronation she had in a set form of words solemnly given herself in Marriage to her Kingdom.)\textsuperscript{19}

Camden would have his readers believe Elizabeth was always the Virgin Queen, a moral pillar who stood above mortal women. He seems to believe this was her innate nature.

When one examines Elizabeth’s response to Parliament’s petition on 10 February 1559, that she marry, one sees she is not so much against marriage as she is ambivalent toward it. She says if it were the will of God she should marry, then she would do so for


\textsuperscript{18}Camden, 17–43.

\textsuperscript{19}Camden, 29.
the sake of the realm. This is very different from Camden’s version that Elizabeth had decided to remain chaste all of her days. This version, recorded in Parliament, shows Elizabeth preferring to remain single only for the immediate future. Her seeming openness to marry for the good of the state would temporarily assuage the fears of those Members of Parliament who wanted her to marry immediately. But she also said she would marry when God “so inclined” her heart. Thus, if she refused to marry she could say she was doing God’s will. She had a way out, so to speak.

In her book, *Monarchy and Matrimony: The Courtships of Elizabeth I*, Susan Doran argues that the standard argument that Elizabeth’s courtships were “political dalliances” or “empty charades” and she never considered marriage because she was set against it is wrong. Doran argues that until 1581, marriage was a real possibility for Elizabeth. She believes Elizabeth genuinely considered the marriage proposals from the Duke of Alençon and her long-standing amour, Robert Dudley. Doran backs up her thesis with primary evidence of the supposed earnestness of many of the marriage negotiations, the feelings expressed by the Queen about various suitors, and her own comments on her unmarried state. Doran explains Elizabeth’s unmarried state was a result of her councilors lack of consensus among the two marriage candidates.

Other scholars offer a more psychological argument for why Elizabeth never married. Lisa Hopkins believes that from a very early age, Elizabeth was aware of the

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insecurity of her position and the importance of the trappings of rank in relation to one's position. She cites the following anecdote as evidence. At the age of three Elizabeth is reported to have said in the wake of Anne Boleyn's fall, "How now, Yesterday my lady Princess, today my lady Elizabeth? How comes it?" Hopkins believes that Elizabeth was very aware of her mother's fall from favor and subsequent execution and how it affected her own station and rank. Hopkins goes on to postulate that a series of deaths related to marriage and childbirth forever turned Elizabeth off the idea of marriage. Jane Seymour, who had been like a mother to her, died as the result of a cesarean section. Another stepmother, Catherine Howard, was executed for infidelity to Henry VIII, and Catherine Parr, whose house Elizabeth lived in during the reign of Edward VI also died in childbirth. Many believe this last death had a special significance because Parr fell ill right after having caught her husband, Thomas Seymour, in a compromising situation with the teenage Elizabeth. Hopkins surmises that Elizabeth equated marriage, childbirth, and all romantic entanglements with death and the loss of loved ones.

The problem with explanations like Hopkins's is that they are both too simple and unprovable. It is simplistic to blame the experiences of childhood as the reasons for all subsequent adult behavior and attitudes. This is not to discount the influence of experience—but rather to caution against overemphasis on its importance. Also, no matter how good an argument is forwarded to show a correlation between the events of Elizabeth's formative years and her later actions, the causal connection is very tenuous. The Queen's actions reveal her stated desire to remain single. In her responses to

23 Hopkins, Queen Elizabeth I and Her Court, 13.

24 Hopkins, Queen Elizabeth I and Her Court, 35–7.
petitions that she marry, her reactions to various marriage suits, and finally, her
willingness to create an otherworldly persona show Elizabeth's wish to avoid marriage.
With this evidence, there is little need to theorize about psychological reasons for her
actions.

Doran's argument is not much more sound than Hopkins's. She would have her
readers believe that since Elizabeth left an opening for marriage for the good of the state
she was actually inclined toward marriage. Elizabeth may not have taken on the raiments
of the Virgin Queen in response to Parliament's 1559 petition that she marry, as Camden
reports, but her statement in the House of Commons clearly demonstrates that she
intended to remain single. She let it seem she was willing to marry if she had to since to
refuse the idea out of hand so early in her reign would have been disastrous. If she had
refused, she probably would have been ousted. Elizabeth also kept marriage negotiations
of various sorts open for so long because she wanted to keep diplomatic relations with
the Continental powers amicable by allowing them to negotiate for her hand.

It was not so much the question of her marriage that was inescapable, but
producing a male child to secure the succession. Elizabeth was well aware of the
importance of the succession from watching her father go to any lengths to secure his
own succession. The Tudor dynasty was a relatively new one, and stability of the realm
was not a forgone conclusion. Also, Spain and France were interested in exercising their
power in England through various claims to the throne. Even before Elizabeth's
coronation, the French were earnestly petitioning the Pope to declare Elizabeth a bastard,
and, therefore, unfit to rule. It is noted in Pope Paul IV's diary that France wanted to
keep Philip II of Spain from controlling England and preferred to see the throne of
England in the hands of Mary Stuart. Philip II had been married to Elizabeth's half-sister, Mary, but Parliament kept him from having any real power. He was now planning to make a case for marriage with Elizabeth, but he lost interest quickly and commented that he would no longer be interested in English affairs since Elizabeth was determined to remain Protestant. Henry Kamen argues that a letter from Count Feria, the Spanish Ambassador in London, to Philip, states that the ambassador believed Philip didn't care about Elizabeth's Protestant beliefs. Kamen argues that it was Elizabeth who put a halt to the proceedings when she discovered Philip was also proposing a marriage alliance with Elizabeth Valois. The Queen is reported to have quipped to Feria that [Philip] "could not have been much in love with [Elizabeth Valois], since he did not have the patience to wait four months." 

Historians such as A. F. Pollard have argued that Elizabeth never married because she knew marriage would offer no solution to the succession. They argue that she thought a bout with smallpox she had in her twenties and a misaligned uterus prevented her from having children. However, medical science at the time stated that this reasoning could not be true because, according to Spanish ambassadors who regularly purchased information from the Queen's laundress, the Queen had regular menstrual cycles, indicating to them that she was still fertile. Also, as late at 1574, when the Queen was

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forty-five years old, Lord Burghley received reports from the Queen’s physicians and her female servants that she was still able to have children.\(^{28}\)

It has been argued that Elizabeth did not want an heir, birthed or named, because of her experience during the Wyatt Rebellion (1554). Sir Thomas Wyatt led a rebellion in Kent to depose Mary Tudor and place the young Elizabeth on the throne. While Elizabeth was no way complicit in the rising, her sister came to judge her a traitor and threat to Mary’s own reign.\(^{29}\) Christopher Haigh believes Elizabeth was very aware of her capacity for jealousy and realized she could never trust a named successor. She is quoted in Haigh as saying, “Think you that I could love my winding sheet, when, as examples show, princes cannot even love their own children who are to succeed them?”\(^{30}\)

The question remains, why did Elizabeth choose not to marry, yet kept negotiations for marriage open? The answer might be that she had to appear open to the question of marriage to keep from making enemies among the nobility and Parliament, who feared for the succession. But, in truth, she would never allow herself to concede power to a husband. From the first, Elizabeth said she inclined to the celibate life. She said she would accept “one mistress and no master.”\(^{31}\) The first candidates for marriage she entertained were Eric XIV of Sweden, a distant and unknown quantity, and the Archduke Charles, the Catholic heir to the Holy Roman Empire. It would seem that Eric was an acceptable candidate because he was Protestant, very wealthy, and would help

\(^{28}\) Haigh, *Elizabeth I*, 16.

\(^{29}\) Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony*, 18.


England open trade with Muscovy. But, a marriage to him would alienate the Holy Roman Empire with which England needed to remain on civil terms.\textsuperscript{32} One could argue that Elizabeth continued negotiations with Eric because it upped the ante of the simultaneous marriage negotiations with the Habsburgs and because of the lavish gifts Eric brought Elizabeth.\textsuperscript{33} The Habsburg match was never a real possibility because of Archduke Charles’s Catholicism and the Empire’s prominent role in the Counter-Reformation. Also, a matrimonial link with the Empire would have strained the already tense relations with France. It seems unlikely that Elizabeth ever seriously considered a foreign marriage (although she may have much later with the Duke of Alençon), especially with her firsthand experience of the reaction in England to Mary Tudor’s marriage to Philip of Spain. Parliament, however, did not care about Elizabeth’s stated desire to remain single, to rule alone, or the difficulty of finding a candidate acceptable to all (especially her); they wanted the succession to be set. Whether through marriage and birth of an heir or by naming a successor, the MPs were not particular; they feared for the stability of the realm and what would happen upon the death of Elizabeth.

This fear for the succession was exacerbated in October 1562, when Elizabeth almost died from a case of smallpox. The entire Court was paralyzed by fear, and the Privy Council showed it was totally incapable of choosing a successor. Nothing of any consequence was accomplished during the Queen’s illness, and it wasn’t until she began to recover that the Council was able to act. The Council decided it would let Parliament

\textsuperscript{32}Doran, \textit{Monarchy and Matrimony}, 31.

\textsuperscript{33}Doran, \textit{Monarchy and Matrimony}, 33–5.
debate the succession question in January 1563. When Parliament convened on January 12, the preacher giving the official sermon to Parliament and the Queen expressed the fears of those present. The preacher referred to Mary Tudor's Spanish marriage as "a terrible plague to all England, . . . so now for want of your marriage and issue is like to prove as great a plague." He went on to say that Elizabeth's recent illness had been a warning that she was mortal and that the succession had to be settled. The tenor of the entire session of 1563 was set by the succession question; both the Lords and the Commons made formal petitions to the Queen to marry or at least settle the succession. Members of Commons made personal appeals from the floor that the Queen marry and remove the burden of uncertainty for her people.

But Elizabeth would not be swayed. Her response to these petitions, given in Parliament, was a masterstroke. Elizabeth said,

The weight and greatness of this matter might cause in me, being a woman wanting both wit and memory, some fear to speak, and bashfulness besides, a thing appropriate to my sex. But yet the princely seat and kingly throne wherein God, (though unworthy) hath constituted me, maketh these two causes to seem little in my eyes, though grievous perhaps to your ears, and bolden me to say somewhat in this matter, which I mean only to touch, but not presently to answer: for so great a demand needs both great and grave advice.

Elizabeth began by falling back on gender stereotypes and deprecating herself and sex by saying that because she is a woman, she lacks wit and memory. Elizabeth understood the prejudices against her because she was a female monarch, but to appease Parliament

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34 Doran, Monarchy and Matrimony, 60.

35 Doran, Monarchy and Matrimony, 60-1.

36 Hartley, 1:88.

37 Hartley, 1:94.
she said she was probably not as intelligent as a man. This made her appear humble before her audience and also defused potential resentment towards her as a female ruler and an unmarried monarch. But, Elizabeth was quick to point out she was made monarch of England by God. She had divine legitimacy, and she also used the term princely throne. Elizabeth often referred to herself as a prince or one of the princes of Europe. She did this to show that she was the equal of her fellow monarchs and was as capable of ruling as a man. She was fond of referring to herself as being much like her father, Henry VIII, and of having his courage. Elizabeth went on to say that her princely stature makes her supposed womanly shortcomings seem insignificant. She finished this opening statement by saying she would eventually speak on the matter of the succession, but not give an immediate answer to the matter because it needs much consideration.

In less than four sentences, Elizabeth brilliantly disarmed those who resented having a woman on the throne, pointed out that God had placed her there, and argued that since she was chosen by God to rule, her shortcomings were inconsequential. She informed Parliament she would answer the request to marry when she felt like it. Elizabeth used the beliefs and rhetorical forms of the day to remove herself from the fray and stand outside and above it so that she could act without coercion in a manner she would choose. Later in the same address, Elizabeth explains that her recent illness was not a punishment from God for not marrying, but simply a chastisement to remind her to remain humble. She concludes by telling the MPs that in the future, “you may have many stepdames, yet you shall never have any more natural mother than I mean to be

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unto you all." These last statements seem to indicate that Elizabeth had only the best interests of her people at heart. How could anyone argue with, or attack, the position of Elizabeth? To do so would be to deny her God-given legitimacy, her wisdom and her humility in appearing to be a feeble and caring woman. Parliament would have to, and did, accept her nonanswer for a while.

Parliament made several subsequent petitions for the Queen to marry or settle the succession in some way, but she always answered, implicitly or explicitly, in a way that placed her outside any recognizable context; therefore, she was able to remain single. Even more importantly, remaining single enabled Elizabeth to cultivate the persona of the Virgin Queen, tying the idea of her virginity with purity and otherness, and linking those ideas with the concept of the inviolability of the realm of England and her ability to rule over it. Elizabeth, the Virgin Queen, would become the living embodiment of the righteous, pure, just, and inviolable realm of England.

This does not, however, mean that Elizabeth was never in love with anyone or that she never felt the emotional pull to marry. Indeed, there were two men whom it appears that she loved and even considered marrying—Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester and Francis, Duke of Alençon. The great irony of these two loves of Elizabeth's is that because of these affairs, she initiated the creation and continuation of her persona as the Virgin Queen.

\[38\] Hartley, 1:95.
CHAPTER IV

MY EYES AND MY FROG:
THE DUDLEY AND ALENÇON MARRIAGE SUITS,
AND THE CREATION OF THE VIRGIN QUEEN

Historians will probably never know Elizabeth's true feelings towards marriage. Having said this, it is surprising that so many historians seem determined to examine Elizabeth's marital inclinations based on tenuous methods such as psychoanalysis. There are those who argue that she never intended to marry and forward psychological theories about Elizabeth's childhood experiences of love and marriage. Others argue that she was sterile because of her bout of smallpox or unable to produce an heir because of physical deformities. Scholars who do believe she wanted to marry use flawed logic to explain away her single state by pointing to the unsuitability of her various suitors, resistance by her Privy Council to her two primary choices (Dudley and Alençon), or resistance by Parliament and the people to whomever she would have chosen. None of these approaches is satisfactory. To say that she never married because of nebulous psychological reasons is not good history and is needlessly reductive. Psycho-history has a strong emotional appeal for general readers and academics alike; but, in the final analysis it is too intuitive-based and not demonstrable enough to satisfy the demands of an academic, historical work.

1Hopkins, Queen Elizabeth I and Her Court.
3Doran, Monarchy and Matrimony.
Conversely, to believe someone as determined and forceful as Elizabeth I was kept from marrying by her Council or Parliament is naive. In fact, it is unfounded when one reads in the sources how desperately both bodies wanted her to marry. It was she who refused to marry and acted against the wishes of Council and Parliament.

A more historically defensible and simple answer to the question of Elizabeth's feelings toward marriage is offered by Christopher Haigh. For Haigh, Elizabeth was a woman "who spent her adult life struggling against the conventional idea of womanhood and found it difficult to do the most conventional womanly thing of all. Elizabeth strove to show that she was not like other women. How could she admit she was just the same as the rest and submit herself to a husband?" Her ability to take the throne and hold it successfully entailed much more than her legitimacy as rightful heir to the Tudor succession. She had to deal with all the prejudices against women as rightful and/or capable rulers. For her to marry would have put her in the category of all other women and she could never do that. Her entire public image and concomitant consolidation of power was surrounded by an air of Otherness, in that Elizabeth was no mere woman—she was an uncommon woman, a perverse prodigy sent by God to save England. She had to stand out against the background of other women and other rulers.

But, how could she continue to refuse to marry and produce an heir in a way that was satisfactory to all those concerned? She would begin to mold herself into what became the role of the Virgin Queen. In late Tudor England, the idea of virginity still retained positive connotations, unlike the Lutheran and Calvinist states on the Continent. There was still a strong Catholic undercurrent in the Protestant England of Elizabeth.

*Haigh, Elizabeth I, 16.*
The Virgin Mary was still very much in the consciousness of the masses and the revived interest in Classical literature provided positive non-Christian models of virginity, such as the Vestal Virgins. Elizabeth could use these models to answer the charge that remaining chaste was against the course of nature. Kathleen Brown has pointed out that "as long as she remained unmarried, Elizabeth could redeem the violation of nature incurred by ruling women with a public image of virginity . . . Elizabeth had appropriated the symbols of virtuous womanhood and used them to forge her authority." Elizabeth could rule as a chaste Virgin anointed by God to protect England, and her eschewing taking a husband on these grounds would be considered a positive aberration of nature instead of rebellion against her place in God's plan. The long and difficult task would be gaining acceptance for this persona, not creating it.

The great irony in all this was that the future "Virgin Queen" was able to construct and find acceptance for her desired state of chaste Otherness as a result of two romantic relationships. Beginning with Dudley's suit and ending with the failed settlement with Francis of Alençon, Elizabeth initiated and eventually solidified the persona of the Virgin Queen. Over the years of Elizabeth's reign, Robert Dudley employed a number of masques, plays, and various theatricals to try to win Elizabeth's hand in marriage. Later, he used them to ask her permission to pursue his own course if she would not marry him. It was in the various dramas presented by Dudley that we see the first acknowledgment of the Queen as a virgin, albeit a role where chastity is to be shed in the name of marriage. Over the years, one sees the presentation of the Queen's

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5Kathleen Brown, 153.

6Kathleen Brown, 22.
chaste state evolve into something to be grudgingly accepted and eventually something to be honored. Elizabeth drew upon these representations of her presented by Dudley in plays and literature to remove herself more fully from the realm of traditional female monarchs and make herself more completely into the chaste and semi-mythical Virgin Queen.

In the case of the Duke of Alençon, a series of masques, plays, pamphlets, and various literatures were employed by a variety of authors to persuade the Queen not to marry the Catholic Frenchmen. It was in the reaction against the proposed Alençon marriage that one finds the drama and literature of the time endorsing, even extolling, the Queen’s virtue, linking it with the health of the State and the survival of the Anglican Church. It can be argued that it was an unintended result of these affaires de coeur that Elizabeth was finally able to attain her position as singular ruler who had to be dealt with in her own context and on her own terms. In order to understand Elizabeth’s persona and its eventual acceptance, her relationships with possible husbands Robert Dudley and Francis of Alençon must be examined.

"MY EYES"—DUDLEY IN ELIZABETH’S COURT

Robert Dudley was the son of John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland, who had tried to engineer the succession after the death of Edward VI. He married his son Guilford Dudley to Lady Jane Grey, granddaughter of Henry VIII’s sister Mary. After Mary Tudor came to power, Northumberland, Lady Jane, and Guilford were all executed.
Robert Dudley, along with his surviving brothers were placed in the Tower. Although it is true that during Dudley’s tenure there, Mary Tudor also placed her sister Elizabeth in the Tower for supposedly conspiring with Protestants to overthrow her, there is little evidence that Elizabeth ever knew Dudley during that time. There is, however, an anecdote that in 1566, Elizabeth told the French ambassador she had known Dudley since she was seven years old.

Whatever the reason, it would seem that Elizabeth held some affection for the Dudley family. As soon as she ascended the throne, Dudley and his surviving brother were given office at court. Ambrose Dudley was given the post of Master of the Ordnance, and Robert received the very prestigious post of Master of Horse. This position was important because Dudley would be in charge of the royal stables and thus have constant access to the new sovereign who loved to ride and hunt. Also, the title of Master of Horse came from the Roman position of magister equite, the person who was closest to the reigning consul or Caesar. (Mark Antony was Julius Caesar’s magister equite.) In the Classics-obsessed Renaissance, the position of Master of Horse was coveted as much for its symbolic as for its practical advantages. Many in Elizabeth’s new court were shocked that the son of a traitor and a relative unknown was chosen for such a prestigious position.

It quickly became clear to those around Elizabeth that Dudley was, by far, the Queen’s favorite. She even gave him the affectionate nickname, “my eyes.”

\footnote{Guy, 226–9.}

\footnote{Doran, Monarchy and Matrimony, 40.}

\footnote{Doran, Monarchy and Matrimony, 41.}
nobles at Court resented this favoritism because they could not understand why so many rewards were bestowed upon one who had done so little for the Queen or for England.\textsuperscript{10} As early as April 1559, the relationship between Elizabeth and Dudley began to attract gossip, and by the fall, their relationship was bordering on the scandalous. The gossips at Court said that Elizabeth was visiting Dudley day and night in his chamber and that her demeanor towards him led many to believe that marriage was imminent.\textsuperscript{11} There was only one problem: Dudley was already married. Even so, Dudley kept his wife, Amy Robsart, in the country, well out of sight of the Queen. He even went so far as to forbid his wife to come to court. The stories of Dudley’s intimate relationship with the Queen supposedly spread to the other courts of Europe through their ambassadors in London.

In actuality, the scandal about Elizabeth and Dudley died down in the first six months of 1560, and was only reignited by the death of Dudley’s wife on 6 September 1560. Unfortunately for all involved, Amy Dudley passed away in very suspicious circumstances. She was found by her servants at the bottom of the staircase of her country house with her neck broken. Lisa Hopkins, like many historians, believes there was no foul play involved. Hopkins points out that modern medical research has suggested Amy Dudley suffered from breast cancer, based on reports such as the Spanish Ambassador Count Feria’s and that “the cause of her death was a spontaneous fracture of the spine as is sometimes suffered by women with advanced breast cancer.”\textsuperscript{12} Of course, as Hopkins points out, there was no such advanced medical knowledge in the sixteenth century.

\textsuperscript{10} Aikin, 270.

\textsuperscript{11} Doran, Monarchy and Matrimony, 41.

\textsuperscript{12} Hopkins, Queen Elizabeth I and Her Court, 34.
century, and it was generally believed that Dudley had her murdered. Not only was it the
timing of Amy Dudley’s death which cast suspicion on Robert Dudley, but also the
circumstances. It was reported that Amy’s headdress was undisturbed by the accident
and that she fell down only eight steps.13

For two persons who seemed relatively oblivious to the impression they were
giving to the world during their “courtship,” Elizabeth and Dudley were very aware of
the ramifications and dangers posed by Amy Dudley’s untimely death. Dudley stayed
away from the house where Amy had died in order to keep anyone from saying that he
had influenced the coroner’s inquest, which he personally ordered. Elizabeth
immediately distanced herself from Dudley and sent him to his house at Kew until the
inquest had brought in a verdict.14

The inquest found that Amy Dudley’s death was an accident, but rumors that
Dudley was responsible and the verdict a coverup persisted. At the French court, these
rumors lingered and courtiers jokingly asked what type of religion allowed a man to kill
his wife, go unpunished by the sovereign, and then marry that same sovereign.15 Dudley
played the grieving husband, nevertheless, and spent a small fortune on his wife’s
funeral. While Elizabeth continued to support Dudley and keep him as a close friend and
confidant, it soon became clear that she was no longer planning on marrying him. This is
evidenced by two things. Early in 1561, Elizabeth refused to ennoble Dudley during a

13Doran, Monarchy and Matrimony, 42.
14Doran, Monarchy and Matrimony, 43.
15Doran, Monarchy and Matrimony, 43.
ceremony, slashing the patent at the last moment.\textsuperscript{16} Second, in an interview with the new Spanish Ambassador Don Alvaro de Quadra, Elizabeth stated that she did have some affection for Dudley, but had never planned to marry him or anyone else.\textsuperscript{17}

During this period, Dudley is reported to have been secretly treating with Ambassador Quadra, asking him to persuade the Queen to marry by pointing out that it seemed to Quadra that the English people would prefer she marry an Englishman. In return, Dudley offered to persuade the Queen to send a representative to the third session of the Council of Trent. This was an attempt to make Spain and the Pope believe that Dudley’s marriage to Elizabeth might return England to Catholicism. He added that if he could not find anyone to go he would go himself. Dudley also promised to get the papal nuncio bearing the pope’s invitation to the council entrance into England.\textsuperscript{18} This statement, recorded by Quadra in his regular reports to Philip II, has caused many historians problems. Writers who wanted to cast Dudley as a Protestant activist have either dismissed the comment as a lie or have not mentioned it at all. Others have claimed Dudley was so single-minded in his desire to marry Elizabeth that he would have helped return England to Catholicism to obtain his goal. This is ridiculous considering Dudley’s long standing Protestant partisanship. Still other scholars believe Dudley was

\textsuperscript{16}Neville Williams, \textit{All the Queen’s Men: Elizabeth I and Her Courtiers} (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 75.


\textsuperscript{18}United Kingdom, Public Record Office, “Ambassador Quadra,” no. 123, 182.
simply lying to Quadra, and, that once he married Elizabeth, he would do nothing to bring Catholicism to England.\textsuperscript{19}

All of Dudley’s stratagems and hopes began to unravel at this point. Elizabeth could not marry Dudley since he had been working with the Spanish to get their support for his marriage to the Queen. This made Dudley appear to favor Catholic aims in England and, thus, appear to be a supporter, albeit an unknowing one, of a Catholic revolt planned by the Spanish upon arrival of the nuncio.\textsuperscript{20} Things began to go so badly for Dudley’s suit that the Earl of Sussex suggested the Knights of the Order of the Garter petition the Queen to marry Dudley. All this was done in hopes of settling the succession. The Catholic nobles Arundel and Norfolk rejected this and instead suggested a petition advocating that the Queen marry, but with no mention of Lord Robert.\textsuperscript{21} By May 1561, Dudley was on the outs with both the Protestant and Catholic peers; his last supporter, as usual, was Elizabeth.

After May 1561, the prospect of Robert Dudley’s marriage to the Queen waxed and waned periodically. Many at court believed that when Elizabeth formally ended marriage negotiations with Eric XIV of Sweden in December 1561, Dudley would wed the Queen soon thereafter.\textsuperscript{22} Dudley tried to shore up his suit with a series of pamphlets printed anonymously urging the Queen to marry Dudley for the sake of the realm.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{19}Doran, \textit{Monarchy and Matrimony}, 47.

\textsuperscript{20}Doran, \textit{Monarchy and Matrimony}, 50–51.

\textsuperscript{21}Doran, \textit{Monarchy and Matrimony}, 51.

\textsuperscript{22}United Kingdom, Public Record Office, “Ambassador Quadra,” no. 145, 221.

\textsuperscript{23}Doran, \textit{Monarchy and Matrimony}, 52.
Dudley also put on a series of masques at the Inner Temple during Christmas and New Year (1562) in the Queen’s honor. The masques consisted of plays that were all thinly-veiled pleas for the Queen’s hand.24 The Queen was flattered and entertained by these theatrics, but Dudley did not get his wish. He, while still a favorite of the Queen, was no longer the obvious choice for her husband. The political wind had shifted against him. Her attendance at his Inner Temple masques was more a sign of good manners than a sign of acceptance of his romantic overtures.

It should be remembered that Elizabeth came to power in the context of pageant and symbolism, portraying herself as a godly woman come to restore the Gospel to England. She became Deborah and Judith, the judge of Israel and the slayer of its enemies, in her quest for the throne and legitimacy. During the first years of her reign, various Protestant tracts, pageants, printed gospels, and prayer books abounded containing images of Elizabeth as the godly woman restoring the faith.25 This image of Elizabeth as the godly woman and Protestant savior was the standard representation of Elizabeth until the Inner Temple pageants hosted by Dudley in 1562.

It is with these pageants that one sees the beginning of the shift from the strictly Protestant representations of Elizabeth to ones that were rooted firmly in the tradition of non-Biblical and, eventually, Classical Greek and Roman symbolism. The Inner Temple pageants were presented by Dudley in yet another attempt to woo the Queen. He used the mechanism of entertainment to ask for Elizabeth’s hand because of two very different social conventions in vogue at the time. The first convention, a constant throughout the


rest of Elizabeth's reign, was the requisite task of asking favor of the Queen only in the most indirect manner. Haigh points out that courtiers most successful in receiving offices and monies were those who never asked directly for anything, but constantly praised and flattered the Queen, showering her with trinkets.26

Using the example of Sir Christopher Hatton, Haigh demonstrates his point. Hatton came to Court in 1564, possessing few recognizable skills other than his ability to dance and flatter to the point of obsequiousness. These two skills served him well. He eventually came to be the Receiver of First Fruits and Tenths, and in 1587, he became Lord Chancellor. Men who felt they, or at least others, were more qualified for the post referred to Hatton as the "dancing chancellor." Many believed that if Hatton had been unable to dance or flatter he would have never received a post.27

So it is in this vein that Dudley was asking Elizabeth, through the indirect and flattering medium of the Inner Temple revels, to marry him. Dudley was also following the ideas laid down in the work "A Mirror for Magistrates: that all monarchs should look into the mirrors held up through poetry and drama to learn how to behave wisely and morally."28 Thus it was in these contexts Dudley presented the play Gorboduc during the Inner Temple cycle. The central character, King Gorboduc (who symbolizes Elizabeth in this instance), is represented as going against the natural order of things by dividing his kingdom between his two sons; eventually a civil war ensues.

Within one land one single rule is best:
Divided reigns do make divided hearts,

26Haigh, Elizabeth I, 93.

27Haigh, Elizabeth I, 91.

28Doran, Monarchy and Matriarchy, 55.
But peace observes the country and the prince
Such is in man the greedy mind to reign,
So great is his desire to climb aloft,
In Worldly stage the stateliest parts to bear,
That faith and justice and all kindly love
Do yield unto desire of sovereignty . . .

Apparently, Dudley intended Elizabeth to realize that her refusal of his hand to settle the succession was against nature's course and would lead England into dynastic war.\textsuperscript{30}

What is important here is that Elizabeth was being portrayed in secular and somewhat mythical terms, not the Biblical iconography previously seen. Also, Elizabeth's preference for chastity was being recognized in the allegory of the play, but it was not being cast in the positive light it would be later in her reign. Her chastity was made to seem a threat to her own stability and to that of the realm. Through the use of these various dramas, \textit{Gorboduc} in particular, Dudley sought to ask for the Queen's hand by showing what lay ahead for her and England if she continued to refuse, and he was counting on the fashionable idea of rulers learning from art to sway her to accept his suit. Elizabeth, however, remained unmoved.

After the Inner Temple pageants and other Christmas masques, Elizabeth made no moves towards matrimony at all, and then, in November 1563, William Cecil opened marriage negotiations with the Habsburgs. Cecil wanted to solve the succession crisis and avoid Dudley marrying the Queen by trying to persuade Elizabeth to marry the

\textsuperscript{29}Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton, \textit{Gorboduc; or, Ferrex and Porrex}, ed. Irby B. Cauthen (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), 21, lines 259–266.

\textsuperscript{30}Doran, "Juno Versus Diana," 261.
Archduke Charles. But, the marriage negotiations with the Catholic Habsburgs caused so much tension that there were outbursts of violence at Court.31

MASQUES FOR THE QUEEN

During the period of the Habsburg marriage negotiations, several dramas were presented by various nobles in which the theme, like that of Gorboduc, was the triumph of marriage over chastity. In each drama, the goddess Diana, symbol of chastity and, in past instances, Queens of England, was convinced by Venus or Juno, goddesses of marriage, to give up the chaste life.32 In one masque, presented at the wedding of Frances Radcliffe to Thomas Mildmay in July 1566, the goddesses Venus, Pallas, and Juno joyously presented the bride with gifts, extolling the fulfillment of her destiny of marriage.33 It is apparent that Elizabeth got the intended message of at least one of these pageants. She remarked to the Spanish ambassador after seeing a very similar masque at Grey’s Inn, “This is all against me.”34

It would seem that there were so many masques emphasizing the triumph of marriage over chastity during the 1560s because the matter of the Queen’s marriage and settlement of the succession were of tantamount importance. It is also important to realize that Elizabeth’s self-proclaimed preference for celibacy was acknowledged in the


33Doran, “Juno Versus Diana,” 264.

34United Kingdom, Public Record Office, “Ambassador Quadra,” no. 286, 404.
plays and even respected by the portrayal of virginity in the goddess Diana. This was the groundwork that Elizabeth used to create her image in the mid-1570s as Diana and the Virgin Queen.

But this initial acknowledgment of Elizabeth's role as a self-proclaimed Diana may not have been Elizabeth's self-invention, but a projection of patriarchal attitudes. According to Philippa Berry, Elizabeth consciously chose to remain single and rule alone, but the early representations of the Queen as Diana and other female personages are male-dominated.\(^\text{35}\) Berry believes that in the early representations of Elizabeth, she was shown in the Petrarchan context of an object of unattainable beauty. Along with this image of the unattainable object came the implicit message that she could be wooed.\(^\text{36}\) In Gorboduc and the various masques during the Habsburg negotiations, Elizabeth was represented as virginal, like Diana, but the underlying theme of each drama was that Diana would decide marriage was somehow more natural than her chaste state. Berry sees this projection of male ideas of Elizabeth's chastity as simply a test put in the way of would-be suitors, or that her chastity was simply an expression that she had not met the right man.\(^\text{37}\)

In the early dramas, Elizabeth was presented much in the manner Philippa Berry describes—a virgin, yes, but a Petrarchan beauty to be won over. She was still an earthbound woman. During the mid-1560s Habsburg negotiations, Elizabeth was slowly coming to be portrayed as an unattainable goddess, removed from the common

\(^{35}\text{Philippa Berry, 62.}\)

\(^{36}\text{Philippa Berry, 62.}\)

\(^{37}\text{Philippa Berry, 62.}\)
perceptions of women. Whether they knew it or not, those around Elizabeth were beginning to see her in the light she wished to be seen in—outside any known contexts and, therefore, able to operate as she wished. The plays did show Diana giving in to marriage, but only through giving her assent to the marriage of others. It now took the power of other goddesses to prompt her assent, not just the persuasion of mortal men.

In the meantime, Robert Dudley appeared to be growing tired of being Elizabeth’s favorite while remaining unmarried to her. He wanted either to marry Elizabeth and share power with her or to be set free to marry another and pursue martial glory on the Continent.\(^38\) During her summer progress of 1575, Elizabeth spent two weeks at Dudley’s castle of Kenilworth. While in residence, Elizabeth saw a series of pageants that pressed Dudley’s desire upon her a final time. In a series of theatricals, Elizabeth was implored by characters symbolizing Dudley to marry him.\(^39\)

In the masque of *Zabeta* (the name a truncated version of Elizabeth), the main character of the title is a nymph dedicated to chastity. Zabeta is reported to have resisted Juno’s pleas for her to marry for seventeen years, the same number of years since Elizabeth’s coming to the throne.\(^40\) The masque ends with the character Iris appealing to Zabeta in the following manner:

How necessarie were for worthy Queenes
That you know wel, whose life alwayes in learning hath been led.
The Countrey craves consent your vertues vaunt themselfe,

\(^{38}\)Doran, “Juno Versus Diana,” 266.


\(^{40}\)Doran, “Juno Versus Diana,” 267.
And Jove in heaven would smile to see
Diana set on a shelve."^{41}

This would be Dudley’s last attempt to induce Elizabeth to marry him. It was also the last dramatic exhortation (on record) for Elizabeth to take a husband.

Dudley, who had known the queen for over twenty years, was not naïve enough to believe that Elizabeth would be readily inclined to accept his offer, and one can see this in another drama presented during her stay at Kenilworth, *The Delivery of the Lady of the Lake*.^{42} Philippa Berry and Susan Doran both point to a section of the drama called “The Speech of Tryton to the Queene’s Majestie”^{43} to demonstrate that Dudley was willing to accept a refusal from Elizabeth as well. It was a piece designed to show Elizabeth’s power to liberate both Dudley from the court and the Netherlands from Catholic Spain. Of course, it was Dudley who expected to lead Elizabeth’s armies against Spain in the Netherlands. In the *Speech*, the chaste Lady of the Lake is saved from the rapacious advances of Sir Bruse sans Pitie by the presence of Elizabeth in the audience.^{44} Doran interprets this as a plea for Elizabeth to release him “from her thrall” and allow him to defend Protestantism from Spain. She believes Dudley is emphasizing Elizabeth’s power to liberate or free those who were in bondage.^{45} Berry sees this section of the drama as a metaphor exhorting Elizabeth to help the Dutch and emphasizes the multivalency of

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^{41}Nichols, *The Progresses*, 1:514.


^{45}Doran, “Juno Versus Diana,” 268.
meaning throughout the play.\textsuperscript{46} Whichever interpretation one chooses, it appears that Dudley was asking Elizabeth to let him choose his own path if she would not marry him.

What is different about these dramas is that Elizabeth was recognized as a virgin who could either marry Dudley or let him pursue another course. Unlike earlier dramas, Elizabeth’s virginity was accounted as a potentially permanent state, not something that could or even needed to be ended. Dudley wanted Elizabeth to let him go if she was going to continue as a chaste ruler. Elizabeth was unmoved by the Kenilworth entertainments, and Dudley married Lettice Knollys, Countess of Essex, four months later.\textsuperscript{47}

THE VIRGIN QUEEN

It was at the Kenilworth entertainments that we see Elizabeth’s virginal persona as something to that is beginning to be accepted and presented as such in public dramas. After the Kenilworth pageants, Elizabeth is portrayed and portrays herself almost constantly as the chaste other-worldly ruler who is to be courted with flattery but will never deign to marry. This overall shift towards an acceptance and veneration of the Virgin/Dianic Queen is evidenced in the pageants and celebrations that followed the Kenilworth dramas.

When Sir Philip Sidney, nephew of Robert Dudley, now Earl of Leicester, presented his play \textit{The Lady of May} (May 1578), a very different image of Elizabeth was shown. The Lady of May, symbolically Elizabeth, had to chose between two suitors,

\textsuperscript{46}Philippa Berry, 98.

\textsuperscript{47}Doran, “Juno Versus Diana,” 270.
Espilus and Therion. Espilus was a poetic shepherd who made no sexual demands on the Lady. Therion was a virile woodsman (the Dudley heraldic symbol is the ragged oak staff) who wanted to have her sexually. In Sidney’s play, The Lady chooses the chaste love of the poet Espilus over the virile love of Therion. With this play it appears that both Sidney and Dudley accepted Elizabeth’s refusal of Dudley’s suit, and Elizabeth’s court had come not only to accept her single state, but praised it in works of art. This praise of Elizabeth as Virgin would increase from this point until her death in 1603.

The playwrights and peers acceptance of the persona of the Queen as a chaste sovereign and semi-mythic persona is evidenced in the pageants that follow the Kenilworth and Lady of May dramas as well as in the celebration of the anniversary of the Queen’s coming to the throne. Accession Day had been marked by the Court in some small fashion since the 1560s. By the mid-1570s, and in the wake of the Kenilworth and Lady Of May productions, it had become a major festival celebrated throughout the land. All over England, sermons were preached extolling the virtues of the Queen’s reign with poetry praising her wisdom, justice, and chastity. At Court, the Accession Day Tilts were held. The Court favorites and peers of the realm josted, engaging in mock combat with the Queen’s champion in a display of their willingness to serve and protect the Queen, whose virginity was coming to symbolize the inviolability of England.

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51 Kathleen Brown, 22.
Elizabeth must certainly have been pleased with this acceptance and promotion by those around her of her single state. She appears to have striven from the beginning of her reign to explain and gain acceptance for her desire to rule alone. What better way to support and endorse this emerging idea, one that she had been fostering for years, than by holding a tournament where she was the “untouchable maid” who is defended by a champion? This was all very much in the vein of the courtly love rituals of the twelfth century, except, in this context, Elizabeth was more than a chaste woman, she was the other-worldly Virgin Queen. All of this was occurring on November 17, a day where her accession to the throne was simultaneously lauded throughout the kingdom in the manner of a feast of the Virgin Mary.

Lisa Hopkins sees the celebration of Accession Day and other rituals of veneration of Elizabeth as possibly taking the place of the veneration of the Virgin Mary. Hopkins says that we cannot know if this connection with Mary was deliberate on Elizabeth’s part; but, Hopkins points out, the way in which Elizabeth was worshiped at court during festivals and constantly prayed for and referenced on feast days appears to have filled a gap left by Protestant eradication of the cult of Mary. Now there was a cult of Elizabeth.52

Kathleen Brown believes that Elizabeth’s association with the image of the Virgin Mary gave her a public aura of wisdom and purity and of being a stable mother to the realm. This stable and motherly image would have presented Elizabeth as the opposite of

52Hopkins, Queen Elizabeth I and Her Court, 31.
the lusty woman of “the misogynist[ic] literature of the time.” Also by “becoming” a Virgin Queen, Elizabeth was presenting herself as a suitable mother for and wife of all England. Like the Virgin Mary, she became both “virtuous and maternal.”

Elizabeth not only presented herself in crypto-Catholic terms, but in Classical ones as well. Whereas an unmarried queen might have been viewed by the people as a liability, a Virgin Queen, presented as Artemis or Diana, was comforting and worthy of worship. Also, these goddesses would remain forever youthful and beautiful. An ageless Queen would become a metaphor for a forever vigorous England that would remain at the zenith of culture and might.

Elizabeth’s expression of her virgin persona, manifested as the Classical Diana, had several advantages. Using classical imagery would quiet those Puritan preachers who saw the cult of the Virgin Queen and its attendant services and pageants as akin to papist blasphemy. Also, drawing upon Classical imagery allowed Elizabeth and her courtiers to cast her in a wider range of roles and draw from a larger palette of symbolic references.

Elizabeth’s drawing on Classical imagery combined with mother imagery may have been prompted by the example of Augustus Caesar. Elizabeth was an avid student of the Latin and Greek classics and would have been familiar with Augustus’s reign. It is possible that Elizabeth associated herself with Classical figures in emulation of portrayals

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53 Kathleen Brown, 21.
54 Kathleen Brown, 21.
55 Hopkins, *Queen Elizabeth I and Her Court*, 42.
of Augustus as a mythical hero in works such as Virgil’s *Aeneid*. Also she was well aware of the work of Suetonius and his account of how Livia became Augusta, Mother of the Country, and was eventually deified by her grandson, Emperor Claudius.

When examining the various Elizabethan pageants from the Inner Temple plays to the Accession Day Tilts, it is important to remember the conscious propaganda motive behind them all. One could say this of Elizabeth’s entire demeanor at all Court and public functions, but especially at the pageants and festivals. According to Haigh, “Such pageants were partly public propaganda, but they were also mass indoctrinations of the participants.” He also says, “the pageantry of the Court was . . . focused upon the Queen’s qualities, making elaborate metaphorical statements of her glory.” It is obvious that the Accession Day fetes were very much propaganda devices, but pageants such as the Kenilworth dramas and Inner Temple plays are too often seen simply as merely elaborate schemes to garner the Queen’s favor. These earlier entertainments were just as much propaganda and indoctrination as the Accession Day revels. While Elizabeth may not have explicitly endorsed these pageants and certainly did not script their undercurrent of asking her to marry, she still gave them a tacit approval.

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59 Haigh, *Elizabeth I*, 94.

60 Haigh, *Elizabeth I*, 95.
“MY FROG”—ELIZABETH AND FRANCIS, DUKE OF ALENÇON

Elizabeth would not have attended these performances or allowed them to be presented if she did not approve of their portrayal of her. She may not have supported the idea that these plays were urging her to marry, but they were reinforcing, unintentionally, the idea of an Elizabeth who could remain chaste and rule alone. Whether people approved or not, they acknowledged her persona as a chaste, nontraditional woman.

By the late 1570s, it appeared to all at Court that the Queen would remain unmarried. Her persona of the Virgin Queen, expressed in various modes including Diana, appeared to be the raiment that she would wear for the rest of her rule. Then the unexpected happened: Elizabeth appeared briefly to fall in love with a foreigner, and, what was worse, a Catholic. Elizabeth seemed to have found herself enthralled with Francis of Alençon, now Duke of Anjou,61 heir to the throne of France. There had been half-hearted negotiations between Elizabeth and the French about a wedding to Alençon throughout the 1570s, but they had never come to anything due to Francis’s youth and the outrage throughout England over the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre in August 1572.62

There was a great outcry among Protestants throughout England over the lukewarm negotiations of the mid- and late 1570s. One of the first specific references to Elizabeth as the Virgin Queen appeared in a play presented in the hopes of dissuading her from marrying Alençon. While on her summer progress in 1578, Elizabeth, accompanied

61With the accession of his brother Henry to the throne of France, Francis was now Duke of Anjou, the heir apparent. For the purposes of this thesis, he will continue to be referred to as Alençon.

62Doran, Monarchy and Matriarchy, 137–8.
by the French ambassador, stopped in Norwich and attended several pageants. These performances were written by Thomas Churchyard and were presented on behalf of the Lord Mayor, a very Protestant gentleman. All of these masques criticized the potential French marriage and implored the Queen to remain single. During a masque given on another day, various Roman deities, such as Mars and Diana, praised and idealized her virginity in such a way as to almost invite comparison with the Virgin Mary. The character of Diana said,

Whoever on earth found a constant friend
That may compare with this my Virgin Queene?
Who ever found a body and a mynde
So free from staine, so perfect to be seene.

Throughout the rest of the play, Elizabeth’s single state is referred to in almost supernatural contexts. She was “unspoused Pallas,” “a sacred Queen,” and was ascribed as having the “wisdom of Pallas, the grace of Venus, and the eloquence of Mercury.” The Queen was presented as the culmination of that which was perfect in woman and ruler and was impervious to worldly lusts. Elizabeth’s chaste state was no longer being portrayed as something to be remedied, but something to be guarded and defended. Had she been negotiating to marry a Protestant prince, one wonders if all of this would have been very different.

Elizabeth ignored the allegorical pleas of these pageants and continued negotiations with France. Some scholars believe that, initially, these negotiations were not in earnest; they were simply a way for Elizabeth to keep Spain from allying with

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63 Doran, “Juno Versus Diana,” 270.
64 Nichols, The Progresses, 2:163.
65 Doran, “Juno Versus Diana,” 272.
France against England. Francis of Alençon, however, desperately wanted to speed up the process of negotiations. He was in a feud with his brother, Henry III, and had even been imprisoned by him because of his support of religious freedom for the Huguenots. Francis saw marriage with Elizabeth as a way of getting out from under his brother’s control and of acquiring power and prestige of his own, especially if he could draw England into the war in the Netherlands on the side of the Dutch. To expedite his suit, Alençon sent his most trusted household servant, Jean de Simier, to England to press his desire for marriage. Alençon knew that Elizabeth had said she would not marry a man she had not met. It appears that Alençon hoped sending his closest confidant would suffice.

Much to the surprise of everyone at Court, the Virgin Queen flirted and flattered Simier to an astonishing degree. She held long and intimate conversations with him, sometimes every day, and it was even reported that they talked of love and not in terms of a marriage agreement. Eventually, Alençon had to slip away from the court at Paris to meet the Queen’s demand to see him. His brother, Henry III, had remained ambiguous about issuing him the permission to go to England. He arrived at Greenwich on 17 August 1579, and traveled incognito at the request of Elizabeth who wanted to avoid popular unrest at his arrival and potential marriage.

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67 Doran, *Monarchy and Matriarchy*, 152.


69 Doran, *Monarchy and Matriarchy*, 162.
But traveling incognito did not avoid the explosion of popular disapproval of the proposed marriage with Alençon. Preachers took to the pulpits across the country and preached against the match as if it were the coming of the Antichrist. There were days of fasting and prayer in hopes of preserving the Queen’s safety, which they felt was imperiled by the proposed marriage to a French Catholic. There was a flood of treatises and pamphlets against the marriage. The most famous of these was John Stubbs’s work, *Discovery of a Gaping Gulf whereinto England is like to be swallowed by another French mariage, if the Lord forbid not the banes, by leting her Majestie see the sin and punishment thereof.*

Stubbs’s arguments, for the most part, were quite standard—Alençon’s religion, Elizabeth’s age, and marriage to the brother of the King of France, a renowned homosexual and libertine. What came to outrage Elizabeth so much was Stubbs’s Knox-like assertion that she was a woman and, therefore, more susceptible to sin (in this case, Catholicism). For Stubbs, Elizabeth, like Eve, would probably succumb to Satan and drag England back to popery through the French marriage. Thousands of copies of the pamphlet were printed and found their way across England. For his efforts, Stubbs and his printer were condemned to death. Their sentences were commuted, and they had their right hands cut off at Tower Hill. It was, to quote Haigh, “a public relations disaster for

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*Stubbs, 3–4.*
Elizabeth.” When Stubbs’s hand was severed he shouted, “God Save the Queen.” The crowd, and soon all of England, was in sympathy with him.\(^{72}\)

Historians are divided in their opinion of Elizabeth’s true feelings for Alençon. Contemporary reports of the time state that Elizabeth was initially repulsed by Alençon because of his extensive smallpox scars, but that later she was much taken with him and even nicknamed him her “frog.”\(^{73}\) Even so, Mack Holt believes that Elizabeth’s entire dealings with Alençon, even her apparent affections toward him, were all part of the greater political game of Continental politics.\(^ {74}\) Susan Doran believes that Elizabeth did come to care for Alençon, but that the outcry among the public and her counselors kept her from marrying him.\(^ {75}\) It appears that Elizabeth did have feelings for Alençon, but that this came after her initial intention of political maneuvering. Also, Elizabeth may have cared for him greatly but that does not mean she would ever marry him or anyone else.

By the time of Alençon’s arrival, Elizabeth’s entire public persona had come to be delineated by her virginity and almost supernatural virtues. How could she allow herself to marry and destroy the fruits of what she had started with her first address to Parliament when she stressed her desire to rule alone and unwed.

Elizabeth’s persona as Virgin and demi-goddess may have been well established before Alençon’s arrival, but his stay in England made it permanent and readily accepted. One could say that Alençon’s arrival in England and subsequent dalliance with the Queen

\(^ {72}\) Haigh, *Elizabeth I*, 76.

\(^ {73}\) Neale, *Queen Elizabeth I*, 247.

\(^ {74}\) Holt, 118.

served to generate so many pamphlets and, especially, plays extolling the importance of the Queen's chastity to Church and State and exhorting her not to marry that her persona of the Dianic Virgin was solidified for the rest of her reign. One reason for this preponderance of dramas was the example of John Stubbs. Direct polemical pamphlets no longer seemed safe, so the allegory and metaphor of drama, like the indirect method advocated by the Mirror for Magistrates, seemed the more prudent route.\textsuperscript{76}

In this post-Stubbs period, Edmund Spenser presented the \textit{Ecologue of the Shepheardes Calendar} (April 1579) in which Elizabeth was "the flowre of Virgins, without spotte, or mortall blemish."\textsuperscript{77} She was chaste and other than mortal. Sir Philip Sidney presented a masque called \textit{The Fortress of Perfect Beauty}. In this work, Elizabeth was an unattainable object of chivalric desire and a kind of Neo-Platonic celestial being, an embodiment of perfection. Being portrayed as a Roman goddess was no longer enough for the ardent supporters of her chastity; she was now a Platonic ideal.\textsuperscript{78}

After Francis of Alençon left England and returned to France still awaiting an answer from Elizabeth, his representatives were treated to one final play. In this work a group of Amazons (symbolic of female independence and strength) battled with a host of knights (symbolizing male power and control) and soundly defeated them. This battle between the sexes is seen by Lisa Hopkins as an implicit negative reply to Alençon's

\textsuperscript{76}Doran, "Juno Versus Diana," 273.

\textsuperscript{77}Doran, "Juno Versus Diana," 273.

\textsuperscript{78}Hartley, 312–29.
overtures. Elizabeth hated being asked direct questions and hated answering them as well. This may have been one way of answering Alençon.\textsuperscript{79}

Although it is true that on 22 November 1581, Elizabeth told Alençon in front of witnesses that she would marry him, she retracted her promise the next day and eventually let negotiations fall by the wayside. Alençon was bought off, in a way, from pursuing the suit farther with £60,000 in loans to pursue his desire to fight in the Netherlands against Parma.\textsuperscript{80} After Alençon left France for the Netherlands, there were no more marriage negotiations between the two, a fortuitous decision for Elizabeth considering Alençon’s sudden death at his estate in Chateau-Thierry on 10 June 1584.\textsuperscript{81}

CONCLUSION

With the departure of Francis of Alençon, Elizabeth never spoke of marriage again, and no one ever broached the subject with her. Her advancing age was a factor, but she was also now the Virgin Queen, England’s Diana, the demi-goddess and protectress of the English people. Historians are divided about how Elizabeth came to take on the persona of the Virgin Queen. Christopher Haigh believes that it was a completely conscious process, but he seems to believe it was specifically a way of avoiding the Alençon/Anjou marriage.\textsuperscript{82} Susan Doran believes that Elizabeth became the Virgin Queen through an acceptance of the image of her created by the writers, poets,

\textsuperscript{79}\textit{Hopkins, Queen Elizabeth I and Her Court}, 159.

\textsuperscript{80}\textit{Doran, Monarchy and Matriarchy}, 187–9.

\textsuperscript{81}\textit{Holt}, 120.

\textsuperscript{82}\textit{Haigh, Elizabeth I}, 172.
and painters around her during the Alençon marriage negotiations.\textsuperscript{83} This assertion is amazing when one considers that the article in which Doran makes this final assessment starts with the Inner Temple plays of 1561, and shows an evolution of the portrayal of Elizabeth in drama and pageants until 1582. It would appear that Doran has missed the point which appears to be so obviously proven by her own article. From the first, Elizabeth presented herself as desiring to remain single and to rule alone. In all the plays, masques, pageants, and court ceremonies, Elizabeth was portrayed as a virgin. The only thing that changed overtime was the idea that her chastity was something that needed to be shed. It evolved into an idea that had to be defended and honored. Also, Elizabeth went from being portrayed in Protestant biblical terms to those of mythical figures such as Diana until her persona evolved into a mythic being of its own context, the Virgin Queen.

Doran also misses the point by stating that the persona was placed on Elizabeth by writers and artists around her. From an examination of Elizabeth’s statements about marriage and her action in that context, it makes sense to assume Elizabeth chose her persona as a single, chaste ruler, governing and guiding that persona implicitly and explicitly. She appears to have realized right from the beginning of her reign that to retain power and to create an aura of legitimacy for her rule, she had to remain single. If she married she would have to share power with, if not lose it to, a husband. But how could she rule alone, unmarried and without issue to settle the succession? Many in power in England did not see a woman as fit or capable to rule. They questioned her legitimacy in the context of law and Nature. But Elizabeth demonstrated that she had the

\textsuperscript{83}Doran, "Juno Versus Diana," 278.
mind to rule, setting herself up as a sort of Vestal Virgin, demonstrating her legitimacy of rule by pointing to God's favor on her and reflecting this in living an outwardly chaste life. Also, by living in chastity and ruling capably, she stood out as being totally different from other women, or at least the expectations men had of women. She was in her own context and had to be dealt with on her own terms. This allowed her to rule as she would and helped facilitate others into seeing her as being someone extranormal.

It must have been obvious to the artists of the time which way Elizabeth wanted to be portrayed. This is evidenced by the fact that she was the Virgin in every play since her accession. The only change was the way in which her chastity was portrayed. Elizabeth was very careful and conscious of her persona, and if she was portrayed in any way that she did not want, she would have stopped it. The case of John Stubbs supports this. For Elizabeth, as long as they remembered her as a Virgin, the rest was usually superfluous.

How did Elizabeth persuade the various artists to portray her as she wished? Patronage and attendance. Elizabeth would not have attended or allowed portrayals that did not serve her interests. By accepting and patronizing various artists, Elizabeth encouraged them to continue to portray her as she wished to be presented. She would, from time to time, incorporate the various literary portrayals of herself in her Court routine, consciously presenting herself as Diana or The Lady of May. This implied approval would encourage the artists to continue showing her as the Virgin Queen. Also, this indirect method of disseminating her persona would be much more effective than heavy-handed, forced propaganda, where the Queen explicitly says how she wishes to be represented. Elizabeth's presentation of herself changed little over her reign. (Her motto
was *semper eadem*, always the same.) What changed was the way in which her unchanging, virginal state was portrayed and eventually accepted. She might outwardly take on some of the raiments of various pageants, but this was simply a hint to keep artisans moving in that direction, her direction, toward the Virgin Queen.

When we see Elizabeth’s court from 1581 on, it was truly the Court of the Virgin Queen, where splendor and flattery ruled the day. But behind the glitter of the Virgin Queen’s Court was sycophancy, factions, and resentment. Under the surface of *Gloriana Regina*’s Court were jealousies ready to divide the Court into paralyzing factionalism. This milieu of flattery and discontent also provided the background for adventurers who sought to supplant the Queen.
The image of Elizabeth I as Gloriana Regina, Virgin Queen, the central hub on which Albion's golden wheel spun and pinion of the "civilized" world (depending on which source one reads), is a persistent one. Indeed, it can still be found in contemporary popular culture, as evidenced by the portrayal of Elizabeth in the 1998 movie starring Cate Blanchett. It seems that the general public, and some academics, want to believe in an Elizabeth who gave up marriage and all manner of personal happiness to take upon her shoulders the heavy yoke of rulership, selflessly and single-handedly initiating a sort of golden age for England. It is amazing how 400-year-old propaganda remains intact in the very late twentieth century.

This glorious England and Court of Elizabeth were, arguably, the result of decades of conscious and conspicuous construction on the part of Elizabeth. It was by the early 1580s, with the ending of the marriage negotiations with the Duc d'Anjou, that Elizabeth was not only accepted as the semi-divine Virgin Queen, but was now supported in and lauded for that role. Initially, Elizabeth and the Court appears to have thrived during the 1580s, within the context of Elizabeth as the Virgin Queen. This part of her reign was a time of ever-increasingly extravagant Court splendor and entertainments, a period where the arts flourished under her patronage, and there was peace.

The arts flourished not simply as a result of Elizabeth's love of the arts, but also because the arts were the vehicle which she used to create her personas and maintain them. Most of the painting, poetry, literature, and theater of the time were all part of a
propaganda machine which worked constantly to maintain the image of Elizabeth as the
Virgin Queen through whom all England's blessings flowed. One received the Queen's
favor, if they wrote poetry and plays about the Queen and her magnificence. By simply
looking in a standard anthology of Elizabethan literature, one sees that many of the
"giants of the age" were all courtiers of Elizabeth who made their careers creating elegiac
works honoring her, or more correctly, her personas.

BOWING TO GLORIANA REGINA

The idea that the cultural and artistic manifestations of the so-called Elizabethan
age were calculated propaganda on the part of Elizabeth and not simply an outgrowth of
her munificence is not a new idea. The problem is that there have been few, if any, good
works dealing with this on a broad scale. Ironically, some of the most insightful
comments on this subject are passing comments made by Christopher Haigh. Haigh
believes that "Elizabeth invited, indeed she insisted upon, the most extreme praise,
expecting her courtiers to tell obvious lies. She forced them into the role of worshipers at
her shrine and made obeisance to her alleged qualities fundamental to court rhetoric."
This becomes increasingly evident following the end of the Alençon marriage
negotiations.

From 1582 onwards, flattery was raised to the level of an art form and remained
so until Elizabeth's death. Indeed it found its greatest expression in the arts. If one
wanted specific favors from the Queen or simply a position at Court, one might have to
write a play, a cycle of poetry, or hold a series of masques (all extolling her

\(^{1}\)Haigh, *Elizabeth I*, 93.
magnificence) to gain Elizabeth’s attention and favor. This approach, however, did not always assure success. The experience of Sir Philip Sidney attests to this fact. One never knew what would win the Queen’s favor, so many courtiers kept up a constant barrage of flattery. Of course, this only worked to the Queen’s advantage.

In many ways, Elizabeth I was no different than any other early modern monarch in the context of patron-client relationships with her courtiers. According to Sharon Kettering, “patronage is an indirect form of power . . . patronage is the art of obligation, of manipulation through means of rewards and punishment.”² The patron-client relationship is as old as politics itself. (The Roman satirist Martial wrote epigrams complaining of and satirizing the enforced sycophancy inherent in the patronage system of Rome in the first century A.D.)³ It is important to remember that the patron-client relationship was usually a reciprocal arrangement intended to benefit both parties. While a client was expected to provide loyalty and service to the patron, the patron was expected to assist and protect her clients, giving them money and offices, arranging profitable marriages, and helping them with legal problems.⁴

One of the ways that clients expressed their loyalty for Elizabeth was through elaborate and ritualized forms of flattery. This flattery could take the form of simple flattering rhetoric, feasts, jousts held in her honor, or plays and literature that extolled the Queen’s virtues.


⁴Kettering, 3.

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Christopher Haigh argues that Elizabeth used flattery as a control mechanism separate from patronage. Her courtiers were to reinforce the ideal she had created for herself, and they, in turn, would gain favor and wealth. Haigh goes on to say that while Elizabeth was arrogant and vain, she was no fool. "She knew she was extolled with shallow gestures and flattering lies—but she wanted it done because it elevated her above all others and enforced extreme deference upon those with whom she worked." This ritualized flattery was a control mechanism, a way for Elizabeth to force obeisance. The idea of a patron controlling clients and receiving flattery because of the potential of reward is nothing new. The idea that courtier flattery served a purpose beyond obeisance, that of reinforcing Elizabeth's created persona, is.

Stephen Greenblatt argues that Elizabeth's ability to force her courtiers into acting out the rituals of flattery was the ultimate expression of power. For Greenblatt, the ability of a ruler to get his or her subjects to participate in a fiction in which no one believes is a much greater expression of the monarch's control than if the subjects actually believed in the ritual. Greenblatt believes that the more outrageous the fiction, the more impressive the manifestation of the monarch's power. Thus, everyone participates silently in a ritual that few actually believe in. Greenblatt goes on to say that, according to Thomas More, the vast majority of man's social relations were self-deluding folly, so why should the social rituals at Court be any less absurd?

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5 Haigh, *Elizabeth I*, 95.
7 Greenblatt, 14.
It would seem that the ritualized flattery at the Court of Elizabeth was a combination of an expression of her power and the absurd quality that inhabits the variety of human social relations. But this is not the entire story. Both Lytton Strachey and Lisa Hopkins believe that Elizabeth’s construct of a Court of adoration was the product of simple pragmatism. They believe that Elizabeth had learned a simple but important truth: keeping the nobles in one place enabled her to keep direct watch on them, and they were much less likely to fulminate against her than if they were at their country estates.\(^8\)

Not only did Elizabeth play the Marian/Dianic role to which all her subjects had to bow and exalt, she also played the seemingly contradictory role of coquette with many of her courtiers. Her primary role might have positioned herself above all standard contexts and references to female monarchs, but, at times, she also presented herself as a woman who had emotional attachments with those around her. The attachments were often expressed in the rhetoric of love, albeit love of the courtly variety. The contradictory nature of Elizabeth’s virgin/coquette persona is best expressed by Haigh:

“[Elizabeth] was both above the court as a sovereign claiming fealty of her knights and of the Court, as the Virgin Lady for whose honor the knights fought at the tilt . . . Elizabeth attempted to control her councilors and her magnates by drawing them into a web of personal, even emotional relationships with her, in which she was, by turns [virgin] queen and coquette.”\(^9\) The alternating personas of Virgin Queen and flirtatious coquette was very useful in that a semi-divine Virgin role would, at times, have created an

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\(^8\)Hopkins, *Queen Elizabeth I and Her Court*, 90–91.

unwanted gulf between Elizabeth and her courtiers. The role of coquette allowed the Queen to become closer to those she needed to deal with on more intimate terms. And when things became too intimate to serve her needs, she retreated back to the distance implicit in her persona as the Dianic Queen.

There must have also been a negative aspect to this contradictory combination of Virgin and flirtatious woman: it must have made her seem like a fickle and lusty woman typical in the common consciousness of the times. This appearance of feminine fickleness may have contributed to what appears to have been a growing disaffection among her courtiers in the 1590s.

Conversely, it can be argued that this strange combination of personas, virgin and coquettish lover, was conceived to keep her courtiers from feeling too secure in their perception of her. Also, this kept her from being straight-jacketed by a single persona. The courtiers could never be too complacent in their dealings with the Queen, because they never knew which role she might don. If her courtiers became too familiar, she could make them back up by reminding them of her virtuous persona. Or, if she needed to draw someone closer to herself, she would play the role of the flirtatious woman. Also, the very contradiction of these personas kept Elizabeth outside of any common contexts; thus, once again, she had to be dealt with in her own context.

The Queen was quite effective in her role as alluring flirt. Sir Christopher Hatton is supposed to have said that “The Queen did fish for men’s souls, and had so sweet a bait that no-one could escape her network.”¹⁰ Hatton’s description of the Queen’s ability to enchant courtiers has a supernatural tone to it. It reminds one of the passage in the

¹⁰Neale, Queen Elizabeth I, 220.
Bible where Jesus exhorted the disciples to become "fishers of men." Even Elizabeth’s persona of the coquette had an other-worldly quality.

The Queen’s flirtations were sometimes as simple as bestowing pet names on her favored courtiers, as she did with Dudley. Walsingham was her Moor and Burghley her Spirit.\textsuperscript{11} Others were treated to more than simple nicknames. Robert Dudley, and later his stepson, Robert Devereux, were told by the Queen that she had romantic feelings for them.

Many of Elizabeth’s courtiers appeared to reciprocate her statements of affection in letters to the Queen. Sir Christopher Hatton is reported by Alison Weir to have written, “My spirit and soul agreeth with my body and life, that to serve you is heaven, but to lack you is more than hell’s torment.”\textsuperscript{12} On first glance, the highly romantic language of this letter may lead readers to believe that courtiers had actually fallen in love with the Queen. It seems more reasonable to assume that this rhetoric of romance was really the language of clientage. Sharon Kettering points out that the correspondence between early modern clients and patrons is filled with terms of loyalty, esteem, and affection. What she refers to as “formal courtesy phrases,” such as “Your Loving Slave,” open and close most of these letters.\textsuperscript{13} These letters do not so much attest to a romantic attachment to the Queen, as they do to the idea that Elizabeth’s courtiers used flattering romantic rhetoric to influence Elizabeth as a patron.

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{11} Neale, Queen Elizabeth I, 219.
\item \textsuperscript{12} Quoted in Weir, 257.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Kettering, 12.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
This mixture of Dianic virgin and coquette can also be understood when viewed in the context of her comment to a deputation from Parliament. She said, "we princes are set on stages, in the sight and view of all the world duly observed." Those set upon stages have many roles to play and personas to take on, and in this seemingly innocuous statement Elizabeth elaborated the basis of her theory of governing. Everything she did from "official spectacles and pageants [to] her ordinary public appearances were theatrically impressive . . . and calculated to enhance her transformation into an almost magical being."

Elizabeth, the demi-goddess and coquette, sat raised on her very public dais and received constant praise and flattery from a stream of courtiers who reinforced the image she wanted to purport in hopes of currying favor and monies from the Queen. It is true that many persons at the Court of Elizabeth received money and positions of power through their flattery. As referenced earlier, Sir Christopher Hatton was said to have risen to prominence (and eventually the Lord Chancellorship) because of Elizabeth’s admiration of his dancing ability.

This ritual of flattery within the Court had its advantages to those who received power, position, and money. This is demonstrated especially by the careers of men like Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, and the aforementioned Hatton. But flattery of and faux courtship with the Queen did not always guarantee reward. There were those who went unnoticed, were simply refused compensation for their obsequies, or felt they had

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14 Neale, Elizabeth I and Her Parliaments, 1:119.

15 Greenblatt, 167.
not received what they deserved. Reciprocity between flattery and patronage was uncertain at best, non-existent at worst.

FAVORS AND FACTIONS AT COURT

The uncertain relationship between flattery and reward may have been intended to keep Elizabeth’s nobles acquiescent and obedient but it also had negative consequences. Many had seen men of questionable talent and ability receive positions and rewards because of their flattery. This, coupled with a lack of patronage from Elizabeth and advancement of those considered inferior or incompetent, led many to feel that the Elizabethan patronage system had become corrupt. What was worse, in the eyes of many of the nobles, men of common ancestry, such as Robert Cecil, had risen to prominence above persons of the noblest blood.

It can be argued that these shifting personas, Virgin and coquette, and the implied relationship between flattery and favor that Elizabeth employed to keep her nobles in line and herself in power eventually led to factionalism, discontent, and treason in the 1590s. Beneath the veneer of the Court’s acceptance of the almost votary worship of Elizabeth came the expectation of rewards endemic to all Renaissance courts. In Elizabeth’s case, the seemingly irreconcilable roles of coquette and Virgin Queen were made palatable by royal largesse. If gifts were not forthcoming, people seemed less inclined to worship at the Elizabethan altar. As in all patron-client relationships, “the extent of reciprocity . . .

16Kettering, 203.
determined the degree of loyalty." Those who felt neglected by the Queen became disgruntled, even rebellious. Also, how believable was the role of the Virgin when the Queen played coquette, at different times, with several men in the post-marriage suite 1580s?

It would seem that the increasingly uncertain relationship between acceptance and flattery of the Queen’s various personas and its reward left several of the most talented and vigorous men of the age without the benefits enjoyed by men of lesser talent and ability. The lives of Edward Spenser and Sir Philip Sidney are excellent examples of this. And then there were men like Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, whose ego made it almost impossible to humble himself before the Queen and who felt that he was not compensated adequately, no matter the honors bestowed upon him. Essex became a rallying point for those who felt they too had been overlooked or undercompensated by the Queen. He became the de facto leader of the anti-Cecil faction. This faction exclaimed that too much power and wealth had been given to a “common clerk” and that many of the noblest men of the realm were left to fend for themselves.

The tension between Essex, the Queen, and the Court factions eventually rendered her Court and her policies impotent and even contributed to open rebellion. To understand the above postulates, one needs to examine the lives of Spenser, Sidney, and especially Robert Devereux.

Edmund Spenser was born in 1552, to a family of small means, but was able to attend Cambridge where he obtained both Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees. He worked for various employers including the Bishop of Kent before entering the service of the

17Kettering, 28.
Earl of Leicester. While in Leicester’s service, Spenser worked diligently to create propaganda which argued against the proposed marriage between Elizabeth and the Duc of Alençon. In 1580, he began work on his magnum opus, The Fairie Queene. After a tenure as an administrative assistant to the Lord Deputy of Ireland, Spenser returned to London to oversee the publication of the first three books of The Fairie Queene.18

Spenser’s Fairie Queene is the most famous and influential work of poetry from the Elizabethan Age. Its size alone, over a thousand pages, is a testament in itself.19 The work is a glorification of Elizabeth in the guises of several different mythical personas. Many scholars have come to see the Fairie Queen as a sort of allegory of praise for and justification of Elizabeth’s authority and ensuing dispensing of justice. The historian Walter Lim sees the work, especially Book V, as a justification of the consolidation of monarchical power around the person of Elizabeth and the need to limit social and individual dissent in the name of good government and the continued glory of England.20 (What better form of flattery than extolling centralization under the Queen?) Lim points specifically to the following passage:

During which time, that he did remaine,  
His studie was true justice how to deale,  
And day and night employed his busy paine  
How to reforme that ragged common-weal  
And that same yron man which could reuale  
All hidden crimes, through all that realme he sent,  
To search out those, that vsd to rob and steale

18 Aeka Tatsuki, Edmund Spenser, [article online], available [Online]: <http://www.notredame.ac.jp/at93el84/Amoretti-html/html/spenser.html> [6 September 1999].


Or did rebell gainst lawfull government;
On whom he did inflict most grievous punishment.\textsuperscript{21}

Lim goes on to argue that Book V of \textit{The Fairie Queen} can be read as a plea for the Queen to act in a more absolutist context and that while he finds her exercise of mercy on many occasions laudable, Spenser is really exhorting the Queen to deal with matters of foreign policy (Ireland) in a more heavy-handed manner. Lim believes that Spenser is making a dual argument that the Queen’s justice and mercy legitimize her rule and keep England stable and happy, but that in the context of foreign policy, those virtues can be a detriment.

What Lim does not tell his readers specifically is how Elizabeth reacted to this work. Did she read it in the way that he has interpreted it, or simply as a very lengthy poem extolling her multitudinous virtues? This seems very strange when one considers it would have been impossible for Elizabeth not to have been aware of such a work that had, as its main theme, her magnificence. Also, we know that Spenser was well-known to the Queen and extremely influential on her policy in Ireland through his work, \textit{A View of the Present State of Ireland}. Spenser’s work on Ireland is now believed to have been the blueprint from which Elizabeth implemented her Irish policy in the 1590s until her death. Indeed, Stephen Greenblatt, Nicholas Canny, and Christopher Haigh have all variously stated that it was Spenser’s \textit{View} which set the tone for much of the subsequent Elizabethan policy in Ireland. Why is it then there is little in-depth discussion of Elizabeth’s reception of Spenser’s \textit{Fairie Queene}?

\textsuperscript{21}Spenser, \textit{The Fairie Queene}, Book V, Canto XII, 28.
Stephen Greenblatt states that all the substantial posts, favors, and gifts that Spenser garnered throughout his life came, not from the Queen, but from favorites of the Queen, such as the Earl of Leicester, Sir Walter Raleigh, and Lord Grey, Lord Deputy of Ireland—men arguably much less gifted in the arts and foreign policy making than Spenser.22

It is surprising that the greatest work of the time, dedicated (at least outwardly) to praising the Queen's reign in toto would receive little recompense from Elizabeth. There is little evidence that Spenser was explicitly trying to curry favor with the Queen for personal gain, but, the fact that Spenser did not receive a lavish pension or a title or office is amazing when considered in the light of the gifts lavished on men such as Christopher Hatton, considered by his contemporaries and modern historians alike to be a mediocrity.

It was this seemingly arbitrary and uneven distribution of favor based in what appears to be whim, not in the typical reciprocity of the patron-client dynamic, that brought about the destruction of two of Elizabeth's favorite courtiers, albeit in different ways and for very different reasons. The clients of early modern monarchs were often referred to as the "creatures" of that monarch, in the sense that they had been created by the patronage of the monarch.23 Both Sir Philip Sidney and Robert Devereux were creatures of the Queen who, at various times, had been at the center of the Queen's favor. Sidney was a favorite for a short time at Court, and Devereux was the Queen's favorite for several years. Devereux remained a favorite when any other man acting as he did would have been vilified as an overly ambitious fool and traitor. Both of these men were

22Greenblatt, 185–88.

23Kettering, 16.
destroyed by the arbitrary manner in which Elizabeth distributed her patronage, Sidney by receiving too little, Devereux by receiving too much. Not only were these two courtiers eventually ruined, but the unity of Elizabeth’s Court and its ability to act decisively was eventually harmed by her fickle favoritism mixed with uneven patronage.

Sir Philip Sidney was the son of Sir Henry Sidney, thrice Lord Deputy of Ireland, and, more importantly, the nephew of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. He started a degree at Oxford, but never finished. However, extended journeys on the continent gave him an excellent education just the same. Upon his return to England, he worked as a diplomat, lived the life of a prominent courtier, sat in Parliament, and was an active patron of the arts.24 By all accounts of the time, Sidney was the rising star of the Court. He appeared to be well-liked by the Queen and was seen by many at Court as a man of grace, talent, and energy.25 With a family background of loyal service to the Queen, the support of many at Court and estimable poetical abilities, Sidney’s career should have been meteoric.

Yet, he fell out of the Queen’s favor by joining the faction that actively opposed her marriage to the Duke of Alençon (c.1579–80). He composed a letter addressed directly to the Queen, urging her not to marry the Catholic nobleman. Sidney was banished from the Court for a time as a result of this letter, and upon his return he worked diligently to regain the Queen’s favor.26


25 Williams, 160–1.

On New Year's Day 1581, Sir Philip Sidney personally exchanged gifts with the Queen, a mark of favor in itself which leads some scholars to believe Sidney was coming back into favor as a courtier (one who had influence with the Queen), not just a hanger-on. More importantly, this exchange of gifts signified an attempt by Sidney to re-ingratiate himself with the Queen. Sidney presented the Queen with a diamond-studded brooch in the shape of a whip. Minogue takes this to mean Sidney was showing the Queen that he was ultimately submitting to her mercy after having endured a period of banishment from the Court for his opposition to the Alençon match.

It seems Sidney spent a great deal of time trying to win the Queen's favor in order to obtain a position with an income. Sidney was supported in the main by his uncle, the Earl of Leicester, but he itched to receive a position of importance at Court and monies of his own. He did receive patronage for his works such as The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia, but this was not enough. Sidney even appeared at the Accession Day tilts in November 1581, with an armband bearing his motto SPERAVI (meaning To Hope) crossed through with a slash mark. This is seen by many as an attempt by Sidney to win back the favor of the Queen by an admission of his defeat and a public statement of his concern that he will never receive a position at Court. Yet, an element of pride played a prominent role in his poverty and lack of significant position. When the Queen offered

27Minogue, 555.

28Minogue, 555.

29Minogue, 567.
him money, Sidney hesitated in accepting, out of pride, and the monies were lost to
him.  

It was in early 1582 that Sidney embarked on what is arguably his greatest literary
achievement, the collection of poetry called *Astrophil and Stella*.  

This work is not only
an allegorical glorification of the Queen's multitudinous virtues, but it was also an
expression of his frustration over his dependency on the Queen and her lack of
recognition of his praise and loyalty.  

Sonnet 83 especially demonstrates Sidney's
frustration. In the following passage, a character representing the Queen is speaking.

Good brother Philip, I have borne you long,
I was content you should in favour creepe,
While craftily you seem'd your cut to keepe,
As though that faire soft hand did you great wrong.

*Astrophil and Stella* gave Sir Philip what he desired most, restoring him to the Queen's
favor. He was knighted in 1583. Some scholars, like Neville Williams, see this
knighting and subsequent appointment as Governor of Flushing in the Netherlands as
signs of his return into the Queen's favor. In reality, it seems the knighting and
governorship came at the urging of Leicester and Walsingham, Sidney's father-in-law.

For all his flattery and public submission to Elizabeth's will, Sidney never received
significant monies or a position of substance. Besides holding the governorship of

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30 Minogue, 567.


34 Williams, 196.
Flushing, Sidney fought with distinction alongside Dutch Protestants in their rebellion against Spain. He was wounded in the thigh during a raid on a Spanish convoy near Zutphen and died a painful and lingering death due to resultant septicemia.35

Even Sidney’s death in the noble cause of England’s support of Dutch Protestants did not win him any special favor from the Queen. She exclaimed that “he had wasted the life of a gentlemen by a common soldier’s fate.” She had little sympathy, as Williams says, “with the idealistic man of action who could never become a courtier [italics added] any more than he could become a successful politician.”36

Neville Williams reports that Sidney’s funeral was postponed almost a month because his creditors were demanding repayment. He goes on to say that had it not been for Mary Queen of Scots’ execution days earlier, Elizabeth might not have even attended his funeral. She attended the service at St. Paul’s as a political measure.37 This sentiment is echoed by Sally Minogue. She believes that Elizabeth was the one who ordered Sidney’s funeral postponed until a time it suited her. Minogue sees this as a way for Elizabeth to have the final word, as it were, with Sidney, and a way to distract the public from Mary’s execution with Sidney’s grandiose funeral. Elizabeth then refused to pay Sidney’s funeral expenses.38

Elizabeth’s reaction to Sidney’s death, the use of his funeral to meet her own ends, and subsequent refusal to pay for the event clearly demonstrate her lack of feeling

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35Williams, 196–7.
36Williams, 198.
37Williams, 197.
38Minogue, 567.
towards him as anything approximating a favorite or Court intimate. What is amazing is that men with lesser talents, like Hatton, or less impressive family backgrounds, like Robert Cecil, made it to the very center of Elizabeth’s world. Sidney had impressive patronage and support, a good family background and good diplomacy. Most importantly, when trying to win the heart of Elizabeth, he was witty and erudite in his flattery of the Queen. Sidney must have been completely befuddled when *Astrophil and Stella* earned him no great gain. When compared to men like Hatton, it is amazing that Sidney, who played the court-ritualized game of flattery like a master, was left out in the cold. Sidney could not have helped but feel that he had been wrongfully denied a place at Elizabeth’s table, but there is no reliable record of him expressing this feeling.

**THE ROOTS OF UNDOING**

Much of Elizabeth’s jealousies and factions in Court were due to her too narrow favoritism. But there was one last splendid act for Elizabeth to play out before the flattery and favoritism of the courtiers factionalized the Court and rendered it almost impotent in the 1590s—the Armada. Elizabeth, always hesitant to go to war, was forced by the threat of a Spanish invasion to rally the nation for war. Since the English navy and army were in abysmal shape at the time, she feared the Armada might take England and depose her.

Elizabeth, however, rose to the occasion, putting aside her unapproachable *Gloriana* persona and rode out among her troops gathered at Tilbury. Elizabeth put on martial raiment including a breastplate and rode amongst her soldiers, giving one of her
The following passage demonstrates how Elizabeth was, one final time, able to reinvent herself to meet the situation. She left behind her Dianic role and appeared as a dutiful monarch ready to fight alongside her subjects to defend their homeland. She was well aware that her gender did not inspire confidence in time of war, so instead of defending or ignoring her subjects’ misgivings she masterfully tackled the subject.

I know that I have the body of a weak and feeble woman; But I have the heart and stomach of a king, and a king of England too, and think foul scorn that Parma or Spain or any Prince of Europe should dare to invade the borders of my realm; to which, rather than dishonor should grow by me, I will myself take up arms; I myself will be your general, judge, and rewarder of everyone of your virtues in the field.

Elizabeth then went on to say that her lieutenant general would actually command the forces in her name.

She accomplished a great deal in her relatively short speech, lessening the trepidation among the people about being led by a woman in time of war and by acknowledging their fears and appearing to accept them. Elizabeth becomes a concerned Englishman, like her audience, and one who will fight to protect English shores. Most importantly, Elizabeth puts the actual command of the forces in the hands of a man, thus alleviating fears about her ability to lead an army. But, she is quick to remind her audience that this commander is a representative of her power, not a substitute for it.

Elizabeth’s speech at Tilbury shows she was still able to reinvent herself when the need arose. Elizabeth was savvy enough to realize the aloof Virgin Queen would do little

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39Greenhut, 42.

to inspire confidence among her subjects or defend England’s shores. She understood the need to take on a persona which was a combination of her father’s commanding presence and the vigor of her youth. Other monarchs who had lived in a milieu bordering on worship would have found it impossible to have appealed to the common soldier as a comrade and admitted the country’s reservations about their leadership abilities. This is not to intimate that Elizabeth was manifesting humility or anything approximating it. The point is that her political savvy was such that she was able to reinvent her personas, one last time, in order to meet a national crisis. We are told that Elizabeth’s speech achieved the desired response, and she was answered with thunderous applause.41

After the defeat of the Armada, Elizabeth returned to her role as the removed and demanding Virgin Queen, and life at Court became more and more focused on flattering the fickle monarch in an attempt to reap dwindling rewards and power. But, Elizabeth was failing to compensate courtiers with the expected patronage. While she was able to force the highest nobles of the land to participate in obsequies toward her, she unwittingly forced them into a competition with each other. While Kettering states that “clientism generated a high level of social distrust and a highly competitive atmosphere [at Court],”42 Elizabeth’s narrowing of patronage created an atmosphere of antagonism and factionalism that made those few who had influence with the Queen “too” powerful while those who did not have influence were left in a political vacuum.43 One might

41Erickson, The First Elizabeth, 375.
42Kettering, 185.
43Haigh, Elizabeth I, 98–99.
endlessly flatter the Queen when the prospect of reward was imminent, but without the prospect of reward, proud magnates become discontented and even seditious.  

It was to this milieu that Robert Dudley's stepson, Robert Devereux, the Earl of Essex, returned to Court in late 1588. Essex cut a very handsome figure and possessed "the mixture of passion, pride, and charm" that the Queen found almost irresistible. Some scholars believe that Elizabeth was so taken with Essex because she hoped that he would serve as a sort of replacement for the recently deceased Dudley (1588). This hope, however, was far from the reality. Essex was little, if anything, like his stepfather or any of the others at Court. Where Leicester and the other courtiers had always been careful to flatter Elizabeth, Essex did these things occasionally. Moreover he was apt to resist the Queen, disobey her outright, and even reproach her openly.

What is even more astonishing is that Elizabeth would actually attempt to mollify Essex. Typically, when Essex and Elizabeth would have a falling out, Essex would plead ill health and retire to his house in the country. Elizabeth often sent notes to Essex asking him to remedy his ill humor and return to Court. This is not to say that Elizabeth was not stubborn and refused to give in to Essex. What this does show is that Elizabeth was having to play a role with Essex she was not used to. It would appear that Elizabeth's emotional need for Essex was greater than his need for her. This was a dynamic totally unfamiliar to her.

\[\text{Haigh, } Elizabeth I, 100.\]
\[\text{Hopkins, Queen Elizabeth I and Her Court, 87.}\]
\[\text{Hopkins, Queen Elizabeth I and Her Court, 87.}\]
\[\text{Hopkins, Queen Elizabeth I and Her Court, 88.}\]
Those at Court could not have failed to notice Elizabeth's apparent willingness to acquiesce to Essex's moods. This undoubtedly would have contributed to his becoming the focal point of a faction at Court. Courtiers would have seen Essex as a force who was able to bend the previously inflexible Queen. Inevitably, many tied their fortunes to those of the rising star Essex.

Essex was a noble of old guard. He came from a family of old and respectable lineage. He presented, for many, a welcome contrast to what many nobles at Court felt was Elizabeth's unfathomable habit of elevating men of rather obscure birth to positions of great power. This contrast with Essex was embodied by the Queen's newest chief administrator and spymaster, a hunchback named Robert Cecil.

Cecil was the only surviving son of William Cecil, Lord Burghley. Burghley was the son of prosperous, but plebeian parents (his father, Richard Cecil was Sheriff of Rutland and, for a time, a Gentleman of the Privy Chamber). He was ennobled by Elizabeth for his service to her as her Secretary.\(^4\)\(^8\) Elizabeth was not the first English monarch to employ advisors who were not of the gentry, but she appears to have been the first to employ so many, and the men of this council knew, to their discontent, that it was the Queen's "clerks" who set the policy of the realm.

This discontent was generally felt by the nobles by the early 1570s, but it was not until 1589, and later that the discontent became widespread and created factions that bitterly divided the Court. The cause of the increased bitterness and factionalism at Court had several causes. The most important was that between 1588 and 1591, most of

the key political figures in Elizabeth’s government died, including the Earl of Leicester, Sir Walter Mildmay, Sir Francis Walsingham, and Sir Christopher Hatton. This left a power vacuum at just the time that Essex was winning the Queen’s affections and adherents at Court. There were many at Court who hoped there would be a wider distribution of offices and power among the “deserving” gentry now that so many of Elizabeth’s advisors had died. Many probably hoped that Essex, through his seeming ability to influence the Queen, would be able to win them office. These were the men who came to form the core of Essex’s faction. They were, for the most part, impoverished nobles who had not been able to win posts or monies from the Queen, no matter how well they seemed to have played the adoring subject.

Into this power vacuum stepped Burghley’s son, Robert Cecil. Burghley had long been Elizabeth’s most trusted advisor and a close friend. Naturally, she would find a place for her old friend’s son at Court. What Essex and his adherents had not counted on was that he would almost immediately fill the position long held by his father, that of closest advisor. Lord Burghley had long planned for his son to take his former post and did not seem to be aware of the problems this would cause at Court. As Elizabeth’s leading advisors began to die, she did not replace them. She instead relied more heavily on favorites like Cecil and, sometimes, Essex. Imagine the feelings of righteous indignation and anger among those at Court who realized they now had little, if any, hope

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49 Herber.

50 Haigh, *Elizabeth I*, 103.

of office since Elizabeth seemed determined to rule according to the advice of a handful of favorites, Cecil chief among them.

Following in his father’s footsteps, Cecil was loath to commit England to military endeavors. He counseled restraint and preferred to bring England glory through diplomacy and sound bureaucracy rather than through war and other martial adventures. Elizabeth had been counseled in a like manner by Burghley all through her reign, and, therefore, she saw Cecil’s advice as sound and, more importantly, in agreement with her own inclinations. As the 1590s wore on, Cecil gained more and more influence over the Queen, and the few posts that came available were given to friends of the Cecils. A courtier seeking office was told by another such seeker that, “the Court is now full of who shall have this and that office.”\(^{52}\) Needless to say, Cecil’s new power brought many adherents into his circle.

This is not to say that Essex was to be counted out of the power game at Court. Essex had gained a wide circle of supporters who hoped his vigor, influence, and recklessness would help serve their own selfish motives. Essex seemed convinced of his ability to accomplish anything he set his mind to. Was he not the Queen’s favorite? How could he be eclipsed by a low-born, hunchbacked clerk? How could Essex, the dashing hero of the tiltyard, be displaced by a crook-backed pencil-pusher? Essex and his adherents squared off against Cecil and his faction in a struggle that lasted throughout the 1590s, and ended with Essex’s execution.

\(^{52}\) Haigh, *Elizabeth I*, 101.
By early 1593, Essex was sworn into the Privy Council.\textsuperscript{53} This raised the hopes of all those who supported him. Surely, they thought, being the Queen’s favorite, and a member of the Privy Council, their desires would be fulfilled. Essex’s entry into the Privy Council had an auspicious beginning; he was never absent from the Council, and he seemed to have some influence on the Queen. But things did not go well for Essex’s faction. By the 1580s, a courtier could flatter the Queen and make all the requisite obsequies and receive nothing in return. After 1593, it seems that even being the focus of the Queen’s affections would gain a courtier nothing. All those who expected to ride to power and position on Essex’s coattails were sadly disappointed. The great irony was that Essex’s endorsement became a kiss of death. An excellent example of this was his endorsement of Francis Bacon for a post as a lawyer at Court in 1594. Having failed to get Bacon this post, he tried to get him the solicitor-generalship. He pressed his suit with such force that Elizabeth said she would give the job to anyone but Bacon.\textsuperscript{54} The greatest irony is that Francis Bacon was cousin to Robert Cecil, and it was probably because Essex backed Bacon that Cecil persuaded the Queen to choose another.

Indeed, Essex’s egoism and belief that he could achieve and, indeed, deserved anything he desired was the root of all his failures and the cause of his undoing. Essex’s ego and belief in his primacy in the Queen’s affections knew almost no bounds.

An argument can be made that it was Elizabeth who encouraged Essex’s egomania. Lytton Strachey thinks Essex came to believe he could control the Queen after their first quarrel. Soon after Essex’s arrival at Court, he and Elizabeth had a

\textsuperscript{53} Strachey, 46.

\textsuperscript{54} Haigh, \textit{Elizabeth I}, 102–3.
virulent argument about her captain of the guard, Sir Walter Raleigh. When Essex was unable to get what he wanted, he left the Queen's presence without permission and made for Margate to take a ship to the Netherlands. He sent a note to the Queen about his intentions. The Queen was terrified at the thought of Essex's going to the Netherlands to fight so she dispatched Robert Carey to fetch him back to Court. It was with this first argument with the Queen that Essex realized he could upbraid the Queen with impunity.\(^{55}\)

This first argument set a bad precedent for Elizabeth. Her favorite believed he had the upper hand and could act with relative impunity and impudence, and those at Court saw the Virgin Queen was all too human. They began to see their Queen as a vain and possibly foolish woman indulging an obviously willful and potentially dangerous noble. This strengthened Essex's position and drew to him many adherents, dimming the radiance of the Queen and weakening her authority.

It would seem that on some level Elizabeth was aware of the influence Essex had over her and at Court. This is evidenced by the fact that she waited until Essex had left on a raid to Cadiz (1595) to make Robert Cecil her official Secretary.\(^{56}\) Cecil had been doing the work of this office for years, but now he held this high post in name, not just in duties. Elizabeth waited for several reasons. Antagonism existed between Essex and Cecil, which always made things difficult. Added to this was Essex's strenuous advocation of a member of his faction for the post, Thomas Bodley.\(^{57}\) Finally, Cecil had done all he could to stop Essex's Cadiz expedition. Following in his father Burghley's

\(^{55}\)Strachey, 31–2.
\(^{56}\)Strachey, 106.
\(^{57}\)Robert Lacey, Robert, Earl of Essex (New York: Atheneum, 1971), 168–9. It should be noted that Thomas Bodley later started the Bodleian Library with books given to him by Essex.
footsteps, Cecil warned the Queen about provoking Spain and how costly wars are. But, Essex, like his stepfather Dudley, was one of the only men who could persuade Elizabeth to undertake a military enterprise. One could view Elizabeth’s appointment of Cecil while Essex was away as a sop to Cecil and done in hopes that Essex would not rail against a decision already made.

Surprisingly, Essex said little about Cecil’s appointment. He was more concerned that Lord Howard of Effingham, who was Lord Admiral of the Cadiz expedition, was made Earl of Nottingham upon their return. Essex was already angry at Effingham for trying to take precedence over him on the expedition. As Lord Admiral, Effingham had the right to command Essex, but since Essex was an Earl, he would not submit to Howard, who was only a Baron at the time. Essex grew so angry at this appointment that he challenged Nottingham to a duel and upon being refused, followed his usual course and left Court, feigning illness in the country.58

In an amazing move, the Queen called Essex back to Court and made him Earl Marshal of England. This would give Essex precedence over Nottingham and feed Essex’s mania for martial tilts and glory.59 And this time, she seemed to be rewarding his insolence with the top military post in the land.

Although Elizabeth continued to indulge the recklessness of her “Wild Horse,”60 as she called Essex, Cecil held the real power and those around Essex remained shut out of posts and monies. This, however, did not stop many nobles from adhering to the

58 Williams, 230.
59 Williams, 230.
60 Erickson, The First Elizabeth, 387.
Essex faction. They probably found it impossible to believe that a man so indulged by the Queen could not sway her in their favor.

The most astounding incident in the relationship between Essex and Elizabeth, and the one that best demonstrates how much Essex's playing to her vanity had blinded her to his recklessness and ambition, involved the country that would be Essex's undoing: Ireland. Unrest had once more broken out in that thorn in England's side.

An Ulster noble, Hugh O'Neil, Earl of Tyrone, had raised a rebellion (1597) in Ulster which threatened to spread throughout that country. In July 1597, Elizabeth called her Council to discuss appointing a new Lord Deputy for Ireland. After a long and fierce series of discussions and debates, Elizabeth seemed to have settled on Sir William Knollys, Essex's uncle, for the post. Surprisingly, Essex disagreed and proposed Sir George Carew, a supporter of Cecil. Many historians think Essex did this because he did not want to lose the support of his uncle at Court and felt Cecil's loss of Carew would be a hindrance. The Queen would not hear of Carew as Lord Deputy, and an argument between the Queen and Essex ensued. Essex turned his back on the Queen in a sign of contempt. Elizabeth boxed Essex's ears and told him to "Go to the Devil." Essex then committed an act that could only be seen as treasonous; he placed his hand on his sword as if to draw it and yelled, "This is an outrage . . . I would not have borne it from your father's hands." Nottingham jumped in front of the Queen and pushed Essex backwards. Essex left the room and once more retired to the country.

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62 Strachey, 168.
63 Strachey, 168–9.
Elizabeth had been challenged and threatened in front of her councilors; by law and tradition there was but one course for her to take—Essex would go to the Tower and then to the block. Instead, she did nothing. Essex remained in the country unmolested while various people pleaded for him to return to Court and beg forgiveness. He did write to the Queen, but there were no words of repentance. The Queen remarked that she would let him stew in the country awhile.64

During this interlude Tyrone dealt the English a terrible blow at the Battle of Yellow Ford. It was England's worst defeat in years and threatened to remove English control of Ireland. Upon hearing news of Tyrone's victory, Essex decided to contact the Queen. At first she held him off, but Elizabeth could not afford to have popular nobles skulking in the countryside. Also she needed to do something about Ireland. She decided to send Essex.65 Upon gaining this appointment to go to Ireland to quell Tyrone's rebellion, Essex exclaimed, "By God, I will beat Tyrone in the field."66

Essex went to Ireland in April 1599, in command of 16,000 foot soldiers and 1,300 cavalry, with orders to engage Tyrone in Ulster and defeat him. Instead, Essex, for no known reason, spent his time garrisoning unimportant castles in Leinster and Munster and slowly losing his force to disease, desertion, and guerrilla attacks. He eventually lost three quarters of his army and asked the Queen for reinforcements. Elizabeth sent him only 2,000 men. He was instructed by her not to return to England until he had beaten

64Hopkins, *Queen Elizabeth I and Her Court*, 96.

65Hopkins, *Queen Elizabeth I and Her Court*, 97–98.

66Haigh, *Elizabeth I*, 139.
Tyrone. When he finally met Tyrone, he made a six-week truce, which he was not authorized to do.\(^{67}\)

Back in England, Elizabeth was second-guessing her choice of placing Essex in command of an army. Sir Walter Raleigh said, “to discontent him as you do, and yet put arms and power into his hands, may be a kind of temptation to him to prove cumbersome and unruly.”\(^{68}\) Raleigh did not know how right he was. Essex and his second-in-command, Southampton, had been discussing a possible return to England to raise the gentry in rebellion and establish themselves in power with Elizabeth as a figurehead. Instead of taking this course, Essex decided to give his command to Charles Blount and return to England himself to explain his actions to the Queen. He felt certain, based on prior experience, that the Queen would indulge him and eventually forgive him.\(^{69}\)

Upon his return to England, he went directly to the Queen in hopes of explaining himself to her before more bad news from Ireland reached her. Upon arriving at Court, Essex burst into the Queen’s room and unexpectedly found her without wig or makeup, soaking her feet, and looking every bit of her sixty-six years. Unperturbed, she asked Essex to return later for a private interview.\(^{70}\) Later that day she had a long, private conversation with Essex where she questioned him at length as to why he disobeyed her, and she then informed him that he would have to answer before the council the next day. Instead of going to the Tower as expected, he was sent to York House where he directly

\(^{67}\)Hopkins, *Queen Elizabeth I and Her Court*, 101, 103.

\(^{68}\)Hopkins, *Queen Elizabeth I and Her Court*, 102

\(^{69}\)Lacey, 238.

\(^{70}\)Lacey, 241–2.
fell ill. Essex’s planned trial was canceled on account of his full confession and submission to the Queen in writing. He was allowed to go home to Essex House.\(^71\)

Essex corresponded with the Queen alternately begging her forgiveness and asking to be put to death. We are told that Elizabeth was moved by these missives, but she did not respond. She spared him a state trial, but would not speak to him, and he was stripped of all his posts. He was freed from confinement, and it was announced that he would spend his life from then on in retirement.\(^72\)

One would have thought that Essex would have realized how lucky he was to be free and alive, but he did not. Who in the history of England had been so presumptuous and reckless towards their sovereign? Essex had argued, refused summons, disobeyed orders, and made threatening gestures toward the Queen. And still he had been allowed his freedom. His gravest sin might have been that he had seen Elizabeth without wig or artifice when he burst into her room. He had glimpsed the old woman, Elizabeth, behind the radiant *Gloriana Regina*. This, more than anything else, may have pushed Elizabeth to refuse his letters and also refuse to renew his monopoly on sweet wines.

Essex’s fortunes had been ruined by his father’s previous expedition in Ireland and his own reckless spending. He begged the Queen to renew his monopoly on sweet wines which was coming to an end by Michaelmas 1600. The Queen indulged him as far as allowing him audience to make his claim, but she suddenly had a change of heart and in the middle of his pleas she threw him out. A month later, it was announced that the profits from the sale of sweet wine would be reserved for the crown. Essex was furious.

\(^71\)Williams, 233.

\(^72\)Williams, 234.
He knew he was now financially ruined.\textsuperscript{73} Essex began to rave like a madman, railing against the Queen without thought to who would hear. When advised that the Queen would require certain conditions before he might receive other monies, Essex exclaimed “Her conditions are as crooked as her carcass.” This outburst reached the Queen, and she supposedly never forgave it.\textsuperscript{74}

One has to wonder why Elizabeth would allow Essex to go free, then force him into a dangerous poverty. Was she trying to goad him into acting rashly one last time and then she would strike? Was this part of a complicated revenge for his actions in Ireland? Could Elizabeth have been laying a plot that goes back to when Essex almost drew his sword on her? Did she send Essex to Ireland knowing it would kill or ruin him as it had so many English commanders? Was her leniency leading up to the surprise removal of the monopoly? Did she hope that Essex would commit treason and thus be executed?

These explanations may be too convoluted. It is also possible Elizabeth was torn between her affections for Essex and her anger at him. Robert Cecil was well aware of the dangerous situation and kept a close eye on Essex House. He also watched the group of impoverished Earls who crowded around Essex. The Earls of Southampton, Rutland, Sussex, and Bedford were, like Essex, mortgaged to the hilt and threw their lot in with Essex.\textsuperscript{75}

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{73} Strachey, 231–2.
\item\textsuperscript{74} Strachey, 232–3.
\item\textsuperscript{75} Williams, 234–5.
\end{footnotes}
On February 8, 1600, Essex and three hundred men, believing that Essex’s popularity would bring the men of London to his cause, took to the streets. Essex shouted, “For the Queen! For the Queen! A plot is laid for my life.” He was met by a herald proclaiming him a traitor. The city did not rise up and rally to Essex; the citizens of London barred their doors and windows to him. He returned to Essex House where he was subsequently arrested and sent to the Tower.

Essex was tried, convicted, and was condemned to death. Elizabeth initially postponed the execution, but allowed it to proceed the next day. On Ash Wednesday, 1601, Essex proceeded to Tower Green. In his last words he appeared contrite and humble. He admitted that he had spent his life “in wantonness, lust and uncleanness” and that he had been “puffed up with pride, vanity, and the love of this world’s pleasure.” His last words as the ax fell were “God save the Queen.”

Looking back over Essex’s career at Court, it is astounding he did not take his place on the block at Tower Green years earlier. It was he who changed the glorious and seemingly harmonious Court of the 1580s into the fractious and divisive Court of the 1590s. It was Essex’s flattery and appearance of unrequited love of Elizabeth which influenced her to allow him liberties that no other man would have dared. Essex made Elizabeth feel young and beautiful again. His petulance and tantrums were probably seen by Elizabeth as demonstrations of love by an impetuous younger man. She may have

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76 Williams, 236.
77 Hopkins, Queen Elizabeth I and Her Court, 106.
78 Strachey, 261–2.
79 Strachey, 263.
taken his actions as a sign of how his love for her was driving him mad. Were she not his champion, her “Wild Horse” could not have excused his actions as the caprices of youth.

By allowing Essex these liberties, Elizabeth was unintentionally making it apparent that she was not the powerful Virgin Queen, but a foolish old woman who was under the spell of a younger man. The nobles came to believe Essex would win them money and office and break the power monopoly held by the Cecil faction. Those around Essex grew bold in their antipathy towards Cecil, and Essex grew bolder in his behavior toward Cecil and the Queen. The business of the Court broke down into infighting over which faction’s candidate would receive a certain post or which title would be given to the Earl of Essex so that his ego would be assuaged and he would return to Court. Elizabeth never seemed to realize that no amount of reward or honorifics would satisfy or pacify the ever offended and constantly demanding Earl.

The last thing any monarch wants is disgruntled barons. Yet, Elizabeth did not seem to understand that by failing to spread the monies and offices in a wider swath throughout the Court, she had alienated most of the nobles of the realm. Not only did her patronage become too narrow, those who seemed her obvious favorites, like Essex, were unable to win perks for their adherents. It is no wonder Elizabeth’s Court in the 1590s was stagnated by infighting and intrigue.
CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSIONS

As the most resplendent sun setteth at last in a western cloud

The execution of Robert Devereux effectively marked the end of Elizabeth’s reign. Although Elizabeth lived until March 24, 1603, she seemed to have resigned herself to a lonely fate in the wake of the execution. According to Lytton Strachey, Elizabeth still danced, ate, and went on summer progress, but all of her previous energy and willfulness were no longer apparent. It was as if Elizabeth had finally realized she was old, and, thus, began to fall periodically ill. Control of the government was now securely in the hands of Robert Cecil, the Lord Chancellor. Even though the death of Essex may have been a personal tragedy for the Queen, it can also be seen as a triumph of sorts. Elizabeth’s desires to control the magnates of England, rule alone with the help of administrators, and to avoid wars were all realized. Essex had represented the vestiges of the feudal nobility’s claims on the monarch, and Elizabeth had brought that down. She appeared to have won. But had she?

Elizabeth had succeeded in solidifying her rule and had been able to rule alone until her death in 1603. This thesis has argued that she was able to gain acceptance as monarch despite being a single woman, not through persuasive arguments or force, but, by becoming, in a sense, her arguments. Elizabeth created a series of personas to make herself publicly into an entity that was outside the context of any standard ideas about

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1Neale, Queen Elizabeth I, 408.
2Strachey, 276.
women or female monarchs of the time. By adapting herself over a period of time and creating personas that forced others to deal with her within her own context, Elizabeth was able to rule as she wished: unmarried and without heirs. Elizabeth eventually became a sort of deity in the persona of the Virgin Queen. As Virgin Queen, Elizabeth was lauded by epic poems and play cycles as the living embodiment of all that was glorious about England. She was worshiped, adored, and exalted as wondrous. It appeared that all was well, and she had forever won the hearts and minds of the realm.

The great irony of her reign is that her ability to adapt and create personas was what kept her in power, but it has been argued that it was also what caused her Court to become a viscous circle of factions in the last twelve years. She failed to realize that the worship and flattery of the Virgin Queen came at a cost. That cost was consistent and wide spread patronage of important courtiers and magnates. As Sharon Kettering has pointed out, the loyalty of the nobles and the stability of a royal court were directly related, even proportional at times, to the patronage distributed by the monarch. Yet, it sometimes appears that Elizabeth had forgotten about the nobles entirely, except for Robert Cecil and Robert Devereux, when it came to her affections and her patronage.

When Elizabeth finally gained acceptance as the elevated Virgin Queen, it seems she slowly lost touch with the pulse of the Court. It appears she had failed to adapt to the changing political climate and had become stagnant and almost oblivious. We know in the last five years of her reign there was much resentment against her at Court, and many nobles openly made disparaging comments about her. Regard for the Queen had fallen so far that a yeoman responded to a sheriff’s inquiry in the Queen’s name by saying,
"Why dost thou tell me of the Queen? A turd for the Queen!"\(^3\) There were many such incidents in the last years of her reign.

Moreover, the cause of and need for Devereux’s execution must have made it very apparent to Elizabeth and the nobles of England that *Gloriana Regina*, self-created symbol of England, had failed. Her image of infinitely wise and semi-divine ruler could now easily be brought into question in the light of Devereux’s treachery. Elizabeth had been shown publicly to be vain, foolish, oblivious, and hesitant because of her infatuation with a young and treacherous rogue whose obsequies blinded her to what, for many, were his obvious and potentially treasonous ambitions.

Robert Devereux had defeated Elizabeth on her own playing field. He had been the living embodiment of all that a young noble seeking advancement at Court was expected, by Elizabeth, to be. He was young, handsome, witty, and an excellent flatterer. By fulfilling all of Elizabeth’s expectations and exalting her to new heights, it would have appeared that Devereux was quite willing to participate in the ritualized Court fiction of worshiping the Virgin Queen. In reality, by playing the worshipful and adoring admirer, Devereux blinded her to his ambitions. He could then operate in all probability with relative impunity to seek his own ends towards glory, power, and, eventually, treason. Elizabeth was tacitly admitting to defeat when she was forced to execute her most ardent admirer.

This was a defeat because Elizabeth had spent her entire reign creating personas that would work against the common beliefs of the time about women. Yet, over the course of her relationship with Devereux, Elizabeth appeared to her Courtly audience to

\(^3\)Quoted in Haigh, *Elizabeth I*, 161.
be foolish not to see Essex’s ambitions, vain to accept his impertinence because of his constant flattery, fickle and weak because she always allowed him to return to Court even after he attempted to draw his sword in her presence, and she appeared ignorant for not having foreseen or forestalled his attempt at rebellion. Through her relationship with Essex, Elizabeth slowly unraveled the decades of self-invention through which she had struggled to create for herself a legitimate and unassailable platform of power from which to rule. The glory and power of her reign was now the embarrassment of an old and foolish woman.

Stephen Greenblatt has stated that when nobles participate in the ritualized worship of a monarch without believing in the innate greatness implicit in the ritual of that monarch, the ritual is an even greater statement of power than if the nobles actually believed. It is much harder to force proud nobles into humbling acts when the monarch has failed to distribute monies and has come to seem the fickle and foolish woman she had always maintained she was not.

It could be argued that by the 1590s, Elizabeth began to believe she was an otherworldly monarch instead of simply playing the persona required of that role. After spending four decades trying to convince the world she was a superior being fit to rule alone, it is not surprising that Elizabeth might have come to believe her own propaganda. She created an atmosphere of worship where she was treated as a deity whose health and happiness maintained the health and happiness of England.

She had also become enmeshed in a sort of reciprocal relationship with the poets, playwrights, and painters of the day. She set the tenor of how she was to be presented,

\(^4\)Greenblatt, 13.
and they presented her that way. It also appears that at times she was influenced by their portrayals of her and presented herself accordingly. The great plays and dramas of the day were those that exalted Elizabeth to the highest degree. Is it any wonder that after years of creating personas to gain acceptance and power and being worshiped by prostrating nobles that Elizabeth forgot she was an actor on her own self-invented stage?

One might point out that if Elizabeth had maintained her distance from her propaganda, she would not have alienated her nobles or fallen for Devereux. But how can an individual who was constantly being told she was the most magnificent being in Christendom through rituals, the arts, and flatteries of the most powerful magnates in the realm not start to wonder if this might just be true?
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VITA

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